

Establishing Safe Spaces: Analyzing Methods to Improve LGBTQ+ Acceptance in Public Schools

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.14354773

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Abstract

This study investigates the setting up of safe spaces and efficient strategies to enhance LGBTQ+ acceptance in public secondary schools in the Philippines. Notwithstanding global progress in LGBTQ+ rights, Filipino LGBTQ+ students persistently encounter considerable obstacles pertaining to discrimination, bullying, and exclusion within educational environments. The report outlines essential ways to cultivate an inclusive and supportive school climate for LGBTQ+ students through an analysis of current policies, practices, and case studies of progressive schools. These initiatives encompass the establishment of anti-discrimination legislation, the formation of LGBTQ+ student organizations, educator training on LGBTQ+ sensitivity, and the incorporation of LGBTQ+ topics into school curricula. The research examines the influence of local and national government policies, with the prospective effects of the *SOGIE Equality Bill*, in fostering a safer and more inclusive educational environment. The study underscores the necessity of partnership among educational institutions, local communities, and LGBTQ+ advocacy organizations to facilitate enduring transformations in attitudes and practices about LGBTQ+ students. Research indicates that although advancements are occurring in certain areas, there is still a necessity for more extensive national regulations and uniform enforcement to ensure secure and inclusive environments for all LGBTQ+ students in the Philippines.

Keywords: Safe Spaces, Inclusivity, LGBTQIA+, Acceptance, Secondary Public School

Introduction

It is imperative that all individuals feel secure while attending education. In the Philippines, however, students who identify as lesbian, homosexual, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) frequently find that their educational experience is marred by bullying, discrimination, a lack of knowledge about the LGBT community, and, on occasion, physical or sexual assault. These violations can potentially cause severe, lasting harm and restrict students' access to education, protected by both Philippine and international law. In the Philippines, lawmakers and administrators at schools have recently concluded that bullying LGBT youth is a major issue and have come up with ways to stop it. The Department of Education (DepEd), which is in charge of primary and secondary schools, made the Child Protection Policy in 2012 to stop bullying and discrimination in schools, including bullying based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The next year, Congress passed the Anti-Bullying Law of 2013. This law sets rules and regulations that make it illegal to bully or harass someone because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Bypassing these rules, schools are sending a clear message that bullying and discrimination are not okay and should not be tolerated. These findings make it clear how important it is to help LGBT youth who are having mental health problems because of discrimination and hostile environments. Also, a news story from The New York Times talked about how LGBT youth often face discrimination, social exclusion, and internalized homophobia, all of which raise the risk of suicide, drug abuse, and mental health problems (Khullar, 2018). A similar story was told in The Philippine Star about four transwomen who were originally not allowed to march in their graduation because the school's rules did not match their gender identities (Licis, 2022). All of these stories shed light on the problems the LGBT community faces, showing how important it is to do more research to help people understand and appreciate their battles.

Research Questions

1. What is LGBTQIA+ high school students' perception of the existing safe spaces?
2. How can LGBT students help shape their school's safe space policies and initiatives?
3. How can schools effectively engage parents, guardians, and communities in creating safe environments for LGBT students?

Related Literatures

Students who identify as LGBT and attend public secondary schools in the Philippines confront several severe problems, including discrimination, bullying, and a dearth of resources that provide support. An investigation conducted by Human Rights Watch in 2017 identified several violations committed against LGBT students. These violations included verbal and physical harassment, discriminatory regulations, and restricted access to material about LGBT issues. This is something that has been acknowledged by the Department of Education (DepEd), which has also pointed out that LGBT adolescents are at a significant risk for experiencing various forms of violence in schools. There is a disconnect between policy and practice, as seen by the fact that many LGBT students do not feel comfortable reporting incidences to school authorities, even though there are legal protections in place.

