

# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY: APPLIED BUSINESS AND EDUCATION RESEARCH

2026, Vol. 7, No. 9, 4133 – 4146

<http://dx.doi.org/10.11594/ijmaber.07.09.25>

---

## Research Article

### Gender Diversity Among High School Students: Challenges and the Role of Schools Toward A Gender-Just Future

Lennen C. Cervantes, Victoria Pena Valenzuela\*

Graduate School, Meycauayan College, Philippines, Department of Public Administration and Governance, College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, Bulacan State University, Philippines

---

#### Article history:

Submission 30 August 2026

Revised 14 September 2026

Accepted 23 September 2026

#### \*Corresponding author:

E-mail:

[victoria.valenzuela@bulsu.edu.ph](mailto:victoria.valenzuela@bulsu.edu.ph)

#### ABSTRACT

This study examined gender preference diversity among high school students, the issues and challenges they encounter, and the role of educational institutions in promoting gender equality. A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was applied, combining qualitative interviews with quantitative surveys among Grades 7–10 students at City of Malolos Integrated School–Sto. Rosario during the 2025–2026 school year. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, while quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings revealed that although many students were open about their gender identity and received acceptance from family and peers, they continued to experience bullying, discrimination, and social exclusion within the school environment. Participants commonly coped by remaining silent or avoiding confrontation. The quantitative findings indicated that schools implemented gender-responsive practices to a moderate extent; however, gaps in awareness and consistent implementation persisted. The study recommends strengthening gender-responsive policies, increasing awareness programs, enhancing faculty training, and expanding institutional support to foster a safer, more inclusive, gender-just future and equitable educational environment.

**Keywords:** *Gender diversity, Gender equality, Gender-just future, Gender-responsive education, LGBTQIA+*

---

## Introduction

Every student, regardless of gender identity, expression, or sexual orientation, deserves equitable access to quality education—a principle directed in both international and Philippine policies, such as the Department of Education's Gender-Responsive Basic Education Pol-

icy and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Department of Education, 2017; United Nations, 2019; UNICEF, 2021). Promoting gender inclusivity and equality remains a core goal of educational systems, and schools play a vital role in fostering safe, fair, and inclusive learning spaces.

---

#### How to cite:

Cervantes, L. C., & Valenzuela, V. P. (2026). Gender Diversity Among High School Students: Challenges and the Role of Schools Toward A Gender-Just Future. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary: Applied Business and Education Research*. 7(9), 4133 – 4146. doi: 10.11594/ijmaber.07.09.25

Even with these issues being dealt with in the school policy, gender-non-conforming students still have to face being teased, excluded, discriminated against, harassed in words and actions, pressured, and socially isolated, which negatively disrupts academic performance, emotional well-being, attendance, and school belonging (Abreu et al., 2022; Choukas-Bradley & Thoma, 2022; Johns et al., 2019; Kosciw et al., 2020). Gaps in implementation are mainly due to lack of necessary resources and limited monitoring (Department of Education, 2017; Galamgam et al., 2021; Mori, 2024). Bullying and safety are closely related to school policies that include all students and school climate that is reassuring. The involvement of the family and community has also been found to be important in decreasing the number of bullies and improving the safety and sense of membership of students (Cahill et al., 2018; Russell et al., 2020; Van Vliet et al., 2025). The major issue, though, is that stakeholders are not fully aware of the services that support them (Barairo et al., 2024; National Education Association, 2023). Even among stakeholders, those who can offer support for inclusive education are hardly aware of their existence. It is also evident that monitoring of the situation as well as evaluation of the activities related to inclusion is done inadequately.

This study was anchored on Bandura's (1977, 2001) Social Learning Theory and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, the main principles of which highlight the effects of social interactions and environments like family, peers, school, and community in the overall development and wellbeing of children (Bandura, 1977, 2001) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In the same way, the latest works in this field emphasize again that family, peer, school, and community factors are essential when it comes to gender-diverse adolescents' quality of life or their ability to feel safe and accepted (Fernandes et al., 2023; Katz-Wise et al., 2022; Leung et al., 2022). Therefore, the study assessed the gender diversity profile of high school students, examined their lived experiences and challenges within the school environment, and determined the role of schools in promoting gender equality.

## Research Questions

The study assessed the gender diversity profile of high school students, the issues and challenges they encountered, their coping strategies, and the role of schools in promoting gender equality.

Specifically, it sought to determine:

- (a) the students' gender diversity profile in terms of heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality;
- (b) the issues and challenges encountered in school interpersonal relationships;
- (c) the ways students addressed these challenges;
- (d) the role of schools in promoting gender equality; and
- (e) an action plan based on the findings to address gender equality issues.

## Material and Methods

### Methodology

The study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches to examine gender-responsive practices in a public secondary school in the Schools Division of Malolos, Bulacan, during School Year 2025–2026. The qualitative phase explored students' lived experiences and provided contextual explanations for the quantitative findings, while the quantitative phase assessed the extent of gender-responsive practices (Bowen et al., 2017; Creswell, 2005; Wasti et al., 2022).

