

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# LGBTIQ+ education for making teaching inclusive? Voices of teachers from all around the world

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**Abstract:** As the protection of the rights and integrity of LGBTIQ+ people seems to be increasing in some parts of the world, discrimination and violence towards them remain a reality in many other contexts. As a result, there is a growing number of initiatives for making education LGBTIQ+-inclusive in order to enhance educational inclusiveness and train fully prepared democratic citizens. However, research is still limited when examining the perceptions of in-service teachers regarding the appropriateness of addressing topics connected to gender identity and diversity and the reality of the LGBTIQ+ community in their lessons and their training to do so. By using a structured interview distributed online, this qualitative study explores the attitudes of 89 in-service teachers from all around the world regarding the introduction of these issues in education. Findings show that, in general, participants agree with the relevance of these issues but highlight that their sensitive nature needs to be considered. Moreover, there seems to be a lack of training in this respect, which would be appreciated. Ultimately, this article intends to expand both research and reflection on the importance of making education LGBTIQ+-inclusive as a means to promote educational inclusiveness and the training of democratic citizens of tomorrow.

**Keywords:** LGBTIQ+; gender identity and diversity; inclusive education; teachers' perceptions; teacher training; qualitative study

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**Received:** February 4, 2023; **Accepted:** May 6, 2023; **Available online:** June 2, 2023

**Citation:** Huertas-Abril CA, Palacios-Hidalgo FJ. LGBTIQ+ education for making teaching inclusive? Voices of teachers from all around the world. *Environment and Social Psychology* 2023; 8(1): 1550. doi: 10.18063/esp.v8.i1.1550

## 1. Introduction

Despite the significant efforts made by governments and institutions around the world to protect the rights and integrity of LGBTIQ+ people<sup>[1-3]</sup>, discrimination and violence towards them remain a reality in many contexts<sup>[4]</sup>. This has been translated into a growing number of initiatives and proposals for making education more inclusive in terms of gender and sexual identity and diversity<sup>[5]</sup>, and even integrating LGBTIQ+ issues directly into the classroom to make queer individuals visible and promote understanding and respect among students<sup>[6]</sup>. All these educational advances are certainly developed to enhance educational inclusiveness and train fully prepared democratic citizens who respect diversity in all its forms.

However, discussions about whether compulsory education should include queer paradigms

and pedagogies (understood as a form of teaching that goes beyond socially constructed binaries by challenging how societal components related to gender and sexuality alienate or even exclude certain individuals<sup>[7]</sup>) have been ongoing for decades<sup>[8–10]</sup>. Since the 1990s, academics and teachers have attempted to bring the tenets of queer theory to education to dismantle the cisheteronormative and patriarchal frameworks that have traditionally guided the development and implementation of curricula. While queer theory rejects essentialist and static views on sex, sexuality and gender and the social norms around them by celebrating transgression and a more discursive, fluid, plural, and continuously negotiated view of sexual and gender identity<sup>[11,12]</sup>, queer pedagogy takes these premises to promote visibility and respect for traditionally marginalized groups to ultimately create a safe space for all students and teachers to express, be, and find themselves. As Nemi<sup>[13]</sup> explains,

*Just as queer theory sought to distance itself from the markers of gender associated with gay and lesbian studies, queer pedagogy offers everyone involved in academic spaces, whether they be heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, asexual, etc., the possibility of understanding issues of sexuality from a new angle (p. 591).*

Indeed, queer pedagogy implies a paradigm shift in terms of how identities are understood and seeks to overcome normalization as well as to give voice to the reality and experiences of LGBTIQ+ individuals and people who do not conform to the restricting binaries posed by society<sup>[13]</sup>. This inclusive pedagogy entails different benefits for both teachers and students. On the one hand, problematizing all gender and sexual identities can support the visibilization and representation of minority identities<sup>[13]</sup>. On the other hand, challenging societal norms related to gender and sexuality may help create more inclusive environments and a more just, tolerant, and democratic society<sup>[14]</sup>.

