

Teachers' Acceptance of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) Students

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Abstract

Teachers play a crucial role in building a harmonious school environment. However, there are some teachers that treat lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students with neglect. Disregarding gender issues and concerns, they discouraged LGBTQ students to realize their full potential. As teachers are very essential in addressing gender equality issues in the classroom, the Researcher explored the teachers' acceptance of LGBTQ students. The Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods Design was used to connect the quantitative results to the qualitative data collection. There were 200 teacher-respondents, and 50 LGBTQ student-respondents who were surveyed. To further determine the experiences of these students, 12 of them were interviewed. The key results of the study revealed that teachers have a high level of acceptance of LGBTQ students, and it is equally perceived by their LGBTQ students. They related their teachers' acceptance with the practice of gender equality. These students revealed that they were accepted by their teachers because the latter treated them as normal persons and equally as that of other students. These results guided the enhancement of the Gender and Development (GAD) program.

Key Words: LGBTQ Students, Teachers' Acceptance, Gender and Development, Gender Equality, Positive Teacher-Student Relationship, Junior High School

The school should be a nurturing environment intended for learning for all students, regardless of social status, race, or gender. The students eventually will develop into citizens who significantly take part in the nation-building.

Part of the mission of the Department of Education (DepEd, n.d.) is to provide a child-friendly, gender-sensitive, safe, and motivating environment to Filipino students. Teachers, on the other hand, facilitate learning and nurture every student. Teachers cater to every type of student, may they be grouped corresponding to socio-economic status, ethnolinguistic heritage, or gender identity. Teachers have direct knowledge concerning the experiences of sexually diverse students. Specifically, teachers have the perspective of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) students in the school. LGBTQ students form one vulnerable group of the school community. Likewise, some challenges occur and affect LGBTQ students because of their gender identity and sexuality, as shown in a survey conducted by the Researcher on 1,010 students from the school where he teaches. There are problems experienced by 247 nonbinary students or those who have cross-gender desires. The said problems are depression (73%), confusion regarding gender (71%), insecurity (69%), rejection by friends (53%), bullied by others (52%), and discrimination (43%). Although there are enabling laws and issued DepEd policies protecting LGBTQ students, problems still persist because, more often, they are not carried out nor strictly enforced (Thoreson, 2017).

Teachers play a crucial role in building a harmonious school environment (DepEd, 2017b). However, some teachers treat LGBTQ students with neglect or inaction. Kosciw, Greytak, Zongrone, Clark, and Truong (2018) revealed those teachers did not often intervene when anti-LGBTQ remarks were made in

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their presence. Teachers did nothing or told the reporting LGBTQ student to ignore the victimization of harassment or assault. Further, they emphasized that the teachers who did not address the reports of students' victimization demoralized the victimized students and could discourage other students from reporting when they are assaulted or harassed at school. Disregarding gender issues and concerns also discouraged LGBTQ students to realize their full potential (Badgett, Waaldijk, & Van der Rodgers, 2019). As teachers are essential in addressing gender equality issues in the classroom (Sampermans & Claes, 2018), the Researcher firmly believed that this is worth investigating further. Moreover, he conceived a proposition that the teachers' acceptance of LGBTQ students is a vital measure in improving gender sensitivity and equality that eventually will reduce the problems of these students in school.

Teachers significantly impact the experiences of their students in school. Positive teacher-student relationships based on acceptance and respect build a friendly environment and motivate students. Through the teachers' affirmative actions, gender mainstreaming, and the commitment to implement gender-responsive policies, gender equality can be achieved.

Research Questions

1. What is the teachers' level of acceptance of LGBTQ students as perceived by the two groups of respondents?
2. Is there a significant difference between the perceptions of the two groups of respondents on the level of acceptance of LGBTQ students?
3. What are the experiences of LGBTQ students regarding their teachers' acceptance?
4. How may the findings of the study be utilized in enhancing the GAD program?

Methodology

This study was prepared through the Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods Design. This design intended to connect the quantitative results to the qualitative data collection. In the quantitative part of the study, the Researcher determined the level of acceptance of LGBTQ students as perceived by the two groups of respondents. Through statistical evaluation, the researcher computed the significant difference between the responses of the two groups of respondents regarding the teachers' level of acceptance of LGBTQ students. In the qualitative part of the study, the researcher examined the experiences of the LGBTQ students, determined their insights about their teachers' acceptance, and connected this with the previous results in teachers' level of acceptance of LGBTQ students.

The researcher made use of Respondent Triangulation to evaluate the teachers' level of acceptance, as perceived by teachers and students as the two groups of respondents. There are 200 teachers from the three selected public secondary schools in the Division of Valenzuela City, Philippines during the Academic Year 2019-2020. They were included in the first group of respondents. For the second group of respondents, there were 50 LGBTQ students from the same selected schools. To further determine the experiences of these students, 12 of them were interviewed. They were from the four grade levels in the three selected public secondary schools.