The qualitative phase involved 12 purposively selected student informants from Grades 7–10, comprising six heterosexual, four homosexual, and two bisexual participants. The quantitative phase included 220 students, selected through stratified random sampling from a population of 1,959. The sample consisted of 55 Grade 7, 51 Grade 8, 42 Grade 9, and 72 Grade 10 students (Busetto et al., 2020; Ahmed, 2024).

Two instruments were used. A researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide was validated by the research adviser, critic, external Department of Education validators, and graduate research panel members of Meycauayan College. For the quantitative phase, the Gender-Responsive Practices

Questionnaire developed by Barairo et al. (2024), based on the Enhanced Gender Mainstreaming Evaluation Framework, was utilized. The questionnaire assessed ten indicators of gender-responsive practices using a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Not Practiced*) to 4 (*Very Much Practiced*). The four-point format reduced neutral responses and improved response discrimination (Jebb et al., 2021).

Ethical standards for research involving human participants were observed. Participation was voluntary, and parental consent and student assent were obtained prior to data collection. Confidentiality was maintained through the use of codes or pseudonyms, secure data storage, and restricted access. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

For data analysis, qualitative interview data were examined through thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, weighted mean, and descriptive statistics to determine the extent of implementation of gender-responsive practices (Turney, 2023). Integration occurred during the interpretation stage, wherein qualitative themes were used to explain and contextualize the quantitative findings, consistent with the sequential explanatory mixed-methods design (Bowen et al., 2017).

## Results and Discussion

Using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, this study integrated the qualitative findings on students' experiences with gender diversity, challenges, and coping mechanisms with the quantitative data on school gender-responsive practices. This integration explained how students' lived experiences are connected to the level of institutional implementation.

### Qualitative Findings

The qualitative phase has 12 Grade 7-10 informants (six heterosexual, four homosexuals, and two bisexual). This cross-grade representation provided diverse adolescent perspectives on sexual orientation and gender diversity within the school.

**Theme 1: Gender Diversity Profile.** It showed that participants mostly understood sexual orientation as emotional, romantic, or physical attraction, although some linked it with gender identity. Informants identified as heterosexuals, homosexuals, or bisexuals; most reported openness and acceptance among peers and family; however, two participants concealed their identities from family because of fear of rejection.

These findings established that sexual orientation and gender diversity are present among junior high school students, but disclosure and acceptance vary by social environment. While many informants have supportive relationships with their family and friends, those who conceal their identities have a lingering fear of rejection.

**Theme 2: Issues and Challenges Encountered.** Generally, the peer relationships were a positive environment for acceptance and respect, but some of the participants were victims of teasing and bullying, experienced discrimination, labelling, and verbal harassment, and were not treated equally with others because they had a different sexual orientation or gender expression. Such situations were experienced in particular when students had not yet established peer groups, had very limited social interactions, and had not transitioned to a level connected to adolescence. Teasing, bullying, and unequal treatment during early junior high school years are common emerging patterns from the qualitative narratives rather than statistically significant differences between grade levels, given that only three informants represented each level.

The study states that both positive peer relationships and unfair experiences occur simultaneously, and it does not completely protect the gender-diverse youths against being labelled and harassed at school. It is in school that the students' gender identities are recognized or rejected; early junior high school is more susceptible, and an unstable environment can be very risky. The qualitative findings have correlated narrative patterns across Grades 7-10 and stressed the need for proactive and constant school support. Encouraging a safe and respectful school climate where faculty constantly learn and teach to address gender bias

and implement gender-responsive teaching methods proactively.

**Theme 3: Coping Mechanisms and School Support.** Revealed that students commonly coped with negative experiences by ignoring comments, remaining silent, or avoiding confrontation. Friends and family served as important sources of emotional support. Participants also recognized school initiatives, including Homeroom Guidance, Araling Panlipunan, Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao, anti-bullying campaigns, and Pride Month activities, as promoting gender awareness. However, some students were unaware of existing gender-responsive and safe-school programs, suggesting gaps in program communication and visibility.

The study results reflect the presence of gender diversity among students of the junior high school and different levels of awareness of gender and sexual orientation among the students. Most adolescents define sexual orientation as emotional or romantic attraction only. (Al Atoom et al., 2024; Bishop et al., 2020; Hall et al., 2021). Still, even though their peers are mostly supportive, they continue to talk about bullying, stereotyping, and harassment. These results are in line with the research on LGBTQ+ individuals' continued exposure to subgroups pressure and the justification of further anti-discrimination laws based on the Department

of Education's (2017) Gender-Inclusive Basic Education (Abreu et al., 2022; Kosciw et al., 2020; Russell et al., 2021). Family acceptance and peer support emerged as an important protective factor. When faced with discrimination, students who received emotional support showed more resilience and constructive coping. According to research (Fernandes et al., 2023; Katz-Wise et al., 2022; Leung et al., 2022), gender-diverse adolescents' well-being and healthy identity development are enhanced by supportive family, peer, and school environments. According to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological perspective, fostering positive educational and developmental outcomes requires coordinated support across family, school, and community systems.