Queer pedagogy has been explored from various perspectives, educational stages, and school disciplines. For instance, Lin *et al.*<sup>[15]</sup> examine how language teachers construct their “queer self” in their professional setting while being affected by the dominant discourse of cisheteronormativity. Similarly, Keenan and Hot Mess<sup>[16]</sup> reflect on how queer pedagogy can be integrated within early childhood education by proposing the idea of “drag pedagogy”, a performative approach to queer pedagogy that celebrates queer imagination among young students and promotes play for learning, aesthetic transformation, and destigmatization of shame. On their part, Pereira-García *et al.*<sup>[17]</sup> dig into the application of queer pedagogy in physical education at university, showing how this pedagogy combined with dancing can reinforce queer embodiment (i.e., the visible awareness and the expression of queer bodies and identities) in sports education, an environment where LGBTIQ+ students often occupy a marginalized and at-risk position.

However, despite the many reflections on the potential of queer pedagogy and the numerous proposals for its integration in the classroom, research is still limited to the researchers’ knowledge when examining the perceptions of teachers regarding the appropriateness of addressing topics connected to gender identity and diversity and the reality of the LGBTIQ+ community in their lessons or, in other words, the appropriateness of making their teaching LGBTIQ+-inclusive. Moreover, few studies explore the training of teachers for inclusive teaching in terms of gender and sexual identity and diversity, notwithstanding its importance in ensuring that young learners receive quality education<sup>[18]</sup>. In the case of pre-service teachers, scholars have shown (both from a quantitative and qualitative perspective<sup>[19–21]</sup>) that future instructors are positive towards the inclusion of issues related to the LGBTIQ+ community at any educational stage as dealing with this content may help LGBTIQ+

students, among other aspects, to know themselves better and face school discrimination based on their identity. Similarly, and with regards to training, other studies have revealed that pre-service teachers are aware of the need to use strategies to fight oppression at schools based on gender and sexual identity, and that training courses for teachers must explicitly include opportunities for them to develop skills and attitudes to support queer students<sup>[22]</sup>. Additionally, academics have also focused on studying the perceptions of pre-service teachers concerning the (in)visibility and inclusion of LGBTIQ+-related issues in their training, exposing the cisheteronormativity present in teacher training institutions, showing a feeling of lack of preparation to make their lessons LGBTIQ+-inclusive, and highlighting the need for more diverse and transgressive representations of LGBTIQ+ individuals, as these can certainly have a positive effect on teachers' attitudes towards queer pedagogy<sup>[23,24]</sup>.

As for in-service teachers, research has also explored their perceptions, finding that despite being willing to integrate issues related to LGBTIQ+ individuals and gender and sexual diversity, teachers feel largely unprepared to do so<sup>[25]</sup>. Likewise, there are also studies exploring the attitudes of in-service university teachers in relation to their training and integration of LGBTIQ+-related issues in their lectures and showing that addressing them in the classroom can be positive and that there is a lack of training in this respect<sup>[26]</sup>. Even so, there are also investigations comparing the perceptions of teachers towards making education LGBTIQ+-inclusive from countries inside and outside the European Union<sup>[27]</sup>. Nevertheless, scholars have not examined the opinions of in-service compulsory education teachers, considering the context outside Europe. In this light, this study seeks to fill in this research gap.

## 2. Materials and methods

An exploratory qualitative study was carried out to understand and analyze in-service teachers' perceptions, attitudes, and concerns regarding the introduction of LGBTIQ+ topics in education.

### 2.1. Research design and instrument

The study was designed to conduct a qualitative analysis, utilizing the Qualitative Evaluation Checklist<sup>[28]</sup> due the exploratory nature of the research. The main objective of this qualitative enquiry is to explore and interpret participants' experiences and perceptions to understand the phenomena based on the meanings they ascribe to them<sup>[29]</sup>.

The objective of the study was to analyze international teachers across different countries and continents regarding LGBTIQ+ issues in education. Three hypotheses are proposed based on the literature review previously carried out.

- H1: International teachers did not receive sufficient training on LGBTIQ+ issues when they were students.
- H2: International teachers consider LGBTIQ+ issues should be included in regular education, together with values education and human rights.
- H3: International teachers think that specific teacher training on LGBTIQ+ issues is needed in 21<sup>st</sup>-century education.

