

LGBTIQ+ Pre-Service Language Teachers' Experiences in Language Teacher Education Programs: A Narrative Case Study

Experiencias de docentes de lenguas en formación pertenecientes a la población LGBTIQ+ en programas de formación docente: un estudio narrativo de caso

Experiências de formandos em ensino de línguas pertencentes à comunidade LGBTIQ+ em programas de formação de professores: um estudo narrativo de caso

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Abstract

Introduction: Research on sexual and gender diversity in Latin American higher education has documented processes of exclusion and institutional silence; however, there is little evidence regarding the experiences of LGBTIQ+ students in teacher-training programs. **Objective:** To explore how LGBTIQ+ language teacher candidates narrate the construction of their identity, experiences of discrimination, and their sense of belonging in a teacher education program. **Methodology:** A narrative case study was conducted using an interpretive qualitative approach with four students in a Bachelor's degree program in Foreign Languages in Bogotá, Colombia. Data were collected through biographical narratives and analyzed using narrative thematic analysis and intra-narrative triangulation. **Results:** The findings identified six main themes: discovery and acceptance of sexual identity, discrimination and institutional silence, self-protection strategies, safe spaces and support networks, identity resilience, and pedagogical aspirations. Participants recounted experiences of exclusion and invisibility but also processes of resistance and self-recognition that strengthened their professional identity as teachers. **Conclusions:** It is concluded that these students negotiate their identities within restrictive institutional contexts and transform experiences of discrimination into sources of resilience, agency, and commitment to inclusive educational practices.

Key words: Gender Identity; Higher Education; LGBTIQ+ Students; Student Wellbeing.

Resumen

Introducción: Las investigaciones sobre diversidad sexual y de género en la educación superior latinoamericana han documentado procesos de exclusión y silencio institucional; sin embargo, existe escasa evidencia sobre las experiencias de estudiantes LGBTIQ+ en programas de formación docente. **Objetivo:** explorar cómo docentes de lenguas en formación pertenecientes a la población LGBTIQ+ narran la construcción de su identidad, las experiencias de discriminación y su sentido de pertenencia en un programa de formación docente. **Metodología:** Se desarrolló un estudio de caso narrativo desde un enfoque cualitativo interpretativo con cuatro estudiantes de una Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras en Bogotá, Colombia. La información se recopiló mediante narrativas biográficas y se analizó a través de análisis temático narrativo y triangulación internarrativa. **Resultados:** Los hallazgos identificaron seis temas principales: descubrimiento y aceptación de la identidad sexual, discriminación y silencio institucional, estrategias de autoprotección, espacios seguros y redes de apoyo, resiliencia identitaria y proyección pedagógica. Los participantes relataron experiencias de exclusión e invisibilización, pero también procesos de resistencia y autorreconocimiento que fortalecieron su identidad profesional docente. **Conclusiones:** Se concluye que estos estudiantes negocian sus identidades en contextos institucionales restrictivos y transforman las experiencias de discriminación en fuentes de resiliencia, agencia y compromiso con prácticas educativas inclusivas.

Palabras clave: Identidad de género; Educación superior; Estudiantes LGBTIQ+; Bienestar estudiantil.

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Resumo

Introdução: Pesquisas sobre diversidade sexual e de gênero no ensino superior latino-americano têm documentado processos de exclusão e silêncio institucional; no entanto, há poucas evidências sobre as experiências de estudantes LGBTIQ+ em cursos de formação de professores. **Objetivo:** explorar como professores de línguas em formação, pertencentes à população LGBTIQ+, narram a construção de sua identidade, as experiências de discriminação e seu senso de pertencimento em um curso de formação de professores. **Metodologia:** Foi desenvolvido um estudo de caso narrativo a partir de uma abordagem qualitativa interpretativa com quatro estudantes de um curso de Licenciatura em Línguas Estrangeiras em Bogotá, Colômbia. As informações foram coletadas por meio de narrativas biográficas e analisadas por meio de análise temática narrativa e triangulação internarrativa. **Resultados:** Os resultados identificaram seis temas principais: descoberta e aceitação da identidade sexual, discriminação e silêncio institucional, estratégias de autoproteção, espaços seguros e redes de apoio, resiliência identitária e projeção pedagógica. Os participantes relataram experiências de exclusão e invisibilização, mas também processos de resistência e autorreconhecimento que fortaleceram sua identidade profissional como docentes. **Conclusões:** Conclui-se que esses estudantes negociam suas identidades em contextos institucionais restritivos e transformam as experiências de discriminação em fontes de resiliência, agência e compromisso com práticas educacionais inclusivas.

Palavras-chave: Identidade de gênero; Ensino superior; Estudantes LGBTIQ+; Bem-estar estudantil.



