



Bahag-Hari: The Lived Experiences and Challenges Faced by Queer Teachers in Education

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ABSTRACT

Educational institutions are expected to promote equity, inclusion, and respect for diversity; however, queer teachers often navigate professional environments shaped by socio-cultural, religious, and institutional norms that influence perceptions of gender identity and sexuality. In the Philippine context, although policies such as the Gender-Responsive Basic Education Policy advocate equality and inclusive practices, the lived experiences of queer educators in public basic education remain insufficiently explored. This study examined the lived experiences and challenges faced by queer teachers in the Philippine educational system and sought to uncover the essence of their professional and personal realities. Guided by transcendental phenomenology, the study involved eight purposively selected queer teachers from public schools in Northern Negros Occidental. Data were gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews that were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Using Moustakas' phenomenological procedures, significant statements were identified, clustered into themes, and synthesized into textural, structural, and composite descriptions. The analysis revealed four major themes: contributions characterized by creativity, leadership, and institutional impact; support mechanisms manifested through advocacy, allyship, and institutional affirmation; resilience in addressing discrimination, harassment, and identity-based bias; and optimism toward inclusivity initiatives such as Gender and Development programs and equality policies. Despite encountering prejudice and identity-based challenges, participants demonstrated strong professional commitment and actively cultivated inclusive classroom environments. The composite essence of the phenomenon reflects a continuous negotiation between identity and professionalism within heteronormative institutional structures, sustained by resilience and dedication to educational service. The findings highlight the importance of strengthening institutional support systems, ensuring consistent implementation of gender-responsive policies, and promoting inclusive leadership practices. These insights contribute to educational research by illuminating the lived realities of queer educators and offer practical implications for policymakers, school administrators, and teacher education institutions seeking to advance equity and inclusivity within the Philippine educational system.

Keywords: Inclusivity in Education, LGBTQIA+ teachers, Phenomenology, Queer educators, Resilience

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INTRODUCTION

Educational institutions are expected to promote equity, respect, and social development. In the Philippines, constitutional guarantees and national education policies emphasize equality and non-discrimination. The Department of Education reinforced this commitment through DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2017, also known as the Gender-Responsive Basic Education Policy, which promotes gender sensitivity and inclusive practices in schools. Despite these policy frameworks, challenges related to gender identity and sexual orientation continue to emerge within educational environments. Queer teachers often navigate professional settings where institutional ideals of inclusivity do not always align with everyday school experiences, particularly in contexts where gender and sexuality remain socially contested (Abesamis & Alibudbud, 2023).

The Philippines is widely recognized for its strong religious and socio-cultural influences on public discourse. These influences shape societal perceptions of gender and sexual identity and frequently frame them within traditional moral narratives. Contemporary research indicates that structural stigma and minority stress continue to affect LGBTQIA+ Filipinos across institutional settings (Alibudbud, 2023). Such socio-cultural dynamics inevitably extend into educational environments, influencing workplace relationships, professional legitimacy, and leadership attitudes.

Recent scholarship further demonstrates that LGBTQIA+ educators often navigate heteronormative expectations embedded within school cultures. In a study of Filipino university teachers, Tarrayo and Potestades (2023) found that queer educators frequently negotiate identity disclosure and professional boundaries within environments that lack fully institutionalized inclusivity structures. Similarly, Staley (2022) argues that inclusive curricula and school cultures require systemic integration rather than isolated advocacy efforts. Without institutional embedding, inclusion risks becoming symbolic rather than transformative.

At the same time, queer educators contribute meaningfully to school communities. Research suggests that inclusive representation improves school climate and supports marginalized students' sense of belonging (Oducado, 2023). Broader educational studies also emphasize that leadership commitment and policy enforcement are critical predictors of inclusive school environments (Russell, 2020). These findings highlight that teacher identity, institutional climate, and administrative support operate as interconnected factors shaping educational equity outcomes.