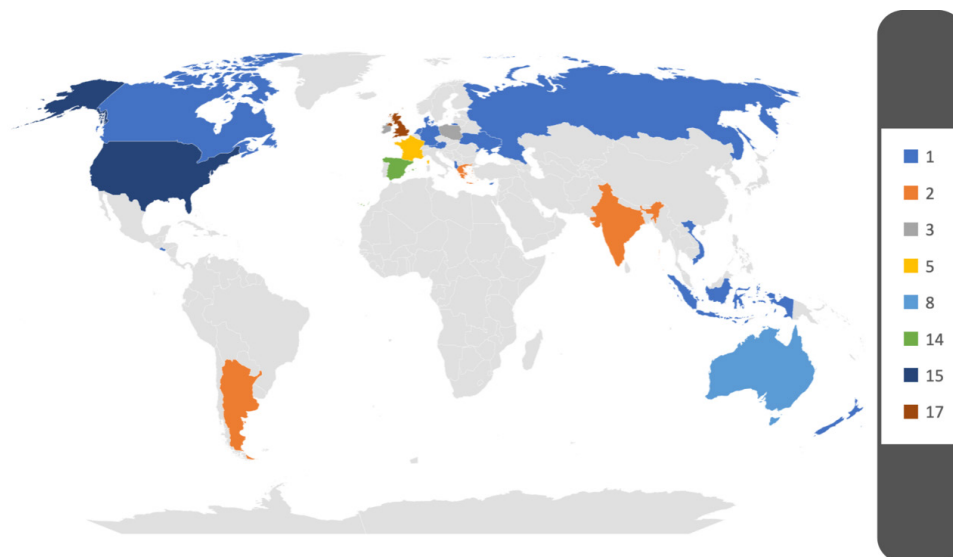
For this purpose, an online questionnaire in English was administered using Google Forms, considering their advantages: “The advantages of online questionnaires include speed and low cost, as well as the elimination of late data submission and other issues. The development of internet technology provides a solid foundation for the implementation of online questionnaires”<sup>[30]</sup>.

To ensure the comparability of all results, all in-service teachers were given four standardized study questions using an online form with consistent terminology<sup>[31]</sup>. The study questions were as follows:

- 1) In your experience as a student, did your teachers/schools address LGBTIQ+ issues? If yes, do you think it was necessary and positive? If not, do you think you would have appreciated receiving it?
- 2) Do you think that talking about LGBTIQ+ in the classroom allows to address other contents (e.g., values education, intercultural education...)? Why?
- 3) During your training as a teacher, were you trained to address LGBTIQ+ issues in your classroom? If yes, do you think it was necessary and positive? If not, do you think you would have appreciated receiving it?
- 4) Do you have any comments or suggestions you would like to add?

## 2.2. Participants

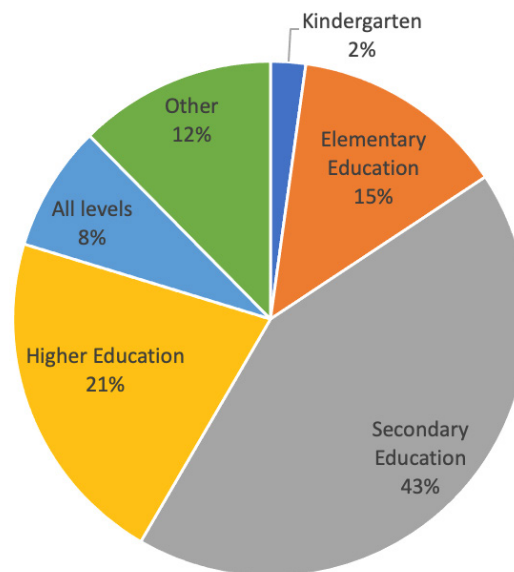
A non-probabilistic sample based on convenience was used for the selection of the participants, who were reached by using professional social networks for teachers. After the administration of the questionnaire, 96 responses were collected, and after the revision process, 89 were valid responses for the study. A total of 85.40% (n = 76) of the participants identified themselves as women, 13.50% (n = 12) identified themselves as men, and 1.10% (n = 1) preferred not to answer this question. Regarding their sexual orientation, 27.0% (n = 24) identified themselves as part of the LGBTIQ+ community, 69.70% (n = 62) were non-LGBTIQ+, and 3.40% (n = 3) preferred not to answer. The distribution of the participants regarding their nationality is shown in **Figure 1**.



