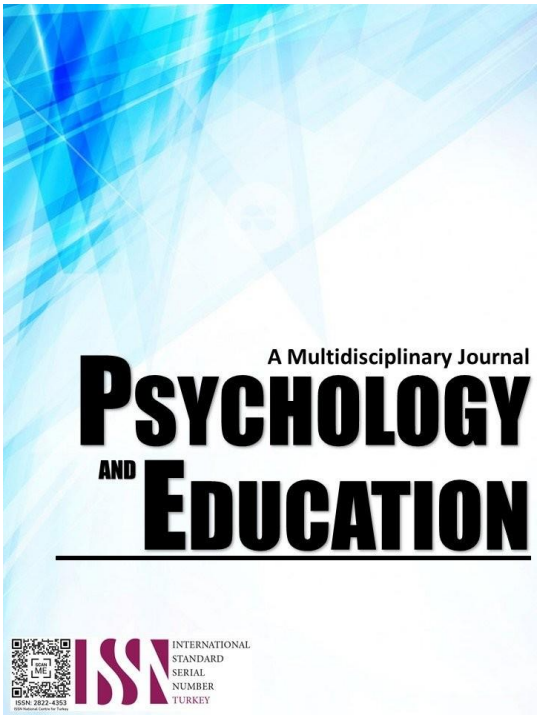
NAVIGATING STRUGGLES AND SUCCESSES: LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LGBTQIA+ STUDENTS



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Research Article

Navigating Struggles and Successes: Lived Experiences of LGBTQIA+ Students

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Abstract

In education, the stories of LGBTQIA+ students are one of the most powerful tales of hardship. It uncovers a wide range of experiences, much like opening a box full of obstacles and successes. This study primarily aimed to delve into and provide a comprehensive understanding of the struggles and successes of LGBTQIA+ students at Morong National High School. The researchers used self-reported data from in-depth semi-structured interviews involving 20 students, five per grade level, from Grades 7 to 10 as the main instrument and were interpreted using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to identify patterns or themes within the qualitative data. The student-respondents were selected through purposive sampling ensuring representation from diverse backgrounds. As the respondents shared their stories, the researchers found that some LGBTQIA+ students experience gradual teasing from their fellow learners. Even though they faced such challenges, they succeeded in breaking stereotypes and excelled academically. They also demonstrated their skills and abilities in sports, leadership, and other extracurricular pursuits. As a coping mechanism, the respondents mentioned that they seek support from friends and other support groups. Their hobbies and engagement in various activities help divert their attention from gender-based discrimination. Therefore, the results indicate that we need to work together in schools and communities to make everyone feel included. This research tells us that we must create safe places for LGBTQIA+ students so they don't face discrimination or bullying. Schools should let students talk about their experiences and feel like they belong. If schools show understanding and help with education, they can help LGBTQIA+ students do well.

Keywords: *struggles, successes, lived experiences, students, LGBTQIA+ students*

Introduction

Social diversity associated with gender and sexual orientation has been a challenge in realizing an inclusive society. This predicament seeps into every social institution. School as a microcosm of society is reflective of these challenges. Members of the LGBTQIA+ community at school face unique challenges and experiences in their educational journey.

Stanford University (2021) explained that the letters in LGBTQIA+ stand for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual. Other people included in the LGBTQIA+ community might identify as two-spirit, nonbinary, or pansexual. In addition, the plus sign represents people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions, and/or sex characteristics who identify using other terms (International Organization for Migration, 2021). Hence, the LGBTQIA+ spectrum is an interplay of sexual orientations, gender identities, and intersex conditions (The Green Party, n.d.).

The American Psychological Association (2015) defined sexual orientation as a component of identity that includes a person's sexual and emotional attraction to another person and the behavior that may result from this attraction. An individual's sexual orientation may be lesbian, gay, heterosexual, bisexual, queer, pansexual, or asexual. Gender identity, on the other hand, is a person's deeply felt, inherent sense of self which may or may not correspond to a person's sex assigned at birth. Meanwhile, gender expression is an individual's presentation, including physical appearance, clothing choice and accessories, and behavior that communicates aspects of gender or gender role.

In contemporary society, it is crucial to recognize the presence of sexual and gender minorities and to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of LGBTQIA+ in social spheres including educational settings as they often encounter unfair treatment, bias, and mistreatment in schools. These difficulties may come from other students, teachers, or even the school as a whole with its policies that can negatively affect learners' emotional well-being, overall health, and academic achievements, thus, impeding academic progress.

The United Nations (2019) has acknowledged that bullying, harassment, and exclusion of LGBT people in educational institutions is a worldwide problem faced by a significant proportion of LGBT students. It is often driven by stigma and prejudice; rooted in deep cultural beliefs about gender roles, masculinity, and femininity. In affirmation, Human Rights Watch (2017) reported that students who are members of this community often find that their schooling experience is marred by bullying, discrimination, lack of access to LGBT-related information, and in some cases, physical or sexual assault.

The Bill of Rights in the 1987 Philippine Constitution guarantees equal protection for every Filipino and prohibits discrimination of persons based on ethnicity, race, religion or belief, political inclination, social class, sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, civil status, medical condition, or any other status in the enjoyment of rights. The fundamental law also declares that the State values the dignity of every human person and guarantees full respect for human rights (Section 11, Article II).