Despite growing scholarship on LGBTQIA+ inclusion in education, most existing studies focus on policy frameworks, higher education contexts, or student experiences rather than the lived realities of educators themselves. In the Philippine setting, there remains limited qualitative research that explores the experiences of queer teachers in public basic education. More specifically, there is a lack of phenomenological inquiry examining how queer educators interpret their professional contributions, navigate discrimination, access support systems, and perceive institutional inclusivity initiatives within their socio-cultural context.

Addressing this gap is important for bridging the disconnect between formal policy commitments and the everyday realities experienced by educators in schools. Understanding how queer teachers construct meaning around their professional roles and challenges can provide deeper insight into the dynamics of inclusivity, institutional culture, and teacher identity.

This study therefore aims to explore the lived experiences of queer teachers in the Philippine educational system. Specifically, it seeks to: (1) describe their professional contributions; (2) identify challenges encountered within school environments; (3) examine coping and support mechanisms; and (4) understand their perspectives on institutional inclusivity initiatives. Grounded in transcendental phenomenology, the study seeks to uncover the essence of being a queer teacher within the Philippine public school context.

By illuminating these lived realities, the study contributes to ongoing conversations on equity, representation, and inclusive educational reform. The findings may inform leadership practice, policy implementation, and institutional strategies aimed at fostering safer and more inclusive learning environments for both educators and learners.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general objective of this study was to explore the lived experiences of queer teachers within the Philippine educational system. Specifically, the study aimed to understand how queer educators perceive and make meaning of their personal and professional experiences in school environments shaped by socio-cultural, institutional, and religious influences. Using a phenomenological approach, the study sought to illuminate the essence of being a queer teacher and how identity, workplace interactions, and institutional structures shape their professional realities.

Specifically, this study aimed to:

1. Describe the personal and professional experiences of queer teachers within their school contexts.



2. Identify the challenges encountered by queer teachers in their interactions with students, parents, colleagues, and school administrators.
3. Describe the coping strategies used by queer teachers when facing discrimination, stigma, or identity-based bias.
4. Examine how socio-cultural and religious influences shape the professional identities and workplace experiences of queer teachers.
5. Explain the meanings queer teachers attribute to inclusion, acceptance, institutional support, and equality within the educational system.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Recent scholarship reflects growing global attention to LGBTQIA+ inclusion in educational institutions. Although policy reforms in many countries have expanded formal protections for sexual and gender minorities, research consistently demonstrates that policy existence alone does not guarantee lived inclusion. Institutional climate, leadership commitment, and broader socio-cultural contexts continue to shape the everyday experiences of queer educators. Studies therefore emphasize that meaningful inclusion depends not only on formal regulations but also on how institutional structures, school cultures, and social attitudes interact to influence the professional realities of LGBTQIA+ teachers. This body of literature provides an important foundation for understanding how queer educators navigate educational environments.

Queer Teacher Identity and Institutional Context

Existing research suggests that queer educators often work within school environments shaped by heteronormative norms and expectations. Tarrayo and Potestades (2023) found that Filipino queer university teachers frequently negotiate identity disclosure and professional boundaries, particularly in institutions where inclusivity structures are not fully institutionalized. Their findings indicate that inclusive practices are often driven by individual educators rather than by systemic institutional support. Similarly, Staley (2022) argues that inclusive education cannot rely solely on personal advocacy; instead, it must be embedded within curriculum frameworks, institutional policies, and administrative leadership to ensure sustainable change. Supporting this perspective, Abesamis and Alibudbud (2023) highlight how cases of discrimination in the Philippine context reveal persistent gaps between equality rhetoric and institutional implementation. Taken together, these studies suggest that queer educators often operate within environments where institutional commitments to inclusion remain uneven or inconsistently practiced.