Filipinos who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) still face discrimination, prejudice, and social shame in the Philippines. This stigma shows up in actions like LGBT kids and teens being bullied, teased, and harassed in their families, schools, and communities; LGBT people being portrayed in the media as silly, unreliable, and even dangerous or predatory; transgender Filipinos being denied entry into businesses; LGBT Filipinos being limited in their roles and jobs; and LGBT Filipinos being denied the right to be involved in politics. LGBT Filipinos frequently face social pressure to conceal, repress, or even try to alter their identities and expressions to be accepted by society and be able to use their rights. These encounters can result in significant psychological discomfort, including immediate repercussions like anxiety, despair, isolation, rage, and internalized stigma, even if many LGBT people learn to manage this social stigma (Hatzenbuehler, 2009; Meyer, 2003). Ignorance or erroneous views linking various gender expressions and sexual orientations to psychopathology or maladjustment are the main causes of anti-LGBT prejudice and discrimination, which are often built on rhetoric of moral condemnation.

According to research conducted by Moog (2012), LGBT students frequently experience emotional and social obstacles as a result of prejudice, which affects their sense of self-efficacy and their level of life happiness. In addition, Manalastas (2013) discovered that young Filipino men who identified as gay or bisexual had a greater chance of committing suicide. This finding highlights the significant mental health repercussions that discrimination can have. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) published a report in 2013 that highlighted the fact that LGBT students face exclusion and marginalization in educational environments, which can result in negative academic and psychological consequences.

In the Philippines, the rights of LGBT people to adequate education and human rights are protected by the principles of equality and non-discrimination embodied in numerous legal frameworks and regulations. However, obstacles persist in terms of implementation and societal acceptance. Here's a summary of the applicable rights and protections:

Legal and policy frameworks

1. The Philippine constitution. The 1987 Constitution provides everyone's right to an education (Article XIV, Section 1) and requires the state to promote equality and nondiscrimination (Article II, Sections 11 and 26). It focuses on human dignity and the protection of individual rights, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, or identity.
2. The Magna Carta of Women (RA9710) While primarily aimed at women, this law includes provisions for vulnerable groups like as gay and transgender women, providing their access to education and protection from discrimination.

3. The Child Protection Policy (DepEd Order No. 40, 2012) The goal is to provide a safe environment for all students by addressing bullying and discrimination, especially that based on sexual orientation and gender identity.
4. Anti-Bullying Act of 2013 (RA10627) This law compels schools to develop anti-bullying policies that safeguard children who face prejudice based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.
5. Proposed SOGIE Equality Bill. Though not yet passed, this measure seeks to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression (SOGIE) in education, employment, healthcare, and other settings.

International commitments

The Philippines has signed international conventions, including:

1. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) ensures the right to an education and freedom from discrimination.
2. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) defends children's rights to education and protection from all types of abuse.
3. The Yogyakarta Principles provide direction for applying international human rights legislation to sexual orientation and gender identity concerns.

The Philippines has laws that protect LGBT rights in schools, but a lot of work needs to be done to make sure that policies are followed. To make sure everyone is treated equally and with respect, we need to pass comprehensive anti-discrimination rules like the SOGIE Equality Bill and encourage a culture of acceptance in schools. These studies taken together expose systematic discrimination and lack of safe environments experienced by LGBT students in Philippine secondary public schools, therefore compromising their well-being and educational opportunities. Dealing with these problems calls for better application of protective legislation, more awareness raising, and the building of encouraging surroundings in educational settings.

Methodology

A case study methodology was utilized in this research project to investigate the lived experiences and views of LGBTQIA+ students at City Central National High School concerning the concept of safe spaces and inclusive environments. To gather in-depth qualitative data, semi-structured interviews were carried out. These interviews offered flexibility and adaptation in the process of investigating these complicated concerns. Secondary School, a public school located in the Division of Cebu City, Cebu, Philippines, was the location of the research. Secondary School is an institution that was designed to provide education that is accessible to all. The students who participated in the study were those who were enrolled in secondary education, specifically those who were in junior high and senior high school. For the study, a purposive sampling method was adopted, and ten LGBTQIA+ high school students were chosen from the day shift. This technique of sampling ensured that participants who were able to contribute insights that were pertinent and thorough, based on their own experiences, were included in the study. Data saturation served as the guiding concept for the selection process, to achieve thorough coverage of the subject matter without the emergence of any new ideas.