Concerning education, the Constitution states that the State shall promote the "right of all citizens to quality education at all levels, and

shall take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all" (Section 1, Article XIV) calling for the establishment of a "complete, adequate and integrated system of education relevant to the needs of the people and society" (Section 2[1], Article XIV).

Likewise, the Philippine statutes such as Republic Act No. 9710 “The Magna Carta of Women” and Republic Act No. 11313 “Safe Spaces Act” have been put in place to combat discriminatory practices in all social spheres. The State recognizes the fundamental right of every person, regardless of sex, age, class, status, ethnicity, color, disability, religious and political beliefs, sexual orientation, or gender identity, to be free from any form of discrimination (The Magna Carta of Women, 2009). The State also recognizes that both men and women must have equality, security, and safety not only in private but also on the streets, public spaces, online, workplaces, and educational and training institutions (Safe Spaces Act, 2018).

Despite the presence of these laws and policies discrimination and prejudicial practices persist. There often are misconceptions about members of the LGBTQIA+ community that impede the delivery of social services including education. The interplay of different gender identities amplifies these experiences. Despite these difficulties, some LGBTQIA+ students exhibit strength and bravery in advocating for their rights and establishing a secure school environment.

The researchers intend to delve into and provide a comprehensive understanding of the obstacles and achievements of LGBTQIA+ students. By investigating their experiences, the researchers seek to raise awareness of the issue and foster a more empathetic and supportive environment. The knowledge and understanding to be contributed among educators, policymakers, and stakeholders shall enable them to implement evidence-based strategies to address the needs and concerns of LGBTQIA+ students effectively where they can put in place targeted strategies and support systems for establishing safe and inclusive learning environments.

This research aims to guide the creation of policies against discrimination, and improvements in school curricula, and training programs for educators and staff members. Similarly, the results will shed light on the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ students, and inform policies, practices, and action planning at both institutional and organizational levels, ultimately, striving toward a more inclusive and equitable education system for all.

Research Questions

The study aimed to provide a thorough exploration of the distinct experiences encountered by LGBTQIA+ students at Morong National High School in the School Year 2023-2024. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the success stories of LGBTQIA+ students in terms of academics and extracurricular activities?
2. What struggles did the respondents face in terms of academics and extracurricular activities?
3. What are the impacts of the respondents’ gender identity on their successes and struggles?
4. What are the coping mechanisms of the respondents in dealing with difficulties and failures to succeed in academics and extracurricular activities?
5. What IEC material is recommended as an intervention to address the problems the respondents mentioned?

Literature Review

The journey of LGBTQIA+ individuals, particularly gay students, is influenced by various societal factors, including cultural norms, family expectations, and religious affiliations. In a conservative Filipino setting, these elements often shape how gay individuals navigate their sexuality. The words “tomboy” and "bakla" are used to describe lesbian women and gay men in the Philippines and are often used synonymously to label transgender people (Nadal & Corpus, 2013). These terms are commonly used interchangeably, which can add complexity to understand the community. Furthermore, this insight can reveal the struggles they encounter in balancing their identities with societal norms. It is important to understand these languages to comprehend the successes and struggles LGBTQIA+ students experience within Filipino environments.

Moreover, LGBTQ+ people continue to experience persecution, incarceration, and even the danger of death in many nations. A growing number of governments and activists are prioritizing laws and safeguards that protect this population against legal discrimination and political, social, and economic marginalization, given the severity and pervasiveness of such abuses. This observation is supported by Respicio (2023), “the societal construct of gender as binary continues discrimination against those deviating from societal norms in historical and religious beliefs." as dealing with societal norms and navigating through legal barriers, LGBTQIA+ individuals face a range of hurdles such as discrimination and exclusion from school.

Tang and Poudel (2018) found that even though the Philippines is considered an open country, Filipino LGBT students still struggle with bullying and discrimination from families, communities, and schools. These struggles include the lack of protection, mental health issues, and discrimination are the challenges for these students. In addition to that, the LGBT community has been fighting for respect and equality in society for a long time. However, despite being normalized, acceptance remains difficult to find, with LGBT individuals facing violence and discrimination throughout their lives. The study shows that there is still a lack of awareness and acceptance of the LGBTQIA+ community and also exposes the impact of gender identity and sexual orientation on transgender-woman students' academic and personal lives. It emphasizes the need to tackle systemic issues in schools to create a safer and more inclusive environment for these students. Suggestions include incorporating sexuality education, providing gender-neutral facilities, and

fostering a school culture that values inclusivity and respect (Panela, 2023). It is important to address ingrained discrimination within organizations in order to create a safe environment for all students, regardless of their sexual orientation. This involves addressing the challenges faced by transgender women students and supporting inclusive efforts, such as offering sex education and implementing gender-neutral facilities.

Adeyemo (2020) underscores the discrimination and lack of legal protection experienced by these students, with religion and societal attitudes playing a significant role. Convocar and Pios (2019) and Chan et al. (2022) further emphasize the need for a supportive learning environment, with the latter pointing to the impact of homophobic bullying on the psychological well-being of LGBTQIA+ students. These studies collectively underscore the need for legal protection, societal acceptance, and supportive educational environments for LGBTQIA+ students in the Philippines. These studies mutually highlight the need for legal protection, acceptance by society, and supportive educational environments for LGBTQIA+ students in the Philippines.