School Climate, Minority Stress, and Structural Influences

Scholars increasingly interpret LGBTQIA+ experiences in institutional settings through the lens of minority stress theory. According to Alibudbud (2023), structural stigma and socio-cultural discrimination continue to influence the well-being of LGBTQ Filipinos. Although this work primarily addresses mental health outcomes, its implications extend to professional settings where workplace climates affect identity expression and interpersonal interactions. Russell (2020) similarly emphasizes that inclusive school climates are strongly associated with improved well-being, belonging, and safety for LGBTQ individuals. However, these benefits are realized only when policies are reinforced by leadership commitment and organizational culture. Complementing these findings, Oducado (2023) reports variability in LGBTQ-related knowledge and attitudes within Philippine higher education institutions, suggesting that societal perceptions continue to shape educational environments. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that institutional climate and socio-cultural norms significantly influence the professional experiences of LGBTQ educators.

Resilience, Advocacy, and Professional Agency

Despite structural constraints, research also highlights the resilience and agency demonstrated by queer educators. Tarrayo and Potestades (2023) observed that Filipino queer teachers often integrate inclusive perspectives into classroom practice even in the absence of strong institutional frameworks. Their findings illustrate how identity negotiation becomes an ongoing process influenced by both personal conviction and institutional expectations. However, Staley (2022) cautions that resilience alone should not be viewed as a substitute for systemic responsibility. While individual advocacy can promote inclusive practices, sustainable educational equity requires institutional structures that actively affirm and protect diverse identities. These perspectives suggest that the experiences of queer educators are shaped by a dynamic interaction between personal agency and structural constraints.

Inclusivity Initiatives and Gender-Responsive Policies

Institutional initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality have become increasingly visible in educational systems. In the Philippines, the Department of Education's Gender-Responsive Basic Education Policy represents a significant institutional effort to integrate gender equality principles within schools. Nevertheless, scholars emphasize that policy effectiveness largely depends on implementation and leadership commitment. Abesamis and Alibudbud (2023) demonstrate how institutional



responses to discrimination cases influence public perceptions of accountability and equality. Similarly, Russell (2020) argues that inclusive policies positively influence school climate only when supported by strong leadership and consistent enforcement. Staley (2022) further reinforces that systemic integration—rather than symbolic acknowledgment—is essential for sustaining inclusive educational environments. These findings collectively suggest that institutional inclusivity is shaped by the interaction of policy frameworks, leadership practices, and everyday school experiences.

Synthesis and Research Gap

Across the literature, three interconnected themes emerge: the negotiation of queer identity within heteronormative institutional structures, the influence of school climate and minority stress on LGBTQ experiences, and the need for systemic integration of inclusive policies within educational institutions. While Philippine scholarship increasingly addresses LGBTQIA+ representation and rights, much of this research focuses on policy discourse, higher education contexts, or student populations rather than the lived experiences of educators themselves. As a result, there remains limited phenomenological inquiry exploring how queer teachers in Philippine public basic education interpret their professional contributions, navigate discrimination, access support systems, and construct meaning around institutional inclusivity initiatives.

Addressing this gap is essential for deepening understanding of how inclusive education policies are experienced in practice. By employing transcendental phenomenology to examine the lived experiences of queer teachers in Philippine public schools, the present study seeks to uncover the composite essence of their professional realities and contribute context-specific insights to discussions on inclusive educational reform.

METHODOLOGY

The following sections provide an in-depth analysis of the qualitative research methodology used, detailing the data sources, instrument selection, data collection techniques, measures to ensure the validity of the findings, data explication procedures, and the ethical considerations that guided this study.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design, specifically transcendental phenomenology as articulated by Clark Moustakas (1994). Transcendental phenomenology aims to describe and interpret the essence of a shared lived experience by setting aside the researcher's preconceived assumptions through the process of epoche or bracketing. This approach is appropriate for the present study because it seeks to explore and understand the lived experiences of queer teachers within the Philippine educational system. Rather than testing hypotheses or measuring variables, the study focuses on describing how participants experience, interpret, and give meaning to their professional realities within educational institutions.

Research Participants and Sampling Technique

The participants of this study were selected using purposive sampling, a technique commonly used in qualitative research to identify individuals who have direct experience with the phenomenon being investigated. The study involved eight queer teachers from public schools in Northern Negros Occidental. The participants were queer teachers currently employed in public schools within the Philippine educational system. They ranged in age from 25 to 40 years old and represented varying levels of teaching experience, with some participants being relatively new to the profession while others had already established several years of experience in the field. In addition, the participants taught at different educational levels, including both elementary and secondary (high school) settings, allowing the study to capture diverse perspectives across the basic education system.