**Figure 1.** Geographical distribution of the participants.

As shown in **Figure 1**, 1.12% of the respondents ( $n = 1$ ) were from Albania, Austria, Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, The Netherlands, Philippines, Germany, Indonesia, New Zealand, Russia, El Salvador, Ukraine, and Vietnam, 2.25% ( $n = 2$ ) were from Argentina, Greece, and India, 3.37% ( $n = 3$ ) were from Ireland and Poland, 5.62% ( $n = 5$ ) were from France, 15.73% ( $n = 14$ ) were from Spain, 16.85% ( $n = 15$ ) were from the United States, and 19.10% ( $n = 17$ ) were from the United Kingdom. Moreover, 2.25% of the participants ( $n = 2$ ) indicated having double nationality, and the remaining 2.25% ( $n = 2$ ) preferred not to answer.

Finally, the distribution of the participants regarding the educational stage at which they teach is shown in **Figure 2**.



**Figure 2.** Educational stage at which the participants teach.

### 2.3. Data gathering and analysis

To gain preliminary understanding of teachers' perceptions on LGBTIQ+ in education, content analysis of their responses was performed. Currently, content analysis is understood as a value-based process constituted by multiple realities, and the creation and development of individual and multifaceted perceptions of phenomena<sup>[32,33]</sup>. Content analysis involves replicability and inferences from the data, considering the context, which may require the development of different approaches and the representation of facts, and evidence about its applicability and validity must accompany the findings<sup>[34]</sup>.

To perform content analysis, we followed the stages suggested by Arbeláez-Gómez and Onrubia-Goñi<sup>[35]</sup>: (i) the theoretical phase, where the information included in the gathered responses is initially organized, allowing a first approach to the topic of the research; (ii) the descriptive phase, where data are structured and analyzed; and (iii) the interpretative phase, where content analysis is interpreted according to the emerging categories. Content analysis was developed following an inductive approach, using the questions established in the instrument for data collection to guide the identification of categories and themes and the organization and interpretation of the results. This way, the four questions of the online questionnaire allowed for the identification of the categories of

analysis, facilitating the research process and the drawing of conclusions.

The qualitative analysis of the data was performed with ATLAS.ti version 9 for MacOS. This software allows operating with several comparable categories and subcategories thanks to the intersection matrices. This analysis also permits it to transform the results into quantitative data (percentages and frequencies). Finally, the quality criteria stated by Palacios-Vicario *et al.*<sup>[36]</sup> were considered.

### 3. Findings

The categories obtained after the analysis of the teachers' responses were (i) experience as students related to LGBTIQ+ issues in education, (ii) connection of LGBTIQ+ with other topics in education, (iii) teacher training in LGBTIQ+ issues, and (iv) controversial issues. These categories are explained in **Table 1**.

**Table 1.** Emerging categories

| Category  | Explanation   |
|---|---|
| Experience as students related to LGBTIQ+ issues in education | This category includes information regarding how participants experienced the learning of LGBTIQ+-related topics during their time as students. It shows whether they received or did not receive such training as well as their own explanation for that situation (e.g., sociocultural and religious justifications, learning from home...).  |
| Connection of LGBTIQ+ with other topics in education          | This category includes information regarding the opinion of participants about whether the introduction of LGBTIQ+-related topics in education can help the teaching of other content. It shows participants' views on how these issues may help them teach values.   |
| Teacher training in LGBTIQ+ issues                            | This category includes information regarding whether and how participants have been trained to include LGBTIQ+-related topics in their teaching. It shows whether they have received or have not receive training at university, thanks to other institutions or y any other means.   |
| Controversial issues  | This category includes information regarding the opinion of participants about controversial issues related to the introduction of LGBTIQ+-related topics in education. It shows their views concerning misunderstanding human rights with indoctrination in connection with inclusive education, related myths, their need for specific materials and referents, and governmental support. |