Significantly, this finding showed that students' unawareness of existing gender-responsive and safe school initiatives emphasized that school program availability does not guarantee student awareness. These gaps in communication and lack of visibility indicate that mere implementation is not enough without active promotion, gender-responsive program enhancement, and well-structured cascading aiming to keep the students engaged at every step; providing them immediate access to the resources is essential to be considered effective and a success.

*Table 1. Distribution of Qualitative Informants*

| Grade Level  | Heterosexual | Homosexual | Bisexual | Total     |
|--------------|--------------|------------|----------|-----------|
| Grade 7      | 2            | 1          | 0        | 3         |
| Grade 8      | 2            | 1          | 0        | 3         |
| Grade 9      | 1            | 1          | 1        | 3         |
| Grade 10     | 1            | 1          | 1        | 3         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>6</b>     | <b>4</b>   | <b>2</b> | <b>12</b> |

The qualitative informants were distributed evenly across Grades 7 to 10, allowing

the study to capture experiences from different stages of junior high school.

*Table 2. Distribution of Quantitative Respondents*

| Grade Level  | Population   | Sample     | Sampling Rate |
|--------------|--------------|------------|---------------|
| Grade 7      | 552          | 55         | 10%           |
| Grade 8      | 510          | 51         | 10%           |
| Grade 9      | 417          | 42         | 10%           |
| Grade 10     | 480          | 72         | 15%           |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>1,959</b> | <b>220</b> | —             |

The data represent a stratified sampling approach where different grade levels are treated as distinct strata. These data present a sampling distribution across four grade levels (7-10) from a total student population of 1,959,

with an overall sample of 220 students. Grades 7-9 use a 10% sampling rate, while Grade 10 uses a 15% sampling rate due to age and developmental considerations, given the study's sensitivity.

*Table 3. Extent of Implementation of Gender-Responsive Practices in Promoting Gender Equality*

| Gender-Responsive Practices                      | M    | SD        | Interpretation     |
|--------------------------------------------------|------|-----------|--------------------|
| GAD-related events and celebrations              | 2.64 | 1.03      | Somewhat Practiced |
| Gender-responsive learning resources             | 2.92 | 0.96      | Somewhat Practiced |
| Gender-fair classroom language                   | 3.08 | 0.97      | Somewhat Practiced |
| Gender-inclusive teaching strategies             | 2.87 | 0.97      | Somewhat Practiced |
| Equal participation and representation           | 3.30 | 0.91      | Somewhat Practiced |
| Gender-responsive sports programs                | 3.03 | 0.97      | Somewhat Practiced |
| GAD activities in the school calendar            | 2.82 | 1.00      | Somewhat Practiced |
| Gender-responsive career guidance and counseling | 2.78 | 0.94      | Somewhat Practiced |
| Gender sensitivity training for personnel        | 2.76 | 1.00      | Somewhat Practiced |
| Mental health and psychological support services | 3.48 | 0.85      | Somewhat Practiced |
| Overall                                          | 2.96 | 0.85–1.03 | Somewhat Practiced |

*Note.* *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation; GAD = Gender and Development.

Table 4 shows that gender-responsive practices were **somewhat practiced overall** ( $M = 2.96$ ). Mental health and psychological support services received the highest rating ( $M = 3.48$ ,  $SD = 0.85$ ), followed by equal participation and representation ( $M = 3.30$ ,  $SD = 0.91$ ). GAD-related events and celebrations obtained the lowest rating ( $M = 2.64$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ). The findings suggest that schools have implemented gender-responsive practices to some extent but need to further strengthen and institutionalize

these initiatives to promote a more inclusive and equitable school environment. These gaps are consistent with previous findings that implementation of gender-responsive policies in Philippine schools is affected by limited training, resources, monitoring, and stakeholder awareness (Barairo et al., 2024; Galamgam et al., 2021; Mori, 2024). Strengthening these areas may improve students' awareness of support services and promote a more inclusive school climate

### **Integration of Qualitative and Quantitative Findings**

*Table 4. Integration of Qualitative Themes and Quantitative Findings*

| Quantitative Gender-Responsive Practice | Quantitative Result               | Related Qualitative Finding                                                                    | Integrated Interpretation                                                                                                                                |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| GAD-related events and celebrations     | Lowest rating ( $M = 2.64$ )      | Some students were unaware of existing gender-responsive initiatives.                          | Limited visibility and communication reduce students' awareness and participation in Gender and Development-related events, activities, or celebrations. |
| Gender-responsive learning resources    | Somewhat practiced ( $M = 2.92$ ) | Students identified Home-room Guidance and subject discussions as sources of gender awareness. | Gender-related learning resources are present, but students' varying awareness suggests that the program may not be consistently visible or accessible.  |