To be included in the study, participants had to meet the following criteria: (1) self-identify as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community, (2) currently work as a teacher in a public school, (3) have at least one year of teaching experience, and (4) be willing to share their lived experiences related to their professional roles. Purposive sampling was considered appropriate because phenomenological research prioritizes depth and richness of experience rather than numerical representation. The goal was not to generalize findings to a wider population but to obtain detailed narratives that reveal the essence of being a queer teacher within a specific socio-cultural and institutional context.

Research Instrument

The primary data-gathering instrument was a researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide. The interview questions were designed to elicit detailed descriptions of participants' lived experiences related to professional contributions, challenges encountered, coping mechanisms, support systems, and perceptions of institutional inclusivity initiatives.

To ensure content validity, the interview guide was subjected to expert review by specialists in qualitative research and gender studies. Feedback was incorporated to improve clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives. A pilot interview



was conducted with one participant who met the inclusion criteria but was not included in the final analysis. This process helped refine question sequencing and probing strategies.

In phenomenological research, credibility is established not through statistical reliability coefficients but through methodological rigor, reflexivity, and trustworthiness procedures.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection followed a systematic process. First, formal permission was secured from relevant school authorities. After approval, potential participants were identified and contacted individually. Each participant received an informed consent form detailing the purpose of the study, voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any time.

Upon receiving consent, in-depth interviews were conducted at a time and platform convenient for the participants. Interviews were audio-recorded with permission and lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Field notes were taken to capture non-verbal cues and contextual observations.

After each interview, recordings were transcribed verbatim. Participants were given the opportunity to review their transcripts to ensure accuracy and confirm that their experiences were properly represented. This process enhanced credibility through member checking.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological method. The analysis followed several systematic steps:

1. **Epoche (Bracketing):** The researcher consciously set aside personal biases and prior assumptions regarding queer identity and educational experiences.
2. **Horizontalization:** Significant statements related to the phenomenon were identified from each transcript.
3. **Clustering of Meaning Units:** Significant statements were grouped into themes representing shared meanings.
4. **Textural Description:** A description of what participants experienced was developed using verbatim excerpts.
5. **Structural Description:** An analysis of how the experiences occurred within institutional and socio-cultural contexts was constructed.
6. **Composite Essence:** Textural and structural descriptions were synthesized to articulate the essence of the lived experience of queer teachers.

This systematic process ensured that findings emerged directly from participant narratives rather than from predetermined categories.

Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure rigor and methodological integrity, the study followed Lincoln and Guba's criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative research. Credibility was achieved through prolonged engagement with participants, member checking, and the use of verbatim transcription of interviews. Transferability was supported by providing thick and detailed descriptions of the research context and participants' experiences, allowing readers to determine the applicability of findings to similar contexts. Dependability was maintained through careful documentation of the research procedures and methodological decisions throughout the study. Confirmability was established through reflexive journaling, maintenance of an audit trail, and ensuring that interpretations were grounded in participants' statements rather than researcher bias.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the conduct of the study. Participants were fully informed about the objectives and procedures of the research prior to their participation. Written informed consent was obtained from each participant, emphasizing that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

To protect participant identity and privacy, pseudonyms were used in all transcripts and research reports, and any identifying information was removed during the transcription process. Audio recordings, transcripts, and related research materials were



stored securely and were accessible only to the researcher. All data were handled in accordance with institutional ethical guidelines for research involving human participants to ensure the dignity, safety, and confidentiality of all participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study derived from in-depth interviews with eight queer teachers in public schools. Using Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological analysis, significant statements were identified, clustered into meaning units, and synthesized into thematic descriptions. Four major themes emerged from the data:

1. Contributions of Queer Teachers — Creativity, Resilience, and Institutional Impact
2. Support Mechanisms — Advocacy, Allyship, and Institutional Affirmation
3. Overcoming Challenges — Resilience Amid Discrimination
4. Initiatives Toward Inclusivity — Institutional Development and Aspirations

Each theme is first presented through textural and structural descriptions grounded in verbatim participant narratives. This is followed by a discussion section interpreting the findings in relation to existing literature and the study's objectives.

