

Reciprocity of the Identity: Perception of Students and Influence of LGBTQIA+ Teacher A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

Education should champion inclusivity, yet prejudice against LGBTQIA+ educators persists globally. Schools, meant to foster open-mindedness, often reinforce discrimination, forcing teachers like me to navigate systemic biases and conceal our identities. Across regions, LGBTQIA+ teachers face microaggressions, job insecurity, and exclusion, affecting their well-being and professional growth. In the Philippines, cultural conservatism exacerbates these challenges, leaving many feeling isolated and unprotected. This prejudice impacts students too, depriving them of diverse role models. Urgent change is needed to create safer, more affirming educational spaces. This study aimed to understand grade 12 students' perceptions of LGBTQIA+ teachers' social interactions and identity. Using a descriptive qualitative approach with 10 purposively sampled students', sub-themes emerged such as the family and social peers influence, and the school and classroom influence under student-teacher social interaction as perceived by the students. While in the identity of LGBTQIA+ teachers as perceived by the students includes the following sub-themes, fostering acceptance, effective and engaging teaching, creating a safe and supportive spaces, encouraging equality and inclusivity, building confidence and support, and empowering, academic growth through feedback and motivation. Future research should explore LGBTQIA+ teachers' social interactions and identity formation, using emerging sub-themes as key indicators. A phenomenological approach will help examine my lived experiences as an educator, focusing on identity shaped through interactions with students, colleagues, and the school community. Through narrative inquiry, I will document personal stories, while classroom observations and student focus groups will provide insights into real-time interactions. Thematic analysis and in-depth interviews with educators will deepen discussions on inclusivity and representation in education.

Keywords: Reciprocity of the identity, perception of students, influence of lgbtqia+ teacher

INTRODUCTION

The global landscape of education, which I believe should be a supporter of inclusivity and enlightenment, remains shadowed by persistent prejudice—especially against educators like me who identify as LGBTQIA+ (GLSEN, 2020; Wright & Smith, 2023). As I contemplate this issue, I have observed how the very institutions designed to foster open-mindedness can paradoxically perpetuate discriminatory practices. This is not merely an anecdotal observation; it is a systemic issue where societal biases seep into the classroom, creating an environment where my sexual orientation and gender identity become grounds for marginalization (Astudillo-Lizama & Faúndez-García, 2021; Añonuevo & Digo, 2023). It strikes me as a profound contradiction that those of us tasked with nurturing future generations are subjected to such exclusionary treatment. The ideal of a safe, affirming learning space feels fundamentally compromised when educators like me are made to feel unsafe (Janssen et al., 2021). The urgency of addressing this issue cannot be overstated, and I am compelled to advocate for a more equitable and supportive educational environment.

This problem is not confined to a single region; I see that LGBTQIA+ teachers like me face a spectrum of challenges all over the world, ranging from subtle microaggressions to outright discrimination (Goldstein-Schultz, 2022; Kurian, 2020). For instance, when I read reports from various countries in Europe and North America, I am struck by the instances of teachers being denied promotions, facing hostile work environments,

or even losing their jobs because of their sexual or gender identity. (Callaghan & Esterhuizen, 2021; Beagan et al., 2021). I feel a sense of disquiet when I come across accounts of educators who are forced to conceal their true selves, living in constant fear of exposure. The weight of this concealment and the constant vigilance required must undoubtedly impact their ability to engage fully with their students and their work. It's a disheartening reality that these forms of prejudice persist in places where progress is often touted (Burns et al., 2023), and it motivates me to advocate for change and support those who suffer in silence.

While these global accounts are troubling, they also prompt me to reflect more deeply on the situation closer to home. In the Philippine context, similar struggles manifest—but with cultural nuances that shape them differently. I have observed how cultural conservatism often intertwines with educational practices, presenting unique complexities for LGBTQIA+ teachers (Brooks & Brooks, 2018). Despite some strides toward greater acceptance, the lived experiences of many LGBTQIA+ educators suggest that these advances are not yet deeply rooted. I have encountered stories of teachers facing pressure to conform to heteronormative expectations, enduring discriminatory remarks, and feeling isolated within their school communities. The lack of comprehensive legal protections and the prevalence of deeply ingrained societal biases create a precarious environment for these educators (Eckes, 2021; Dhaliwal et al., 2020). These stories are not abstract to me—they are deeply personal. I personally resonate with the experiences of those who navigate these challenges, and I am driven to fully understand the extent of their realities within the Philippine educational system (Lualhati, 2019)

