

e-ISSN 3026-3468
p-ISSN 3026-2593**Article info**Received manuscript:
17/03/2026
Final revision:
21/04/2026
Approved:
23/04/2026This work is
licensed under
Creative Commons Attribution
License 4.0 CC-BY International
license**ATTITUDES AND PREPAREDNESS OF LECTURERS IN SUPPORTING LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, QUEER, INTERSEX, ASEXUAL+ (LGBTQIA+) STUDENTS: THE ROLE OF TRAINING, POLICY KNOWLEDGE, AND PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT****Remofilwe Sara Makgorog¹, Constance Matshidiso Lelaka^{1*}**¹The Discipline of Social Work, School of Human & Community Development, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg 2000, South Africa*Correspondence E-Mail: tshidi.Lelaka@wits.ac.zaDOI: <https://doi.org/10.30598/baileofisipvol3iss3pp690-704>**ABSTRACT**

Lecturers play a pivotal role in fostering inclusive educational environments, but their attitudes and preparedness to support LGBTQIA+ students vary globally. Training in LGBTQIA+ cultural competency enhances awareness of sexual and gender diversity, enabling educators to address student needs while promoting equity, diversity, and social justice. This study explored lecturers' attitudes and preparedness, focusing on training, policy knowledge, and professional engagement. Six themes emerged: lecturers' attitudes, collaboration with internal and external stakeholders, importance of LGBTQIA+ training, training received, knowledge of supporting policies, and participation in LGBTQIA+ events. A qualitative exploratory case study design was used, collecting data from ten lecturers through purposive and snowball sampling. Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face and analysed thematically. Findings revealed generally positive attitudes toward LGBTQIA+ students, though concerns about correct pronoun use and misgendering were noted. Most lecturers lacked formal training, relying on self-education, with mixed views on the importance of training due to resource constraints. Awareness of policies and psychosocial support varied, with greater engagement linked to higher knowledge. Participation in LGBTQIA+ events was moderate, while collaboration with stakeholders was identified as key to effective support. The study highlights the critical need for formal training, policy awareness, and structured institutional support to strengthen lecturers' capacity to support LGBTQIA+ students effectively.

Keywords: Collaboration, Cultural Competency, Inclusive Education, LGBTQIA+ Students, Lecturer Preparedness

INTRODUCTION

Lecturers are individuals who teach and deliver academic instruction at universities, colleges or other educational institutions, playing a central role in facilitating learning and imparting knowledge to students through various teaching methods and instructional approaches (Burroughs-Lange, 1996). According to Kwok (2018) LGBTQI+ cultural competency training increases educators' awareness and understanding of LGBTQI+ identities, experiences and issues amongst Chinese tertiary educators. Schotte et al. (2022) expresses that being aware and seeking to comprehend issues experienced by LGBTQI+ students help them better understand the needs and experiences of those students. LGBTQI+ cultural competency training

aligns with broader efforts to advance equity, diversity, and social justice within educational settings (Chonody et al., 2022). Due to diverse backgrounds and beliefs, some lecturers may hold stigmatizing or discriminatory attitudes towards LGBTQI+ students, which can impact their interactions with LGBTQI+ students and their ability to create inclusive and supportive environments and therefore are oblivious to the challenges faced by LGBTQAI+ students (Sithole, 2015). Mogotsi et al. (2017) suggests that opportunities for professional development focused on LGBTQI+ inclusion can enhance lecturers' knowledge and awareness through workshops, seminars and online courses providing valuable insights into LGBTQI+ identities and issues.

The knowledge and perception of LGBTQI+ students vary significantly across different regions and educational settings worldwide (Oladipo, 2021). In a study conducted by Hall and Rogers (2018) in a college in the United States, it was established that educators with fundamentalist religious orientations generally displayed more negative attitudes towards homosexuality compared to those with more progressive religious orientations. According to Page (2017) a study conducted in an English Language Arts classroom, at the University of Minnesota, revealed notable correlations between teachers' age, comfort levels, awareness of resources and implementation levels. Whereas younger teachers exhibited greater comfort with LGBTQI+ texts, they demonstrated lower awareness of available resources and consistent implementation rates (Page, 2017). Mollura (2017) expresses that in one study there was discrimination against sexual minorities in American schools, particularly affecting students who defy traditional gender roles. The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) reported that 57% of transgender students heard negative remarks about gender expression from lecturers or other staff members and experienced targeting by adults at school (Mollura, 2017).