Contrary to being normalized, Briones (2022) noted the LGBT community in the Philippines is merely tolerated, not fully embraced, as various types of discrimination against them persist. De Santos (2017) stated that in the country, students often experience bullying and discrimination based on their sexual orientation and gender identity, and schools often lack the resources to properly support them. The article focuses on LGBT students who are facing bullying and discrimination and often lack the school support they need. These struggles include the lack of proper school support, bullying, and discrimination are the challenges of LGBT members in the Philippines. The article focuses on LGBT adolescents who are bullied and discriminated against at school and frequently do not receive the necessary help. LGBT individuals in the Philippines face issues such as a lack of appropriate school support, bullying, and discrimination.

Furthermore, the fight for survival continues for LGBTQIA+ students in religious colleges and universities (Craig et al., 2017). LGBTQIA+ students confront a variety of challenges in higher education, including hostile environments, institutional discrimination, and struggles with identity and faith. However, they show resilience and agency in dealing with these problems (Renn, 2020; Craig et al., 2017). Furthermore, evidence suggests that schools are developing environments that encourage LGBT students' personal, social, and academic well-being (Renn, 2020). Furthermore, LGBTQIA+ students in religious colleges and universities continue to face survival challenges (Craig et al., 2017).

In school experiences, many LGBTQIA+ students experience certain challenges that are unique to them; in spite of this they have also exhibited success and resilience as they endeavor to complete their studies. As observed by the University of San Diego (2015), their interactions are influenced by many aspects, such as support networks established within these institutions as well as personal attempts at reconciling their orientations/gender diversities against religious beliefs. In 2015, students who participated in the Diverse Learning Environment (DLE) survey at the University of San Diego (USD) showed more agreement in terms of recognizing diversity in sexual orientation than the students who took the survey in 2010. The finding indicates the enhancement of the environment towards acceptance of sexual orientation diversity and better campus culture. Moreover, Programs, resources and events aimed at supporting queer couples are visible within the different departments. The initiatives have been successful because they received support from institutions that enable students to succeed.

Several gaps and limitations hinder a comprehensive understanding of their experiences at the University of San Diego (USD) despite efforts to address the struggles and successes of LGBTQIA+ students in literature. For one thing, since there is no systematic tracking or documentation so far, identifying and celebrating academic and extracurricular successes made by LGBTQIA+ students has been difficult. It is also hard to know how they contribute to society within the university due to this. Several gaps and limitations hinder a comprehensive understanding of their experiences at the University of San Diego (USD) despite efforts to address the struggles and successes of LGBTQIA+ students in literature. Also, there is a lack of understanding about how the overall well-being and academic performance of the students were affected by these problems and successes so far which still exist. Moreover, LGBTQIA+ students use strategies to deal with problems, but these need to be analyzed comprehensively so that assistance can be targeted for everyone. The exploration and development are needed to improve institutional support and create inclusivity to identify and implement evidence-based LGBTQIA+ students' needs-tailored Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) materials.

Angelo and Bocci (2021) noted that the global movement to safeguard lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other (LGBTQ+) people has made great strides in recent decades. Renn (2022) presents that LGBT students can succeed academically, socially, and personally when schools create an atmosphere that gives them a sense of belonging. These imply that stories of strength and success exist despite the problems that they face. These also show that one factor that LGBTQIA+ students need is a welcoming environment to excel in their academic, social, and emotional growth. However, the impact of these accomplishments on them was not mentioned in the study.

Turning to the academic pursuits of LGBTQIA+ students, they face a range of challenges in higher education, including hostile climates, institutionalized discrimination, and struggles with identity and faith. However, they also demonstrate resilience and agency in coping with these challenges (Renn, 2020; Craig et al., 2017). In addition to that, there is supporting evidence that suggests campuses are creating environments that promote the personal, social, and academic well-being of LGBT students (Renn, 2020).

Additionally, according to Pitcher et al. (2019), college students often face a negative environment on campus, but many still persevere.

Supportive environments, such as LGBTQ+ resource centers and affirming policies, play a crucial role in their success. The positive psychology framework and the concept of thriving are also key to understanding their success (Hill et al., 2020). Despite encountering challenges on campus, college students demonstrate resilience and perseverance. This resilience is often nurtured by supportive environments such as LGBTQ+ resource centers and affirming policies. By fostering supportive environments and adopting a positive psychology approach, institutions can better support the success and well-being of LGBTQ+ students in higher education.

LGBTQIA+ students frequently face hostility, lack of support, and discrimination in school settings, which can affect their academic performance and overall well-being (Goodrich, 2016; Kosciw, 2002). However, this research suggests that creating an inclusive campus environment and fostering a supportive school community can contribute to their self-actualization and enhance their quality of life (Espinol et al., 2021). Furthermore, positive shifts in attitudes towards LGBTQIA+ individuals, particularly among heterosexual students, can generate more positive experiences for LGBTQIA+ students as a whole (McCormack, 2012).