The potential consequences of this prejudice are far-reaching, and I feel the weight of this reality deeply. Beyond the immediate impact on teachers like me, I see how it creates a ripple effect throughout the educational system (Assari & Caldwell, 2018; Lorenz, 2021). As someone who identifies as LGBTQIA+, I recognize that students in similar positions are deprived of visible and affirming role models (Bridge et al., 2022). This situation fosters a climate of fear and silence, discouraging open dialogue about diversity and inclusion (Rezvi & Hossain, 2023; Yang & Kung, 2024). I worry that this ultimately undermines the very purpose of education, which should be to cultivate critical thinking, empathy, and respect for all individuals. The emotional and psychological toll on LGBTQIA+ teachers like me, along with the subsequent impact on our students, is a matter of urgent concern (Chen et al., 2020; Guijarro-Ojeda et al., 2021). Because of this, I am motivated to explore these consequences further and contribute to a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ educators in Philippine schools.

Statement of the Problem

In my research, I aim to understand how Grade 12 learners perceive their LGBTQIA+ teachers' identities within an educational context. Having LGBTQIA+ teachers in the classroom influences students' perspectives on identity, diversity, and inclusivity, but how these changes occur remains somewhat unexplored. By examining this mutual relationship, I hope to shed light on its implications for creating a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. Specifically, I seek to answer: What are the perceptions of grade 12 senior high school students on the identities of LGBTQIA+ teachers in an educational context?

Theoretical Lens

My research is grounded in the Reciprocity of Identity Theory, based on Sheldon Stryker's Identity Theory (1968) and Lucie G. Taylor's (2024) study. The theory suggests that identity is co-constructed through social interactions, emphasizing the mutual influence between personal identity (how I see myself) and social identity (how others see me). I focus on Personal Identity, highlighting how LGBTQIA+ teachers' identities are shaped by both self-perception and students' views. The theory suggests that students' understanding of diversity and inclusion is influenced by their interactions with teachers with marginalized identities, contributing to an inclusive learning culture.

METHODS

In undertaking this research, I chose a descriptive qualitative approach because I wanted to listen closely to the often-unspoken social realities of students—especially their perceptions of LGBTQIA+ teachers within the classroom. Rooted in a phenomenological framework, the study was shaped by a desire to understand how students genuinely experience and make sense of the presence of LGBTQIA+ educators in their learning environment. Kidapawan City, with its cultural diversity and layered social dynamics, provided a compelling backdrop for this exploration. The process of selecting participants was intentional and thoughtful. Using purposive sampling, I sought individuals whose lived experiences could shed light on the very questions I was grappling with. I engaged ten Grade 12 students, all aged 18, in a combination of In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). These settings offered more than just data—they became spaces for reflection, dialogue, and at times, vulnerability. What struck me most during these conversations was how willing the students were to share their insights, and how their stories often challenged or deepened my own understanding of inclusivity and identity in education. Ethical responsibility remained central throughout this journey. I made sure to secure approval from the Research Ethics Committee (REC) and the HCDC Graduate School Dean, and I approached the process of informed consent not as a formality but as a commitment to transparency and respect. Building rapport with the participants was not just about establishing trust—it was about creating an environment where they felt heard, safe, and valued. Their voices are the heart of this study, and I carry the weight of that trust with great care.

To analyze the data, I applied Braun and Clarke's thematic approach. As I immersed myself in the transcripts, I found myself pausing often—sometimes surprised, other times unsettled—by the rawness of the students' perceptions. Certain phrases echoed across multiple interviews, revealing shared experiences of both admiration and tension in their interactions with LGBTQIA+ teachers. I began to notice that some codes I initially labeled as 'acceptance' actually held nuances of 'conditional acceptance'—a distinction that only emerged as I sat with the data longer and considered the broader social context. Organizing the codes into themes felt less like sorting and more like mapping a story, one that continually challenged my assumptions and demanded a deeper level of listening. It was in this process that the sub-themes began to reveal themselves—not as categories imposed from above, but as patterns that emerged organically through engagement with the students' lived realities systematically coding interview transcripts to identify key themes that captured the essence of students' experiences. Throughout the research process, I aimed to balance structure with sensitivity, ensuring that the interpretation of findings remained grounded, credible, and ethically sound. To uphold the study's trustworthiness, I cross-referenced transcripts with audio recordings and stored all data securely in an encrypted Google Drive folder (<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1I18DMvMjIqFjKw4QS8ACUTiOYOnlZ-JV?usp=sharing>). Ethical integrity was a central priority, and I strictly followed both national and institutional guidelines to protect participant confidentiality. As an LGBTQIA+ researcher, I acknowledged how my identity might shape my perspective, yet I maintained academic rigor and transparency throughout the process. To support clarity and quality in the presentation of this research, I utilized generative artificial intelligence tools like ChatGPT for language refinement. This use was limited to enhancing structure and expression and did not influence the data analysis or interpretation of findings. Through rigorous methodology, ethical adherence, and transparent research practices, this study offers meaningful insights into the role of LGBTQIA+ educators, contributing to the broader discourse on inclusivity and diversity in education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

