



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



Spectrum of inclusivity: LGBTQ+ acceptance through the perspectives of Apayao state college employees

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Abstract

Despite a society that is moving forward with acceptance of differences, LGBTQIA+ issues are still a key topic in the community with a varied perception towards them. This study was conducted to assess the perceptions of the employees towards the acceptance of higher education institution towards LGBTQ+ members. Mixed-method approach using an adapted survey questionnaire was utilized to gather data. Frequency and percentage, Weighted mean, and Thematic analysis were used to interpret the data. The study reveals that employees are significantly aware of the discrimination faced by LGBTQIA+ individuals, recognizing systematic oppression and unique barriers, though there is a gap in awareness regarding general health services and mental health struggles. Employees generally have positive interactions with LGBTQIA+ individuals and feel comfortable around them. While there is neutrality on dress code policies, there is strong support for lenient dress codes and all-gender bathrooms. The effectiveness of institutional policies on gender inclusivity is acknowledged, with employees agreeing that the college promotes a supportive environment through adequate policies and programs. Overall, the findings suggest a need for continuous education and advocacy to address awareness gaps and further enhance institutional support for LGBTQIA+ individuals.

Keywords: LGBTQIA+; Inclusivity; Acceptance; Perspectives; Employees

1. Introduction

The existence of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ+) can be traced back for centuries. Historically, the Babaylans exercised their rights to cross-dressing for both men and women, as well as the capacity to marry and have sexual relations with people of the same gender [1]. Despite a society that is moving forward with acceptance of differences, LGBTQIA+ issues are still a key topic in the community with a varied perception towards them. The acceptance of these minority groups is as closely associated with social stigma. Varying perception on LGBTQIA+ community is dependent on whether a country is progressive or not [2]. Countries with a more diverse population tend to have a more open culture that embraces diversity and tolerance for differences. Consequently, in countries with conservative or traditional cultures, gender and social norms must be more strictly adhered to earn social acceptance [3].

The Philippines is one of the most LGBT-friendly countries in Southeast Asia. Research shows that the Philippines had an equality index of 57/100, trailing behind Taiwan's 63/100 index score [4]. Boasting a high equality score, however, there is still a lot of discrimination and negative stereotypes about LGBTQ individuals in the Philippines. According to a report published by the Commission on Human Rights, LGBTQIA+ children face various forms of discrimination and bullying in schools and physical, verbal, and emotional abuse within their households [5]. Additionally, several activists

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have highlighted that the LGBTQIA+ community faces tolerance but not complete acceptance in the Philippines [6]. The lack of acceptance of LGBTQIA+ individuals in the Philippines may be due to Catholicism's deep influence on gender roles. A study by Reyes [1] stated that the levels of religiosity among Catholics and Evangelicals are directly associated with the levels of homonegative views toward LGBTQIA+ individuals. Moreover, harmful media representations further reinforce these homophobic and transphobic sentiments of Filipinos [7].

Most people would believe that the members of the LGBTQIA+ community are treated equally, but the reality is far from what others expect. At best, LGBTQIA+ members are only tolerated by society and, at worst, are being denied their rights to receive equal treatment because of other individual's bias towards gender conformity [8].

Apayao State College (ASC) is committed to promoting gender acceptance and inclusivity within its academic community. Through the efforts of the Gender and Development (GAD) Office, ASC integrates gender-responsive policies and programs, conducts gender awareness training, and participates in national campaigns such as the 18-Day Campaign to End Violence Against Women and Children. By establishing partnerships with external stakeholders, ASC ensures the continuous development and implementation of gender-responsive initiatives, contributing to a more equitable and supportive environment for all members of the academic community.

However, there are gaps in our understanding of how individuals perceive their acceptance toward LGBTQIA+ people. Numerous research studies have been conducted and published in Western nations relating to acceptance towards LGBTQIA+ community, however, there needs to be more similar studies in the local context. The results of this research can be used as a reference to understand the acceptance of ASC employees towards LGBTQIA+. This research is addressing Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) numbers 5: Gender equality and SDG 10: Reduced inequalities. Furthermore, the data gathered would also be beneficial in formulating a solution to help school institutions create an environment that would promote the wholehearted acceptance of the LGBTQIA+ community and its members.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

This study was utilized through mixed-method approach using an adapted survey questionnaire [9] to gather the research data.

2.2. Locale of the Study

This study was conducted at Apayao State College - Conner Campus.

2.3. Respondents of the Study

The respondents of this study are the permanent non-teaching employees of the Apayao State College-Conner Campus. Total enumeration was used.