| <b>Quantitative Gender-Responsive Practice</b>   | <b>Quantitative Result</b>        | <b>Related Qualitative Finding</b>                                                                                               | <b>Integrated Interpretation</b>                                                                                                                                                                         |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Gender-fair classroom language                   | Somewhat practiced (M = 3.08)     | Participants generally described positive and respectful relationships, although some experienced teasing and verbal harassment. | The positive rating may reflect efforts toward respectful communication, but continued verbal harassment suggests that gender-fair language is not consistently practiced across all school interactions |
| Gender-inclusive teaching strategies             | Somewhat practiced (M = 2.87)     | Students reported varying levels of acceptance and unequal treatment.                                                            | Inclusive teaching practices may be present but require more consistent implementation to ensure that all students are treated equally.                                                                  |
| Equal participation and representation           | Relatively high rating (M = 3.30) | Many participants described supportive peer relationships and acceptance.                                                        | Positive participation may support peer acceptance, but discrimination can still lead to exclusion.                                                                                                      |
| Gender-responsive sports programs                | Somewhat practiced (M = 3.03)     | Qualitative narratives have limited direct evidence                                                                              | It is moderately implemented; qualitative evidence on gender-inclusive sports was limited, warranting further investigation.                                                                             |
| GAD activities in the school calendar            | Somewhat practiced (M = 2.82)     | Some students recognized Pride Month activities, while others were unaware of gender-responsive programs.                        | The findings emphasize communication gaps that limit students' awareness of Gender and Development activities.                                                                                           |
| Gender-responsive career guidance and counseling | Somewhat practiced (M = 2.78)     | Some students experienced discrimination and relied on friends and family rather than institutional support.                     | The low rating highlights the need for more visible and accessible gender-responsive guidance and counseling services                                                                                    |
| Gender-sensitivity training for personnel        | Somewhat practiced (M = 2.76)     | Students continued to experience stereotyping, teasing, bullying, and unequal treatment.                                         | Persistent discriminatory experiences highlight the need for continuous staff capacity-building in gender-sensitive practices                                                                            |
| Mental health and psychological support services | Highest rating (M = 3.48)         | Friends and family provided emotional support, but some students coped through silence and avoidance.                            | While support services are highly rated, students' passive coping highlights that availability must be paired with stronger trust and visibility.                                                        |

Integrating the qualitative and quantitative findings provides a clearer explanation of the implementation gaps. The students recognized initiatives such as Homeroom Guidance, anti-bullying, classroom discussions, and Pride Month, but their unawareness of other safe

school programs indicates that program availability does not guarantee students' awareness and participation. To address this matter, school administration, staff, and teachers should make positive change through constant specialized training. Observe teachers' biases

and the active incorporation of gender-responsive practices into daily lessons. School administration and staff proper handling of concerns about gender-diverse students. This proactive dissemination is vital because school is the primary environment where gender-diverse student identities are affirmed (Clay, 2024)

This qualitative finding corresponds with the quantitative results, particularly the low rating for GAD-related events and celebrations ( $M = 2.64$ ) and GAD activities included in the school calendar ( $M = 2.82$ ). These results suggest that students may have limited exposure to or awareness of gender-related activities. Thus, the relatively low quantitative ratings may be explained by the qualitative accounts indicating gaps in program visibility, communication, and student awareness.

Similarly, gender-responsive career guidance and counseling ( $M = 2.78$ ) and gender sensitivity training for personnel ( $M = 2.76$ ) received relatively low ratings. These findings may help explain why some students continued to report teasing, stereotyping, bullying, verbal harassment, and unequal treatment despite the presence of general school initiatives. While students generally described peer relationships as supportive and accepting, the persistence of unfair experiences shows the need for more organized and visible interventions.

On the other hand, mental health and psychological support services received the highest rating ( $M = 3.48$ ). This finding is consistent with the qualitative accounts emphasizing the importance of emotional support from friends,

family, and supportive environments. However, some students reported coping with discrimination by remaining silent, ignoring negative comments, or avoiding confrontation. This suggests that while support services may be available, their visibility and accessibility should continue to be strengthened so that students experiencing gender-related challenges can actively seek appropriate assistance trusting the program's help.

Overall, the integration of findings indicates that the primary concern is not simply the absence of gender-responsive programs but the need to improve their visibility, consistency, and accessibility. The qualitative narratives then provide contextual explanations for the moderate quantitative ratings and support the development of a more targeted action plan for promoting gender equality in the school.

To address Research Question (e), the proposed action plan has created a program that answers the qualitative and quantitative findings. Low quantitative ratings for GAD events and qualitative student unawareness indicate a clear need for an effective communication campaign. To tackle documented harassment and passive student coping, the plan prioritizes reinforcing anti-bullying protocols, visible counseling support, and continuous faculty training in gender-responsive instruction. By aligning students, faculty, staff, families, and community stakeholders, this framework systematically transitions a passive safe-school policy into an active, inclusive learning environment.

