

EQUALITY FOR ALL: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY ON THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF GAY AND LESBIAN EDUCATORS IN THE CONTEXT OF GAD PROGRAMS

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of gay and lesbian educators in the Municipality of Pres. Roxas within the context of Gender and Development (GAD) programs. Using a phenomenological design, the research sought to understand how these educators perceived the implementation of GAD initiatives, the challenges they encountered in their professional and personal lives, and their recommendations for fostering a more inclusive and supportive educational environment. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with fifteen participants selected through purposive sampling. Colaizzi's method of phenomenological analysis was employed to identify significant statements, formulate meanings, and generate themes that reflected the essence of participants' experiences. The study revealed that while GAD programs promoted awareness and symbolic inclusion, their implementation remained inconsistent and often limited to formal compliance rather than genuine institutional transformation. Participants described both positive and negative experiences, including moments of recognition and persistent encounters with discrimination, microaggressions, and professional exclusion. Cultural conservatism and weak policy enforcement were identified as key barriers to inclusivity. Despite these challenges, participants expressed hope for improvement through enhanced GAD training, stronger policy enforcement, collaboration with LGBTQ+ organizations, and community engagement programs. The findings emphasized that inclusivity in education requires not only policy formulation but also active leadership, empathy, and a culture of respect for diversity. The implications of the study underscore the need for education stakeholders to strengthen GAD implementation by institutionalizing comprehensive gender sensitivity training, ensuring accountability, and providing mental and emotional support for LGBTQ+ educators. Future research should examine intersectional experiences, leadership influences, and the long-term impact of inclusive policies on teacher motivation and retention. Ultimately, the study affirms that equality for all educators can only be achieved through continuous advocacy, evidence-based reforms, and a sustained commitment to genuine inclusivity in Philippine education.

Keywords: *Gender and Development, LGBTQ+ educators, inclusivity, phenomenology, educational equity, gender sensitivity, Philippine education*

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Addressing equality and inclusivity in education remains a pressing concern, particularly for lesbian and gay educators who continue to face discrimination and systemic barriers. Despite global advocacy for gender and sexual orientation inclusion, LGBTQ+ educators often struggle for recognition, acceptance, and equal professional opportunities (Alexander, 2018).

In the Philippines, Gender and Development (GAD) programs aim to promote inclusivity, especially in education. However, challenges persist. LGBTQ+ educators still encounter professional and personal obstacles that affect their growth and well-being (Abad, 2020). This study explores the experiences of gay and lesbian educators within GAD programs, evaluating whether these initiatives foster inclusion or reinforce systemic inequality.

Internationally, schools have made strides in adopting inclusive policies, yet many countries still lack clear protections for LGBTQ+ staff. This absence increases the risk of marginalization and exclusion (Bilodeau & Munt, 2020). Educators may face limited access to leadership, workplace harassment, and pressure to conform to heteronormative standards (Blackwell & Peters, 2022). Although research has emphasized the importance of institutional support, gaps remain in understanding how these policies affect LGBTQ+ educators' lived experiences across different cultural contexts (Bell & White 2021).

The Philippines has seen progress through GAD efforts and policy frameworks aimed at promoting gender inclusivity (Bagabaldo, 2023). Yet, uneven implementation leaves many LGBTQ+ educators vulnerable to peer, administrator, and student discrimination (Aguilar, 2021). While proposals like the Anti-Discrimination Bill exist, the absence of enforceable national legislation contributes to continued bias and exclusion (Bautista, 2020). Research in this area tends to focus on students, overlooking the distinct challenges faced by LGBTQ+ educators (Aniceto, 2022). This gap highlights the need to examine how inclusive policies are practiced in real school settings.

At the local level, cultural and institutional norms present further hurdles. In rural areas, conservative and religious ideologies perpetuate stigma against non-heteronormative identities (Alim, 2019). LGBTQ+ educators often feel unsafe, fearing job insecurity or social exclusion (Bantug, 2021). In urban centers such as Metro Manila, educators still experience microaggressions, career limitations, and difficulty expressing their identities (Aquino, 2019). Although some schools have adopted GAD-related policies, these are often weakly enforced and fail to challenge underlying cultural biases (Benitez, 2022).

This study responded to these challenges by centering the voices of gay and lesbian educators. It shifts the focus from student-centered or broad policy studies toward the lived realities of educators navigating inclusion efforts. Through qualitative inquiry, the research aimed to reveal how current GAD programs function in practice, shedding light on gaps and successes. Finally, the study contributed to the ongoing conversation about gender equity in education and offers insights for future reforms and advocacy efforts

aimed at building more inclusive school environments in the Philippines and beyond (Bonifacio, 2018; Banerjee, 2019).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design grounded in phenomenology to deeply explore the lived experiences of gay and lesbian educators within the context of Gender and Development (GAD) programs. The choice of a qualitative framework was deliberate and appropriate given the study's focus on understanding the subjective experiences and personal interpretations of individuals who navigated professional environments shaped by socio-cultural norms and institutional policies. Phenomenology, in particular, aligned with the aim of capturing the essence of lived experiences, which were rich, complex, and often deeply emotional. As Creswell (2013) highlighted, phenomenological research sought to explore how individuals made sense of their personal and professional worlds through the lens of their consciousness.