As I analyzed deeper into the data, I began to see patterns emerge—threads of meaning weaving together to form the sub-themes that naturally unfolded from my study's broader themes. The Modified Paradigm in Figure 1 illustrates the themes and subthemes of my study. The themes composed of Social Interaction (Student–Teacher Social Interaction as Perceived by the Students) and Identity of LGBTQIA+ Teachers.

In Theme 1, two phenomena could transpire: how the teacher views himself (Personal Identity) in the interaction process and how the students view him (Social Identity). This distinction became crucial in my analysis as I realized that my study privileges students' perceptions rather than teachers who are part of

LGBTQIA+. While I acknowledge the significance of exploring the teachers' sense of self, my focus remained on the students' experiences, thus situating my study within the framework of social identity rather than personal identity. Moreover, two sub-themes had emerged in Social Identity which includes, Family and Social Peers' Influence and School and Classroom Influence. On the other hand, as what students perceived on the identity of the LGBTQIA+ teachers emerged the following sub-themes which includes, Fostering Acceptance and Respect, Encouraging Equality and Inclusivity, Building Confidence and Support, Creating a Safe and Supportive Spaces, Effective and Engaging Teaching, and Empowering Academic Growth through Feedback and Motivation.

The Modified Paradigm visually represents these key themes and sub-themes, encapsulating the voices of students who have been taught by LGBTQIA+ educators. Their perceptions paint a vivid picture of acceptance, curiosity, and the lingering weight of societal biases. Through their stories, I gain insight into the complex dynamics of student-teacher relationships and the profound impact LGBTQIA+ educators have on shaping perceptions. In capturing these experiences, I aim to illuminate the intricate intersections of education, identity, and human connection.