Table 5. Proposed Action Plan to Address Gender Equality Issues

| Priority Area                           | Project/ Activities                                            | Tasks                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Success Indicators                                                                                                      | Time Frame     | Target Stakeholders                                                   | Expected Outcome                                                                                                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| GAD Program Visibility                  | GAD Calendar Integration<br>GAD-Related events and Celebration | To increase students' awareness of existing gender-responsive programs and services conduct regular orientation, information campaign, and awareness activity                                                                                           | Functional GAD Programs                                                                                                 | All Year Round | GAD Coordinator, Students, Teachers, and School Administrators        | Increased awareness and participation in GAD programs                                                                                                   |
| Support System for Student Well - Being | Anti-Bullying and Safe-School Programs                         | Strengthen anti-bullying campaigns, reporting mechanisms, and classroom discussions on respect, equality, and inclusion.<br>- assess current mental health support capacity<br>- establish peer support group<br>- develop crisis intervention protocol | Reduced the incidence of gender-based bullying<br><br>Improved access to academic, emotional, and psychosocial support. | All Year Round | Students, teachers, guidance personnel                                | More inclusive and equitable learning environment<br>Improved mental health outcomes for all students                                                   |
|                                         | Mental Health Support                                          | - strengthen gender-responsive career guidance                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                         |                |                                                                       | Increased accessibility and awareness of student support service                                                                                        |
|                                         | Support Groups and Counselling                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                         |                |                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                         |
| Faculty Development                     | Comprehensive Gender Sensitivity Training                      | - conduct gender sensitivity and gender responsive training for teaching and non-teaching personnel<br>- develop training modules on gender sensitivity                                                                                                 | Faculty and staff are trained in gender sensitivity and can respond appropriately to gender-related concerns            | Yearly         | Trainers/facilitator, Faculty, and substitute teachers                | Faculty and staff are confident in handling gender diverse students<br><br>Improved gender-responsive practices and more inclusive learning environment |
| Student participation                   | Inclusive Leadership Development                               | Conduct leadership training for gender diverse students<br>Elect student ambassadors                                                                                                                                                                    | Balanced representation in all clubs                                                                                    | Yearly         | Students, Leadership trainers, sports coordinators, scholarship funds | Equal opportunities for leadership and sports development regardless of gender/sexual orientation                                                       |
|                                         | Gender Equality Workshop                                       | Organize gender equality workshop                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Leadership positions reflect gender diversity                                                                           |                |                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                         |

| Priority Area                                              | Project/ Activities                             | Tasks                                                                                                                                                          | Success Indicators                                                                                            | Time Frame     | Target Stakeholders                        | Expected Outcome                                                |
|------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                            | Gender Responsive Sports and Recreation Program | Promote non-traditional sports for all genders<br><br>Establish mixed-gender sports where suitable                                                             | Equal participation rates in sports across gender groups<br><br>Facility improvements support gender equality |                |                                            |                                                                 |
| Family and Community Engagement                            | Parent and Community Outreach                   | Organize workshops that support gender equality<br>Disseminate information to increase awareness about gender sensitivity<br>Collaborate with community groups | Active Participation of Parents and Stakeholders, collaborative initiatives                                   | All Year Round | Stakeholders, parent, Outreach coordinator | Increased community awareness and support for gender equality   |
| Resources Development and Learning Environment Enhancement | Gender-Responsive Learning Resource Center      | - create a dedicated space for gender-responsive materials<br>- have a multimedia resource on gender equality                                                  | Establishment of a resource center with regular usage by students                                             | All Year round | Facilities, Budget, signages               | Physical environment supports all students' dignity and comfort |
|                                                            | School Environment and Improvement              | - ensure gender-neutral facilities<br>- implement visible gender equality messages, slogans, or tags<br>- create a safe space for gender diverse students      | Facilities meet gender-inclusive standards                                                                    |                |                                            |                                                                 |
| Monitoring and Evaluation                                  | Monitoring and Evaluation System                | Develop indicators, collect data, and analyze report findings                                                                                                  | Regular reports, data-driven improvements, and stakeholder satisfaction                                       | All year round | School Administrator                       | Improvements in gender equality efforts                         |

## Conclusion

The study concludes that gender diversity is evident among junior high school students, while discrimination, bullying, teasing, and social exclusion remain concerns. Family and peer support contribute significantly to students' resilience, whereas avoidance and silence are commonly used coping strategies. Although gender-responsive practices are present, their moderate implementation indicates continuing institutional gaps.

## Recommendations

Schools should therefore strengthen GAD programs, faculty training on gender-responsive and inclusive pedagogy, mental health and counseling services, student awareness campaigns, and collaboration with families and communities. School leaders should establish clear anti-discrimination mechanisms and improve communication about available safe-school and support programs. Student ambassadors or peer-led initiatives may also be utilized to promote gender awareness across grade levels. A comprehensive gender-equality action plan should prioritize institutional commitment, faculty development, student support, community engagement, and resource enhancement (Department of Education, 2017; UNICEF, 2021).