LGBTQIA+ students face a lot of difficulties that are intricate and far-reaching. Scholars like Steck and Perry (2018) and Matthyse (2017) accentuate the importance of having safe environments for all in educational institutions. The author argues against it, while the latter talks about raising awareness. Furthermore, it highlights the peculiar obstacles encountered by LGBTQIA+ students on Christian colleges' campuses and in social work field education. In support of this claim, Vespone (2016) highlighted the creation of LGBTQ support groups on Christian college campuses as a way to provide assistance and positive intervention for LGBTQ students. By exploring the current literature on the subject, the article shows that LGBTQ students often face unique challenges such as discrimination, harassment, and struggles with identity, and these issues can lead to mental health issues. Additionally, LGBTQ support groups can provide a safe space for individuals to integrate their spiritual and sexual/gender identity and receive support and understanding from their peers. This type of support can help LGBTQ students resolve internal conflicts and lead to positive outcomes such as increased self-esteem, lower levels of anxiety and depression, and a better overall college experience. The article also provides specific interventions and suggestions for counselors working with LGBTQ students, as well as implications for future research in this area. Overall, the studies presented in this article support the creation of LGBTQ support groups on Christian college campuses, as a positive means of supporting LGBTQ students and helping them to navigate the unique challenges they may face.. Together, these studies reveal why there should be a holistic approach to fostering an environment favorable to LGBTQIA+ students who require support plus affirmation.

However, the studies did not discuss the potential challenges and opposition that may arise from certain religious institutions or conservative groups, the lack of standardized approaches in implementing support groups, the potential lack of qualified staff or counselors, and the impact on non-LGBTQ students. Further research and considerations may need to be taken into account to effectively establish and promote these support groups as a positive means of aiding LGBTQ students

Finding supportive friend groups, concealing or downplaying their LGBTQ identity, engaging in extracurricular activities, confiding in understanding teachers, honing their writing, musical, and leadership skills, and doing research to better understand and develop their identity were among the most common coping mechanisms of gifted LGBTQ students in middle and high school (Hutcheson & Tieso, 2014). This implies that LGBTQIA+ students employ a variety of strategies to deal with the difficulties that they face, so it is important to comprehend these mechanisms so that educators and other facilitators can provide proper guidance and support to these students. Nevertheless, the study did not have a discussion of the specific struggles and obstacles that they may have faced.

Similarly, the study by Lucassen et al. (2022) found the effectiveness of various coping strategies across cognitive, emotional, environmental, social, and behavioral domains for sexual and gender minority youth (SGMY). Techniques like cognitive restructuring and behavioral activation from cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) have been adapted to better suit the needs of SGMY, showing promise in addressing their mental health concerns. Adapting and understanding these coping strategies can help create interventions such as web-based formats, as mentioned in the study. Nevertheless, the study does not specify the challenges that SMGY encounter, needing to employ these coping mechanisms.

The study conducted by Roe (2015), examined the role of school social workers in supporting LGBT youths, they explored how gay and bisexual adolescents perceive peer support. The research revealed that while these teens receive assistance from their friends, they also express concerns about potential judgment from non-LGBTQ+ peers. Additionally, the study emphasizes the importance of providing resources and education to students outside the LGBTQ+ community. To foster empathy among students, the study suggests various strategies, including organizing activities to promote understanding of others' emotions, facilitating support groups for LGBT students, training peer allies, and connecting LGBT youths with adult mentors.

Although the study highlights peer support for LGBT youths in schools, it overlooks how cultural and societal influences, such as family acceptance and community attitudes, might affect this support. Furthermore, it doesn't investigate how school policies or staff support could influence peer relationships among LGBT students. Considering these factors could provide a more comprehensive understanding of peer support for LGBT youths in educational settings.

According to the article by Sanders (2013), many LGBTQ young people feel confident and proud of who they are. They believe that they deserve happiness and the freedom to live their lives as they want, despite facing hate. It's important for them to have role models who have overcome tough times and stayed strong. These role models can encourage them not to give up on opportunities, especially

education, and to believe in their ability to succeed, no matter what others say. With self-confidence and inspiration from resilient role models, LGBTQ youth can tackle challenges, follow their dreams, and create a more inclusive and hopeful future for themselves and others.

However, it's important to remember that the study might not cover every aspect of LGBTQ youth experiences, and there could be other factors affecting their self-confidence that weren't discussed. Additionally, not all LGBTQ youth may have access to the same support systems or role models mentioned in the article.

Furthermore, the study of Menghao et al. (2023) focused into the online world of LGBTQIA+ folks as they figure out who they are. By digging through almost a thousand forum posts, they discovered that when people chat online, they mainly do three things: share thoughts, express feelings, and talk about real-life stuff. What stood out is that these online talks aren't just about getting info, they're like virtual hangouts where they reflect, get support, and learn how to handle life's ups and downs. It shows how important it is for support services to be there for them during these big moments in their lives.

While this study tells us a lot about how LGBTQIA+ folks use online forums to explore who they are, there are some things it didn't look at or could have done better. For example, it didn't check how different types of forums or websites might change people's experiences. Also, since it only focused on written posts, it might have missed the details of how people talk, like tone or facial expressions. Plus, it didn't look into how things like age or cultural background could affect how people interact online. These are important things to think about when we're understanding the study and planning more research in this area.