A standard questionnaire that was changed was used. It was based on questions taken from the 2012 LGBT poll by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency. The questionnaire was made to fit the local situation and asked about current safe spaces, problems with getting to supportive environments, and how people felt about the college's efforts to be more welcoming. This tool made it easier to gather data that was specific to the situation, which then made it possible to analyze and compare those results with broader ones found in similar studies.

Ethical Considerations

A dedication to honesty and ethical responsibility is just as important as technical knowledge and time when conducting research. Ethical considerations were thoroughly reviewed throughout the investigation to guarantee that participants' rights were protected. Every effort was made to ensure the privacy and secrecy of all individuals participating.

Results and Discussion

The data from the phenomenological research that focused on the lived experiences and perspectives of LGBTQIA+ students about inclusiveness and safe places are supported by this study, which anchors to further reinforce those findings. The execution of the study resulted in the collection of a substantial quantity of data that is pertinent and can be utilized to provide the students with further information:

In order to delve deeply into limited educational phenomena like programs, schools, or organizations, the researchers employed a case study research design during the qualitative phase. Understanding how participants at City Central National High School feel about inclusion initiatives, the difficulties they have in gaining access to supportive environments, and the current state of safe spaces is the primary goal of case study analysis.

Categorization of Data

The data were categorized based on participant replies, identifying prevalent answers to establish the fundamental themes. The data were systematically arranged and categorized according to the common notions articulated by the participants. Regrouping was conducted to minimize the fundamental themes. Condense the primary topics into fewer elements. The method ultimately produced fundamental concepts. The second set of data comprised significant phrases extracted from the transcripts, which were categorized as thematic statements.

Both the key sources and the participants gave strong answers to the same sets of questions. Students from both Junior High and Senior High helped us find our sources. The meeting with our responders was set up for a time that worked for them. They can give information to the study about their lives as LGBTQIA+ students. Each of them gave an answer that was related to their own experience when asked through the guide question.

Table 1 Participant's information

Pseudonym	Sexuality	Gender Identity	Preferred Nouns
Tine	Lesbian	Cisgender	He/ Him
HJ	Lesbian	Gender Fluid	He/ Him
Kiki	Lesbian	Non-binary	He/Him
Pat	Queer	Gender Fluid	She/Her
Yanie	Transgender	Non-binary	She/Her
Gail	Transgender	Non-binary	She/Her
Nina	Queer	Cisgender	She/Her
Michelle	Pansexual	Non-binary	She/Her
Aidah	Bisexual	Gender Fluid	She/Her
Cathy	Bisexual	Non-binary	She/Her

The purpose of this analysis is to investigate the intricate relationship between sexuality, gender identity, and preferred nouns by considering survey data acquired from ten different individuals. There is a nuanced picture that emerges from the findings regarding how the participants negotiate their identities, which highlights the fluidity and diversity that exists within these categories.

The study revealed two individuals identifying as bisexual, three as lesbian, one as pansexual, two as transgender, and two as queer. This variability in sexual orientation illustrates the extensive range of human sexuality beyond the conventional binary of heterosexuality and homosexuality. The incorporation of "queer" as a self-identified category is significant, as it frequently denotes a repudiation of strict labels and an acceptance of non-normative identities.

The poll indicated a substantial percentage of participants identified beyond the conventional gender binary. Five participants identified as non-binary, three as gender fluid, and two as cisgender. This illustrates an increasing recognition and acceptance of gender identities that transcend the male-female

dichotomy. The existence of "gender fluid" persons underscores the flexible and progressive essence of gender identification, whereas "gender-free" or "ungendered" signifies a total repudiation of gender classification.

Participants' preferred nouns were also asked about in the poll. Beyond the usual "he/him" and "she/her" pronouns, a wide range of preferences were found. Three of the people who answered chose "he/him," and seven chose "she/her." This result shows how important it is to respect people's choice of pronouns and understand that traditional gendered language doesn't always match up with gender identity.