Future research may examine gender-diverse students through longitudinal designs, investigate resource requirements for gender-responsive education, and further explore the experiences of female learners, or conduct an inferential analysis studying the relationship between gender-responsive practices and school climate. Collectively, these measures can contribute to a safer, more equitable, and inclusive learning environment in which all students are respected regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

## References

- Abreu, R. L., Audette, L., Mitchell, Y., Simpson, I., Ward, J., Ackerman, L., Gonzalez, K. A., & Washington, K. (2022). LGBTQ student experiences in schools from 2009–2019: A systematic review of study characteristics and recommendations for prevention and intervention in school psychology journals. *Psychology in the Schools*, 59(1), 115–151. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22508>
- Ahmed, S. K. (2024). How to choose a sampling technique and determine sample size for research: A simplified guide for researchers. *Oral Oncology Reports*, 12, 100662. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.oor.2024.100662>
- Al Atoom, M., Abdel Razeq, N. M., Othman, A., Shaheen, A., Abu Hananneh, M. M., Al-Nabehsi, M., Langer, A., & Gausman, J. (2024). Development of gender identity during adolescence: Perspectives from Jordanian and Syrian youth. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 29(1), Article 2312853. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2024.2312853>
- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Prentice-Hall.
- Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52, 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.1>
- Bandura, A., & Bussey, K. (1999). Social cognitive theory of gender development and differentiation. *Psychological Review*, 106(4), 676–713. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.106.4.676>
- Barairo, F. Q., Ramos, R. A., & Torregoza, N. D. (2024). Gender responsiveness in the Philippine basic education context: Priority thrusts and initiatives in the Schools Division of Batangas City. *Journal of Electrical Systems*, 20(5s), 882–903.
- Bishop, M. D., Fish, J. N., Hammack, P. L., & Russell, S. T. (2020). Sexual identity development milestones in three generations of sexual minority people: A national probability sample. *Developmental Psychology*, 56(11), 2177–2193. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0001105>
- Bowen, P., Rose, R., & Pilkington, A. (2017). Mixed methods: Theory and practice—Sequential explanatory approach. *International Journal of Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods*, 5(2), 10–27.

- Bradshaw, G. (2019). Inclusion in schools: Gender and sexual diversity. *BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education*, 11(1), 29–31.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Harvard University Press.
- Busetto, L., Wick, W., & Gumbinger, C. (2020). How to use and assess qualitative research methods. *Neurological Research and Practice*, 2, Article 14. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s42466-020-00059-z>
- Cabral, J., & Pinto, T. M. (2023). Gender, shame, and social support in LGBTQI+ exposed to discrimination: A model for understanding the impact on mental health. *Social Sciences*, 12(8), 454. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12080454>
- Cahill, H., Beadle, S., Davis, M., & Farrelly, A. (2018). *Connect with respect: Preventing gender-based violence in schools classroom programme for students in early secondary school (ages 11–14)*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
- Cardinal, H. (2021). Creating safe and inclusive schools for LGBTQ students. *BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education*, 13(2), 17–21.
- Choukas-Bradley, S., & Thoma, B. C. (2022). Mental health among LGBT youth. In D. P. VanderLaan & W. I. Wong (Eds.), *Gender and sexuality development*. Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-84273-4\\_18](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-84273-4_18)
- Clay, R. A. (2024, January 1). Policymakers are taking aim at women and LGBTQ+ individuals. *Monitor on Psychology*, 55(1), 52. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2024/01/trends-policy-developments-women-lgbtq>
- Creswell, J. W. (2005). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Merrill.
- Day, M., & Brömdal, A. (2024). Mental health outcomes of transgender and gender-diverse students in schools: A systematic literature review. *International Journal of Transgender Health*, 25(3), 398–415. <https://doi.org/10.1080/26895269.2024.2359934>
- Delos Reyes & Blanco. (2022). Anti-discrimination bill based on SOGIE: An occupational justice perspective. *Journal of Social Health*, 82–84.
- deMayo, B. E., Gallagher, N. M., Leshin, R. A., & Olson, K. R. (2025). Stability and change in gender identity and sexual orientation across childhood and adolescence. *Mono-graphs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 90(1–3), 7–172. <https://doi.org/10.1111/mono.12479>
- Department of Education. (2017). *Gender-responsive basic education policy* (DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2017). [https://www.deped.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/DO\\_s2017\\_032.pdf](https://www.deped.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/DO_s2017_032.pdf)
- Department of Education. (2022, May 30). *DepEd continues to strengthen its commitment to SDG, global citizenship through renewal of the ICO-KPTEP learning series*. <https://www.deped.gov.ph/2022/05/30/deped-continues-to-strengthen-its-commitment-to-sdg-global-citizenship-through-renewal-of-the-ico-kptep-learning-series/>
- Diamond, M. (2002). Sex and gender are different: Sexual identity and gender identity are different. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 7(3), 320–334.
- Djong Hui Ing, M., Gear, S., & Booth, R. O. (2023, October 18). *Working towards gender equality: The role of teachers and teaching*. Global Partnership for Education.
- Fernandes, T., Alves, B., & Gato, J. (2023). Between resilience and agency: A systematic review of protective factors and positive experiences of LGBTQ+ students. *Healthcare*, 11(14), 2098. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare11142098>