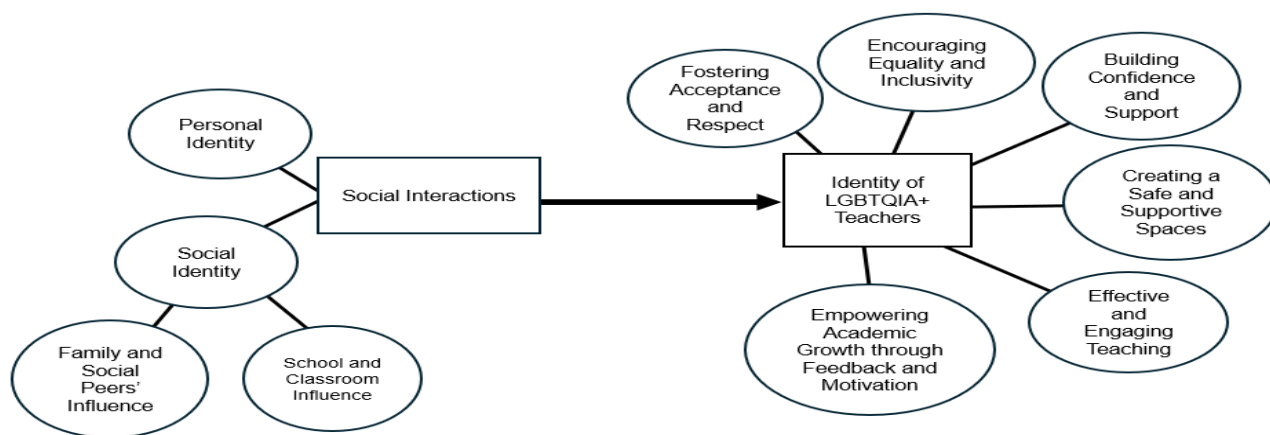


Figure 1: Modified Paradigm

Theme 1: Student–Teacher Social Interaction as Perceived by the Students

As I engaged deeply with student perception, I uncovered the intricate ways in which interactions with LGBTQIA+ educators shape their perspectives, extending far beyond the formal classroom setting. These moments—whether in hallways, cafeterias, or unexpected encounters in town—reveal a dynamic interplay of familiarity and respect, reinforcing the importance of informal student-teacher relationships in fostering inclusivity (Wright & Smith, 2023). As one participants shared that *“Ah, tung grade 9, naa koy teacher nga L, part of the LGBT. Kanang, katong time na recess ug naa sad competition, siya jud ang naghelp sa amoa – kung unsaon ni, unsaon ni siya, unsaon na. Lingaw kayo mi ato na time, sige lang sya crack ug jokes maskin stress na kayo mi, nalingaw nasad mig apil. Ug kanang, gitabangan jud mi niya for the sake of our section”*. (Ah, when I was in Grade 9, I had a teacher who was L, part of the LGBT community. During recess and when there was a competition, they were really the one who helped us—guiding us on what to do, how to do this, and how to do that. That time was really fun because he kept cracking jokes even though we were already stressed, and we ended up enjoying it too. And he genuinely helped us for the sake of our section.)-P3, IDI, L103-124. My analysis illuminated two key sub-themes that influence students' perceptions: the family and social peers', and the school and classroom influence. Recognizing the significance of these factors is essential in understanding how social identities are constructed and how inclusive educational environments can be nurtured (Ullman, 2022).

Sub-Theme 1: Family and Social Peers' Influence

As I explored students' interactions with LGBTQIA+ teachers, I found that their perceptions are deeply influenced by the values they absorb from their families and peer circles, with family attitudes often shaping

their initial outlook (Antonelli & Sembiente, 2022). As my participants highlighted that, *“Dako kaayo help ako mga parents in understanding them so I would still choose them as my teachers. because, they provide not just the subject matter that we tackle in school, but also what is happening in our society. They help us to open our eyes to see things on our perspective. To help us involve ourselves sa mga problema sa country po”* (My parents have been a great help in understanding them, so I would still choose them as my teachers because they not only teach the subject matter we tackle in school but also help us understand what is happening in our society. They open our eyes to different perspectives and encourage us to be involved in the issues affecting our country.)-P2, IDI, L342-363.

Some students grow up in accepting and supportive households, while others face rejection due to religious or cultural beliefs, making it more challenging for them to embrace LGBTQIA+ educators. Yet, many of these students exhibit remarkable resilience, developing their own perspectives despite societal pressures. When parents foster acceptance, students tend to approach LGBTQIA+ teachers with greater ease and understanding, while meaningful peer relationships with LGBTQIA+ individuals further cultivate empathy and appreciation (Yang & Kung, 2024). In the interview my participant stated that, *“Paggalang po at pagbibigay suport po sa kanila na lage pong pinapaalala sa akin ng mga magulang ko ang mga hakbang po na ito, bilang isang mag-aaral, ay makakatulong sa amin upang lumikha ng isang mas inklusibong kapaligiran na nagtataguyod nga paggalang at pagtanggap sa lahat kabilang na ang mga guro sa LGBTQIA+ ”.* (Respect and support for them, which my parents always remind me of, are important steps that, as a student, can help us create a more inclusive environment that promotes respect and acceptance for everyone, including LGBTQIA+ teachers.)-P5, IDI, L275-280. As an LGBTQIA+ educator, witnessing students embrace and respect LGBTQIA+ teachers reaffirms the vital role of representation in education and highlights the importance of supportive family and social networks in nurturing inclusivity.

Sub-theme 2: School and Classroom Influence

Through my exploration, I have come to understand that the influence of LGBTQIA+ educators on students is deeply connected to the inclusivity and supportiveness of the school environment. When authenticity is embraced, it fosters respect, understanding, and positive attitudes toward diversity (Hernandez & Torres, 2023). My participants shared with emphasis that, *“Diri sa school sir, which is Kidapawan City National High School, naga value jud ug diversity kay daghan man jud ang mga LGBT, part of the LGBT diri, as students, kanang teachers”* (Here at our school, which is Kidapawan City National High School, they really value diversity because there are many LGBT individuals, both as students and teacher)-P3, IDI, L681-691 At Kidapawan City National High School, I have witnessed how the presence of LGBTQIA+ teachers and students contributes to a culture of mutual respect and appreciation for diverse identities.