Quota sampling and purposive sampling were the techniques utilized in choosing the respondents included in the second group. The researcher used quota sampling in limiting the number of respondents to 50 students,

and he purposively selected confirmed LGBTQ students to serve the intention of the study. For the teacher respondents, he purposively selected teachers from the three schools representing a medium, a large, and a very large-sized public secondary schools in Valenzuela City, Philippines.

Results

Teachers' Level of Acceptance of LGBTQ Students

1.1. As Perceived by Teachers

Teachers' acceptance is a variety of interpersonal acceptance, which refers to the warmth, affection, care, concern, nurturance, or support of teachers shown to their students (Rohner, 2016). It also indicates the teachers' approval, understanding, tolerance, or friendliness with their students. Teachers rated their level of acceptance of LGBTQ students.

Table 1 Teachers' Level of Acceptance of LGBTQ Students			
Indicators	WM	VI	Rank
Teachers can tolerate some of the determining signs or manifestations of LGBTQ students.	3.10	A	10
Teachers allow LGBTQ students to show who they are.	3.43	HA	5
Teachers find ways to practice gender mainstreaming, sensitivity, and equality.	3.33	HA	6.5
Teachers respect the preference of LGBTQ students.	3.53	HA	2
Teachers are openhearted to the behaviors of LGBTQ students.	3.33	HA	6.5
Teachers appreciate the skills and talents of LGBTQ students.	3.77	HA	1
Teachers welcome LGBTQ students from coming out and being out at school.	3.19	A	9
Teachers do not discriminate against LGBTQ students in any manner.	3.51	HA	3
Teachers openly protect LGBTQ students from harassment, abuse, and bullying.	3.47	HA	4
Teachers are not afraid to show support to LGBTQ students.	3.32	HA	8
Overall Weighted Mean	3.40	HA	

Table 1 shows the teachers' level of acceptance of LGBTQ students and the corresponding weighted means.

In Rank 1, with a weighted mean of 3.77 or highly accepted, teachers appreciate the skills and talents of LGBTQ students. In Rank 2, with a weighted mean of 3.53 or highly accepted, teachers respect the preference of LGBTQ students. In Rank 3, with a weighted mean of 3.51 or highly accepted, teachers do not discriminate against LGBTQ students in any manner. Teachers had high regard for the rights of LGBTQ students and treated their students equally.

These show the top two indicators of the teachers' high level of acceptance of LGBTQ students involved understanding the students' abilities and identities. Fosen (2016) also indicated this factor in attaining a positive teacher-student relationship, which is to know the students' qualities, including their abilities and identities. The third in the top three indicators of the teachers' acceptance of LGBTQ students involved showing no prejudice and respecting the rights of LGBTQ students. As specified by ICJ (2017) and CHR (2019), the respect for the human rights of LGBTQ and the support to nondiscrimination based on SOGIE were vital. This is also parallel to the findings of Persinger et al. (2020) that adults showing acceptance toward trans students had strong support for policies and practices that inclusively protect them.

1.2. As Perceived by Students

Table 2 Teachers' Level of Acceptance of LGBTQ Students As Perceived by Students			
Indicators	WM	VI	Rank
Teachers can tolerate some of the determining signs or manifestations of LGBTQ students.	3.06	A	10
Teachers allow LGBTQ students to show who they are.	3.56	HA	2
Teachers find ways to practice gender mainstreaming, sensitivity, and equality.	3.24	A	8
Teachers respect the preference of LGBTQ students.	3.52	HA	3
Teachers are openhearted to the behaviors of LGBTQ students.	3.48	HA	4
Teachers appreciate the skills and talents of LGBTQ students.	3.68	HA	1
Teachers welcome LGBTQ students from coming out and being out at school.	3.32	HA	7
Teachers do not discriminate against LGBTQ students in any manner.	3.22	A	9
Teachers openly protect LGBTQ students from harassment, abuse, and bullying.	3.42	HA	5
Teachers are not afraid to show support to LGBTQ students.	3.40	HA	6
Overall Weighted Mean	3.39	HA	

Table 2 shows the perceived teachers' level of acceptance of LGBTQ students and the corresponding weighted means, which are gathered from the student respondents. LGBTQ students also rated their perceived teachers' level of acceptance to determine if the teachers' acceptance is similarly felt by their students.