Contributions of Queer Teachers — Creativity, Resilience, and Institutional Impact

Results

Participants consistently described themselves as active contributors to school life. Their contributions extended beyond classroom instruction and included leadership in extracurricular activities, cultural programs, and student engagement initiatives.

Several participants emphasized their involvement in performing arts, event organization, and student mentoring. One shared:

“As a teacher, we should be someone who will motivate and uplift students' capabilities—especially in dancing and school programs.”

Others described being entrusted with responsibilities because of their perceived competence:

“Most of the school heads would agree that these queers are really assets to the schools.”

Recognition from administrators and colleagues was frequently mentioned. Participants expressed pride when their talents were acknowledged:

“They really appreciate that a queer teacher has something to offer to the school.”

Beyond creative talents, participants framed their contributions in terms of professionalism and commitment to their role:

“Our main role is to be a dispenser of knowledge... to be an agent of change.”

Structurally, their experiences of contribution were shaped within a context where visibility carried both opportunity and scrutiny. Excellence functioned as both professional fulfillment and a pathway toward institutional acceptance. Their presence in schools was experienced as impactful, particularly in fostering inclusive and engaging environments for students.

Discussion

The findings indicate that queer teachers experience their professional contributions as both creative expression and institutional affirmation. Participants described themselves as active contributors to extracurricular programs, leadership initiatives, and classroom innovation. Their narratives suggest that creativity functions not only as pedagogical engagement but also as a mechanism for professional visibility and legitimacy within school environments.

These results imply that queer educators operate as dynamic institutional agents whose talents and leadership strengthen school culture. Their contributions challenge deficit-based perceptions by positioning queer identity as an asset rather than a limitation. Recognition from administrators reinforces their sense of belonging and validates their professional identity within the educational system.

These findings are consistent with recent scholarship emphasizing identity negotiation and professional agency among queer educators. Tarrayo and Potestades (2023) found that Filipino queer teachers actively integrate their identities into pedagogical practice while navigating institutional expectations. Similarly, Staley (2022) argues that inclusive educational spaces are



strengthened when diverse identities are acknowledged as integral to institutional development rather than treated as peripheral concerns.

Support Mechanisms — Advocacy, Allyship, and Institutional Affirmation

Results

Participants described their experiences as queer teachers as shaped not only by personal advocacy but also by the presence of supportive relationships and institutional environments that affirmed their identities. Support mechanisms emerged through multiple layers, including collegial allyship, mentorship practices, professional collaboration, and perceived institutional openness toward gender diversity within schools.

Within their classrooms, participants often assumed mentoring roles for students navigating questions of identity. One participant explained:

“As a queer teacher I always make sure that even gender identity is more expressive as of this time... I make sure that my student is aware to address queer teachers with respect.”

Another participant emphasized the importance of integrating gender awareness into everyday classroom discussions:

“I reinforce awareness within my scope of teaching. Telling everyone in my class that gender identity is something that they may be aware.”

Participants also described encouraging students—particularly those within the LGBTQIA+ spectrum—to express themselves confidently while maintaining respectful behavior within school environments. One teacher shared:

“I always make my students which under the umbrella of the spectrum to be their self and express their self, but it should have boundaries inside the school premises.”

Similarly, another participant expressed affirmation combined with guidance:

“If they want to express themselves in any way that they want to, let them be... it’s really okay what they want to be... as long as they don’t aggravate people.”

Advocacy during moments of discrimination was also identified as an important form of support within the school community. Participants recalled situations where they intervened when students experienced ridicule or exclusion. One participant shared:

“When I stood up for a pupil because he was insulted because of his gender... teachers are the ones who can really guide them.”