According to Lee et al. (2021) globally, perceptions towards LGBTQI+ students are influenced by cultural, religious and societal norms. In more progressive regions, there has been a marked shift towards greater acceptance and support for LGBTQI+ individuals (Lee et al., 2021). Educational institutions in these areas often implement policies and programs aimed at fostering an inclusive environment (Lee et al., 2021). As expressed by Saquita et al. (2023) many tertiary institutions have established LGBTQI+ resource centres, support groups and inclusive policies in more developed parts such as parts of North America and Western Europe based on a study, they conducted at Altavas College. Studies show that while discrimination still exists, there is a growing awareness and support for LGBTQI+ rights in educational settings (Saquita et al., 2023). Lee et al. (2021) stated that attitudes in Asia vary widely, while some countries like Taiwan and Thailand are becoming more accepting, others maintain strict anti-LGBTQI+ laws and societal norms. Educational institutions in these regions may reflect these broader societal attitudes, affecting the experiences of LGBTQI+ students (Lee et al., 2021).

While many African nations regard non-heterosexual orientations and gender non-conformity as taboo, some, like Kenya, have constitutional provisions safeguarding individuals from the stigma and discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity (Mogotsi et al., 2017). Some regions within Africa and the Middle East often have more conservative views

on LGBTQI+ issues, mostly influenced by cultural and religious beliefs (Sithole, 2015). In some African countries, LGBTQI+ individuals face legal challenges and social stigma (Sithole, 2015). Countries like Nigeria and Uganda have stringent anti-LGBTQI+ laws and pervasive societal stigma (Oladipo, 2021). LGBTQI+ students in these underdeveloped regions often experience severe discrimination and lack of support, both within educational institutions and in broader society (Moagi & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2021).

Nigeria has strict anti-LGBTQI+ laws, very limited institutional support for LGBTQI+ individuals and societal attitudes are predominantly conservative, with widespread stigma and discrimination against LGBTQI+ individuals (Moagi & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2021). LGBTQI+ students are called "sisieko," which translates to "Lagos girl", this term is used pejoratively, especially against boys or men perceived to be feminine or not conforming to traditional masculine norms (Okanlawon, 2020). The implication is that these individuals are like girls from Lagos, who are stereotypically seen as overly fashionable or feminine, and this is used to mock and demean them (Okanlawon, 2020). Moreover, Moagi & Mavhandu-Mudzusi (2021) mentioned that Nigeria has laws such as the Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act (2014) which criminalizes same-sex relationships, prohibiting same-sex marriage and any form of association that supports LGBTQI+ rights. The law prescribes up to 14 years in prison for anyone who enters a same-sex marriage or civil union and up to 10 years for anyone who supports or funds LGBTQI+ organizations (Moagi & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2021). Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act (2014), initially introduced as the "Kill the Gays" bill, was later amended to remove the death penalty but still imposes life imprisonment for certain homosexual acts (Moagi & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2021). The law also criminalizes the "promotion" of homosexuality, making it illegal to advocate for LGBTQI+ rights (Vincent & Munyuki, 2017). As stated by Vincent and Munyuki (2017) these legal and societal contexts create a challenging environment for LGBTQI+ individuals in Nigeria and Uganda, reinforcing discrimination and hindering efforts toward social acceptance and support.

South Africa has made significant strides in protecting LGBTQI+ rights, reflecting a complex and evolving landscape (Oladipo, 2021). South Africa stands out in the African context for its progressive legal framework protecting LGBTQI+ rights (Base, 2022). Most African countries have incorporated a Bill of Rights into their constitutions, affirming their commitment to combating discrimination in any form (Base, 2022). In a study conducted by Base (2022) it revealed that despite the laws put in place to protect LGBTQI+ people, negative attitudes towards gay and lesbian students persist at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, with male heterosexual students exhibiting more negative attitudes towards LGBTQI+ individuals compared to their female counterparts. This further demonstrates the need for lecturers to be aware and informed about challenges facing LGBTQI+ students and allow their teaching spaces to spread awareness (Mogotsi et al., 2017). Students coming from rural and traditional settings such as Kwa-Zulu Natal and the Eastern Cape tend to be conserved and display more signs of homophobia towards LGBTQI+ students (Fhumulani & Mukwevho, 2018). Furthermore, South African universities are increasingly working towards creating inclusive environments for

LGBTQI+ students (Vincent & Munyuki, 2017). Some universities have also implemented inclusive policies and practices to accommodate LGBTQI+ students, such as gender-neutral restrooms and inclusive housing policies (Oladipo, 2021).