Methodology

Research Design

In this study, a phenomenological approach was utilized to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ students of Morong National High School. The phenomenological approach investigates lived experiences and aims to uncover what a particular experience means to a group of people and how they experienced it (Ho & Limpaecher, 2022). This is typically accomplished by systematically collecting and analyzing narrative materials using methods that guarantee the credibility of the data gathered and the conclusions formed (Byrne, 2021). The data gathered were evaluated using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis method, making it an appropriate research design, in which the researchers can also develop interventions in accordance with the study's findings.

Participants

The twenty (20) total participants, five (5) per grade level, were chosen by employing purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique. The reasons for adopting a purposive strategy were based on the assumption that, given the aims and objectives of the study, the student-respondents share common characteristics as members LGBTQIA+ community at Morong National High School.

According to Sugiyono, as cited by Ersela (2019), purposive sampling is used when the target of the sample has certain characteristics, so it may not take other samples which do not have the characteristics that have been determined. Purposive sampling is a technique to choose a sample based on specific considerations. Therefore, subjects are hand-picked because they are informative or they possess the required characteristics.

Instruments

In order to gather qualitative data for this study, the researchers used semi-structured interview questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions specifically designed to assess the experiences of the selected respondents regarding the school support system. The researchers obtained informed consent from all participants, ensuring that they were fully aware of the purpose of the study and their rights as respondents. Confidentiality was strictly maintained throughout the data collection process to protect the privacy of the participants.

Data Analysis

In the study conducted by Kurup (2017), purposive sampling was used to recruit parents in Singapore, providing valuable insights into their perceptions of vaccination. 19 parents with regularly vaccinated children were selected via purposive sampling. The interviews, conducted face-to-face or via telephone, utilized a semi-structured guide and were recorded. This study highlights the importance of purposive sampling in capturing a range of perspectives and experiences.

A qualitative discussion was applied for the first to fourth research questions which involved analyzing participant responses. This analysis dug into the details of the data to gain a deeper understanding of what's being studied. Direct quotes or excerpts from respondents were used to supplement and illustrate key points and offer context for findings.

In this research study, once the data were gathered and organized, the researchers analyzed and interpreted it using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to identify patterns or themes within the qualitative data. This method of analysis includes processes such as bracketing personal experiences, constructing significant statements, organizing them into themes, and crafting textural and

structural descriptions that culminate in a composite essence, all with the objective of profoundly comprehending participants' lived experiences. This approach provides researchers with the best opportunity to comprehend the innermost deliberation of the "lived experiences" of study participants (Alase, 2017).

Lastly, based on the identified achievements, difficulties, and obstacles faced by LGBTQIA+ students, information, education, and communication materials was developed.

Results and Discussion

In this study, twenty (20) students who are members of the LGBTQIA+ community, five 5 each from Grades 7-10, from Morong National High School participated. There were four (4) females and one (1) male in Grade 7 who identified themselves as bisexuals. While in Grade 8, there was one (1) lesbian, three (3) females, and one (1) male who identified as bisexual. In Grade 9, there was one (1) gay, one (1) lesbian, and two (2) females, and one (1) male identifying as bisexual. Lastly, there was one (1) who identified as gay, and three (3) males and one (1) female who identified as bisexual in Grade 10. The respondents' academic and extracurricular experiences were evaluated using a questionnaire consisting of open-ended questions.

Struggles that LGBTQIA+ students face in terms of academics and extracurricular activities

Most of the LGBTQIA+ students didn't experience any struggles. However, some of them encountered struggles in terms of academic and extracurricular activities.

One major issue pointed out was bullying along with exclusion from society where one of the respondents who identified as bisexual had to experience teasing as well as being called names by schoolmates which made them lose concentration during class. *"Noong ako'y nakatanggap ng pang-aasar sa aking isang kaibigan sa classroom, kaya po ako ay nawalan ng gana sa pagsasagot sa klase dahil ako'y kanilang pinag-uusapan."* according to the respondent. It is stated that they got teased and called names by classmates, which made it hard for them to focus in class. They felt bad and didn't want to participate because others were talking about them. It shows how bullying can really affect someone's ability to learn and feel comfortable in school.

On top of that, the majority of the respondents from Grades 7 and 10, along with a few respondents from Grades 8 and 9, mentioned discrimination as a struggle for academic performance. *"I struggled with discrimination and invalidation from others and because of that, it became an obstacle for me to achieve my academic pursuits."* as per one of the students' response. This feeling was common among students, showing how discrimination hurts self-confidence and grades. Whether it's obvious or not, discrimination makes it tough to feel like you belong in class and learn properly.

Following that, a few respondents, mostly from Grade 7 and Grade 10 acknowledged that their mental health had been affected, therefore hindering their participation in school activities. One of them mentioned *"On a personal level, I have felt that I experienced brief regressions that greatly affected my mental state and performance towards academics and extracurricular activities.".* The respondent experienced brief regressions in which they cope through going back to previous behaviors and even a decline in progress which had an impact on their mental health which affected their performance in school.