1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of sexual and gender diversity in higher education is not a recent development; however, it continues to exhibit structural vulnerability. It is evident that universities in Latin America perpetuate heteronormative discourses and practices, institutional silence, and discriminatory language that is considered the norm. Moreover, there is a conspicuous absence of explicit protocols, despite these institutions professing to be “inclusive”. For LGBTIQ+ pre-service language teachers pursuing a career in education, the process of identity construction is not merely a personal matter, but rather a continuous negotiation between visibility, risk, and legitimacy. In this context, students must strategically decide when to voice their opinions, what to withhold, and to whom they should disclose information, as a form of self-protection against potential symbolic or direct sanctions.

The present study employs a qualitative interpretative narrative case study approach, focusing on the experiences of four students who identify as LGBTIQ+ and are enrolled in a bachelor’s degree program in Foreign Languages in Bogotá, Colombia. The objective of this research was to identify the experiences and challenges of LGBTIQ+ pre-service language teachers in an educational context and its incidence on their academic performance and professional prospects. The study was conducted with four students enrolled in a language program in Bogotá. The fundamental question that guided the research was: How do LGBTIQ+ pre-service teachers narrate their experiences of identity, discrimination, and resistance within their university context, and how do these experiences shape the way they envision their future teaching practice?

The data comprised biographical narratives, which were analyzed using narrative thematic analysis with iterative coding and inter-narrative triangulation. Six general categories were identified: 1) the process of discovering and accepting sexual identity; 2) cases of discrimination and the phenomenon of institutional silence; 3) strategies used for self-protection and partial concealment; 4) the concept of safe spaces and the role of support networks; 5) the concept of identity resilience with pedagogical implications; and 6) the relationship with teaching/education.

At the same time, the experiences narrated by these students are not limited to harm. Many reframe discrimination as an ethical and pedagogical driver: they not only want to be accepted, but also to become teachers who build empathetic, safe, and power-conscious classrooms. In this sense, diversity is no longer treated as ‘an individual problem’ but becomes a matter of educational justice: are we training teachers who will continue to reproduce silence or teachers who understand inclusion as political practice?

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

It is important to start by defining the term LGBTQ+, although these definitions vary depending on the context and the period. According to Hässler (2024), LGBTQ+ is an abbreviation for the collective designation of individuals who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, or queer/questioning, along with those who identify as having any other minority sexual orientation or gender identity. This terminology is adopted throughout the study to acknowledge the heterogeneity of participants’ experiences while avoiding the exclusion of identities that may not be explicitly represented within specific acronyms.

The present study adopts a social, cultural, and historical perspective on sexual and gender identities,



thereby challenging the notion of these phenomena as biological absolutes. The term 'sex' is typically employed to denote classifications determined at birth based on observable traits. However, contemporary studies have demonstrated that both the concepts of sex and gender are the products of cultural mediation and historical contingency (Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Lorber, 2018). From this standpoint, gender can be conceptualized as a context-dependent category that is subject to change in response to social changes and institutional arrangements.

This perspective is expanded upon in the subsequent conceptualization of gender identity as an evolving sense of self, shaped by the interplay of biological, psychological, and sociocultural factors, and expressed across different contexts over time (Edwards & Brooks, 2011; Steensma et al., 2013). It also refers to "the recognition of the perceived social gender attributed to a person" Diamond (2002, p.323). The concept of identity is not static; rather, it is understood as a practice that is reiterated, negotiated and re-signified in interaction with norms (Butler, 1990). Within educational settings, power is exerted not only through explicit communication, but also through the silences that regulate the visibility and recognition of sexual and gender diversity (Foucault, 1978). This observation is corroborated by the recurring pattern of institutional omission noted in the extant literature and in the results presented here. In view of the points, inclusive school climates and the function of teachers as protective factors have been shown to mitigate stress for minority groups and support student well-being (Kosciw et al., 2018; Meyer, 2010). Likewise, Wilson and Cariola (2020), in a systematic review of qualitative studies, reported that experiences of discrimination, rejection, and social stigma significantly affect the mental health and emotional well-being of LGBTIQ+ youth, while supportive environments contribute to resilience and positive identity development. This point has already been integrated into the results section and is consistent with the theoretical position adopted here.