This design allowed for a contextual, in-depth understanding of how gay and lesbian educators experienced inclusion or exclusion, support or marginalization, and empowerment or invisibility within their workspaces. The qualitative nature of the study provided the flexibility necessary to capture the fluid and evolving nature of experiences, particularly those that were influenced by internal identity dynamics and external societal structures. Through open-ended conversations and interactive dialogue, the researcher was able to access the nuanced and often unspoken realities that shaped these educators' daily lives.

Research Participants

The participants of this study comprised fifteen (15) self-identified gay and lesbian educators who were employed in public elementary schools within the Municipality of Pres. Roxas. These individuals were selected purposefully based on their firsthand engagement with GAD programs and their unique insights into how these policies had affected their professional trajectories and personal identities. Nine (9) of the participants participated in in-depth interviews (IDIs), while six (6) were involved in a focused group discussion (FGD).

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted using a combination of in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focused group discussions (FGDs), guided by a semi-structured interview guide that had been subjected to expert validation. This mixed-method approach within qualitative inquiry ensured that a range of perspectives, both individual and collective, were captured and analyzed. The setting for data collection was the public elementary schools within the Municipality of Pres. Roxas, providing a naturalistic environment for authentic storytelling and reflection.

All IDIs and FGDs were audio-recorded with participants' consent. The recordings were transcribed using a denaturalized transcription method, which focused on the content and meaning rather than the exact grammar or speech patterns.

Procedures

Before initiating any data collection activities, the researcher obtained formal approval from the Dean of the Graduate School and the Ethics Review Committee of the academic institution. Ethical clearance ensured that the study adhered to national and institutional standards for research involving human participants. Following institutional approval, the researcher wrote to the Schools Division Superintendent (SDS) of Pres. Roxas, seeking permission to conduct the study in public schools within the division. Once this had been granted, corresponding letters were sent to the principals of the participating schools and to the individual teacher participants.

Participants were informed about the purpose, procedures, and ethical safeguards of the study. Informed consent was obtained in both written and verbal forms. The researcher scheduled interviews based on participants' preferences, prioritizing their availability, convenience, and safety. Depending on conditions, interviews were conducted face-to-face in a private setting within the school premises or online using secure digital platforms.

Data Analysis

The process of analyzing the collected data in this study adhered to Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological method, which was well-suited for capturing the richness of lived experiences. This method allowed the researcher to systematically extract, organize, and interpret significant statements made by participants during in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The data analysis process began with the transcription of audio-recorded interviews into textual form, using a denaturalized approach that focused on content and meaning rather than linguistic precision.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Discussion of Key Findings

This chapter presented, interpreted, and discussed the key findings derived from the lived experiences of gay and lesbian educators in public elementary schools within the Municipality of Pres. Roxas, as they navigated the realities of Gender and Development (GAD) programs. The results were organized thematically based on narratives gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Each theme reflected the participants' experiences of inclusion and exclusion, acceptance and discrimination, empowerment and marginalization, as well as their coping mechanisms and insights in relation to their professional and personal identities within the educational system.

Perceptions and Experiences of Gay and Lesbian Educators on the Implementation of Gender and Development (GAD) Programs in Pres. Roxas

Table 1. Perceptions and Experiences of Gay and Lesbian Educators on the Implementation of Gender and Development (GAD) Programs in Pres. Roxas

Themes	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements	Meanings / Interpretations
Partial Inclusion and Symbolic Recognition	Invitations to events, limited participation, token representation	"I feel included when invited to speak during GAD events but excluded when	Inclusion was often symbolic; educators were recognized publicly but had limited influence in

Themes	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements	Meanings / Interpretations
Gaps Between Policy and Practice		my suggestions are ignored.”	planning or decision-making.
	Uneven implementation, lack of monitoring, inconsistency across schools	“GAD programs make me feel secure about my identity, yet positive influences are inconsistent.”	While policies exist, their daily execution was inconsistent, revealing gaps between advocacy and practice.
	Personal empowerment, visibility, role modeling	“GAD programs help me express who I am, self-assurance, and I feel more confident with my students.”	GAD initiatives enhanced encouraging educators to model inclusivity and authenticity.
	Subtle jokes, gossip, hidden biases	“Subtle jokes and gossip persist despite GAD goals promoting acceptance.”	Despite official inclusivity, everyday microaggressions undermined respect and equality.

The thematic analysis presented in Table 1 highlights how gay and lesbian educators perceived and experienced the implementation of GAD programs within public elementary schools in the Municipality of Pres. Roxas. Four themes emerged from the

qualitative data: (1) partial inclusion and symbolic recognition, (2) gaps between policy and practice, (3) influence on professional confidence, and (4) microaggressions amid formal inclusivity. The results revealed that while GAD programs offered opportunities for recognition and participation, these remained largely symbolic and inconsistent across schools. Participants described mixed feelings of empowerment and marginalization, underscoring that institutional culture, administrative support, and social attitudes strongly shaped their sense of belonging. The narratives collectively emphasized the persistent gap between policy intentions and lived experiences, illuminating the complexity of translating GAD advocacy into inclusive school practices.