*Note: Authors.*

#### 3.1. Experience as students related to LGBTIQ+ issues in education

To the first part of the first question of this study (In your experience as a student, did your teachers/schools addressed LGBTIQ+ issues?), 73.30% of the participants responded that they had no experience regarding receiving training on LGBTIQ+ issues. Some of the reasons behind these answers included sociocultural and religious justifications:

*My teachers did not address this at all. I had a Catholic education, and therefore, it was taught that being gay was against nature. (P003)*

*In our culture, it is not even allowed to bring up sexual issues as you may be perceived as a sexually inappropriate teacher. (P081)*

Moreover, 6.74% of the participants mentioned that even training was not provided at education-

al centers, they got information about LGBTIQ+ issues thanks to their families or external agents.

*I was lucky enough to have a mother who took the time to teach these issues to me. (P040)*

*My teachers never mentioned these issues themselves, but back in 11th Grade, they invited a group of LGBT+ speakers to discuss with and answer our [anonymous] questions. (P071)*

Finally, regarding 13.48% of the participants who assured that they had received training about LGBTIQ+ issues during their school and academic education, most of them highlighted that it had been scarce and mainly during college and high school.

*As a student, I experienced brief discussions of sexuality and sexual orientation in subjects such as health, but it was always a sidenote or “other”, as opposed to a genuine option. (P085)*

It is outstanding, however, the response by P012: “LGBT was considered normal and not worth special attention.”

Focusing now on the second part of the question (If [your teachers/schools addressed LGBTIQ+ issues when you were a student], do you think it was necessary and positive? If not, do you think you would have appreciated receiving it?), 49.43% of the participants considered that they would have appreciated that their education centers had provided them with LGBTIQ+ training, while 3.37% considered that it is “necessary” or “useful”. Among the reasons to support these ideas, we can emphasize the following three statements as relevant examples:

*...it would have given me some understanding of what I was going through and experiencing emotionally instead of it being a taboo subject in schools. (P049)*

*...it would have removed stigma and isolation allowing for a more natural and supportive environment to grow up in instead of it being taboo. (P005)*

*I would have appreciated it since I am bisexual and some of my classmates called me “pervert” because they thought there were only hetero and homo. (P006)*

Although 2.24% of the participants were unsure if they would have liked to receive this type of training when they were students and 5.62% considered that it was not necessary, 24.71% explicitly mentioned that they would not have liked it as they consider LGBTIQ+ issues should not be part of education, or at least not at all educational stages.

*I do not think these issues need to be discussed before puberty, but at that stage schools should be able to facilitate respectful discussion and clarify equality/acceptance issues. (P022)*

*Keep politics out of school. Being forced to study certain issues usually made me resentment (sic.) them. (P008)*

### **3.2. Connection of LGBTIQ+ with other topics in education**

Over three quarters (78.65%) of the participants see a clear connection of LGBTIQ+ issues to other global and democratic values taught at schools, which should be then addressed in education.

*LGTB+ issues are everybody's issues. The issues involved are about inclusion, understanding and tolerance. These issues are the same for many other groups e.g., people with disabilities, people of other religions or races or cultures, etc. (P003)*

*Talking about LGBT+ issues in the classroom is essential as it may help to deal with a possible issues such as difficulty accepting sexual orientation, coping with other people's reactions, gender dysphoria, low self-esteem and self-harm or even suicidal thoughts. Also, it can prevent depression from long-term effects of bullying and discrimination. (P051)*

Nevertheless, 5.62% of the participants considered that possibly or sometimes, as it may “depend on the class” (P067) or “talking about LGTB+ issues needs not come first” (P004), or the students’ level or maturity:

*I think it assures that you can create an open environment to speak about whatever is important to your students. I actively disagreed with my CELTA mentor who said subjects like religion and politics are off limits in the classroom. It is entirely up to the space you create whether those subjects are ones you can bring to the room. For me educating about LGBT+, racism, sustainability is very important. People need to be able to deal with those issues. Obviously, I wouldn't bring those subjects to a low-level group, because they won't be able to express themselves enough. But for higher level nothing is off the table. Beginning with respecting each other's opinions and tentative listening. (P048)*

In contrast, 15.73% of the participants state that LGBTIQ+ issues should not be included in education in general or in values education in particular, especially with minors. The justifications for this perspective are related to both personal and sociocultural factors.