The results of the poll indicate that the identities of the participants are not discrete groups but rather networks that are fluid and interrelated. For instance, some people may identify as bisexual and non-binary, while others may identify as gay and gender flexible. Both of these identities are valid. Because of this connection, the intricacy of individual identity is brought to light, as is the necessity of approaching these categories with sensitivity and comprehension respectively.

Table 2 LGBTQIA+ Experiences in School

Major Theme	Core Ideas
LGBTQIA+ Experiences in School	They get teased a lot by other students and they also get discriminated and made fun of.
	Discrimination and bullying are so rampant in our school.
	Gender Stereotyping.
	Restricted students to wear desired uniforms that align with their gender identity.
	Bullying due to sexuality and gender.
	Discrimination and bullying are some issues that I commonly observe in our school.
	Gender inequality is being treated differently because of your gender or because you do not conform to femininity or masculinity. For example, rules only apply to one gender.
	Pressure from gender roles in academics students may feel pressured to conform to traditional gender roles which can affect their studies.
	Gender discrimination and social norms in terms how they call a member of the lgbtqia as "BAYOT" and more.

Students in secondary public schools who identify as LGBTQIA+ frequently confront a variety of unique problems and experiences. There are a lot of people who struggle with difficulties with their identity, self-acceptance, and the requirement to express their gender or sexual orientation in an atmosphere that is accepting. Students continue to be subjected to harassment or exclusion based on their identification, which is disheartening because bullying and prejudice are still prevalent. They may experience emotions of isolation, worry, and depression as a result of this, which can have an impact on their mental health. On the other hand, several educational institutions have started to introduce LGBTQIA+ inclusive policies, such as anti-bullying programs and safe spaces, to make the atmosphere more welcoming of those who identify as LGBTQIA+.

Students who identify as LGBTQIA+ are also looking for visibility and representation in the curriculum, clubs, and extracurricular activities to gain a sense of being validated and seen. When it comes to providing a space for connection and activism, Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) and other supportive student groups frequently come to the rescue. Teachers and staff members who are allies play a significant role in the development of an inclusive school culture by providing active support to kids who identify as LGBTQIA+ individuals. Despite the difficulties, a significant number of LGBTQIA+ students also find moments of empowerment as a result of the formation of strong, supportive relationships with classmates who talk about their experiences.

In the end, the experiences of LGBTQIA+ students attending secondary public schools are extremely diverse; but, the growing visibility of LGBTQIA+ concerns in education is progressively creating spaces that are safer and more accepting for these students to thrive in. In the course of their trip, these

children will be shaped not just by the challenges they encounter but also by the resilience they create along the way.

Table 3 Support Systems and School Policies

Major Theme	Core Ideas
LGBTQIA+ Support Systems and School Policies	Celebrate Pride Week or LGBTQIA+ History Month at school. More people should know about these activities since they may make everyone feel welcome and demonstrate LGBTQIA+ kids their identities are appreciated. It is important for schools to have clear, formal anti-discrimination rules that protect LGBTQIA+ students. These rules should cover everything, like bullying, abuse, and getting into facilities. Regularly train teachers, staff, and students about LGBTQIA+ problems to make them more aware, encourage respect, and help everyone feel welcome. This makes the school setting more accepting and cuts down on discrimination based on ignorance. LGBTQIA+ history, literature, and themes should be taught in schools so that LGBTQIA+ students can see themselves reflected in their education and encourage acceptance among all students. Schools need to make sure that bullying based on sexuality, gender identity, or gender expression has clear and consistent effects. There should be programs to stop bullying, and any cases should be dealt with right away. Make sure that all of the students, no matter what gender they identify, feel at ease and secure at school by giving them gender-neutral bathrooms. Supporters of LGBTQIA+ people should stand up against discrimination and help their LGBTQIA+ friends. Having a strong group of friends can help stop bullying and make the school a place where everyone feels welcome and supported. Give LGBTQIA+ students access to trained counselors or mental health workers who can help with their specific emotional and mental needs. This can help with problems like depression, worry, and feeling alone.