Theme 1: Partial Inclusion and Symbolic Recognition

The first theme revealed that most gay and lesbian educators felt partially included in GAD initiatives, yet their participation was limited to symbolic gestures rather than meaningful engagement. Several participants expressed that they were invited to speak during school events but excluded from actual decision-making processes.

One educator shared, “I feel included when invited to speak during GAD events but excluded when my suggestions are ignored” (ID11.1.1).

Another mentioned, “We are often visible only during Pride Month, but afterward, our voices disappear” (ID11.1.2).

Some educators reflected that “being asked to represent diversity feels tokenistic rather than genuine inclusion” (FGD1.1.1).

Others added, “Our opinions are rarely considered in developing school GAD plans” (IDI1.1.3) and “There is acknowledgment of our presence but not acceptance of our ideas” (IDI1.1.4).

These statements suggest that inclusion is often ceremonial, reflecting limited institutional willingness to share power. This interpretation gains support from the findings of Aguilar (2021), who explained that many GAD policies in Philippine schools exist only at the formal level without deep structural engagement. The results also corroborate with the study of Bautista (2020), who reported that LGBTQ+ educators are frequently invited for visibility but excluded from leadership participation. Similarly, Benitez (2022) emphasized that symbolic inclusion without empowerment perpetuates inequality, reinforcing heteronormative authority structures.

Theme 2: Gaps Between Policy and Practice

The second theme demonstrated a persistent discrepancy between the ideals of gender inclusivity in policy and their implementation in practice. Participants described that GAD programs, while well-intentioned, lacked consistent monitoring and contextual adaptation.

One teacher observed, “GAD programs make me feel secure about my identity, yet positive influences are inconsistent” (IDI1.2.1).

Another shared, “There are schools where GAD is active and others where it is forgotten” (IDI1.2.2).

Several reflected, “Policies are displayed on bulletin boards but not truly practiced” (FGD1.2.1).

One participant emphasized, “Training focuses more on women empowerment than LGBTQ+ inclusion” (IDI1.2.3), while another added, “There is little effort to evaluate if GAD activities are inclusive for everyone” (IDI1.2.4).

The implications suggest that inconsistencies across schools reinforce selective implementation. This was supported by Abad (2020), who traced the origins of GAD programs to global frameworks yet observed uneven adaptation in local educational systems. The findings also align with the study of Cabanes (2021), who noted that GAD initiatives tend to focus narrowly on women’s issues while neglecting LGBTQ+ perspectives. Moreover, the work of Alim (2019) revealed that rural schools, in particular, struggle with contextualizing gender-responsive policies due to traditional beliefs and lack of training.

Theme 3: Influence on Professional Confidence

The third theme revealed that GAD initiatives contributed to increased professional confidence among some participants, enabling them to express their authentic selves and model inclusivity.

One educator stated, “GAD programs help me express who I am and be proud of my identity” (IDI1.3.1).

Another remarked, “My students respect me more when they see I am part of school initiatives on equality” (FGD1.3.1).

A teacher shared, “Before GAD, I was afraid to speak about gender issues, but now I can facilitate discussions confidently” (IDI1.3.2).

Others reflected, “I feel more empowered knowing that policies exist to protect me” (IDI1.3.3) and “Being visible in GAD events improved how my colleagues treat me” (IDI1.3.4).

These experiences show that GAD programs, despite inconsistencies, provide psychological safety and enhance educators’ self-efficacy. This is congruent with the findings of Benitez (2022), who argued that active administrative support in implementing gender-sensitive policies leads to higher job satisfaction and confidence among LGBTQ+ educators. The results also gain support from Bautista (2020), who identified that institutional recognition fosters a sense of belonging and motivation. Furthermore, the study of Reyes (2019) reinforced that educators’ participation in inclusive programs strengthens their capacity to lead dialogues on equality and serve as role models for students.

Theme 4: Microaggressions Amid Formal Inclusivity

The fourth theme captured the contradiction between the formal presence of inclusivity and the persistence of discriminatory attitudes. Participants recounted experiences of ridicule, gossip, and microaggressions that undermined GAD’s purpose. \

One teacher explained, “Subtle jokes and gossip persist despite GAD goals promoting acceptance” (IDI1.4.1).

Another shared, “Some colleagues tease us in front of students and call it humor” (FGD1.4.1).

Others stated, “Even with policies, prejudice is normalized in staff rooms” (IDI1.4.2), “I am respected in meetings but mocked outside” (IDI1.4.3), and “Students mirror the disrespect they see from adults” (IDI1.4.4).