*I feel that all aspects connected with sexual identity are too personal and private to be discussed in class at any level. It is each person's personal choice; I am not sure that values or intercultural education have much to do with LGTB issues. (P018)*

*It would be impossible to directly address such issues in my classroom as, like politics, such topics are not permitted. Even so, an accepting atmosphere exists in my institution. I would prefer it to be addressed as a broader human rights issue. (P030)*

Finally, P068 warns: “One should be very careful about tackling those contents. I tend to show the big picture: our society but not values directly. And we can discuss our society values, our nation/Republic values and goals.”

### **3.3. Teacher training in LGBTIQ+ issues**

To the third question (During your training as a teacher, were you trained to address LGBTIQ+ issues in your classroom? If yes, do you think it was necessary and positive? If not, do you think you would have appreciated receiving it?), 91.01% of the participants answered they had no received specific training, while 8.99% asserted they had received some training on LGBTIQ+ issues. Despite this, 42.70% would appreciate specific teacher training on LGBTIQ+ issues, 8.99% consider it is “useful”, while 3.37% think it is “necessary” and 2.25% see it as “helpful”.

*I would have appreciated if I has been trained; I think many teachers in my country are homophobic and LGBT+ topics are generally considered taboo, which is why it's not talked*



*about; and precisely why it should be discussed. (P026)*

*I probably would have benefitted from training on how best to support those students who had genuine need and were excluded from the school community as a result of the perceived differences. (P064)*

P034 highlights: “No, I wasn’t trained, but it’s never too late to educate yourself, so I might take part in this kind of training one day.” P045, however, considers that “not all school administrators are open to this, although the needs are arising to educate the students”.

The aforementioned positive attitudes towards specific training on LGBTIQ+ issues contrast with 26.97% who explicitly mention they would not like to receive this type of training.

*“Ideology” out of schools. No gender ideology at schools. The kids’ education belongs to their parents, not to the State or to the LGTB community. They must be respected, but they also have to respect the children and their parents. (P056)*

Furthermore, 5.62% of the participants are not sure regarding the relevance of teacher training on LGBTIQ+ issues.

*I was not trained, and I doubt it is the role of the teachers to address such issues. It should be up to the government to make the teaching of LGBT+ part of the educational system and to hire qualified speakers to educate the students. I am not LGBT+, therefore I do not feel entitled to addressing those issues in class. (P071)*

In this light, one of the participants feels pessimistic regarding the situation of LGBTIQ+ issues in education and teacher training:

*I have been to some in-service teacher training sessions about inclusion of these issues in textbooks and how actually things seem to be getting worse. A previous edition (2001) of a book included same sex couples and this has been edited to exclude them in a more recent edition. I feel this is true across the board that the current political climate is allowing bigotry to be acceptable in the name of freedom of speech or individual expression. (P016)*

### 3.4. Controversial issues

The answers to the fourth question (Do you have any comments or suggestions you would like to add?) has given rise to a series of controversial issues, namely:

- 1) Misunderstanding human rights with indoctrination. Some participants consider that discussing LGBTIQ+ issues in education is directly connected to politics, ideology, and even indoctrination:

*I believe families should have some say in the kind of content their children are shown or taught when it comes to sexual and affective diversity, and especially about gender identity. Children are vulnerable and easy to influence. They should be taught about LGBT issues so that they can be more empathetic and respectful, but it should all be based on science and facts and not on theories and ideology. In some schools, children are being taught unscientific ideas such as the non-existence of biological sex. It is important that teaching them about LGBT issues doesn’t turn into indoctrination. (P054)*