The implementation of comprehensive anti-discrimination rules is necessary to effectively combat discrimination against LGBTQIA+ students in secondary public institutions. The policies in question ought to provide students with explicit protection based on their sexual orientation and gender identity, thereby guaranteeing a clear commitment to equality and inclusion. To provide kids with emotional support and a feeling of community in an atmosphere that is frequently tough, schools should also construct safe spaces.

These safe spaces could include LGBTQIA+ support groups or counselors that are strictly committed to the field. In addition, fostering a culture of understanding and reducing stereotypes can be accomplished by providing frequent training on LGBTQIA+ knowledge and sensitivity to teachers, staff, and students. The incorporation of LGBTQIA+ history and various representations into the curriculum serves to legitimize the experiences of students and encourages inclusivity among all pupils.

The development of Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) is something that should be encouraged because it allows students to form connections and push for change within their institutions. It is necessary, to keep a secure learning environment, to enforce stringent anti-bullying measures, with clear repercussions for discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation. To guarantee that all students can feel comfortable and respected in their day-to-day activities, schools should also provide facilities that are gender-neutral, such as restrooms and locker rooms. When it comes to mental health, providing LGBTQIA+ students with access to resources that are specifically customized to meet their needs can help address the unique obstacles that these students may encounter, such as concerns with self-esteem and anxiety. Last but not least, fostering acceptance throughout the entire school and demonstrating that these students are appreciated and visible can be accomplished by honoring LGBTQIA+ culture through activities such as Pride Week and LGBTQIA+ History Month.

Table 4 Social Interaction and Relationship

Major Theme	Core Ideas
LGBTQIA+ Social Interaction and Relationship	When bullying happens, it's important for school leaders to act quickly and in public. This shows kids that hate is not okay at school and sets a standard for how to behave. If someone does something biased, there should be clear and fair consequences. Teaching LGBTQ+ awareness and holding seminars can help students understand varied sexual orientations and gender identities. This instruction can promote empathy and respect in social studies, health, and literature. LGBTQ+ student organizations and support groups allow students to express themselves without judgment or harassment. These locations can foster community and peer support. Schools should have clear anti-discrimination rules for sexual orientation and gender identity. Students, teachers, and parents should get regular policy updates. Teachers and staff should get frequent LGBTQ+ inclusion training on how to address discrimination, support LGBT students, and establish a respectful and equal atmosphere. This can lessen bias and insensitivity. LGBTQ+ role models in school or external speakers can motivate pupils and fight misconceptions. Role models demonstrate leadership and achievement and show pupils that being LGBTQ+ is not shameful. LGBTQ+ students might find supportive peers through peer mentorship or buddies. This builds allies, increases understanding, and provides emotional and social support to pupils. Use of inclusive language in the classroom and in all interactions should be pushed by schools. For example, students' preferred pronouns and terms for sexual orientation and gender identity should be used. This helps make a respectful space where everyone feels seen and important.

One of the most important factors in the growth of students is the social contacts and relationships that they have while they are attending school, particularly in public secondary schools. Interactions like these assist students develop their identities, have an impact on their emotional well-being, and contribute to the development of their social skills. It is common for children to create some of the most crucial and long-lasting friendships throughout this period of their lives. These friendships provide them with a sense of belonging and support. However, social dynamics can also be hard, as children may be subjected to bullying, exclusion, and peer pressure.

This is especially true for students who identify as LGBTQIA+ or who are different from the mainstream. It is possible for many people to have emotions of loneliness, anxiety, or low self-esteem as a result of these social challenges. Having meaningful relationships with both their classmates and their professors can be beneficial for students because it can help them develop resilience, empathy, and self-confidence. Through participation in extracurricular activities, students have the opportunity to connect with others who have similar interests and passions.