- Galamgam, M. A., Bautista, J., Eblacas, I., & Rosario, E. (2021). An analysis on the implementation of the Gender-Responsive Basic Education Policy. *The ASTR Research Journal*, 5(1), 31–42.
- Generale, M. P., & Cubing, E. M. (2023). Gender awareness: Classroom experiences of senior high school students. *Journal of Gender, Culture and Society*, 3(2), 15–30. <https://doi.org/10.32996/jgcs.2023.3.2.3>
- GLSEN, American School Counselor Association, American Council for School Social Work, & School Social Work Association of America. (2019). *Supporting safe and healthy schools for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer students: A national survey of school counselors, social workers, and psychologists*. GLSEN.
- Hall, W. J., Dawes, H. C., & Plocek, N. (2021). Sexual orientation identity development milestones among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer people: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 752536. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.752536>
- Han, Z. Y., Ye, Z. Y., & Zhong, B. L. (2025). School bullying and mental health among adolescents: A narrative review. *Translational Pediatrics*, 14(3), 463–472. <https://doi.org/10.21037/tp-2024-512>
- Hapal, D. K. (2023). *In fight for equal rights, queer Filipinos build communities on social media*. Pulitzer Center.
- Hapal, D. K. (2023, February 12). *Disinformation on SOGIE bill spreads as Filipino queers face real-world discrimination*. Pulitzer Center.
- Hocking, C. (2017). Occupational justice as social justice: The moral claim for inclusion. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 24(1), 29–42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14427591.2017.1294016>
- Jebb, A. T., Ng, V., & Tay, L. (2021). A review of key Likert scale development advances: 1995–2019. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, Article 637547. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.637547>
- Johns, M. M., Lowry, R., Barrios, L. C., Demissie, Z., McManus, T., Rasberry, C. N., Robin, L., & Underwood, J. M. (2019). Vital signs: Disparities in violence victimization and suicide risk among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender high school students—Youth Risk Behavior Survey, United States, 2017. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 68(3), 67–71. <https://doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6803e1>
- Katz-Wise, S. L., Godwin, E. G., Parsa, N., Brown, C. A., Pullen Sansfaçon, A., Goldman, R., MacNish, M., Rosal, M. C., & Austin, S. B. (2022). Using family and ecological systems approaches to conceptualize family- and community-based experiences of transgender and/or nonbinary youth from the Trans Teen and Family Narratives Project. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, 9(1), 21–36. <https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000442>
- Kay, C. M. (2022). *Challenges of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA) students in higher education* (Doctoral dissertation, Walden University). Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection.
- Kosciw, J. G., Clark, C. M., Truong, N. L., & Zongrone, A. D. (2020). *The 2019 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth in our nation's schools*. GLSEN.
- LaFave, J., & Inwards-Breland, D. J. (2025). Intersectionality in youth who are transgender and gender diverse. *Pediatric Annals*, 54(10), e344–e348. <https://doi.org/10.3928/19382359-20250828-03>
- Lee, J. G. L., Ylioja, T., & Lackey, M. (2016). Identifying lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender search terminology: A systematic review of health systematic reviews. *PLoS ONE*, 11(5), e0156210. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0156210>
- Leung, E., Kassel-Gomez, G., Sullivan, S., Murahara, F., & Flanagan, T. (2022). Social support in schools and related outcomes for LGBTQ youth: A scoping review. *Discover Education*, 1, Article 18.

- <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44217-022-00016-9>
- Mendizabal, R. N. (2024). Teachers' challenges and strategies in fostering gender equality in the classroom. *QCU The Lamp: Journal of Education*, 2(1).
- Miralles-Cardona, C. (2025). Teaching gender equality in teacher education: Does existing practice actually support gender mainstreaming implementation? *Frontiers in Education*, 10, Article 1570115. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2025.1570115>
- Mori, G. B. (2024). School as a safe space through gender-responsive basic education policy. *Educational Challenges*, 29(2), 273–286. <https://doi.org/10.34142/2709-7986.2024.29.2.18>
- Mutya, H. L. S. V., Libao, C. R., & Dado, J. D. C. (2021). Developing a positive and inclusive environment for LGBTQ+ through the lens of the students. *International Journal of Research in Engineering, Science and Management*, 4(11).
- National Education Association. (2023, June 7). *Five ways to support your LGBTQ+ students*. NEA Today. <https://www.nea.org/nea-today/all-news-articles/five-ways-support-your-lgbtq-students>
- Newport, F. (2024, February 20). *LGBTQ+ identification in U.S. rises to 9.3%*. Gallup. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/656708/lgbtq-identification-rises.aspx>
- Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2013). *Gender stereotyping as a human rights violation* (OHCHR-commissioned report). United Nations.
- Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2014). *Women's rights are human rights* (HR/PUB/14/2). United Nations. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/HR-PUB-14-2.pdf>
- Outright International. (2025). *Rights in retrograde* (Policy series). <https://outrightinternational.org/topics/rights-retrograde>
- Owen, L., Taylor, A. B., Saris, J. M., & van der Cruisjen, R. (2022). Identifying coping strategies used by transgender individuals in response to stressors. *Transgender Health*, 7(4), 301–312. <https://doi.org/10.1089/trgh.2021.0171>
- Pabst, L. M., & Kollmayer, M. (2023). How to make a difference: The impact of gender-fair language on text comprehensibility amongst adults with and without an academic background. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, Article 1234860. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1234860>
- Pedrajas, R. P., & Jalandoni, N. D. (2023). Promoting gender equality in the classroom: Teachers' challenges and strategies. *Journal for Educators, Teachers and Trainers*, 14(3), 390–398. <https://doi.org/10.47750/jett.2023.14.03.048>
- Pew Research Center. (2023, June 23). *5 key findings about LGBTQ+ Americans*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/06/23/5-key-findings-about-lgbtq-americans/>
- Philippine News Agency. (2025). *Congress marks milestone in legislating gender equality bills in 2023*.
- Pretorius, L., & Patel, S. V. (2025). What's in a name? Participants' pseudonym choices as a practice of empowerment and epistemic justice. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 48(4), 371–388. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2024.2432271>
- Reyes, M. E. S., Torre, B. T., Bautista, A. D., Castañeda, J. G. M., Delos Santos, J. J. I., Muyargas, M. M., Taylor, A. B., Eden, T. M., Hobaica, S., Lara, E. A., Jauregui, J. C., Jarret, B. A., Suffredini, K., & Nath, R. (2024). *2024 Philippines national report on the mental health of LGBTQ+ young people*. The Trevor Project. <https://thetrevorproject.org/survey-international/ph/2024/en/>
- Russell, D. H., Anderson, J. R., Riggs, D. W., Ullman, J., & Higgins, D. J. (2020). Gender diversity and safety climate perceptions