*No gender education at schools. Ideology out of schools. It's not your business. The parents are the ones who educate their children. (P056)*

*Why are you doing this? Keep identity politics out of places in the world that don't have them. They are not productive or helpful. Quite the opposite. View on it are opinion and not fact and there don't belong in education. (P008)*

- 2) Persistent myths. Lack of sex education and training on LGBTIQ+ issues has traditionally led to certain myths, as reflected by the participants:

*When being educated about sexuality, I was told by a nurse that sodomy was unnatural for example. (P082)*

*I was, on a number of occasions as a schoolboy, approached by sexual deviants, saying they had the "right" to "educate" me by trying to make me participate in their "activities". I have also been approached with the "how do you know you won't like it if you don't try it?" argument. (P074)*

*I live in Turkey, so cultural norms (family, etc.) are fiercely protected here but there is acceptance to a surprising degree of LGBTQ, e.g., Zeki Muren was a mega star for 35 decades. However, usually it is seen as exotic or just plain abnormal, to be honest. (P030)*

- 3) Specific materials and referents needed. There is still a lack of materials to support teachers regarding LGBTIQ+ issues, as well as updated teacher training programs.

*I wish resources, textbooks, Cambridge tests, and teacher training programs would be updated to include more diversity that reflects our modern world. (P031)*

*I think it's important, but the sensitive nature of the topic need to be considered. Teachers need support in implementing it into the curriculum—clear information on what should be taught, and at what level, along with the necessary resources to deliver the lessons. I think this is certainly necessary at the beginning. (P036)*

Moreover, real referents play a crucial role in education:

*I am a trans woman teacher. Young students need referents. (P055)*

- 4) Governmental support and inclusion in official curricula:

*My responses hinged on my belief that governments should provide the impetus for such acceptance and how to teach across the board. If only certain schools provide such guidance, we will continue to have confused kids and prejudiced adults. I think we should have a natural attitude to introducing "sensitive" subjects in schools. We still have trouble teaching the birds and bees for goodness' sake. We have a long way to go but I have observed that forcing issues fuels adults' negative opinions unless introduced and employed by governments. I wait for the day when we LIVE it rather than feel the need to TEACH it (acceptance). (P009)*

## 4. Discussion

This study has provided relevant insights into the perceptions, attitudes, and concerns of in-service teachers from different parts of the world regarding the integration of LGBTIQ+ issues as educational content. As shown in the responses from the participants, there seems to be a generally accepted idea that LGBTIQ+-related issues should have a place in the classroom because of their connection to other realities (as highlighted by P003: “LGTB+ issues are everybody’s issues. The issues involved are about inclusion, understanding and tolerance.”), corroborating the results of previous similar studies that reveal positive attitudes among teachers in this regard<sup>[19–21,26]</sup>. Yet, there also appears to be a consensus among some interviewees regarding the sensitive nature of making education LGBTIQ+-inclusive (as pointed out by P008: “Keep identity politics out of places in the world that don’t have them”), which undoubtedly reflects the cisheteronormative and patriarchal frameworks that have traditionally (and still today) regulated curricular design and implementation. Whatever the opinions of the participants, results also show a generalized lack of training in this sense, which parallels other investigations<sup>[26]</sup>.

At this point, it is necessary to revisit the hypotheses of the study. H1 (International teachers did not receive sufficient training on LGBTIQ+ issues when they were students) was formulated based on previous studies that highlight the profusion of initiatives for making education LGBTIQ+-inclusive<sup>[5,6]</sup>, which suggest that inclusive education in terms of gender and sexual identity and diversity was not common some decades ago. This hypothesis is corroborated, as the majority of the participants explicitly highlighted that they did not receive training on LGBTIQ+ issues during their years as students mainly due to sociocultural and religious reasons.