These findings reveal that despite the institutionalization of GAD, everyday practices still reproduce inequality. This was supported by Bautista (2020), who found that workplace microaggressions remain widespread despite anti-discrimination policies. Similarly, the results corroborate with Cardenas (2020), who highlighted that the absence of accountability mechanisms perpetuates normalized bias. The findings are also consistent with Alexander (2018), who explained that global education systems often maintain heteronormative discourses that silence LGBTQ+ experiences even under inclusive frameworks.

Finally, the findings illustrate that while GAD programs have opened spaces for recognition and limited empowerment, they remain hindered by symbolic inclusion, inconsistent practice, and persistent prejudice. The study thus underscores the need for continuous institutional reflection, structured accountability, and the authentic participation of LGBTQ+ educators in program design and implementation to ensure that GAD initiatives achieve their inclusive intent.

Challenges and Barriers Encountered by Gay and Lesbian Educators in Their Professional and Personal Lives within the Educational System of Pres. Roxas

Table 2. Challenges and Barriers Encountered by Gay and Lesbian Educators in Their Professional and Personal Lives within the Educational System of Pres. Roxas

Themes	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements	Meanings / Interpretations
Subtle and Overt Discrimination	Workplace exclusion, biased leadership	“Administrators are hesitant to trust LGBTQ educators for leadership roles due to stereotypes.”	Institutional bias and prejudice limited equal opportunities and professional advancement.
	assignments, stereotyping		
Cultural and Societal Norms as Barriers	Traditional gender expectations, stigma, lack of open discussion	“Cultural norms discourage open talk about sexuality, restricting mentorship and support.”	Deep-rooted conservatism constrained open identity expression and access to support networks.
Institutional Policy Gaps and Weak Enforcement	Lack of explicit anti-discrimination rules, poor implementation	“Policies are there but no one enforces them consistently in schools.”	Weak policy enforcement left educators vulnerable and unsupported.
Psychological and Emotional Strain	Stress, self-censorship, fear of rejection	“I always filter my words and actions to avoid	The constant need for self-monitoring caused emotional fatigue and

Themes	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements	Meanings / Interpretations
		offending others or being hindered authentic judged.”	engagement.

The thematic analysis in Table 2 provides a rich account of the difficulties and barriers that gay and lesbian educators experienced in their personal and professional lives within the local educational system. Four major themes emerged: (1) subtle and overt discrimination, (2) cultural and societal norms as barriers, (3) institutional policy gaps and weak enforcement, and (4) psychological and emotional strain. These themes reveal how social stigma, institutional constraints, and limited policy enforcement intersect to perpetuate marginalization despite the formal presence of GAD programs. Participants' stories reflected feelings of fear, isolation, and limited career progression. The data highlight that while policies advocate equality, structural and cultural realities continue to reproduce inequities that hinder full participation and authentic inclusion of LGBTQ+ educators in the teaching profession.

Theme 1: Subtle and Overt Discrimination

This theme revealed that many participants faced both covert and explicit forms of discrimination that affected their self-worth and professional advancement.

One educator explained, “Administrators are hesitant to trust LGBTQ educators for leadership roles due to stereotypes” (IDI2.1.1).

Another shared, “I have been overlooked for promotion even with higher qualifications” (IDI2.1.2).

A participant noted, “Parents sometimes complain when they learn that I am gay, as if I’m not fit to teach their children” (FGD2.1.1).

Others recalled, “There are students who mimic how I talk or walk, and other teachers just laugh” (IDI2.1.3) and “Even in meetings, my ideas are questioned simply because of who I am” (IDI2.1.4).

These experiences illustrate that discrimination often manifests as systemic exclusion, microaggressions, and professional invisibility. This interpretation was supported by Reyes (2019), who found that gay and lesbian educators in Philippine schools commonly encounter both overt and subtle prejudice that restricts their leadership opportunities. The results also gain support from Bantug (2021), who observed that implicit bias and stereotyping in the workplace undermine LGBTQ+ educators’ professional legitimacy. Similarly, Dworkin and Messerschmidt (2020) emphasized that institutional discrimination persists even in organizations that publicly espouse diversity.

Theme 2: Cultural and Societal Norms as Barriers

The second theme exposed the strong influence of cultural conservatism and religious values that continue to shape educators' experiences.

One participant stated, "Cultural norms discourage open talk about sexuality, restricting mentorship and support" (IDI2.2.1).

Another mentioned, "When I express gender equality ideas, some colleagues say they go against moral teachings" (FGD2.2.1).

One teacher observed, "Students are taught tolerance but not real acceptance" (IDI2.2.2).

Others expressed, "In our town, being gay is still seen as a weakness or sin" (IDI2.2.3) and "I have to act more 'manly' or 'feminine' depending on the expectations of the community" (IDI2.2.4).

These statements show how local culture and religion continue to dictate behavioral expectations, forcing LGBTQ+ educators to suppress or alter their identities to maintain social approval. This interpretation was supported by Aniceto (2022), who emphasized that Filipino cultural and religious traditions often conflict with gender inclusion policies. The results also corroborate with the study of Alim (2019), who found that teachers in rural schools face heightened cultural stigma, limiting open expression of sexuality. Likewise, the findings align with Kimmel (2019), who described schools as social institutions that reinforce heteronormative norms, making them difficult spaces for LGBTQ+ individuals to express authenticity.