This study was guided by the Person-in-Environment (PIE) framework, a foundational social work perspective that emphasises the dynamic interaction between individuals and their social, cultural, economic and physical environments (Rogers, 2020). The PIE perspective asserts that understanding behaviour and well-being requires examining both individual characteristics and the external contexts that shape experiences (Rogers, 2020). In this study, PIE complemented social constructivist theory by providing a holistic lens to explore how university policies, campus climate, institutional support systems and broader societal attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals influence lecturers' attitudes and preparedness to support LGBTQIA+ students. The framework also highlights reciprocal relationships, suggesting that institutional initiatives, such as LGBTQI+ training programmes, can positively influence lecturers' beliefs and practices. PIE offers practical tools for assessing and intervening in environmental contexts, guiding the development of inclusive policies and support mechanisms within the university. Its strengths include promoting a comprehensive understanding of how multiple environmental factors, such as family, community and societal norms, shape experiences and outcomes (Weiss-Gal, 2008). However, criticisms include the potential overemphasis on environmental influences at the expense of individual agency and the limited generalisability of context-specific findings (Weiss-Gal, 2008). Overall, applying the PIE perspective enabled the study to contextualise lecturers' attitudes and preparedness within the broader institutional environment, ensuring practical relevance for policy development and intervention design.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study adopted a qualitative research approach, which refers to an overall strategy guiding the selection of methods for collecting and analysing data (Cleland, 2017). Qualitative research focuses on understanding individuals' perspectives, experiences and meanings through non-numerical data such as interviews and observations (Jackson et al., 2007), and is particularly useful for exploring complex, socially constructed realities (Cleland, 2017). An exploratory case study design was employed to examine lecturers' attitudes, beliefs and knowledge regarding LGBTQI+ students at the University of the Witwatersrand, allowing for an in-depth investigation of this relatively under-researched issue within its real-life context (Harwell, 2011; Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2009). The target population comprised qualified lecturers within the Faculty of Humanities who have direct contact with LGBTQI+ students (Weyers, 2011), and a sample of ten lecturers was selected. Purposive sampling was used to deliberately identify participants with relevant experience (Etikan et al., 2016; Palinkas et al., 2013), and snowball sampling was applied to recruit additional participants through referrals (Sharma, 2017; Singh & Masuku, 2014). Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, which

were audio-recorded and conducted following ethical approval (Mazhar et al., 2021; Adams, 2015; Rutakumwa et al., 2020). The data were analysed using thematic analysis to systematically identify and interpret recurring themes, and findings were examined in relation to existing literature and theoretical frameworks to better understand lecturers' preparedness and capacity to support LGBTQI+ students (DeSantis & Ugarriza, 2000; Naeem et al., 2023). The study received ethical clearance from the University of Witwatersrand, Human Research Ethics (Non-Medical) and the ethical reference number is SW/24/06/04. To ensure integrity and trustworthiness of the research, the researcher observed the importance of credibility, transferability, conformability, dependability. According to Williams, (2018). trustworthiness in research refers to the quality, credibility, and reliability of a study and its findings, it is a key concept in qualitative research, ensuring that the results are credible and can be trusted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of the Results and Thematic Analysis

The study results revealed the following demographic characteristics of the participants. In terms of gender, four (4) participants identified as male, four (4) as female, and two (2) as non-binaries. Regarding age distribution, one (1) participant was between 15 and 35 years, five (5) were between 35 and 45 years, and four (4) were above 45 years of age. In terms of race, six (6) participants identified as African, two (2) as White, one (1) as Coloured, and one (1) as Other. Concerning marital status, most participants were single (5), followed by those who were married (4), and one (1) who was divorced. Most participants were employed on a full-time basis (8), while two (2) were employed part-time. Regarding departmental affiliation, the highest representation was from the Department of Psychology (3), followed by Film and Television (1), Sociology (1), Demography and Population Studies (1), Speech Pathology (1), African Studies (1), South African Sign Language (1), and Modern Languages (1). Participants were drawn from several academic schools, with most coming from the School of Human and Community Development (4), followed by the School of Literature, Language and Media (3), the School of Social Sciences (2), and the Wits School of Arts (1).

Through the analysis of data, the following themes were identified: attitudes of lecturers, importance of collaboration with both internal and external stakeholders in support of LGBTQIA+ students, importance of training on LGBTQIA+ and related matters, training received by lecturers engaging with LGBTQIA+ students, knowledge on policies supporting the LGBTQIA+ students, and participation in LGBTQIA+ events.

Theme 1: Attitudes of lecturers

Attitudes in the world of LGBTQIA+ means a lot and should be portrayed positively to ensure inclusion. Although not everyone supports such population group, there were different attitudes portrayed by lecturers and this is supported by the following excerpts:

“Yeah, personally, I've got a very positive attitude towards them, yeah, especially I before, before I taught this module of counselling special populations. I want to be honest, I used to have a negative perception towards them, yes. But like any other person, a wise man changes his what, his decision and I also changed my position...” [Dr Bokie]

“Umh, I respect LGBTQIA+ people, students more, not simply because everybody deserves to be respected. There's a particular kind of intellectual acuity and there's a particular kind of theoretical consciousness that they have around sexuality as a whole...” so the more you engage with students of LGTB in those scenarios, the more I truly just learn. Oh, my God these kids. Yeah, very brilliant...” [Dr Hollard]