Others described offering direct mentorship to students who struggled with identity-related concerns:

“I really need to step up to help those pupils to make them understand the situation. They really need someone who can truly understand and stand by them through this journey.”

While participants provided support to students, they also described receiving affirmation from colleagues and administrators within their institutions. Several teachers emphasized that their professional environments fostered acceptance and respect. One participant noted:

“My colleagues really support me... they perceive LGBTQ and queer educators have potentials.”

Another participant reflected on the openness of their workplace:

“My workplace is very understanding and much open when dealing with us... they really appreciate that a queer teacher has something to offer.”

Beyond interpersonal support, participants also observed broader institutional shifts toward inclusivity. One teacher commented:

“I think the Department of Education is really trying to embrace now the LGBTQIA plus individuals within the educational landscape.”



Professional development activities also served as avenues for building supportive networks among educators. Participants described seminars and collaborative activities as opportunities to connect with others who shared similar commitments to inclusive education. As one participant explained:

“Through joining seminars... that’s a good avenue to foster support and expand a network of teachers that share the same vision and passion.”

Across these narratives, support mechanisms emerged as a reciprocal process. Participants actively created safe and affirming spaces for students while simultaneously experiencing validation and encouragement from colleagues, administrators, and institutional initiatives.

The experience of support mechanisms was shaped by interconnected layers of personal agency, relational advocacy, and institutional affirmation. At the personal level, queer teachers positioned themselves as mentors and protectors who responded to discrimination and encouraged self-confidence among students. At the relational level, support from colleagues strengthened their ability to advocate within the school community. Many participants emphasized that respectful relationships with fellow teachers helped normalize diversity and reinforced their sense of belonging within the profession.

At the institutional level, perceived openness within the Department of Education and the presence of non-discriminatory policies contributed to a sense of legitimacy and security. These structural supports enabled participants to carry out advocacy efforts more confidently and to model inclusive practices within their classrooms.

Within this layered structure, support functioned both as something participants offered and something they received. Their experiences illustrate a dynamic exchange of affirmation: queer teachers empower students to express their identities with confidence, while institutional and collegial support reinforce teachers’ professional agency and self-assurance.

Thus, support mechanisms were not experienced merely as formal policies but as lived relational practices. They manifested through mentorship conversations, classroom discussions about respect, faculty advocacy moments, collaborative seminars, and everyday gestures of allyship. Together, these mechanisms contributed to the development of more inclusive educational environments where both educators and students could navigate identity with dignity and security.

Discussion

The findings suggest that queer teachers function not only as educators but also as advocates and affirming figures within school communities. Participants described promoting respect for gender identity, addressing discrimination, guiding students experiencing identity confusion, and fostering confidence among LGBTQIA+ learners. At the same time, support from colleagues, school leaders, and institutional policies played a critical role in sustaining their professional confidence and agency.

These experiences highlight the importance of inclusive school climates where support is embedded in everyday interactions as well as in institutional frameworks. The presence of allyship among colleagues, openness from administrators, and inclusive policy language strengthens the ability of queer educators to advocate for themselves and their students.

These findings align with scholarship in queer education. Kevin Kumashiro argues that educators play a critical role in disrupting heteronormative assumptions embedded in schooling and that inclusive practice requires both curricular and relational transformation. Similarly, Elizabeth J. Meyer emphasizes that teachers who challenge gender-based harassment contribute significantly to safer school climates. Research by Stephen T. Russell and Jessica K. McGuire further demonstrates that supportive educators are central to improving school climate and well-being outcomes for LGBTQ students. Moreover, Catherine Lugg highlights that institutional policies and administrative support are critical in legitimizing inclusive practices within public schools. Together, these perspectives reinforce the importance of both individual advocacy and systemic support mechanisms in fostering affirming educational environments.

Overcoming Challenges — Resilience Amid Discrimination

Results

Despite positive experiences, participants reported encountering discrimination in various forms. These ranged from teasing and inappropriate jokes to more direct questioning of their identity and capability.