In rank 1, with a weighted mean of 3.68 or highly accepted, the students perceived that their teachers appreciate their skills and talents as LGBTQ students. In rank 2, with a weighted mean of 3.56 or highly accepted, students perceived that their teachers allow LGBTQ students to show who they are. In rank 3, with a weighted mean of 3.52 or highly accepted, students perceived that their teachers respect their preference as LGBTQ students.

These show the top three indicators of LGBTQ students perceived their teachers' high level of acceptance involved revealing and understanding the students' personal characteristics, abilities, and identities. These imply that LGBTQ students acknowledged the efforts of their teachers to know them. Likewise, Fosen (2016) indicated that knowing the students' qualities was a factor in positive teacher-student relationships. Additionally, Skipper and Douglas (2015) proved that feedback is an essential factor in developing these relationships.

The teachers' level of acceptance of LGBTQ students as perceived by students has an overall weighted mean of 3.39, which means highly accepted. This is the same as the previous result. This implies that there are warm connections between teachers and these students. This conforms to Rohner's (2016) warmth dimension of interpersonal acceptance, which is the high level of the affectional connection between persons.

2. The Extent of Difference Between the Two Groups of Respondents

Table 3 The Extent of Difference Between the Two Groups of Respondents on the Teachers' Level of Acceptance of LGBTQ Students							
Group	n	Mean	SD	α	z-Value Computed Critical		Decision
Teachers	200	3.40	0.71	0.05	0.06	1.96	Accept Ho
Students	50	3.39	0.67				

Table 3 shows the summarized data and results on the extent of difference between the perceptions of the two groups of respondents on the teachers' level of acceptance of LGBTQ students.

The z-test is used as a statistical tool to determine the significant difference between these two groups of respondents on their perceived teachers' level of acceptance. The computed z-value, which is 0.06, is lower than the critical z-value, which is 1.96 at $\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis is accepted. This indicates that there is no significant difference between the two groups of respondents on the teachers' level of acceptance of LGBTQ students. Therefore, the teachers' high level of acceptance of LGBTQ students is equally perceived by their LGBTQ students. This is also shown in the results of Alicar-Cadorna and Mata (2014) that homosexual students were highly accepted by their school community, and they had no significant difference in the level of acceptance. Gama et al. (2017) further implied that teacher acceptance is an important variable to consider in improving interpersonal relations in schools.

3. Experiences of LGBTQ Students Regarding their Teachers' Acceptance

The following themes are derived from the analysis of the transcripts of the interviews from 12 LGBTQ students who are the participants of the qualitative part of the study. There are eight male students or 75% of the total participants and four female students or 25% of the total participants. The students who took part in the interview acknowledged that they are part of the LGBTQ community, and most of them are gays. Many of them are optimists who have been accepted by their families. They mentioned that it is hard to be LGBTQ because they are judged, bullied, discriminated, ridiculed, or teased based on their gender identity. Most of them found out their varied gender identity between the ages of 10-12 years old, which is in the latter part of their time in elementary school to the earlier part of junior high school.

3.1. Societal Prejudice

In school, LGBTQ students experienced being judged, ridiculed, and teased by others who were mostly their classmates. They chose to be unaffected by the comments of others. For instance, Participant A mentioned, “I feel sad when sometimes someone ridicules me; I do not mind them.”

Some students felt they were unnoticed by their teachers since their gender identities were not too obvious. As Participant F conveyed, “They reacted that my identity was not that obvious.”

3.2. Positive Individuals

Although LGBTQ students faced societal prejudice, it was overshadowed by their positivism. They consciously highlighted their positive experiences in school. They pointed out the affirmative views about them, which were commendable, talented, and enjoyable to be with. As Participant C said,

I have always heard that being gay is not a sin and that I can make them happy, and for me, it is a pleasure to hear them say that. They considered me a good role model to emulate because of my talent and excellence.

This is also reflected in the previous result that teachers appreciate the skills and talents of LGBTQ students, which was the top indicator in the teachers’ level of acceptance.

Having friends who supported them and have the gender identity they identify with uplifted their feelings. Participant J stated, “My happiest moment is when I have many friends who support and accept me.” This is also the observation of the teachers in the previous result that LGBTQ students have a circle of friends with the gender identity they relate with, which was the top LGBTQ manifestation. LGBTQ students were happy because their families, teachers, and most of their classmates accepted them. Participant H expressed, “It is happy to be a part of LGBTQ because my family and teachers accepted me.”

3.3. Teachers’ Acceptance of LGBTQ Students

All LGBTQ students felt their teachers’ acceptance. Their teachers treat them as normal persons and equally as other students. As Participant I affirmed, “They treat me as a normal person, and they accept me being an LGBTQ student.” It is supported by Participant G when asked about their teachers’ acceptance; he responded, “Yes, because they know how to treat people equally even though you are part of the LGBTQ community.” Thus, LGBTQ students implied that the key indicator in teachers’ acceptance is gender equality.