“I didn't think it influenced my attitude. It influenced my awareness, rather than my attitude, because I have several sexually diverse friends in my life, so I don't have issues, you know? I don't have to think, Is this, okay? Because some people are very like, binary minded so I'm not. For me, it's well, because I'm used to diversity.” [Prof Amy]

“So, I've never had any negative interaction or difficult time. I think I've always just respected and been respected for my views. So, while I might not subscribe or be part of the community, it doesn't mean that I can't respect your community. I kind of equated to religion. While I might not belong to your religion, I can still respect what you believe. That's kind of where I come from, and it helps yeah.” [Prof Fezy]

The quotes illustrate a range of evolving attitudes and personal reflections among the academic staff toward LGBTQIA+ students, shedding light on the importance of supportive attitudes in promoting a psychologically safe classroom environment. Dr. Bokie's acknowledgment of his own past negative perceptions and his subsequent change in attitude after teaching about “special populations” shows how increased understanding and exposure can foster positive attitudes toward LGBTQIA+ students, aligning with research by Gegenfurtner (2021), which suggests that attitudes are influenced by personal beliefs, emotions and social interactions. Dr. Casey's and Dr. Hollard's reflections similarly highlight how engagement with LGBTQIA+ individuals have deepened their empathy, appreciation and respect, suggesting that positive interactions can enhance faculty members' cultural competence and openness. Prof. Amy's and Dr. Innocent's emphasis on treating all students equally reflects a commitment to fairness, though it also hints at a more general perspective that may overlook the specific needs of LGBTQIA+ students. Prof. Fezy's comment, comparing respect for LGBTQIA+ individuals to respect for religious diversity, further underlines the impact of respectful attitudes in creating an inclusive learning environment.

Mavhandu-Mudzusi (2017) argues that negative or indifferent attitudes among educators can contribute to a hostile classroom environment, leading to increased anxiety and stress for LGBTQIA+ students. In contrast, the proactive stances taken by Dr. Gabrielle and Dr. Joy to ensure their classrooms are safe and inclusive spaces demonstrate a conscious effort to combat discrimination and promote psychological safety. This aligns with the findings of Gegenfurtner (2021), who emphasizes that supportive and inclusive attitudes among educators play a pivotal

role in fostering a welcoming environment, enhancing LGBTQIA+ students' sense of belonging and safety in academic settings.

Theme 2: Importance of collaboration with both internal and external stakeholders in support of LGBTQIA+ students

While working with the LGBTQIA+ students, there is needs for more collaboration with other stakeholders to enhance and strengthen support for this population. Different participants shared their own experiences regarding such a narrative:

"Yes, so obviously I've done external things. So, with ASHA, which is the American Speech Hearing Association, they do quite a lot of online work. So they've done courses in terms of, like, what it means to be trans and there's quite a lot of that online sort of support, where you can tap into other countries as resources...So those sorts of organizations overseas, particularly have got like Australia has a really great Association, and so does the Speech Therapy Association in America, they've been really helpful with online courses and you know that they've got a sort of course, med bridge, that you can go on and do courses through that, and that's they have gender affirming therapies that are there, that you can learn how to do... I was also contacted by the Disability unit; I think there is an individual who is advocating for transgender and LGBTQ+ individuals and reached out and asked if services were available to which they were directed to me. And then I said that if that is something that a student comes in seeking help with, that they can be directed to this department." [Prof Fezzy]

"I've always worked with Gala, the gay and lesbian archive at Wits and I've worked with other organizations, like Trans organizations, like Iran T and things and, yeah, I think it's always useful to have people from those organizations like come into your classroom and talk to students about what they're doing or even organizations which talk around sex work." [Prof Gabrielle]

"I insisted two years ago that my colleagues, so this department is a safe zone, we are trained so I insisted that we get Safe Zone Training." [Dr Hollard]

"So, we promptly arranged with some members of our local deaf community who we know associate with LGBTQ+ community. So, we had kind of the conversations and discussions, and on that basis, we started including more diverse vocabulary in terms of gender and sexual orientation." [Prof Emily]

The quotes provided illustrate the various ways lecturers actively support LGBTQIA+ students through collaborative engagement with both internal and external stakeholders. Dr. Bokie's advocacy for community acceptance of LGBTQIA+ individuals underscore a commitment to promoting inclusivity on a broader scale, resonating with Szyndlar & Wąsikiewicz-Firlej's (2019) findings on the importance of community-based support networks for LGBTQIA+ students. Dr. Casey's collaboration with the Gender Equity Office to inform students about available policies and support resources within the institution demonstrates the value of internal partnerships in fostering a supportive academic environment. This aligns with research by Jones (2019), who found that internal collaboration between faculty, administrative staff and student

organizations strengthens LGBTQIA+ support structures, ensuring policies are inclusive and accessible.