Participants shared how their school actively practices inclusivity, creating spaces where students do not merely coexist but genuinely value and learn from one another, *“Our classroom po is already practicing inclusivity that is po why everyone of us knows how to respect each other po. Whenever I see it, by being an ally and supporting my peers po. I can help create a safer and more welcoming environment for everyone po.”* (Our classroom is already practicing inclusivity, which is why every one of us knows how to respect each other. I see that by being an ally and supporting my peers, I can help create a safer and more welcoming environment for everyone.)-P4, IDI, L666-673. This resonates with my research showing that when LGBTQIA+ teachers feel empowered to be their authentic selves, they help cultivate safer and more accepting learning spaces (McBrien et al., 2022). The openness of educators and institutions in discussing LGBTQIA+ identities highlights the transformative role of schools in shaping perceptions, fostering empathy, and encouraging students to embrace diversity beyond the classroom.

In conclusion, as I listened to the stories shared by students, I was struck by how the most meaningful impressions of their LGBTQIA+ teachers weren't always shaped by formal lessons or structured interactions. Often, it was the simple, unscripted moments—a joke shared during a stressful competition, a teacher's quiet guidance during recess, or an encouraging word in the hallway—that left a lasting mark. These moments revealed the deeply human connections that quietly shape students' perceptions of identity, care, and respect. I came to understand that inclusivity lives not just in policy or curriculum, but in the spaces where students feel

seen and supported as people. The stories also reminded me of the powerful roles families, peers, and school environments play in framing these perceptions—sometimes reinforcing biases, but often offering opportunities for growth and empathy. As I reflect on these findings, I see a call for schools to move beyond performative inclusion and into intentional practice—where LGBTQIA+ educators are not only protected but empowered, and where every hallway, classroom, and conversation can become a space for belonging.

Them 2: Identity of LGBTQIA+ Teachers as Perceived by the Students

As I reflect on these findings, I see an urgent call for schools to recognize and institutionalize this potential—through inclusive policies, teacher training, and systemic support that not only protect LGBTQIA+ educators but amplify the unique value they bring to education. Through my exploration of students' perceptions, I have come to see the profound impact that LGBTQIA+ educators have in fostering inclusivity, acceptance, and supportive learning spaces (Wright & Smith, 2023). By fully embracing their identities, these educators not only challenge biases but also broaden students' perspectives, creating environments that nurture personal growth and self-acceptance (Talusán, 2022). This theme includes the following sub-themes, Fostering Acceptance and Respect, Encouraging Equality and Inclusivity, Building Confidence and Support. Furthermore it includes, Creating a Safe and Supportive Spaces, Effective and Engaging Teaching, and Empowering Academic Growth through Feedback and Motivation.

Sub-theme 1: Fostering Acceptance and Respect

As a teacher who identifies with the LGBTQIA+ community, I believe that we have a profound impact on fostering inclusive and supportive educational spaces. By modeling respect and acceptance, we challenge biases and open students' minds to broader perspectives. As participants shared that, *“LGBTQIA+ teachers are also promoting acceptance and appreciation to all of us. Wala ko ka feel ug discrimination towards them po sir maskin unsa akong identity po.”* (LGBTQIA+ teachers are also promoting acceptance and appreciation for all of us. I never felt any discrimination from them, sir, regardless of my identity)-P1, IDI, L453-463. Our authentic presence in the classroom becomes a powerful tool for confronting stereotypes and normalizing diverse identities, creating a culture of inclusivity (McBrien et al., 2022).

The participant stated that, *“Ma feel nako sa ilaha sir, sa mga lgbtq teachers na naa jud acceptance and respect maskin unsa ko, mabayot man ko or ma tomboy. Makita jud nako nan aa jud ang pagdawit ug parespeto”* (I can really feel, sir, that LGBTQIA+ teachers show acceptance and respect no matter who I am, whether I am gay or a tomboy. I can truly see that they genuinely embrace and respect everyone)-P5, FGD, L 31-40. Through the creation of safe spaces, we not only enhance students' emotional well-being but also boost their academic engagement, promoting a sense of belonging that improves both participation and performance. This research highlights how LGBTQIA+ representation in schools empowers students to embrace diversity, model kindness, and challenge societal prejudices (Shattuck et al., 2024).