2.4. Research Instrumentation

An adapted survey questionnaire [9] was used to gather the research data. It was composed of 3 parts: Part I elicited the profile of the respondents; Part II measured the level of awareness, behavior of the respondents, and the institutional support, and Part III was for the recommendations.

2.5. Data Gathering Procedures

The researcher sought permission from the administration of the institution for the conduct of the study. After approval, the researcher personally distributed and retrieved the questionnaires to all the respondents with the content of the questionnaires being explained to them clearly and answers was consolidated and was treated with confidentiality. To obtain better data, clear, precise, and understandable questions should be posed, ensuring that there is no ambiguity, with in-depth information in the opinion of the respondents.

2.6. Statistical Analysis

Frequency and percentage were used to compute for the demographic profile of the respondents.

Weighted mean was used to measure the level of awareness, behavior, and institutional support of the respondents using 5 Point-Likert scale

Table 1 5 Point-Likert Scale for Awareness

Scale	Mean range	Descriptive interpretation
5	4.20 – 5.00	Fully aware
4	3.40 – 4.19	Aware
3	2.80 – 3.39	Neither
2	1.80 - 2.79	Not Aware
1	1.00 – 1.79	Fully not aware

Table 2 5 Point-Likert Scale for Agreement

Scale	Mean range	Descriptive interpretation
5	4.20 – 5.00	Strongly agree
4	3.40 – 4.19	Agree
3	2.80 – 3.39	Neither
2	1.80 - 2.79	Disagree
1	1.00 – 1.79	Strongly disagree

Thematic analysis was used for the recommendations of the respondents.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Profile of the respondents

Table 3 provides a demographic profile of respondents, highlighting their sex, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. Among the 31 respondents, 48.39% are male and 51.61% are female. All respondents identify as cisgender, with no representation from other gender identities such as transgender, non-binary, or genderqueer. Gender expression aligns closely with biological sex, with 48.39% expressing masculinity and 51.61% expressing femininity. In terms of sexual orientation, the majority (80.65%) identify as heterosexual, while 16.13% are homosexual, and 3.22% are bisexual. There is no representation of other sexual orientations like pansexual or asexual. This data reflects a homogenous group in terms of gender identity and expression, with some diversity in sexual orientation.

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine [10] emphasizes the importance of understanding the distinctions and interrelations between these constructs. It highlights how clear measures of sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation can provide insights into societal inequalities and improve the identification of minority populations

Table 3 Profile of the respondents

	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	15	48.39
Female	16	51.61
	31	100
Gender identity		
Cisgender	31	100

Transgender	0	0
Non-binary	0	0
Genderqueer	0	0
Agender	0	0
Bigender	0	0
Genderfluid	0	0
Two-Spirit	0	0
	31	100%
Gender expression		
Masculine	15	48.39
Feminine	16	51.61
Androgynous	0	0
Gender Nonconforming	0	0
Fluid	0	
	31	100%
Sexual orientation		
Heterosexual	25	80.65
Homosexual	5	16.13
Bisexual	1	3.22
Pansexual	0	0
Asexual	0	0
Demisexual	0	0
	31	100%

3.2. Awareness towards the LGBTQ Discrimination by the Employees

Table 4 Awareness towards the LGBTQ Discrimination by the Employees

Statement	Mean	Interpretation
LGBTQIA individuals are systematically oppressed in the Philippines.	4.08	Aware
LGBTQIA individuals face certain barriers in my community that are not faced by heterosexual individuals.	3.88	Aware
Members of the LGBTQIA community experience more bullying than heterosexual adolescents in my immediate community (barangay, school, workplace).	4.04	Aware
Members of the LGBTQIA+ community are not treated equally when availing of general health services	2.96	Neither
Members of the LGBTQIA community experience more depression and suicidal thoughts than heterosexual adolescents.	2.96	Neither
Overall Mean	3.58	Aware

Table 4 shows the data which indicates that employees are significantly aware of the discrimination faced by LGBTQIA individuals, with a mean awareness score of 3.58. They recognize that LGBTQIA individuals are systematically oppressed, face unique barriers in their communities that heterosexual individuals do not encounter, and experience

higher levels of bullying, with the means of 4.08, 3.88, and 4.04, respectively. However, there is a neutral stance regarding the unequal treatment of LGBTQIA+ individuals in general health services and their mental health struggles, including depression and suicidal thoughts, with a mean of 2.96. This suggests a gap in awareness or acknowledgment in these specific areas.

The results corroborate with the study of Domingo [11] which reveals that heteronormative practices and traditional norms significantly affect LGBTQIA+ individuals, leading to a deterioration of confidence, rejection of sexual diversity, and inhibition of authenticity. It also emphasizes the importance of a solid support system in helping LGBTQIA+ to embrace their genuine selves and succeed academically.