One participant shared:

“There were parents who doubted me at first because of how I express myself.”

Another described subtle forms of exclusion:



“Sometimes you feel the judgment, even if they don’t say it directly.”

Instances involving students were also mentioned:

“There were times students would mimic how I talk or move. It was hurtful.”

Participants described responding to these challenges through composure and professionalism. Many emphasized self-control and emotional regulation:

“I just focus on my work. I prove myself through my performance.”

Resilience was a recurring element in their narratives. Teaching was described as a calling that outweighed negative experiences:

“No matter what they say, I know why I am here. I am here to teach.”

Structurally, discrimination was experienced within broader cultural norms that shape perceptions of gender and sexuality. However, participants navigated these environments by reinforcing their professional identity and demonstrating competence.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that queer teachers continue to encounter both subtle and explicit forms of discrimination, including teasing, parental resistance, identity-based questioning, and inappropriate student behavior. These experiences reflect the persistence of heteronormative norms within educational environments despite formal equality policies.

At the same time, participants consistently emphasized resilience rooted in professional purpose. Their commitment to teaching served as an anchoring force that enabled them to confront prejudice while maintaining authority and composure. Resilience manifested through assertiveness, strategic self-presentation, emotional regulation, and reaffirmation of their educator identity.

These results resonate with Alibudbud’s (2023) discussion of minority stress within Philippine contexts, which explains how structural stigma can shape lived experiences while individuals simultaneously develop adaptive coping strategies. Tarrayo and Potestades (2023) likewise illustrate how queer Filipino educators navigate identity negotiation within institutional structures, balancing authenticity with professional expectations.

Initiatives Toward Inclusivity — Institutional Development and Aspirations

Results

Participants acknowledged efforts toward inclusivity within their schools but expressed that progress remains ongoing. Policies promoting gender sensitivity were seen as important symbolic milestones.

One participant stated:

“There are policies now that protect us, and that’s already a big change compared before.”

Gender and Development activities were frequently cited:

“During GAD celebrations, we talk about equality and respect.”

However, some participants noted gaps between policy and practice:

“Policies are there, but sometimes implementation depends on the leadership.”

Others expressed aspirations for stronger representation:

“I hope someday we can see more LGBTQ leaders in higher positions.”

Inclusivity was experienced as an evolving institutional process. While participants recognized improvements, they also described a desire for deeper structural integration and consistent enforcement. Their narratives reflected both appreciation for existing initiatives and hope for broader transformation.

Discussion

Participants described inclusivity initiatives—such as Gender and Development (GAD) programs and equality statements—as sources of hope and symbolic affirmation. While appreciative of progress, they emphasized that inclusivity remains an evolving process requiring stronger enforcement, leadership representation, and structured support systems.



These findings suggest that policy acknowledgment alone is insufficient. Sustainable inclusivity requires structural integration, monitoring, and visible leadership commitment. Participants' aspirations for LGBTQIA+ representation in higher administrative roles indicate a desire for institutional transformation beyond symbolic recognition.

These interpretations align with Staley (2022), who argues that meaningful queer-inclusive education demands systemic integration rather than surface-level reform. Abesamis and Alibudbud (2023) further highlight how institutional responses to discrimination cases influence broader perceptions of equality and legitimacy in Philippine society. Oducado (2023) also demonstrates that educational institutions play a critical role in shaping attitudes toward LGBTQ individuals, reinforcing the importance of sustained policy-driven inclusion.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the lived experiences of queer teachers in the Philippine public educational system using a transcendental phenomenological approach. Guided by the objectives of describing their professional contributions, identifying the challenges they encounter, examining their coping and support mechanisms, and understanding their perspectives on institutional inclusivity initiatives, the findings revealed a multidimensional and nuanced professional reality shaped by both opportunity and constraint.

First, the study established that queer teachers contribute significantly to their institutions beyond their instructional responsibilities. Participants described active involvement in creative programs, leadership roles, and student mentorship, positioning themselves as valuable assets within their school communities. Their presence often enriches school culture by promoting inclusivity, creativity, and student engagement. These findings demonstrate that queer identity does not hinder professional performance; rather, it can strengthen educational environments through diverse perspectives and innovative contributions.