Sub-theme 2: Encouraging Equality and Inclusivity

As an LGBTQIA+ educator, I've witnessed how my presence in the classroom can be transformative, fostering an inclusive and affirming space where students feel empowered to embrace their identities. By challenging societal norms and serving as a role model, I strive to create an environment that encourages confidence and self-acceptance (Mercier, 2021). As the participants remarked that, *“Naga influence sila na mag break ug biases and gina show nila na everyone should be valued no matter what their gender identity is”* (They influence us to break biases and show that everyone should be valued no matter what their gender identity is)-P2, IDI, 321-327.

My authenticity and dedication to inclusivity make the classroom more than just a place for academics—it becomes a space for empowerment and self-expression (Stentiford & Koutsouris, 2021). One of the most striking insights came from the participant who shared that, *“What I like the most about them being my teachers is they are very flamboyant. They know, they know how to show me a good time. They, they break different boundaries in order for their students to have a better time and to freely express themselves as a*

person". (What I like the most about them as my teachers is that they are very flamboyant. They know how to make learning enjoyable, breaking different boundaries to ensure their students have a better experience and can freely express themselves as individuals.)-P1, FGD, L73-89. Despite the challenges that come with this role, I remain committed to shaping a more just and accepting educational landscape, ensuring that every student feels seen, valued, and inspired.

Sub-theme 3: Building Confidence and Support

As I reflect on the experiences shared by students, I see how deeply LGBTQIA+ educators influence their confidence, self-acceptance, and resilience. Their presence fosters inclusive spaces where I, like many others, feel valued, seen, and empowered to embrace my identity without fear of judgment (Busch et al., 2022). In my interview, the participant shared that, *"I feel safe and valued po sir around the LGBTQIA+ teachers because their presence makes me more confident about my capacity as student and by that I am free to show what can I do without hesitation"* (I feel safe and valued around LGBTQIA+ teachers, sir, because their presence makes me more confident in my abilities as a student, allowing me to freely show what I can do without hesitation.)-P1, IDI, L64-73.

Through their authenticity and openness, these educators become powerful role models, encouraging them to navigate their own journey with courage and self-assurance (Clark & Kosciw, 2022). One of the most striking statements came from the participant, who said that, *"Ano sir like naa koy insecurity, so during pandemic sir is kana encounter sad ko ug kanang bully gud sir. Naka isip sad ko sir na what if mag share sad ko ug problem sa ako LGBT na teacher. So mao to sya sir nag hatag sya ug mga advice and gina boost niya akong confidence gud sir, na kaya sa ako ability na malampasan nako ako problem"* (Sir, I have insecurities, and during the pandemic, I also experienced being bullied. I thought about sharing my problem with my LGBTQIA+ teacher, and when I did, they gave me advice and helped boost my confidence, reassuring me that I have the ability to overcome my struggles.)-P3, FGD, L142-172. Even in the face of societal challenges, their unwavering dedication to inclusivity shapes learning environments that celebrate diversity and nurture personal growth for all students

Sub-theme 4: Creating a Safe and Supported Space

As a teacher, I've seen firsthand how having LGBTQIA+ educators in the classroom profoundly impacts students, creating inclusive and supportive learning spaces where they feel represented and valued. My presence goes beyond teaching—it nurtures self-acceptance, confidence, and a true sense of belonging among students (Stentiford & Koutsouris, 2021). As the participants shared that, *"I feel seen and validated po in classes kay open kaayo sila sa amoa especially if naa mi mga personal concerns, dali sila maduolan. Also, they help me to be myself and to show who really I, I am."* (I feel seen and validated in classes because they are very open to us, especially when we have personal concerns, making them easy to approach. Also, they help me be myself and show who I truly am)-P5, IDI, L62-72.

I recognize the importance of advocating for inclusive policies that help make schools safer and more affirming for everyone (Galgo, 2023). The sentiment of the participant struck me in its simplicity yet profound impact that, *"Having them as a teacher make, makes us more com, co ah comfortable about ourselves kay ang ilang presence gud sir, same sa giingon sa ako kauban, welcoming jud kayo"* (Having them as a teacher makes us more comfortable with ourselves because of their presence, Sir. Just like what my classmate said, they are truly very welcoming)-P4, FGD, L78-87. While challenges exist, my resilience and dedication to education continue to inspire students and foster a culture of diversity and acceptance within the school community.