Sexual orientation can serve as a source of strength to academic experiences via a number of indirect pathways. For instance, research has shown that LGB campus climates enhance academic integration for LGB students (Woodford & Kulick, 2014). LGB campus climates, and higher visibility and proximity to LGB faculty, staff, and student peers, mutually positively influence both social and academic integration, and in turn, participate in making the academic environment more healthy and welcoming for LGB students (Reinert & Yakaboski, 2017). Furthermore, mounting evidence also shows that sexual orientation disclosure and the possession of supportive relationships with LGB peers positively impact academic outcomes (Albright, 2023). Moreover, location disclosure within the academe and the benefits of being a gay male graduate student are areas in which sexual orientation is bound to play a role in positively impacting academic experiences (Ecker, 2013). In sum, sexual orientation can positively influence academic experiences by promoting visibility, working toward creating inclusive campus hangouts, and helping students establish supportive teaching and peer relationships.

This implies that the academic performance and mental health of some of the LGBTQIA+ students are affected by struggles like bullying, exclusion, and discrimination. This shows that LGBTQIA+ students need acceptance and equal opportunities to make a welcoming environment that helps the academic and personal growth of every student, regardless of their sexual orientation.

The impact of the student's gender identity on their successes and struggles

The respondents discussed how being a member of the LGBTQIA+ community has become a factor that impacted their successes and struggles. These impacts varied for each individual.

Impact on Successes

Several individuals from Grades 7 to 9 claimed that their identity did not positively affect their academic performance. "*It doesn't really affect my academical experience."* as per one of the students' response. The student is expressing that their identity, such as their background or personal characteristics, doesn't seem to have an impact on their academic performance. They're suggesting that

regardless of who they are or where they come from, their experience in school and their ability to do well academically remains consistent.

Nevertheless, the majority stated that they have experienced a sense of empowerment and encouragement from themselves and their peers that contributed to improving their performance in academics and extracurricular activities. One indicating their experience stated "*My sexual orientation influenced my self-esteem, and increased my resiliency. It had also reduced my anxiety and stress. I have more confidence to participate to activities and perform in school confidently after being comfortable with my sexual orientation."* indicating that being part of the LGBTQIA+ community contributed to their achievements by influencing their self-esteem and resiliency, reducing their anxiety and stress, which made them more comfortable with their sexual orientation.

Following that, several respondents shared how their identities enabled them to create and seize opportunities. "*My sexual orientation, while not inherently linked to the idea, had given me an expanded insight on issues in political and social areas. This had led me to excel in discussions related to social studies, enabling me to maximize my participation and performance.my sexual orientation had led me to expand my knowledge in issues concerning the LGBTQIA+ community and other social and political topics on the side. With that, my gained interest in these areas have positively influenced my engagement in my studies that involve the mentioned topics."* as shared by one of the respondents, stating that their sexual orientation has also spurred them to broaden their knowledge in areas concerning the LGBTQIA+ community and other social and political topics. Consequently, their interest in these domains has also positively influenced their engagement in studies involving these. This has helped them to excel in discussions related to social studies, maximizing their participation and performance.

In terms of motivation and engagement, several respondents expressed that their identity gave them more encouragement in studying. One respondents asserted "*Ang isang pagiging bisexual ko po ay nakatulong sa aking klase dahil sa simula po ng maging bisexual ako ay hindi na ako naging mahiyain sa klase. Mas lumakas ang loob ko na sumali sa quiz bee, lettering, at mag volunteer bilang isang treasurer sa klase."* The respondent is saying that they haven't noticed any significant changes or negative experiences since they became part of the community. They feel that the way they were treated and the opportunities they had before being part of the community are similar to what they experience now. In simpler terms, they're saying that their identity hasn't caused them any problems or differences in how they're treated.

Impact on Struggles

Out of the 20 respondents, nearly half of them claimed their identity had no significant impact on the struggles they faced, especially among Grade 8 students. A respondent claimed "*Wala naman akong masyadong kakaiba na naexperience simula noong naging parte ako ng community na ito. Kung ano yung status, mga opportunity at trato saakin ng mga tao noong straight pa ako ay hindi naman malayo sa nararanasan ko ngayon. Kung tutuusin, wala naman akong negative experiences."* As stated, being part of the community hasn't changed much for them. They didn't face any major differences in how they were treated or the opportunities they had compared to when they identified as straight. Overall, they haven't had any negative experiences related to their identity.

On the other hand, several respondents expressed discouragement as the impact of their identity, mostly among the Grade 9 respondents, in which some claimed to have affected their motivation and engagement in class. "*Naiimpluwensyahan ako nito sa paraan ng pag iisip ng negatibo."* as disclosed by one of the respondents, claiming that the obstacles caused by their identity influence them into thinking negatively.

Thereafter, a few respondents claimed that they experienced discrimination because of their identity. One of them stated "*My mental health was rapidly declining—making it hard for me to participate to any activities properly. Stress from home, school, and from my peers had made my mental health issues worse. I struggled with discrimination and invalidation from others and because of that, it became an obstacle for me to achieve my academic pursuits."* The student felt like their mental health was getting worse really quickly because of stress at home, school and their friends. They also felt like they were treated unfairly and not taken seriously by others because of who they are. This made it really hard for them to do well in school.