Professors Gabrielle, Fezzy and Emily further illustrate the benefit of external collaboration by involving specialized organizations and online resources that bring critical LGBTQIA+ perspectives and education into their classrooms. For instance, Prof. Gabrielle's work with the Gay and Lesbian Archive (GALA) and Dr. Hollard's Safe Zone training initiative exemplifies efforts to create safer, more knowledgeable spaces for LGBTQIA+ students. These efforts reflect Jones' (2019) research, which suggests that partnerships with organizations provide targeted training and awareness, empowering lecturers to support students effectively and bridging knowledge gaps on LGBTQIA+ issues. Lastly, Prof. Fezzy's reference to gender-affirming therapies and online resources in collaboration with international associations highlights how external partnerships can enhance lecturers' awareness and competence, directly benefitting students seeking inclusive services. This aligns with Szyndlar & Wąsikiewicz-Firlej's (2019) emphasis on the role of external partnerships in offering specialized training, thus creating a supportive campus climate where LGBTQIA+ students feel represented and respected.

Theme 3: Importance of training on LGBTQIA+ and related matters

Awareness, training and self-awareness on LGBTQIA+ matters is vital for creating inclusive and respectful educational environments. It increases awareness of sexual orientation and gender identity, reduces discrimination, and equips lecturers with the skills to support LGBTQIA+ students effectively. This will ultimately enhance confidence, promotes inclusive policies and practices, and fosters a positive institutional climate. The following excerpts support participants experiences:

"So, I think especially the lecturers, they need to have this information so that they don't become judgmental." [Dr Bokie]

"And I think that it's important that there is an awareness made so that we can be more inclusive and we're able to be more well-adjusted and more balanced in terms of how we deal with individuals...So I think allowing individuals to have access to that information, especially our older population, will really help, maybe bridge the gap that exists between the generations now." [Prof Fezzy]

"Training is not going to for me personally; training is not going to do anything for me. It's a waste of my time. I can do more than what that training can offer for myself, and I'm willing to...that's the other thing. I've got a self-awareness about that that I think that's the most important thing." [Prof Emily]

The quotes reveal faculty members' varied perspectives on LGBTQIA+ inclusivity and the role of training in achieving it, which aligns with the research findings that LGBTQIA+ cultural competency training is essential for promoting awareness, understanding and inclusivity (Schotte et al., 2022). Dr. Bokie and Dr. Casey underscore the importance of educating lecturers on LGBTQIA+ issues to prevent judgmental attitudes, resonating with Schotte et al. (2022), who

argue that understanding LGBTQIA+ students' experiences help lecturers better support their unique needs. Similarly, Prof Fezzy emphasizes awareness as a bridge across generational divides, a viewpoint consistent with Kwok (2018), who advocates for training that increases lecturers' cultural awareness and adaptability.

Some faculty members, however, express scepticism or frustration with the training process. For instance, Dr. Darell points out that diverse perspectives on LGBTQIA+ issues could complicate training, while Prof Emily feels that formal training might not add value beyond her own self-awareness. These views highlight potential barriers to implementing training initiatives, underscoring the importance of tailored, comprehensive programs that address specific needs, as suggested by de Wet and van Wyk (2021). Dr. Joy's critique of the university's commitment to LGBTQIA+ inclusivity further emphasizes the need for institutional support, as successful training requires not only individual commitment but also infrastructure and resources, aligning with the broader approach to advancing equity in educational settings outlined by Chonody et al. (2022). Moreover, Okanlawon (2020) suggests that training in inclusive practices, respectful language and visible support can improve educators' knowledge and attitudes, supporting statements made by Dr. Bokie and Dr. Casey, who recognize training as beneficial for fostering a more welcoming university environment.

Theme 4: Training received by lecturers engaging with LGBTQIA+ students

Although some participants received trainings, some opted to self-development while other have not received training at all, the gap will always remain and these need to be challenged all the time because lecturers need to be empowered and support lectures with on-going trainings related to the LGBTQIA+ at the universities:

"I have read extensively about eh sexuality, yes, because LGBT also comes under sexuality, you understand the concept of sexuality, so I have read extensively, and I have taught a module on gender and sexuality. So has opened a lot of things to what to me and I am also teaching psychopathology, abnormal psychology, and under abnormal psychology, such topics, they appear, and I have read about them extensively, so that at least at the end of the day, when I talk about them, when I see them, I know exactly even what is going on in their what in their minds, so that I don't want I don't judge them, yes... I came with the information, not here, yes, I was trained before I came to Wits." [Dr Bokie]

"So, I've been trained twice, in safe zone training and actually twice as well, by the gender equity office under campus housing and residence life." [Dr Hollard]

"No, not as far as I know. Look, I must be honest with you, we do get a lot of emails from Wits, and if it's a very busy time, I don't have time to read them, and they come and go. They may have been, but not that I'm aware of. So, I'm not saying categorically that Wits has never done it. I'm just saying I'm not aware of it and I've never attended such." [Prof Emily]