LGBTQ students emphasized that they are highly accepted by their teachers based on the confirmatory question on the rating of their teachers’ acceptance. This is parallel to the preceding results in assessing the teachers’ level of acceptance of LGBTQ students. To restate, there is a high level of teachers’ acceptance of LGBTQ students, and it is equally perceived by these students. There is no doubt that the ratings obtained from the teachers accurately reflect their acceptance. It is verified by the LGBTQ students’ perceived teachers’ acceptance, analyzed through the z-test to be statistically the same, and finally, it is also established in the experiences of these students concerning their teachers’ level of acceptance.

4. Utilization of the Findings of the Study in Enhancing the GAD Program

Utilizing the results of the study, the Researcher proposed an enhanced GAD program for the succeeding academic year, focusing on the following:

1. Gender mainstreaming,
2. Gender sensitivity, and
3. Strategies in addressing gender-based discrimination and violence in school.

The proposed GAD program could be done through a virtual or face-to-face conference, whichever manner is suited in the circumstances of the school. The semiannual school-based in-service training and the annual GAD seminar are proposed to be the avenue for the discussion on the enhanced GAD program. These training programs are best suited in disseminating the said information to improve the responsiveness of teachers and staff on GAD issues and concerns.

Discussion

The key results of the study revealed that teachers have a high level of acceptance of LGBTQ students, and it is similarly perceived by their LGBTQ students. This implies that the teachers' acceptance was recognized by their LGBTQ students.

1. Teachers Have a High Level of Acceptance of LGBTQ Students.

The overall weighted means of the teachers' level of acceptance of LGBTQ students as perceived by teachers and students are 3.40 and 3.39, respectively. The means are both interpreted as highly accepted. Therefore, teachers have a high level of acceptance of LGBTQ students. This also shows a similar result from Alicar-Cadorna and Mata (2014) that homosexual students were highly accepted by their school community, which included teachers.

Almost all the indicators listed from both teacher and student respondents are rated with a high level of teachers' acceptance. The most common indicators of teachers' level of acceptance of LGBTQ students involve understanding the students' personal characteristics, abilities, and identities. Fosen (2016) also indicated this factor in attaining a positive teacher-student relationship, which is to know the students' qualities.

2. The Teachers' High Level of Acceptance of LGBTQ Students is Equally Perceived by Their Students.

The significant difference between the two groups of respondents on their perceived teachers' level of acceptance was determined in the study. The result entails that there is no significant difference between the two groups of respondents on the teachers' level of acceptance of LGBTQ students. Therefore, the teachers' high level of acceptance of LGBTQ students is equally perceived by their LGBTQ students. This implies that there are warm connections between teachers and these students. This conforms to Rohner's (2016) warmth dimension of interpersonal acceptance, which is the high level of the affectional connection between persons. This also implies that LGBTQ students acknowledged the efforts of their teachers to know them. Similarly, Skipper and Douglas (2015) noted that feedback is an essential factor in developing positive teacher-student relationships. It reaffirms the findings of Alicar-Cadorna and Mata (2014) that homosexual students are highly accepted by their school community, and they have no significant difference in the level of acceptance.

3. Teachers' Acceptance Impacts the Positive Experiences of LGBTQ Students in School.

Although LGBTQ students faced societal prejudice, it was overshadowed by their positivism. Moran (2017) also found factors that affect the experiences of transgenders, some incidents were adverse, but some were positive. LGBTQ students consciously highlighted their positive experiences in school. They pointed out the affirmative views about them, which are commendable, talented, and enjoyable to be with. In motivating students, Koca (2016) revealed that teachers encourage them that they have the potential to succeed. This is also reflected in the result that teachers appreciate the skills and talents of LGBTQ students, which is the top indicator in the teachers' level of acceptance. LGBTQ students are also happy because their teachers accepted them. Therefore, teachers' acceptance impacts the positive experiences of LGBTQ students in school. Likewise, Gama et al. (2017) implied that teachers' acceptance is important in improving interpersonal relations in schools. Garvey et al. (2018) further noted that the school environment has an impact on LGBTQ students' academic success.

4. The Key Indicator of Teachers' Acceptance is Gender Equality.

The teachers' acceptance is perceived by LGBTQ students through gender equality. These students revealed that they are accepted by their teachers because the latter treated them as normal persons and equally as other students. Therefore, the key indicator of teachers' acceptance is gender equality. This is also related to the result of Sampermans and Claes (2018) that there is a connection between positive student-teacher relationships and gender equality attitudes. It further supports the goals of DepEd (2017a) that schools mainstream gender to foster gender equality and Soliman (2016) that GAD sought to equalize the relations between people.

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