Another student mentioned that their identity caused them to fear opening up which impacted their struggles. "*I struggle on opening up to my parents about my sexuality, afraid that they might get mad or something else,"* as the respondent said. It's common for people to feel scared about sharing their true selves, especially when it comes to things like sexuality, with their parents. They worry that their parents might react badly, like getting angry or upset. This fear can make it really hard for them to open up and talk about what they're going through.

Much study has been conducted on LGBT students in terms of campus climate and academic accomplishment, with the conclusion that a healthy campus atmosphere may have a positive impact on students' academic success. However, no research has been conducted to determine the significance of campus climate, student levels of depression, anxiety, and stress, and student degree of outgoingness in predicting academic achievement. McCormick (2023) investigated the relationship between campus climate, depression, anxiety, and stress levels, and student level of outness in predicting the self-reported grade point average of LGBT college students. Basic Psychological Needs Theory, a sub-theory of Self-Determination Theory, was utilized to interpret the data.

The data implies that there is a diverse range of how the students' LGBTQIA+ identity impacted their positive and negative experiences including their performance and motivation. Certain effects, such as empowerment and discouragement, are prevalent, while some are less common. These emphasize the importance of providing the LGBTQIA+ community with a supportive and inclusive environment in order to improve their well-being, performance, and academic and extracurricular journey.

Coping mechanisms of the students in dealing with difficulties and failures to succeed in academics and extracurricular activities

The LGBTQIA+ students disclosed the coping mechanisms that they apply in response to the difficulties and failures that they have experienced.

They described strategies such as seeking support and advice from peers, self-empowerment, disregarding, studying more, engaging in self-reflection, socializing, writing literature, and distracting themselves through tasks and leisure activities as their coping mechanisms, varying for each individual.

Peer Support

Among the respondents, the majority—mostly respondents who identified as bisexual, stated that they seek support and advice from peers. One of them said *"I ask a lot of advice and help from my peers to cope."* They claimed that confiding and receiving advice from their peers was their way of dealing with struggles they face.

The study of Roe (2015) discusses how school social workers can assist LGBT youths in public schools. They conducted a study where they explored how gay and bisexual teens perceive support from their peers. The study found that these teenagers got help from their friends, but they're also worried about being judged by non-LGBTQ+ peers. Furthermore, the study highlights how crucial it is to offer resources and education to students who are not part of the LGBTQ+ community. The study proposes several strategies to enhance empathy among students, such as organizing activities to improve understanding of others' feelings, facilitating support groups for LGBT students, training peer allies, and connecting LGBT youths with adult role models. These interventions aim to make the school feel friendlier and more understanding.

Self-empowerment

Coming in second most frequently is self-empowerment among respondents who are primarily seventh-grade students. "*Tinatagan ko ang loob ko dahil alam ko na ito lang ang alam kong paraan para mapasan ko lahat ng hirap na aking dinadanas bilang isang bisexual" a*s stated by one of the respondents, expressing that empowering and encouraging themselves is their way of managing and coping with the challenges they encounter.

Based on an article by Sanders (2013), Many LGBTQ young people today feel strong. They proudly say, "This is who I am. I deserve to be happy. And I deserve to live my life in a way that makes me happy." They don't let hate stop them. It's crucial for them to see role models who faced tough times but stayed strong. By having self-confidence and finding inspiration in resilient role models, LGBTQ youth can navigate challenges, pursue their dreams, and ultimately shape a more inclusive and promising future for themselves and others.

Disregarding

Following that, some students who's all identified as bisexual from tenth grade disclosed that they cope with struggles through disregarding other people's comments. One of them mentioned "*Nalagpasan ko siya sa pamamagitan ng hindi ko nalang pinapansin yung mga sinasabi nila, ng mga tao, dedma nalang parang ganon. Kasi once na parang pinansin mo ako lang yung masasaktan and parang nakakapagpababa pa siya ng confidence."* They claimed that ignoring the comments of other people helped them to deal with their struggles, saying that they do it to avoid discouragement and getting hurt.

A qualitative study by Tang and Poudel (2018) discovered that there is one strategy that these students are using in response to these challenges is to pay no attention to negative comments. The students try to protect their mental and emotional wellbeing by ignoring any derogatory remarks or discriminatory behavior.

Focusing on studies

While some also expressed that they focus more on their studies in order to handle the challenges. "*Nalagpasan kopo ito sa pamamagitan ng pag-aaral ng mabuti"* as indicated by one of those respondents, in which they claimed that they study more in order to cope with the challenges.

A study by Lucassen et al. (2022) found that some students focus on studies to face struggles, as a coping strategy. The review reveals coping mechanisms such as focusing on studies that positively affect mental health among sexual and gender minority youths.

Self Reflection

Then, out of the respondents, only one student mentioned self-reflection as a coping mechanism. "*The main coping mechanism that I have used during these difficulties was simply plain self-reflection that helped me gain a rational perspective on things,"* stating that reflecting on themselves helped them overcome the challenges they encounter.