Theme 3: Institutional Policy Gaps and Weak Enforcement

The third theme revealed that while GAD and anti-discrimination policies exist, their actual implementation and enforcement remain weak. Many participants noted that school leaders failed to uphold clear accountability mechanisms.

One respondent said, “Policies are there but no one enforces them consistently in schools” (IDI2.3.1). Another remarked, “Even when discrimination happens, no action is taken unless it’s very serious” (FGD2.3.1).

A participant added, “Complaints about unfair treatment are dismissed as personal issues” (IDI2.3.2).

Others pointed out, “There’s no clear reporting system for gender-related harassment” (IDI2.3.3) and “The GAD office exists, but it feels more symbolic than functional” (IDI2.3.4).

These narratives reveal that the absence of strict enforcement undermines policy credibility, allowing discriminatory practices to persist unchecked. This is congruent with the findings of Cardenas (2020), who identified the lack of enforcement mechanisms in Philippine GAD programs as a major contributor to ongoing inequality. The results also gain support from Aguilar (2021), who observed that policy implementation often depends on the discretion of school administrators rather than institutional mandates. Moreover, Magsino (2020) emphasized that the absence of accountability systems in schools perpetuates a culture of tolerance toward discrimination despite existing laws.

Theme 4: Psychological and Emotional Strain

The fourth theme highlighted the emotional toll experienced by gay and lesbian educators as they navigate heteronormative and unsupportive environments.

One participant shared, “I always filter my words and actions to avoid offending others or being judged” (IDI2.4.1).

Another expressed, “Every day feels like a performance where I must hide parts of who I am” (FGD2.4.1).

Several recounted, “It is exhausting to constantly pretend just to fit in” (IDI2.4.2), “Sometimes I question if I am respected for my work or just tolerated for my identity” (IDI2.4.3), and “The lack of support makes me feel isolated even when surrounded by people” (IDI2.4.4).

These reflections underscore the mental and emotional labor required to survive in unsupportive institutions. This finding gains support from Hopkins (2020), who reported that LGBTQ+ educators globally engage in self-censorship as a coping mechanism against systemic bias. The results also corroborate with Robinson and Ellis (2021), who observed that invisibility and identity suppression contribute to burnout and psychological distress. Similarly, the findings align with Garcia and Johnson (2022), who found that institutional neglect of LGBTQ+ well-being leads to professional disengagement and reduced morale among educators.

Finally, the findings from Table 2 reveal that discrimination, cultural norms, weak institutional frameworks, and emotional strain remain intertwined challenges that shape the lived realities of gay and lesbian educators. Despite GAD policies, these barriers continue to obstruct the full realization of inclusivity in educational institutions. The narratives affirm that addressing such issues requires not only stronger enforcement of gender-sensitive laws but also the transformation of school culture through sustained education, empathy, and representation of LGBTQ+ voices in policy implementation.

Recommendations and Suggested Improvements to Foster a More Inclusive and Supportive Environment for LGBTQ+ Educators through GAD Programs

Table 3. Recommendations and Suggested Improvements to Foster a More Inclusive and Supportive Environment for LGBTQ+ Educators through GAD Programs

Themes	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements	Meanings / Interpretations
Enhanced Training and Awareness	LGBTQ sensitivity	“Programs should include specialized leadership training and clear anti-discrimination policies.”	Teachers emphasized the need for structured, targeted capacity-building programs that reflect real LGBTQ+ issues.
	sessions, inclusive		
	pedagogy		
	workshops		
Policy Strengthening and Enforcement	Clear guidelines, accountability measures	“There should be strict rules and actual penalties for discrimination, not just	Participants called for firm institutional action to ensure

Themes	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements	Meanings / Interpretations
		reminders during meetings.”	equality and safety in the workplace.
Collaboration and Resource Support	Partnerships with organizations, peer networks	“Collaboration between schools and LGBTQ organizations can enhance program inclusivity.”	External partnerships can provide expertise, mentorship, and sustainable inclusivity programs.
Community and Parental Engagement	Advocacy, public awareness, values education	“We should educate parents and communities so they understand that inclusion benefits all learners.”	Broader social acceptance was seen as essential to the success of school-based GAD efforts.

The thematic analysis in Table 3 outlines the proposed strategies and recommendations shared by gay and lesbian educators to enhance the inclusivity and effectiveness of Gender and Development (GAD) programs in schools. Four major themes emerged: (1) enhanced training and awareness, (2) policy strengthening and enforcement, (3) collaboration and resource support, and (4) community and parental engagement. The findings highlighted that while current GAD programs have laid the foundation for gender inclusivity, they often overlook the specific realities and needs of LGBTQ+ educators. Participants emphasized that GAD initiatives must evolve from

symbolic compliance to transformative action, addressing structural inequities, administrative accountability, and cultural stigma. The results suggested that for GAD to achieve its intended purpose, inclusive leadership, continuous training, and partnerships with civil society must be prioritized to create a truly equitable educational environment.