Some examples of these activities are sports teams, clubs, and student groups. Environments like these frequently function as safe havens, creating leadership, teamwork, and a sense of community among its inhabitants. For students who may be experiencing difficulties in their personal lives or in their academic pursuits, it is also crucial for them to have supportive relationships with people they can trust, such as teachers, counselors, and mentors. It is ultimately the quality of the social interactions and relationships that children have at school that has a big impact on their development and well-being. This has an effect on how they deal with problems and how they construct their future outcomes.

Results and Findings

It is necessary to take a holistic strategy that is founded in teaching, legislation, and community participation to establish safe places for LGBTQ+ children in public schools. Not only does the inclusion of LGBTQ+ issues in the curriculum respect the historical and cultural contributions of the LGBTQ+ community, but it also normalizes diversity, which in turn reduces ignorance and prejudice. It is necessary to have comprehensive anti-bullying rules; however, the effectiveness of these policies is contingent on active enforcement and consistent training for educators to address LGBTQ+ problems with sensitivity and competence during their interactions with students. Restrooms and locker rooms are examples of gender-neutral facilities that are designed to address the specific issues that transgender and nonbinary students confront. These facilities are designed to create physical environments in which these students feel respected. In addition, the promotion of student-led programs like as Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) facilitates the empowerment of LGBTQ+ students and their allies by offering platforms for peer support and activism. The fact that many students are subjected to stigma and isolation, which affect their emotional well-being, necessitates the addition of mental health resources that are specifically designed to meet the requirements of LGBTQ+ individuals. Affirmations that are visible, such as pride flags and inclusive messaging, are a show of institutional support; however, more profound improvements are brought about by community involvement, which includes seminars and open discussions for families and parents. Peer-led diversity education programs are helpful in demolishing preconceptions and building empathy among students; nevertheless, these programs need to be maintained through constant policy assessments and modifications in order to adapt to the changing norms of society. Misinformation or cultural biases almost always serve as the root cause of resistance to these measures, which highlights the importance of maintaining open lines of communication and working together with all relevant parties. There is the potential for public schools to become environments in which LGBTQ+ children not only feel secure but also prosper academically and personally. This can be accomplished by addressing systemic concerns and cultivating a culture of acceptance.

Education and Awareness

Education and awareness of LGBTQ+ issues are critical in promoting understanding, reducing stigma, and fostering an inclusive environment for individuals of all sexual orientations and gender identities. Implementing LGBTQ+ education in educational institutions is a highly effective method to confront misconceptions, foster acceptance, and mitigate bullying or prejudice. Incorporating LGBTQ+ subjects into curricula, including lessons on LGBTQ+ history, literature, and contemporary social issues, normalizes varied identities and cultivates empathy among students. The representation of LGBTQ+ experiences in school materials helps affirm their identities and foster a friendly atmosphere. Furthermore, instructing children on the variety of sexual orientations and gender identities can enhance overall knowledge and empathy, hence reducing the likelihood of individuals engaging in harmful behaviors or holding prejudices. Awareness campaigns and workshops centered on LGBTQ+ topics are essential instruments for fostering understanding. These activities may manifest in several formats, including school-wide assemblies, peer-led debates, and staff training sessions. These programs instruct students and instructors on the significance of respect, inclusivity, and the necessity of confronting detrimental preconceptions and biases. LGBTQ+ inclusive training for educators and staff imparts the knowledge and skills necessary to help LGBTQ+ students and effectively resolve discriminatory issues. LGBTQ+ education and knowledge are essential in mitigating the detrimental impacts of social stigma. Research indicates that enhanced comprehension of LGBTQ+ issues correlates with a reduced propensity for negative stereotypes and discriminatory conduct (Human Rights Campaign, 2020). Inclusive training on LGBTQ+ themes in the workplace can foster more tolerant settings, diminish prejudice, and enhance support for LGBTQ+ employees. Likewise, when LGBTQ+ topics are openly addressed in educational environments, students are more inclined to cultivate affirmative perspectives on diversity and comprehend the significance of advocating for human rights.

Policy and Legislation

In the Philippines, policies and legislation concerning LGBTQ+ rights in secondary public education have progressed, however substantial deficiencies persist regarding explicit protections and inclusive practices for LGBTQ+ students. Although the Philippines is regarded as somewhat progressive regarding LGBTQ+ rights within Southeast Asia, specific legal protections for LGBTQ+ pupils in public secondary schools remain inadequate.