3.3. Interactions towards the LGBTQ+ individuals

Table 5 Interactions towards the LGBTQ+ individuals by the Employees

Statement	Mean	Interpretation
I appreciate LGBTQIA+ individuals.	4.20	Strongly agree
I feel comfortable interacting with LGBTQIA+ individuals.	4.00	Agree
I initiate interacting with LGBTQIA+ individuals.	3.63	Agree
I do not feel any strong emotions (e.g. irritation, happiness, empathy, etc.) when I interact with an LGBTQIA+ individual.	2.61	Disagree
I feel anxious with LGBTQIA+ individuals because I might offend them.	2.75	Disagree
I would prefer not to interact with LGBTQIA+ individuals if given the chance.	2.29	Disagree
I feel a sense of repulsion when I interact with LGBTQIA+ individuals	2.38	Disagree
Being in the same place with an LGBTQIA+ individual makes me uncomfortable.	2.50	Disagree
Overall Mean	3.04	Neither

Table 5 shows the data on the interactions towards the LGBTQ+ individuals. Based on the results, employees generally have positive interactions with LGBTQIA+ individuals, with an overall mean score of 3.04. Respondents strongly agree that they appreciate LGBTQIA+ individuals, feel comfortable interacting with them, and they also agree that they initiate interactions, with a mean of 4.20, 4.00, and 3.63 respectively. In addition, respondents also disagreed that they feel a strong emotion during interactions, feeling anxious about offending LGBTQIA+ individuals, preferring not to interact with them, feeling repulsion, and feeling uncomfortable in their presence. This suggests that the employees generally appreciate and feel comfortable around LGBTQIA+ individuals, there are no anxieties and discomforts that need to be addressed.

According to a study by Salazar [12], it highlighted that inclusivity and positive interactions significantly enhanced the confidence, performance, and well-being of LGBTQIA+ members. Affirmations and supportive actions from individuals contributed to a positive work environment, demonstrating that employees can be comfortable and supportive of LGBTQIA+ members.

3.4. Institutional support towards the LGBTQ

Table 6 indicates that employees have a mixed stance towards institutional support for LGBTQIA+ individuals through dress code policies, with an overall mean score of 3.32, reflecting a neutral position. Respondents agree that implementing lenient dress code policies within schools or workplaces would be beneficial (Mean:) and positively impact institutions, with means of 3.58 and 3.54, respectively. There is neutrality on the concern that lenient dress codes might lead to indecent dressing. Employees also agree that strict dress codes contribute to better character and discipline, but they disagree with feeling uncomfortable when seeing LGBTQIA+ individuals cross-dressing. This suggests that while employees see the value in lenient dress codes and support for LGBTQIA+ individuals, they also believe in maintaining certain standards.

According to a study by Cumming-Potvin [13], lenient dress code policies in educational institutions promote inclusivity and respect for individual identities, which can enhance the overall well-being and academic performance of LGBTQIA+ students and workers.

Table 6 Dress Code

Statement	Mean	Interpretation
It would be happy if lenient dress code policies were implemented within my school/workplace	3.58	Agree
Lenient dress code policies would positively impact schools, workplaces, and other institutions.	3.54	Agree
Implementing a lenient dress code policy would encourage students and employees to dress indecently.	3.38	Neither
Strict dress codes will help students develop better character and discipline compared to lenient dress code policies.	3.70	Agree
Seeing LGBTQIA+ students and employees cross-dressing makes me uncomfortable.	2.42	Disagree
Overall Mean	3.32	Neither

Table 7 All gender bathrooms

Statement	Mean	Interpretation
I would be happy if all-gender bathrooms were installed within private and public spaces.	3.63	Agree
All-gender bathrooms would positively impact schools, workplaces, and other institutions.	3.79	Agree
I would feel comfortable using the all-gender bathroom installed within my school/workplace.	3.58	Agree
Overall Mean	3.67	Agree

Table 7 indicates a positive attitude among employees towards the installation of all-gender bathrooms, with an overall mean score of 3.67, reflecting agreement. Respondents agree that they would be happy if all-gender bathrooms were installed in private and public spaces, believe that such bathrooms would positively impact schools, workplaces, and other institutions, and feel comfortable using them within their school or workplace, with means of 3.63, 3.79, and 3.58, respectively. This suggests a strong support for the inclusion of all-gender bathrooms, which can promote inclusivity and reduce discrimination.