Theme 1: Enhanced Training and Awareness

This theme revealed that participants saw education and continuous professional development as the key to fostering genuine inclusion. Several educators highlighted the importance of integrating LGBTQ+ sensitivity and awareness into teacher training programs.

One participant stated, “Programs should include specialized leadership training and clear anti-discrimination policies” (IDI3.1.1).

Another shared, “We need training that teaches teachers how to talk about gender diversity without fear or bias” (FGD3.1.1).

Others said, “Workshops should go beyond women empowerment and include LGBTQ+ realities” (IDI3.1.2), “Administrators must attend GAD seminars, not just assign teachers to go” (IDI3.1.3), and “Regular orientations help reduce misconceptions about gay and lesbian teachers” (IDI3.1.4).

These statements emphasize that awareness-raising is central to reducing bias and ensuring that inclusivity becomes an institutional norm rather than a symbolic act.

This was supported by Garcia and Johnson (2022), who noted that professional development centered on LGBTQ+ sensitivity equips educators with the tools to foster safe learning spaces. The results also corroborate with the findings of Javier (2021), who argued that teacher education programs must integrate comprehensive modules on gender diversity. Furthermore, Hennessy (2018) emphasized the need for queer pedagogical frameworks in teacher preparation programs to dismantle institutional prejudice and equip educators to handle complex discussions on identity and equality.

Theme 2: Policy Strengthening and Enforcement

The second theme focused on the educators' call for stricter enforcement and clearer institutional accountability to ensure that GAD policies are not only implemented but also respected.

One participant remarked, "There should be strict rules and actual penalties for discrimination, not just reminders during meetings" (IDI3.2.1).

Another expressed, "Policies must clearly state protection for LGBTQ+ teachers" (FGD3.2.1).

Additional participants shared, "The GAD office should be empowered to handle complaints independently" (IDI3.2.2), "We need policy monitoring that checks if schools follow inclusivity standards" (IDI3.2.3), and "Without enforcement, GAD will stay as paperwork only" (IDI3.2.4).

These reflections indicate that policy effectiveness relies heavily on clear institutional mechanisms and sanctions for violations. This interpretation gains support from Cardenas (2020), who pointed out that weak policy enforcement perpetuates discrimination within schools despite progressive frameworks. The findings also align with Aguilar (2021), who asserted that the lack of accountability structures in GAD programs results in inconsistencies in implementation. Likewise, Magsino (2020) affirmed that institutional oversight and performance audits are necessary to ensure that GAD initiatives translate into actual behavioral and systemic changes.

Theme 3: Collaboration and Resource Support

The third theme demonstrated participants' belief that partnerships with external organizations and access to adequate resources are critical for sustainable inclusivity.

One educator shared, "Collaboration between schools and LGBTQ organizations can enhance program inclusivity" (IDI3.3.1).

Another mentioned, "We need experts who can guide us on proper gender sensitivity implementation" (FGD3.3.1).

Others expressed, "Linking with human rights groups will make our programs more comprehensive" (IDI3.3.2), "Financial resources must be allocated to sustain GAD activities" (IDI3.3.3), and "Peer

mentoring programs among LGBTQ+ teachers will help strengthen support networks” (IDI3.3.4).

These statements reveal the necessity of cross-sector collaboration to provide technical expertise, financial assistance, and psychosocial support. This was supported by Wieringa (2022), who argued that partnerships between schools and advocacy organizations can produce more relevant, community-driven GAD policies. The results also corroborate with Habermas (2019), who emphasized that participatory policymaking strengthens ownership and inclusivity. Similarly, Moen (2022) affirmed that collaboration among educators, local stakeholders, and advocacy groups leads to institutional transformation and long-term policy impact.

Theme 4: Community and Parental Engagement

The fourth theme underscored the importance of extending inclusivity efforts beyond schools to families and communities. Educators stressed that genuine inclusivity requires social understanding and cooperation among parents, guardians, and local leaders.

One participant stated, “We should educate parents and communities so they understand that inclusion benefits all learners” (IDI3.4.1).

Another remarked, “Community orientation sessions must include discussions on LGBTQ+ rights and respect” (FGD3.4.1).

Others explained, “Parents sometimes object when we teach about gender equality; they need awareness too” (IDI3.4.2), “When communities are informed, discrimination in schools lessens” (IDI3.4.3), and “We should involve barangay leaders in promoting equality-based projects” (IDI3.4.4).

These insights point to the social dimension of inclusion, where educators recognized that transformation must involve collective cultural awareness. This interpretation was supported by Reyes (2019), who emphasized that social acceptance of LGBTQ+ educators improves when community engagement accompanies school reforms. The results also gain support from Lister (2020), who identified that external awareness initiatives bridge the gap between school inclusion and societal conservatism. Likewise, Salazar (2021) explained that involving parents and local stakeholders in gender advocacy reduces resistance and normalizes diversity in rural contexts.