The quotes highlight lecturers' varying degrees of training, experience and knowledge regarding LGBTQIA+ issues, resonating strongly with findings by Jones (2019), who notes that

educators often receive insufficient training for effectively supporting LGBTQIA+ inclusivity in educational settings. Dr. Bokie's extensive self-study and background in sexuality and psychology have helped him foster an understanding and non-judgmental approach, aligning with Hall and Rogers (2018), who found that educators trained in LGBTQIA+ inclusivity often demonstrate better support and create more inclusive environments for LGBTQIA+ students. Several lecturers, such as Dr. Hollard and Dr. Joy, report formal training, including safe zone training and studies in Black Studies and Sexuality Studies, which they draw upon to support LGBTQIA+ inclusivity. These experiences reflect Hall and Rogers' (2018) findings, which highlight the positive impact of structured training on educators' ability to address the unique needs of LGBTQIA+ students. However, other educators like Dr. Darell and Prof Emily mention either lacking formal training or not being aware of it, underscoring Jones' (2019) critique that without systematic professional development, educators may lack the confidence or knowledge to handle LGBTQIA+ issues effectively. The gap in awareness or training noted by several participants suggests that, despite isolated initiatives, comprehensive, mandatory training may be lacking across the institution, a point reinforced by Dr. Hollard's concern that existing policies require training that many have yet to receive. This disparity supports Jones' (2019) argument that without sufficient training, educators may unintentionally create non-inclusive environments, impacting LGBTQIA+ students' sense of belonging and safety in academic settings.

Theme 5: Knowledge on policies supporting the LGBTQIA+ students

LGBTQIA+ policies at universities are crucial for preventing discrimination and promoting equality, inclusion, and accountability. They foster safe, supportive environments that enhance well-being and academic success, while guiding inclusive practices, training, and support systems to uphold diversity and equity. Therefore, it is imperative for lecturers to be aware of such. When asked about the awareness of LGBTQIA+ policies, this is what they had to say:

"I've got no awareness. I think they will be, I'm assuming they will be, because this is Wits, but I'm not aware of it. I'm more aware in terms of my department's positioning. I'm aware of disability rights policies and stuff like that, but not LGBTQ." **[Prof Emily]**

"So, I think Wits is making strides towards developing policies and you know, connections that need to be there, have they been tapped into and utilized to the full extent? Probably not...So I think that on paper, the policies are great, like they really are trying to be inclusive and so I think, from on a paper perspective, they've gone as far as they can, and they've really extended their hand in terms of saying, we're inclusive. I think in terms of training other people to be inclusive, like lecturers and staff that are involved in treating and working with these individuals, I don't think it's gone that far yet." **[Prof Fezzy]**

"So not very effective, because that information often doesn't diffuse enough to our students for various reasons. One, these offices-gender equity office, Transformation Office, the Disability Rights Unit, they only intervene when they are invited or when there's a crisis." **[Dr Hollard]**

The quotes reflect significant gaps in policy awareness among lecturers, which aligns with research showing that unclear or inconsistently communicated institutional policies limit effective support for LGBTQIA+ students (Boyland et al., 2018). Dr. Darell, Prof Amy and Prof Emily, for example, acknowledge their limited awareness of LGBTQIA+ policies at Wits University, despite assuming such policies likely exist. This lack of awareness is concerning, as Boyland et al. (2018) emphasize that well-informed faculty members can better advocate for LGBTQIA+ students' rights and create a supportive campus environment. Moreover, Dr. Hollard suggest that although some policies exist, they remain underutilized or only activated in crisis situations, which impedes their effectiveness.

Prof Fezzy and Dr. Casey recognize that policies have made some headway in supporting LGBTQIA+ students, particularly in student residences with accommodations. However, they note that this support is often limited to 'on paper' efforts, with few practical initiatives to embed inclusivity into daily campus practices. Ubisi (2021) similarly found that when policies supporting LGBTQIA+ students are not widely known or consistently applied, they do little to foster inclusive environments and may even contribute to fragmented implementation across departments. Additionally, Dr. Joy and Dr. Hollard underscore that awareness is insufficient for creating an inclusive campus culture. They suggest that without enough pressure or intentional training, these policies cannot fully address the challenges LGBTQIA+ students face. This need for more targeted training to bridge policy and practice is well-supported by Ubisi (2021), who argues that consistent communication of non-discrimination frameworks is essential for creating a comprehensive and supportive educational environment for LGBTQIA+ students.