Second, while participants reported encountering discrimination ranging from subtle judgment to explicit questioning of their competence, they consistently demonstrated resilience rooted in professional commitment. Teaching was frequently described as a calling that sustained them despite social and institutional pressures. Through emotional regulation, dedication to their craft, and a strong sense of professional identity, participants were able to navigate discriminatory experiences while maintaining their effectiveness as educators.

Third, the study revealed that support mechanisms operate at both relational and institutional levels. Affirmation from school leaders, acceptance from colleagues, and initiatives such as Gender and Development (GAD) programs contributed to participants' sense of belonging within their institutions. Nevertheless, participants emphasized that inclusivity remains an evolving process that requires stronger implementation of policies, consistent administrative support, and broader representation of LGBTQIA+ individuals in leadership and decision-making positions.

Overall, the findings highlight that the essence of being a queer teacher in the Philippine educational context is characterized by resilience, meaningful contribution, identity negotiation, and aspirations for institutional progress. This study contributes to educational research by providing empirical insight into the lived experiences of queer educators, a group whose professional realities remain underrepresented in Philippine educational scholarship. By documenting their voices and experiences, the research helps illuminate the intersection between teacher identity, institutional culture, and inclusive education.

The study also offers practical implications for policymakers and school administrators. Educational institutions may strengthen inclusive environments by reinforcing gender-sensitive policies, integrating LGBTQIA+ awareness into professional development programs, and ensuring that anti-discrimination measures are consistently implemented. School leaders play a critical role in cultivating respectful workplace cultures where diversity is recognized as an institutional strength. By supporting inclusive practices and equitable opportunities for all educators, educational systems can foster environments that allow both teachers and students to thrive.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, several actionable recommendations are proposed for key stakeholders in the educational sector.

For school administrators, it is recommended that inclusive school policies be strengthened through clear implementation guidelines and regular monitoring mechanisms. School leaders may establish formal anti-discrimination protocols, including confidential reporting channels and designated personnel responsible for addressing identity-based concerns. Administrators are also encouraged to organize annual training workshops on inclusive leadership and gender sensitivity to ensure that school policies are translated into daily practices that promote respect and equity within the workplace.



For teachers and school personnel, continuous professional development on diversity, gender sensitivity, and inclusive pedagogical strategies should be implemented. Schools may conduct regular seminars, learning action cells (LAC sessions), or professional development programs focused on fostering respectful classroom environments and addressing unconscious bias. Teachers are also encouraged to incorporate inclusive teaching practices that promote empathy, acceptance, and equitable participation among students.

For policymakers and educational authorities, it is recommended that monitoring and evaluation systems be strengthened to ensure that gender-responsive education policies are consistently implemented across schools. Educational agencies may develop standardized guidelines, conduct periodic policy audits, and provide institutional support to schools that require assistance in implementing inclusive programs. In addition, policies that promote equitable access to leadership and professional advancement opportunities for qualified LGBTQIA+ educators should be encouraged to strengthen representation in educational leadership.

Teacher education institutions are encouraged to integrate structured coursework and training modules on diversity, equity, and inclusive education into both pre-service and in-service teacher preparation programs. By equipping future educators with the knowledge and skills necessary to engage with diverse identities and perspectives, teacher education programs can help build more inclusive and culturally responsive school environments.

Finally, future researchers are encouraged to expand this line of inquiry by including larger and more diverse participant groups across different regions and educational settings. Comparative studies between public and private schools, as well as the use of mixed-method research designs, may provide deeper insights into institutional climate, teacher well-being, and inclusivity practices. Further research may also examine the impact of inclusive policies on teacher retention, job satisfaction, and student outcomes in diverse educational contexts.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no financial, professional, or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the conduct, analysis, or reporting of this study. The research was conducted independently and without external funding or institutional pressure that may have affected its findings.

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