H2 (International teachers consider LGBTIQ+ issues should be included in regular education, together with values education and human rights) was formulated considering the findings of previous research that reveals positive opinions among teachers in this sense<sup>[19–21,26]</sup>. This hypothesis is partially corroborated as although most interviewed teachers believed that making education LGBTIQ+-inclusive could help students better understand themselves and the world, some participants were doubtful of tackling these issues with minors because of their alleged connection to politics, ideology, and indoctrination. In this sense, the positive opinions of international teachers towards making their lessons LGBTIQ+-inclusive are in line with those found in other studies (e.g., in the study of Huertas-Abril and Palacios-Hidalgo<sup>[26]</sup>). However, opposing attitudes and concerns among some of the participants are once again a reflection of the cisheteronormative and patriarchal models that remain in some areas of present societies and cultures. However, it is worth noting that the participants’ limited mention of the reality of transgender, intersex, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming identities suggests that much work is still needed in order to ensure their recognition, visibility and representation, as well as that of cisgender identities, in the classroom.

Finally, H3 (International teachers think that specific teacher training on LGBTIQ+ issues is needed in 21<sup>st</sup>-century education) was built based on the claims of teachers around the necessity of being properly trained to educate students in respect, tolerance, awareness and understanding, and human rights in general<sup>[37]</sup>, and in LGBTIQ+-related issues in particular<sup>[22,38,39]</sup> that are shown in research. This hypothesis, as in the case of H2, is partially corroborated. While most teachers participating in the study considered that being prepared in this respect would be useful, helpful, and necessary (thus corroborating the opinions of teachers from other studies, e.g., the study of Palaci-

os-Hidalgo<sup>[38]</sup>), others did not think these issues necessarily need to have a place at schools not only because they might not be needed at certain educational stages (as revealed by university teachers in the study carried out by Huertas-Abril and Palacios-Hidalgo<sup>[26]</sup>), but also because they are presumably controversial, ideological, and related to politics.

## **5. Limitations of the study**

Despite the relevance of this study, our findings should be interpreted in light of certain limitations. First, the results are only based on the self-reported opinions and experiences of the participants, and therefore, subjective. For this reason, future research should consider using additional data-gathering techniques to obtain more reliable data. Second, the analysis is qualitative, so quantitative data could also complement the findings. Third, neither the origin of the participants nor their belonging to the belong LGBTIQ+ community were considered as variables of analysis. Prospective studies should consider exploring whether these two aspects may have an effect on the perceptions of teachers regarding the introduction of LGBTIQ+ topics in education. Fourth, it cannot be said that the population of the study is representative due to the differences among participants in terms of gender, so future research should consider recruiting a more varied sample. Fifth, the results are part of an exploratory study (global in-service teachers) with a limited number of participants, so further research should include a higher number of respondents to obtain more significant and extrapolatable data. Sixth, although the study claims to follow a queer theoretical approach, the authors are aware that the participants' limited/inexistent reference to queer pedagogy or the reality of trans, non-binary or gender nonconforming people makes it follow an approach closer to positivist LGBTIQ+ studies rather than queer theory. Finally, the authors also acknowledge that their own positionality, culture and identities may have affected the analyses, undertaking of the project and interpretations of the data.

## **6. Conclusion**

This research has presented a relevant problem concerning in-service teachers' perceptions and attitudes regarding the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ issues in education, a field scarcely explored yet<sup>[21,25,26,38,40]</sup>. In general, the findings presented here are positive as they reveal that teachers from different parts of the globe agree on the idea that making education LGBTIQ+-inclusive is beneficial and necessary in today's society. Moreover, they show that educators, regardless of the level or subject they teach, need to be properly trained to bring LGBTIQ+-related issues into their classroom, promote a more inclusive learning environment, and educate the democratic citizens of tomorrow. In any case, it seems also necessary to reflect on the need of securing the visibility and representation of transgender, intersex, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming people in the classrooms, as a really inclusive education needs to recognize these identities, too.

These findings should therefore encourage researchers, teachers, and administrators to continue reflecting on the necessity to develop and implement comprehensive sexual and gender education as part of the integral development of individuals. As expressed by P040, "Education is the key to overcoming hate," so societies, cultures and education systems should take this premise and work together to build a better world, educate more tolerant people, and guarantee respect for all human rights.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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