Theme 6: Participation in LGBTQIA+ events

Participating in University LGBTQIA+ events is important as it fosters awareness, understanding, and visibility of LGBTQIA+ issues. It promotes inclusion, builds supportive communities, and encourages allyship, helping to challenge stigma and discrimination while strengthening social cohesion and advocacy for equality. When asked about their involvement, this is what they had to say:

"I used to join the gay pride March but then o got sick so I can't walk far so I can't do that anymore to my great disappointment because I used to enjoy them. And I know even in the deaf community I have quite a few friends who are not binary or straight and there's quite a nice initiative in the deaf community and even straight people join like a deaf group for the gay pride March, so I used to but not anymore." [Prof Gabrielle]

"I haven't been actively been involved during any of those events but I have been notified of and will notify other so that they are aware of it so as I said I might not be in the community but I am aware of what it happening and so I try to stay alert and aware and informed so that I am able to better and steer people in the right direction. I might not be actively involved in the community it doesn't mean I don't support it am in support of what's going on in the community. If you know support they know where to come it's that I'm not actively advocating, I am not

podium standing, speeches and all.” [Prof Fezzy]

The quotes illustrate the varying degrees of engagement and awareness amongst lecturers regarding LGBTQIA+ events and initiatives, emphasizing both personal involvement and broader institutional support. Prof. Gabrielle's reference to social parties suggests that while informal gatherings may occur, structured events like Pride Month might not be as prominent, which Prof. Amy supports by stating a lack of awareness of any campaigns. This reflects a gap in visibility that Coetzee (2023) points out, noting that active participation in LGBTQIA+ events help normalize LGBTQIA+ identities on campus. The past involvement in Pride marches indicates that while personal engagement can be fulfilling, barriers like health issues can limit participation. Her acknowledgment of the deaf community's inclusive initiatives demonstrates the potential for intersectional support within marginalized groups. Similarly, Prof. Fezzy's comments illustrate a supportive stance despite not being actively involved, echoing Acompañado's (2023) finding that such support can positively affect student experiences.

CONCLUSION

The study explored lecturers' attitudes and preparedness in supporting LGBTQIA+ students, focusing on training, policy knowledge, and professional engagement, with ten participants. Key findings highlighted that lecturers' attitudes vary, with generally positive views toward LGBTQIA+ students but concerns about correct pronoun use and misgendering. Most lecturers have not received formal training, relying instead on self-education or personal experience, and opinions on the importance of training are mixed due to implementation and resource concerns. Knowledge of policies and available psychosocial support is uneven, with more active engagement linked to better awareness. Participation in LGBTQIA+ events was moderate, while collaboration with internal and external stakeholders emerged as crucial for effective support, including through campaigns and capacity-building initiatives. Applying the person-in-environment perspective emphasized how lecturers' attitudes, engagement, and participation are shaped by broader institutional, social, and community contexts. Overall, the study underscores the need for formal training, policy awareness, and structured institutional support to enhance lecturers' capacity to support LGBTQIA+ students effectively.

ETHICAL STATEMENT AND DISCLOSURE

This study received ethical clearance from the University of Witwatersrand, and the clearance number is Protocol Number SW/24/06/04. All the ethical consideration were observed during the process of research. The authors observed no potential conflict of disclosure.

REFERENCES

- Adams, W. C. (2015). Conducting semi-structured interviews. In *Handbook of practical program evaluation* (pp. 492–505). <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119171386.ch19>
- Burroughs-Lange, S. G. (1996). University lecturers' concept of their role. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 15(1), 29–50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0729436960150103>
- Boyland, L. G., Kirkeby, K. M., & Boyland, M. I. (2018). Policies and practices supporting LGBTQ students in Indiana's middle schools. *NASSP Bulletin*, 102(2), 111–140. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192636518782427>
- Chonody, J. M., Parker, L., & Webb, S. (2022). Bullying toward LGBTQ+ students in Australian schools: Understanding teachers' intentions to intervene. *Journal of LGBT Youth*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2022.2096744>
- Cleland, J. A. (2017). The qualitative orientation in medical education research. *Korean Journal of Medical Education*, 29(2), 61–71. <https://doi.org/10.3946/kjme.2017.53>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.
- DeSantis, L., & Ugarriza, D. (2000). The concept of theme as used in qualitative nursing research. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 22(3), 351–372. <https://doi.org/10.1177/019394590002200308>
- Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11>
- Fhumulani, T., & Mukwevho, M. H. (2018). Perceptions, knowledge and observation of rights by campus students on the LGBTQ community in a rural-based university in South Africa. *Gender and Behaviour*, 16(2), 11377–11392.
- Gegenfurtner, A. (2021). Pre-service teachers' attitudes toward transgender students: Associations with social contact, religiosity, political preference, sexual orientation, and teacher gender. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 110, 101887. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2021.101887>
- Hall, W. J., & Rodgers, G. K. (2019). Teachers' attitudes toward homosexuality and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer community in the United States. *Social Psychology of Education*, 22, 23–41. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-018-9463-9>
- Harwell, M. R. (2011). Research design in qualitative/quantitative/mixed methods. In *The SAGE handbook for research in education* (pp. 147–164). <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483351377.n11>
- Jones, T. (2019). South African contributions to LGBTI education issues. *Sex Education*, 19(4), 455–471. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2018.1535969>
- Kwok, K. D. (2018). Training educators to support sexual minority students: Views of Chinese teachers. *Sex Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2018.1530649>
- Lee, E. O. J., Kamgain, O., Hafford-Letchfield, T., Gleeson, H., Pullen-Sansfaçon, A., & Luu, F. (2021). Knowledge and policy about LGBTQI migrants: A scoping review of the Canadian and global context. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 22, 831–848.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-020-00771-4>