Espinol et al. (2021) found that students have been able to overcome hardships through self-reflection. They also found that gay and lesbian students are able to self-actualized when they have good self-esteem, accept their genders, and are given the chance to express themselves. Campus clubs that help students express their genders can be mechanisms for experiencing self-actualization.

Writing literature

Following that, the same respondent claimed that they write literature as a way of coping. *"So I've used my self-reflection into writing literature which had lifted a considerable amount of tension."* as per the students' response, expressing that reflecting on themselves and using the rational perspective they gained in creating literature works was their way of coping.

In support to these results, study by Hutcheson and Tieso (2014) found out that one of the most common strategies that gifted LGBTQIA+ students include honing their writing skills. Through honing their writing skills, these students discovered a way to communicate, explore, and comprehend who they are. Writing acted as an instrument for self-reflection, emotional expression, and the investigation of difficult emotions connected to their identities.

Socializing

Thereafter, one student also identified socializing with their loved ones as a means of coping. "*Of course spend most of my time with my friends and family.*" the respondent shared, indicating that in order to manage the struggles they face, they choose to bond and socialize with their family and peers.

Similarly, Menghao et al. (2023) found how LGBTQIA+ people figure out who they are and find support online. By examining online communications, they observed how they construct the meaning of their identities and provide support and information for others. However, this study did not discuss how LGBTQIA+ utilize online platforms in coping with academic and extracurricular struggles.

Distraction

Lastly, only one student mentioned distracting themselves as their strategy. The respondent stated "*My coping mechanisms are distracting myself through various tasks or leisure activities like using my phone and hanging out with my friends that didn't discriminate against me. In that way, I won't get distracted with my studies and stay focused instead of thinking of my problems and difficulties from time to time."* They said that in order to cope, they divert their attention to other things such as doing tasks,leisure activities, and socializing.

Lucassen et al. (2022) highlighted certain helpful techniques for supporting the mental well-being of LGBTQ individuals, such as doing activities that distract from worries. For instance, Strauss and his colleagues found that trans and gender diverse young people found relief by using social media, playing games, or watching online videos, which temporarily took their minds off their concerns.

These findings imply that LGBTQIA+ students at Morong National High School use a variety of coping mechanisms to deal with and handle the challenges that come their way. These results also suggest that coping mechanisms such as disregarding, focusing on studies, and self-empowerment, that are employed by LGBTQIA+ students at the school are some of the strategies that are less commonly observed among LGBTQIA+ individuals. These underscore the need for support for the LGBTQIA+ community and the understanding of the diverse strategies that they utilize in order to implement proper guidance and build respect.

IEC material recommended as an intervention to address the problems the respondents mentioned

Presented below is the Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) material that the researchers developed as a strategic intervention to address the concerns raised by the respondents. This comprehensive resource has been carefully developed to provide clear, accessible, and practical information that addresses the identified struggles. Its objective is to fill in knowledge gaps, encourage positive behavior change, and create an improved understanding of critical subjects by using engaging visuals, concise language, and practical suggestions. By utilizing this IEC material, communities can become more informed, proactive, and resilient.

Conclusions

This research determined the significant challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ students in schools. They had to cope with various sorts of difficulties, such as discrimination, stigma, and bullying, but they also showed incredible strength in overcoming these challenges. They find ways to cope and succeed despite the hardships they endure.

In addition to overcoming challenges, the research also found that LGBTQIA+ students have excelled academically. They demonstrated their skills and abilities in academics, sports, leadership, and other extracurricular activities, consistently breaking stereotypes. These achievements are significant, given the obstacles these students have to face. The successful coping mechanisms that helped the students

are also remarkable. They rely on various coping strategies, such as seeking support from friends and support groups. These exceptional students serve as an inspiration for all, proving that with determination and self-acceptance, anyone can excel in both academics and extracurricular pursuits.

Collaborative efforts must be made within schools and communities to create a more inclusive environment. The research serves as a call to action, urging the establishment of safe spaces that safeguard LGBTQIA+ students from discrimination and bullying. It is crucial for institutions to provide platforms for students to share their experiences and foster a sense of belonging. These actions need to be prioritized urgently, given the magnitude of the challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ students. By promoting empathy and providing educational support, schools can address this issue head-on and empower LGBTQIA+ students to thrive.

The researchers recommend strengthening the circulation of knowledge about the struggles faced by LGBTQIA+ students in schools. This includes raising awareness about discrimination, stigma, and bullying needs understanding and empathy promotion among students, teachers, as well as the entire community. Education programs should be developed that will provide information on LGBTQIA+ matters, and promote their inclusiveness in society while challenging stereotypes at the same time.

Motivating LGBTQIA+ students to participate in extracurricular activities and leadership roles can help them improve their self-confidence and develop skills. In these aspects, it is important for schools to actively encourage and celebrate the accomplishments of LGBTQIA+ students thereby giving them chances to grow and succeed themselves.

Future studies ought to acknowledge the diverse backgrounds and identities within the LGBTQIA+ community. It is important to understand the effects of sexual orientation and gender identity when planning for interventions that support individuals may be tough particularly if you ignore ethnicity, disability status, economic status as well as race. Researchers must focus on having varied and all-inclusive research respondents with an objective to recognize respect and make a priority the views of marginalized LGBTQIA+ persons.

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