According to a study by Wagner and Crowley [14], the availability of all-gender bathrooms significantly improves the sense of safety and well-being for transgender and non-binary individuals, contributing to a more inclusive environment.

Table 8 Institutional policies on gender inclusivity

Statement	Mean	Interpretation
College faculty and staff promote gender inclusivity on the campus.	3.87	Agree
The college offers adequate policies to protect the LGBTQIA community from bullying and violence.	3.76	Agree
The college offers sufficient programs (gender sensitivity seminars, etc.) to promote gender inclusivity.	4.02	Agree
The college organizes training and seminars for its faculty and staff to improve their conduct and management of LGBTQIA+ individuals.	4.06	Agree
Overall Mean	3.93	Agree

Table 8 indicates that employees generally agree with the effectiveness of institutional policies on gender inclusivity, with an overall mean score of 3.93. Respondents agree that college faculty and staff promote gender inclusivity on campus, and that the college provides adequate policies to protect the LGBTQIA+ community from bullying and violence. Additionally, there is agreement that the college offers sufficient programs, such as gender sensitivity seminars, to promote gender inclusivity, and organizes training and seminars for faculty and staff to improve their conduct and management of LGBTQIA+ individuals. This suggests a strong institutional commitment to fostering a supportive and inclusive environment for LGBTQIA+ individuals.

A study by Parra [15] emphasizes that comprehensive policies and regular training programs are crucial for creating an inclusive academic environment that supports the well-being and success of LGBTQIA+ students and staff.

Overall, based on the data provided for the institutional support, employees display mixed opinions regarding institutional support for LGBTQIA+ individuals through dress code policies, showing neutrality overall but appreciating lenient policies' positive impacts. They believe that strict dress codes foster better character and discipline yet are uncomfortable with cross-dressing, indicating the need for balance. Regarding all-gender bathrooms, employees show strong support, recognizing the positive impact and increased comfort these facilities provide. Institutional policies on gender inclusivity also receive a favorable response, with high agreement on their promotion, protection, and training efforts for LGBTQIA+ inclusivity. Overall, this reflects a growing acceptance and support for LGBTQIA+ inclusivity within institutions, although nuances and areas for improvement remain.

3.5. Recommendations to improve college acceptance for LGBTQ+ members.

Table 9 Recommendations to improve college acceptance for LGBTQ+ members

Themes	Actions
Policy Development and Integration	Incorporate policies benefiting LGBTQIA+ individuals into GAD (Gender and Development) progress. Ensure cross-dressing is not allowed to protect the wholesome image of the institution.
Gender-Neutral and Inclusive Facilities	Install and include LGBTQIA+ comfort rooms in future building plans Provide gender-neutral facilities such as comfort rooms. Organize campus-wide events celebrating diversity, pride, awareness weeks, and workshops to educate the broader student body on LGBTQIA+ issues.
Inclusivity-Related Policies and Mental Health Programs	Develop more inclusivity-related policies. Implement mental health and well-being programs. Initiate programs to strengthen LGBTQIA+ community representation
Open-Mindedness and Respect	Encourage open-mindedness and acceptance of individual choices among all college members. Promote happiness and respect for everyone's choices, as long as they do not disrespect others' lives
Inclusivity-Related Policies and Mental Health Programs	Develop more inclusivity-related policies. Implement mental health and well-being programs. Initiate programs to strengthen LGBTQIA+ community representation.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study reveals that employees are significantly aware of the discrimination faced by LGBTQIA+ individuals, recognizing systematic oppression and unique barriers, though there is a gap in awareness regarding general health services and mental health struggles. Employees generally have positive interactions with LGBTQIA+ individuals and feel comfortable around them. While there is neutrality on dress code policies, there is strong support for lenient dress codes and all-gender bathrooms. The effectiveness of institutional policies on gender inclusivity is acknowledged, with employees agreeing that the college promotes a supportive environment through adequate policies and programs. Overall, the findings suggest a need for continuous education and advocacy to address awareness gaps and further enhance institutional support for LGBTQIA+ individuals.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

Authors have declared that they have no known competing financial interests OR non-financial interests OR personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Statement of ethical approval

The study was conducted with approval and in accordance with the standards of the college. No ethical approval was required, as the research followed all applicable ethical guidelines, ensuring respect for the respondents' privacy and confidentiality

Disclaimer (Artificial Intelligence)

I acknowledge that I have not used ChatGPT or Copilot for refining some of the sections in the document.

Disclosure of informed Consent

I affirm that the respondents voluntarily agreed to participate after being fully informed about the purpose, nature, and potential implications of the study. Their responses have been collected with utmost respect for their privacy and confidentiality, in accordance with ethical research guidelines.

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