Finally, the findings from Table 3 illustrate that the improvement of GAD programs depends on a multifaceted strategy, strengthened professional training, policy enforcement, institutional partnerships, and cultural education. The voices of gay and lesbian educators underscore the need for a transformative shift from compliance-based GAD initiatives toward participatory and equity-driven implementation. Aligning with global frameworks for gender equality, these insights affirm that inclusivity must be both institutional and social, anchored on accountability, awareness, and collective responsibility.

IMPLICATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This chapter presented the implications of the study's findings and outlined directions for future research on the lived experiences of gay and lesbian educators within the context of Gender and Development (GAD) programs in the Municipality of Pres. Roxas. The implications were discussed in relation to educational policy implementation, inclusive school leadership, teacher empowerment, and institutional collaboration in promoting gender equality and diversity in education. Emphasis was placed on how the results could guide educators, school heads, and policymakers in fostering professional environments grounded in acceptance, respect, and inclusivity for all educators regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation. Furthermore, this chapter identified potential areas for future research that may deepen understanding of LGBTQ+ educators' lived experiences, enhance gender-sensitive teacher training, and strengthen institutional mechanisms that uphold equity and human rights in Philippine education.

On the Perceptions and Experiences of Gay and Lesbian Educators on GAD Program Implementation

The findings from Table 1 highlight that while GAD programs have made strides toward inclusion, they often function symbolically rather than transformationally. Gay and lesbian educators felt partially included through participation in events and recognition, yet their voices remained marginalized in decision-making and policy formulation. The results imply that policy implementation must move beyond ceremonial inclusion toward genuine engagement and representation of LGBTQ+ educators in leadership and GAD committees. Schools should ensure that the spirit of inclusivity embedded in GAD policies is reflected in daily practices, such as staff relations, classroom management, and teacher evaluation, so that educators feel safe and respected regardless of gender identity. Furthermore, institutional monitoring and evaluation

mechanisms should be established to assess the authenticity of inclusivity efforts rather than their mere compliance with policy mandates.

Future research should investigate how different leadership styles, particularly gender-responsive and transformational leadership, influence the implementation of GAD programs in schools. Comparative studies between rural and urban districts could reveal the contextual disparities in inclusivity. Longitudinal research may also explore how continuous GAD interventions affect the attitudes of educators and administrators over time. Moreover, future studies may employ mixed-method approaches to evaluate the relationship between perceived inclusivity and professional motivation among LGBTQ+ educators. Expanding this line of research will strengthen the foundation for evidence-based GAD policies that truly promote equity and empowerment across the educational system.

On the Challenges and Barriers Encountered by Gay and Lesbian Educators

The second thematic table revealed that systemic discrimination, cultural conservatism, and weak institutional support continue to challenge LGBTQ+ educators. The persistence of heteronormative attitudes underscores that GAD programs, while existing in policy, remain inconsistently applied in practice. These findings imply the urgent need for sustained teacher sensitization programs, gender-awareness training for administrators, and the integration of inclusive perspectives into school governance. Educational institutions must also confront the psychological and emotional toll that bias and invisibility exert on LGBTQ+ educators by strengthening mental health support systems and peer networks. Beyond school-level intervention, policymakers should ensure that GAD programs are backed by enforceable sanctions against discriminatory behaviors and clear reporting mechanisms that protect teachers' rights and dignity.

Future researchers may explore how intersectional factors—such as religion, socioeconomic background, and geography, interact with sexual identity to shape LGBTQ+ educators' experiences. Studies could also examine how school culture and leadership climate influence teachers' sense of belonging, confidence, and well-being. Quantitative studies may be conducted to measure the correlation between inclusive school environments and the retention, motivation, and job satisfaction of gay and lesbian educators. Furthermore, future research could assess the psychological resilience strategies employed by LGBTQ+ teachers to navigate workplace adversity. This would contribute to building comprehensive frameworks that integrate emotional well-being into GAD program evaluation.

On the Recommendations and Improvements to GAD Programs for LGBTQ+ Inclusivity

The third table's findings indicated that strengthening GAD programs requires proactive strategies that extend beyond gender awareness to structural reform. The study implies that institutions must institutionalize regular LGBTQ+ sensitivity training, establish accountability mechanisms for enforcing anti-discrimination policies, and develop partnerships with advocacy groups and community stakeholders. The inclusion of LGBTQ+ educators in policymaking ensures that their lived experiences inform the evolution of gender-responsive education. Furthermore, community engagement and parental awareness initiatives are crucial for shifting cultural perceptions, particularly in rural and conservative contexts. These implications affirm that sustainable inclusivity must operate across multiple levels, policy, practice, and community consciousness.

Future research could evaluate the effectiveness of specific GAD interventions, such as sensitivity workshops, advocacy partnerships, and leadership mentoring programs for LGBTQ+ educators. Researchers might also investigate the role of collaborative networks between

schools, civil society, and local government in sustaining inclusive practices. Comparative case studies could be conducted to identify best practices from schools that have successfully mainstreamed LGBTQ+ inclusivity within GAD frameworks. Additionally, policy-focused research could examine how the Department of Education (DepEd) and local government units (LGUs) can align mandates to create standardized anti-discrimination and gender-sensitivity measures nationwide. Finally, future scholars may explore how intersectional frameworks, such as queer pedagogy and social justice education, can be integrated into teacher education programs to ensure that inclusivity becomes an embedded educational philosophy rather than a compliance-based requirement.