The *SOGIE (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Expression) Equality Bill* represents a significant legislative initiative aimed at advancing LGBTQ+ rights. This bill has been presented in the Philippine Congress numerous times but has not yet been enacted into law. The *SOGIE Equality Bill* aims to offer extensive protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression across multiple sectors, including education. The objective is to safeguard LGBTQ+ individuals, especially students, against discrimination in educational institutions, encompassing bullying, harassment, and exclusion due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. This measure has garnered support; yet, it has encountered resistance from conservative factions, leading to delays in its enactment.

In the absence of a federal statute specifically safeguarding LGBTQ+ students, some local governments and educational institutions have instituted policies and programs designed to foster safer settings for LGBTQ+ individuals. Numerous educational institutions have instituted LGBTQ+ support groups, awareness initiatives, and workshops to promote inclusivity. Numerous educational institutions in Metro Manila and other metropolitan regions have implemented LGBTQ+ inclusive policies, including the provision of gender-neutral uniforms and support services for LGBTQ+ students. Nonetheless, these initiatives are not uniformly implemented nationwide, and rural or less urbanized regions may be devoid of such programs or regulations.

In 2019, the Department of Education (DepEd) released a memorandum urging schools to foster an inclusive environment for LGBTQ+ students, namely by tackling bullying and harassment related to sexual orientation and gender identity. The memorandum advocates for respect, non-discrimination, and inclusivity in educational institutions but refrains from enacting definitive, nationwide policies to safeguard LGBTQ+ students. This memorandum represents progress; nonetheless, its non-binding status indicates that schools are not legally obligated to adhere to its standards, resulting in inconsistent enforcement across.

There is no national requirement in the Philippines for the inclusion of LGBTQ+ subjects in the school curriculum. Nonetheless, certain educational institutions provide LGBTQ+ awareness and sensitivity initiatives as components of extracurricular activities. These programs seek to foster respect and comprehension, educate children regarding LGBTQ+ matters, and combat bullying. While these programs are not obligatory, they signify crucial advancements in promoting acceptance and inclusion inside educational institutions.

Despite encouraging advancements in many aspects of LGBTQ+ inclusion within secondary public education in the Philippines, the absence of comprehensive national legislation and the inconsistent execution of inclusive policies provide considerable obstacles. The enactment of the *SOGIE Equality Bill* and additional initiatives to integrate LGBTQ+ rights into the education system are essential measures to guarantee that all students, irrespective of sexual orientation or gender identity, can access a secure, supportive, and inclusive educational setting.

Support Systems

The Philippines' secondary schools are steadily making strides toward enhancing their support systems for LGBTQ+ students, although these systems continue to be inconsistent. Some educational institutions in urban areas have taken the initiative to establish Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) and LGBTQ+ student organizations. These organizations provide LGBTQ+ students with safe spaces and support from their peers. As an additional measure, several educational institutions offer LGBTQ+ sensitivity training to their faculty and staff to better meet the requirements of these students and to foster an inclusive environment. On the other side, kids who identify as LGBTQ+ frequently do not have access to institutional support systems in rural areas, and schools may not have any clear procedures for how to handle issues that are connected to sexual orientation and gender identity. The provision of tools and

activities to create awareness about LGBTQ+ rights and to provide emotional support is another important role that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and advocacy groups play. Even though there are encouraging measures being taken, there is still a lack of comprehensive and consistent assistance for LGBTQ+ students across the country.

Discussions

Discrimination against LGBTQ+ students in secondary public schools persists as a substantial problem, with numerous students encountering harassment and exclusion due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. Research indicates that a significant proportion of LGBTQ+ children report encountering verbal or physical bullying, including name-calling, threats, or physical assault, just due to their identity. This discrimination is frequently enacted by peers, but it can also be sustained by faculty members who may lack adequate training to address LGBTQ+ concerns successfully. LGBTQ+ students often experience a lack of safety in their educational settings, adversely affecting their academic performance and overall well-being. Transgender students have increased discrimination risks, such as being denied access to suitable restroom facilities or facing transphobic remarks from peers and staff.