Sub-theme 5: Effective and Engaging Teaching

As an LGBTQIA+ educator, I find that my authenticity and resilience play a crucial role in creating inclusive and engaging teaching practices where students feel seen, heard, and valued. I've come to realize that teaching effectiveness isn't just about mastering the subject matter but about being relatable, patient, and committed to inclusivity (Mercier, 2021). As the participants passionately stated that, *"LGBTQIA+ teachers also provide the*

best and effective way of teaching po. Mas ginapadali nila po ila lesson para mas dali sad namo masabtan. Gahatag sila ug examples na makarelate dayon mi as students” (LGBTQIA+ teachers also provide the best and most effective way of teaching. They make their lessons easier for us to understand and give examples that we, as students, can easily relate to.)-P2, IDI, L32-44.

My approach to teaching challenges traditional ideas of what it means to be professionally competent, showing that personal identity can actually enhance teaching effectiveness, not detract from it (Palacios-Hidalgo & Huertas-Abril, 2023). The response of the participant resonated with me deeply that, *“As teachers, ah I find them very emotional very flamboyant and very outgoing they can really, mo, they can really entertain students and make them make them learn more and make them learn more easier in methods where it’s very entertaining so that the student can easily understand what they’re teaching”-P1, FGD, L44-55.* Through creating supportive, inclusive environments, I see firsthand how this approach enriches the educational experience, helping students foster self-acceptance and compassion

Sub-theme 6: Empowering Academic Growth through Feedback and Motivation

From my perspective, the impact of LGBTQIA+ educators goes far beyond the classroom—they are essential in creating spaces where students feel motivated, resilient, and academically empowered through inclusive and supportive teaching. Their encouragement and constructive feedback help them to embrace challenges with a growth mindset, making learning a transformative experience (Poteat et al., 2025). As the participant spoke with gratitude about their experience that, *“Um, for me po having an LGBTQIA+ teacher po, giving feedback to my work po has improved my academic experience. Like in my grammar po, he corrected me in a way po na dili ko ma degrade. They help me din po think beyond the box to further understand the topic.” (Um, for me, having an LGBTQIA+ teacher giving feedback on my work has improved my academic experience. For example, in my grammar, he corrects me in a way that does not make me feel degraded. They also help me think beyond the box to further understand the topic.)-P4, IDI, L 210-223.*

But their influence isn’t just about academics; they cultivate confidence and critical thinking, shaping both our intellectual and personal development (Folkman, 2024). One particularly striking revelation came from the participant who emphasized that, *“It has ah affected my academic performance greatly because of the way they teach and the way they motivate I can easily understand understand what they are teaching to us because of that I am more motivated to study and to always recite in class whenever I get the chance and because of that my academic performance has been excelling ever since” (It has greatly affected my academic performance because of the way they teach and motivate us. I can easily understand what they are teaching, and because of that, I feel more motivated to study and participate in class whenever I get the chance. As a result, my academic performance has been excelling ever since)- P1, FGD, L189-210.* Their presence reinforces the importance of inclusive education, ensuring that every student, no matter their background, has the opportunity to thrive.

In conclusion, as I sat with the stories students so openly shared, I began to see how the identities of LGBTQIA+ teachers are not only acknowledged—but deeply felt—in the daily rhythms of school life. Across each sub-theme, from fostering respect and creating safe spaces, to motivating academic growth, what resonated most was how these educators, simply by being themselves, inspire transformation in their students. Their presence challenges outdated norms and helps shape classrooms that are emotionally rich, intellectually stimulating, and grounded in empathy and acceptance. The narratives reflected more than appreciation—they spoke of empowerment: students feeling seen, respected, and capable of more because someone believed in them without condition. These findings highlight the urgent need for inclusive policies, sustained support for LGBTQIA+ educators, and comprehensive training that embraces diversity as a strength. In honoring these lived experiences, we are reminded that the heart of education lies in connection—and that equity in the classroom begins with visibility, authenticity, and courage.

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

My future research will explore LGBTQIA+ teachers' social interactions and identity formation using a phenomenological approach. Through narrative inquiry and classroom observations, I will capture their personal stories, examining how identity is expressed and received in schools. Focus groups with students and interviews with educators will reveal the mutual influence between teacher identity and student perceptions. Thematic analysis will refine emerging sub-themes. This study highlights LGBTQIA+ educators' crucial role in fostering inclusive learning spaces and advocating for diversity, equity, and inclusion, ensuring schools become safe, affirming environments that promote acceptance, empathy, and social justice for all.

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