Overall Implications and Future Research Directions

The overall implications of this study emphasize that achieving equality and inclusivity for gay and lesbian educators requires deep structural, cultural, and institutional transformation. The findings revealed that while the Gender and Development (GAD) framework has laid a foundation for gender equality, its actual implementation in schools remains limited, fragmented, and often superficial. The lived experiences of participants showed that inclusion frequently exists in policy documents but not in daily practice. GAD initiatives were present but inconsistently applied, resulting in symbolic rather than meaningful participation of LGBTQ+ educators in school activities and policy development. These realities call for a reassessment of how GAD programs are carried out in schools and how institutional commitment can be strengthened to translate policies into practices that genuinely support diversity and human rights in education.

The results also imply that inclusivity in education must go beyond legal and procedural compliance. It requires the cultivation of empathy, understanding, and shared responsibility among school leaders, teachers, and policymakers. Educational leaders have the moral and professional duty to set the tone for acceptance by integrating inclusive values into school vision,

mission, and daily operations. Teacher education institutions, in turn, should revisit their curricula to ensure that future educators are equipped with both the knowledge and sensitivity to handle issues of gender, identity, and equality in diverse classrooms. The study highlights that inclusivity must be embedded in leadership practices, curriculum design, classroom interactions, and professional relationships. This comprehensive approach ensures that inclusivity becomes not only a written policy but also a lived experience for educators and learners alike.

Another major implication concerns the persistent gap between policy and practice. Despite the existence of GAD programs, many educators continue to experience bias, subtle exclusion, and institutional neglect. This suggests that policy enforcement mechanisms must be clearly defined and properly implemented. Institutions should establish monitoring and evaluation systems that assess the quality of inclusivity within their operations rather than simply checking compliance with guidelines. Administrative accountability must also be strengthened to ensure that discriminatory behavior is addressed promptly and fairly. The roles of DepEd supervisors, school heads, and GAD coordinators should evolve from mere implementers to active advocates of inclusive reform, ensuring that gender sensitivity becomes a continuous commitment rather than an occasional activity.

The emotional and psychological dimensions of inclusion also emerged as an important implication. Participants described feelings of isolation, exhaustion, and internal conflict resulting from a lack of understanding and acceptance in their work environments. This implies that inclusivity cannot be achieved without prioritizing mental and emotional well-being. Schools should provide psychosocial support programs and counseling services that address the unique challenges faced by LGBTQ+ educators. Establishing mentorship programs and peer support networks can also create safe spaces where educators can share experiences, foster solidarity, and build resilience. These initiatives not only protect teachers' mental health but also promote motivation, professional growth, and a sense of belonging.

The study further revealed that cultural and societal norms continue to influence perceptions of gender and sexuality in education. In rural or conservative areas like the Municipality of Pres. Roxas, cultural conservatism and religious beliefs often shape school culture. This finding implies that educational reform must extend beyond school walls to include broader community engagement. Collaboration with parents, local government units, and community organizations is vital in reshaping public attitudes toward gender diversity.

Through sustained dialogue, community education, and advocacy programs, schools can bridge the gap between traditional values and inclusive practices. Future research could examine how community participation and cultural adaptation strategies influence the long-term success of GAD programs in local contexts.

At the policy level, the implications point to the need for an intersectional approach. LGBTQ+ educators experience overlapping forms of discrimination based on gender, sexuality, class, religion, and geography. Recognizing these intersecting identities allows policymakers to design more targeted interventions that address both individual and systemic inequalities. The study encourages future researchers to examine the intersections between gender identity and other social determinants to uncover the layered barriers that shape educators' experiences. This approach will help ensure that inclusivity policies are responsive to the diverse realities within the LGBTQ+ community.

Future research should focus on evaluating the effectiveness of GAD programs through empirical and longitudinal studies. Researchers may assess the relationship between inclusive leadership practices and teacher job satisfaction, motivation, and retention among LGBTQ+ educators. Comparative studies between urban and rural schools could provide insights into how socio-cultural environments affect inclusivity efforts. Quantitative studies may also validate the impact of inclusive policies on school performance, teacher productivity, and community

perception. Mixed-method research could explore how lived experiences translate into measurable educational outcomes, linking inclusivity with institutional success.

Researchers are also encouraged to investigate the role of teacher education programs in preparing future educators to address issues of gender inclusivity. Studies could examine the effectiveness of pre-service and in-service GAD training and its influence on classroom practices. Future research may expand to include the experiences of bisexual, transgender, and non-binary educators to provide a more comprehensive understanding of gender inclusivity in the Philippine context. Policy-focused studies could also explore how educational institutions and local governments can align mandates to create consistent and well-enforced anti-discrimination measures nationwide.

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