The LGBTIQ+ community encompasses a wide spectrum of sexual orientations and genders that deviate from conventional norms. The promotion of such diversity within educational contexts is imperative to counteract exclusionary practices that have been demonstrated to undermine students' emotional, social and academic development (Cuéllar & Rivera, 2016; Ramírez-Rincón & Velasco-López, 2022). In the Colombian context, inclusive education has advanced through legal and policy frameworks that promote equity and participation; however, significant challenges remain regarding the effective implementation of inclusive practices and the recognition of diverse identities within educational institutions (Cely & Abreus, 2022). In response to these challenges, several Colombian higher education institutions have adopted gender and diversity policies aimed at promoting equity, preventing discrimination, and fostering inclusive educational environments. Such policies recognize sexual and gender diversity as a fundamental component of educational inclusion and student well-being (Echeverry, 2019). It is evident that schools function as arenas where power dynamics are both maintained and challenged (Butler, 1990; Meyer, 2010). Research in teacher education has also demonstrated that heteronormative assumptions continue to shape pedagogical practices and institutional cultures, limiting the recognition and inclusion of sexual and gender diversity within educational settings (Cruz Galindo, 2020). Similarly, Cruz Rios (2026) found that teachers often report insufficient preparation to address issues of sexual and gender diversity in the classroom, highlighting the need for greater awareness and inclusive pedagogical practices in teacher education.

These dynamics have the capacity to influence the societal rules governing gender and sexuality. Freire (1970) also posits that education should be a liberating act, rooted in conversation and critical thinking, and that educators should be encouraged to challenge systemic inequalities and suppressions. Consequently, the present study aligns with a critical paradigm that perceives LGBTIQ+ experiences as sites of knowledge, change, and justice.



Historical background of LGBTIQ+ diversity.

The existence of sexual and gender diversity is not a recent sociocultural phenomenon; rather, it can be traced back to ancient civilizations. In these societies, non-heteronormative identities and practices were often understood as part of the natural variability of human experience rather than as moral deviations. Historical accounts reference figures such as Gilgamesh, who is sometimes described as the first documented homosexual (circa 4000 BCE), and the poet Sappho of Lesbos, whose work openly expressed desire between women and eventually contributed to the term “lesbian”. In ancient societies such as Egypt, Greece and Rome, same-sex relationships were tolerated to a certain extent by society and, in certain elite contexts, were even valued. It is evident that several Roman emperors, including Julius Caesar, Hadrian, and Helio-gabalus, engaged in relationships with partners of different genders. Historical evidence suggests that sexual and gender diversity has existed across societies and historical periods. Understandings of sexuality and gender were often shaped by cultural and social contexts rather than rigid binary frameworks, highlighting the historical variability of these concepts (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). Within these early social orders, sexuality was largely conceived as a plural, fluid, and situational practice, rather than organized through rigid binary categories.

This relative plurality, however, underwent a significant transformation with the consolidation of Christianity as a state religion in the 4th century CE. The development of Christian moral doctrine has historically portrayed sexual and gender diversity as sin and transgression. Theological voices, such as that of Saint Augustine, classified homosexual acts as *contra naturam*, arguing that they violated the divinely ordained link between sexuality, procreation, and moral order (Lamberigts, 2011). This moralization laid the foundation for legal and institutional persecution across Europe in subsequent centuries. By the modern period, same-sex desire was not only stigmatized but criminalized, as demonstrated by Article 175 of the German penal code, which penalized male homosexuality (Grau, 1999).

Review of previous studies

Previous studies have identified recurring patterns of exclusion, institutional silence, and resistance regarding LGBTIQ+ experiences in educational settings. Research conducted in Colombia, Chile, and Brazil reveals that discrimination, heteronormative practices, and sociocultural beliefs continue to shape the identities and educational experiences of students and teachers. In the Colombian context, Martínez Ospino et al. (2018) found that attitudes toward homosexuality among university students remain influenced by cultural norms and social beliefs, which may affect levels of acceptance and inclusion. Rubio-Aguilar et al. (2021) documented how heteronormative structures within educational communities contribute to the invisibilization and marginalization of sexual and gender diversity. Likewise, Catalán (2018) explored the narratives of homosexual and lesbian teachers in Chile, highlighting how educators develop strategies of resistance and identity negotiation to challenge heteronormative expectations within school environments. Similarly, Ramírez-Rincón and Velasco-López (2022) reported experiences of discrimination, exclusion, and institutional silence affecting LGBTIQ+ individuals in Colombian schools. In the Brazilian context, Soares (2020) highlighted how educational environments continue to reproduce heteronormative norms that influence the experiences of sexually diverse individuals. Furthermore, Quiñonez (2023) and Koch et al. (2025) demonstrated that religious beliefs may negatively affect self-acceptance and the disclosure of sexual orientation. Despite these challenges, literature consistently documents processes of resilience, identity negotiation, and adaptation through which students and teachers construct forms of agency and resistance. Collectively, these studies suggest that the challenges faced by LGBTIQ+ individuals are not isolated incidents, but manifestations of broader systemic inequalities embedded within educational institutions.