- Mavhandu-Mudzusi, A. H. (2017). Impact of stigma and discrimination on sexual well-being of LGBTI students in a South African rural university. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 31(4), 208–218. <https://doi.org/10.20853/31-4-894>
- Mazhar, S. A., Anjum, R., Anwar, A. I., & Khan, A. A. (2021). Methods of data collection: A fundamental tool of research. *Journal of Integrated Community Health*, 10(1), 6–10. <https://doi.org/10.24321/2319.9113.202101>
- Moagi, L. A., & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, A. H. (2021). Violence against LGBT(QI) persons in Africa. In *The Palgrave handbook of African women's studies* (pp. 873–889). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28099-4_102
- Mogotsi, I., Nduna, M., Mavhandu-Mudzusi, A. H., & Mthombeni, A. (2017). Studying sexuality: LGBTI experiences in institutions of higher education in Southern Africa. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 31(4), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.20853/31-4-1330>
- Mollura, J. (2017). *School personnel attitudes and knowledge towards LGBTQ students* (Capstone project).
- Naeem, M., Ozuem, W., Howell, K., & Ranfagni, S. (2023). A step-by-step process of thematic analysis to develop a conceptual model in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 22, 16094069231205789. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231205789>
- Okanlawon, K. (2021). Homophobia in Nigerian schools and universities: Victimization, mental health issues, resilience of LGBT students, and support from straight allies: A literature review. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 18(4), 327–359. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2020.1749211>
- Oladipo, O. J. (2021). *Undergraduate LGBTQI students' perceptions and awareness of safe sex practices and related institutional services at a metropolitan university in South Africa* (Thesis). University of Johannesburg.
- Page, M. L. (2017). From awareness to action: Teacher attitude and implementation of LGBT-inclusive curriculum in the English language arts classroom. *SAGE Open*, 7(4), 2158244017739949. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244017739949>
- Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 42(5), 533–544. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y>
- Rutakumwa, R., Mugisha, J. O., Bernays, S., Kabunga, E., Tumwekwase, G., Mbonye, M., & Seeley, J. (2020). Conducting in-depth interviews with and without voice recorders: A comparative analysis. *Qualitative Research*, 20(5), 565–581. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794119884806>
- Rogers, L., De Brún, A., Birken, S. A., Davies, C., & McAuliffe, E. (2020). *Social work methods and interventions for helping others*. SAGE.
- Saquita, S. P., Tungala, J. M. J., & Lopez, M. J. D. (2023). LGBTQI+: Level of awareness and inclusivity among college students. *European Journal of Pedagogical Initiatives and Educational Practices*, 1(7), 3–8.

- Schotte, K., Rjosk, C., Edele, A., Hachfeld, A., & Stanat, P. (2022). Do teachers' cultural beliefs matter for students' school adaptation? A multilevel analysis of students' academic achievement and psychological school adjustment. *Social Psychology of Education, 25*(1), 75–112. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-021-09669-0>
- Sithole, S. (2015). Challenges faced by gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) students at a South African university. *TD: The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa, 11*(4), 193–219. <https://doi.org/10.4102/td.v11i4.54>
- Szyndlar, M., & Wąsikiewicz-Firlej, E. (2019). The LGBT community as a stakeholder in communicating corporate social responsibility: An analysis of selected case studies. *Scripta Neophilologica Posnaniensia, 19*, 191–221. <https://doi.org/10.14746/snp.2019.19.14>
- Ubisi, L. (2021). Queering South Africa's protective school policy for LGBT+ youth: The Nare Mphale case. *Journal of Educational Studies, 106*–138.
- Vincent, L. D., & Munyuki, C. (2017). 'It's tough being gay': Gay, lesbian and bisexual students' experiences of being 'at home' in South African university residence life. *South African Journal of Higher Education*.
- Weiss-Gal, I. (2008). The person-in-environment approach: Professional ideology and practice of social workers in Israel. *Social Work, 53*(1), 65–75. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/53.1.65>
- Williams, D. D. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry in daily life*. EdTech Books. <https://edtechbooks.org/qualitativeinquiry>
- Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (Vol. 5). Sage.