The emotional impact of such discrimination is significant, leading to an increased incidence of mental health problems among LGBTQ+ students. Research indicates that LGBTQ+ students subjected to prejudice are at a heightened risk of experiencing anxiety, sadness, and suicidal thoughts in comparison to their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts. The mental health burden is intensified by the insufficient supportive services in numerous schools, resulting in children lacking appropriate coping strategies and access to counselors capable of addressing their particular needs. The stigma associated with LGBTQ+ identities frequently results in feelings of isolation, hindering students' ability to establish meaningful relationships or seek assistance when necessary.

Furthermore, prejudiced educational settings impede the academic achievement of LGBTQ+ pupils. Studies demonstrate that LGBTQ+ adolescents subjected to bullying or discrimination frequently report diminished academic performance and a weakened sense of belonging within the school environment. The persistent anxiety of bullying or ostracism may compel children to evade school or disengage from their academic pursuits entirely. The absence of school involvement impedes academic success and restricts students' participation in extracurricular activities, thereby separating them from their peers and depriving them of opportunities to cultivate supportive relationships. Discrimination creates academic and social problems that negatively impact the overall school experience for LGBTQ+ kids.

Initiatives aimed at mitigating discrimination in secondary public schools have encountered differing levels of efficacy. Although several schools have adopted LGBTQ+ inclusive policies, including anti-bullying initiatives and LGBTQ+ student clubs, advancements vary significantly among districts. A significant number of pupils persist in indicating insufficient teacher support and the lack of formal mechanisms to effectively address discrimination. In educational institutions where LGBTQ+ matters are not freely discussed, students frequently experience invisibility and marginalization. To address this issue, schools must provide safer settings by implementing inclusive policies, conducting awareness programs, and providing training for both students and staff to promote acceptance and mitigate discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perspectives of LGBTQIA+ students attending City Central National High School, both in junior high and senior high school, with relation to the presence of safe spaces inside the school and the degree to which they think they are adequate. For this study, qualitative phenomenological analysis was utilized to gain an understanding of the participants' perspectives on existing safe spaces, difficulties in gaining access to supportive surroundings, and perceptions of programs aimed at promoting inclusivity.

According to the findings of the survey, City Central National High School has made tremendous progress toward offering LGBTQIA+ students an environment that is welcoming and accepting of their identities. The fact that the pupils have reported feeling like they belong at school is evidence of the supportive

environment that exists there. The fact that harassment and discrimination are less common, on the other hand, is an indication that there are still places that could use some development. There is still a need for enhanced understanding and awareness, particularly in the area of campus interactions, although the majority of students have pleasant interactions with one another.

Recommendations

To avoid discrimination and promote safe spaces for LGBTQ+ students in secondary public schools in the Philippines, the following recommendations can be implemented:

1. Establish Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Policies: Educational institutions must have explicit policies that categorically forbid discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression. These policies ought to be extensively disseminated to students, educators, and personnel.
2. Incorporate LGBTQ+ Education into the Curriculum: Integrate LGBTQ+ topics into the educational curriculum, encompassing LGBTQ+ history, rights, and the significance of diversity and inclusion, to enhance knowledge and mitigate stigma among students.
3. Educate Educators and Personnel on LGBTQ+ Sensitivity: Facilitate ongoing training for educators, school counselors, and administrators on addressing LGBTQ+ problems, supporting LGBTQ+ children and fostering an inclusive, non-discriminatory environment.
4. Enhance Counseling and Mental Health Support: Educational institutions must provide specialized counseling services capable of addressing the distinct obstacles encountered by LGBTQ+ students, such as bullying, mental health concerns, and familial issues.
5. The LGBTQ+ community and schools should work together to combat prejudice and build inclusive learning environments for all students. This can be achieved through the creation of joint educational programs, workshops, and resources.

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