- in schools and other youth-serving organisations. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 117, Article 105334. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105334>
- Russell, S. T., Bishop, M. D., Saba, V. C., James, I., & Ioverno, S. (2021). Promoting school safety for LGBTQ and all students. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 8(2), 160–166. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23727322211031938>
- Ryan, C., Russell, S. T., Huebner, D., Diaz, R., & Sanchez, J. (2010). Family acceptance in adolescence and the health of LGBT young adults. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, 23(4), 205–213. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6171.2010.00246.x>
- Saewyc, E. M., et al. (2021). Gender diversity and adolescent wellbeing. *Journal of School Health*, 91(2), 84–92.
- Schmidt, N., & Sheikh, Z. (2024, October 15). *Sexual orientation*. WebMD. <https://www.webmd.com/sex-relationships/sexual-orientation>
- Stańczykiewicz, B., & Senczyszyn, A. (2024). Bullying of LGBTQ+ children and adolescents in schools: Understanding the phenomenon, consequences, and international standards with a focus on the Polish context. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 15, Article 1493745. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2024.1493745>
- Subedi, K. R. (2025). *Safeguarding participants: Using pseudonyms for ensuring confidentiality and anonymity in qualitative research*. ResearchGate. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/388832574\\_Safeguarding\\_Participants\\_Using\\_Pseudonyms\\_for\\_Ensuring\\_Confidentiality\\_and\\_Anonymity\\_in\\_Qualitative\\_Research](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/388832574_Safeguarding_Participants_Using_Pseudonyms_for_Ensuring_Confidentiality_and_Anonymity_in_Qualitative_Research)
- Turney, S. (2023). *Frequency distribution: Tables, types & examples*. Scribbr. <https://www.scribbr.com/statistics/frequency-distributions/>
- UNICEF. (2021, December). *Gender transformative education: Reimagining education for a more just and inclusive world*. UNICEF Education Section Programme Division. <https://www.unicef.org/education>
- United Nations. (2019). *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The gender snapshot 2019*. United Nations Statistics Division. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2019/gender-snapshot.pdf>
- Van Vliet, R., Van der Ploeg, R., Kretschmer, T., Kiekens, W. J., & Baams, L. (2025). Supportive school strategies for sexually and gender-diverse students: A meta-analysis of the associations with bullying-victimization experiences and feelings of school safety. *Educational Research Review*, 47, Article 100689. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2025.100689>
- Vizcarra-García, J. (2021). Teachers' perceptions of gender-inclusive language in the classroom. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation*, 4(3), 110–116. <https://doi.org/10.32996/ijllt.2021.4.3.12>
- Wasti, S. P., Simkhada, P., van Teijlingen, E. R., Sathian, B., & Banerjee, I. (2022). The growing importance of mixed-methods research in health. *Nepal Journal of Epidemiology*, 12(1), 1175–1178. <https://doi.org/10.3126/nje.v12i1.43633>
- Williams Institute. (2023, December). *Adult LGBT population in the United States*. UCLA School of Law.
- Yesil, A., & Balci Karaboga, F. A. (2021). Gender equality awareness among middle school students. *Journal of Qualitative Research in Education*, 28, 51–78. <https://doi.org/10.14689/enad.28.3>
- Zuckerman, S. L., et al. (2020). The behavioral, psychological and social impacts of team sports: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *The Physician and Sportsmedicine*.