The theoretical framework elucidates the tension between exclusion and resistance that shapes the schooling experiences of LGBTIQ+ pre-service language teachers. While educational institutions tend to reproduce heteronormative ideologies and disciplinary practices, these same spaces also foster the emergence of counter-discourses of empowerment and solidarity. In the context of Colombia, where religion, culture and education remain profoundly intertwined, the formulation of inclusive policies and awareness programs is imperative.

Recent Latin American studies have increasingly emphasized the need to understand LGBTIQ+ educational experiences through narratives situated in specific institutional and cultural contexts (Escobar Gómez, 2021; Ramírez-Rincón & Velasco-López, 2022). Research conducted in Colombia has documented the persistence of discrimination, institutional silence, and exclusionary school practices affecting LGBTIQ+ students and teachers (Ramírez-Rincón & Velasco-López, 2022). At the regional level, studies on Latin America and the Caribbean have also shown that LGBTQ+ children and adolescents continue to experience bullying, victimization, and barriers to full educational participation (Martínez et al., 2023). Similarly, recent research in higher education has demonstrated that sexual and gender diversity continues to shape students' educational trajectories, influencing their experiences of belonging, exclusion, and academic persistence (Durán Rosado, 2025). More recent research in Colombian higher education has highlighted the importance of student and teacher awareness, participation, and inclusive pedagogical practices in addressing sexual and gender diversity in educational settings (Rivera Quiguanás et al., 2024).

4. METHODOLOGY

The present research is situated within the interpretive paradigm, which, as posited by Guba and Lincoln (1994), is predicated on the ontological assumption that reality is socially constructed from the experiences, meanings, and perspectives of individuals. From this standpoint, knowledge is conceptualized as a situated interpretation that emerges from the interaction between the researcher and participants. In accordance with this paradigm, a qualitative case study was developed. According to Stake (1995), the objective of a qualitative case study is to understand a particular phenomenon in depth within its natural context, prioritizing descriptive richness over statistical generalization. In this sense, the case focused on the experiences of four students in the Bachelor's Degree in Foreign Languages program. These students self-identify as members of the LGBTIQ+ community and reflect on the processes of acceptance, discrimination and identity construction within the educational environment.

Instruments for data collection encompass biographical narratives, which are understood to be personal accounts used by subjects to reconstruct their experiences in their own words, attributing meaning to the events and emotions experienced (Bolívar et al., 2001). Each participant was tasked with the composition of an individual narrative, the purpose of which was to facilitate an exploration of their personal and academic history. The relevance of the instrument is evidenced by its capacity to facilitate access to the perceptions, emotions and meanings that participants attribute to their formative experience. This is in line with the comprehensive and subjective nature of the qualitative approach adopted.

The analysis of the information was conducted through the implementation of narrative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Riessman, 2008), with the objective of identifying meanings, patterns, and recurring themes in the accounts of the four participants. The process entailed a meticulous and iterative



reading of the narratives, culminating in the identification of units of meaning. These units were then subjected to initial coding and subsequent categorization into emerging categories. These categories were interpreted in an integrated manner, considering both individual nuances and shared patterns. Finally, inter-narrative triangulation (Denzin, 1978) was performed, which allowed the categories of each case to be compared to highlight similarities, differences and common themes. This triangulation process served to enhance the credibility and internal consistency of the study, by establishing a link between individual experiences and significant collective trends within the educational context.

Ethical Considerations

The present research was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of confidentiality, autonomy, and respect for participants' integrity, as established by qualitative research standards (American Psychological Association, 2020). Prior to data collection, all participants were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature, and each provided written consent to participate. To safeguard the privacy of the subjects and ensure anonymity, the four participants selected pseudonyms: Josué, Juan, and Spencer and Daniela, which were used consistently throughout the analysis and discussion. Personal identifiers and contextual information that could compromise confidentiality were either removed or modified.

The study was conducted with a commitment to nonmaleficence and respect for diversity, ensuring that no participant experienced harm or distress during the research process. The narratives were shared voluntarily and reviewed collaboratively to guarantee accurate representation of each voice. In accordance with the ethical guidelines for social and educational research (Creswell & Poth, 2018), the researcher-maintained transparency, reflexivity, and sensitivity throughout the data collection and interpretation process. The participants were recognized as co-constructors of knowledge within an inclusive and respectful framework.

5. RESULTS

The analysis of the four narratives was performed in a qualitative manner. This allowed the discursive patterns and emerging categories to be identified. These categories are reflective of the experiences of participants who are LGBTIQ+ pre-service language teachers on degree programs for the learning of foreign languages. In accordance with the narrative thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), a recurrent reading and open coding of the narratives was conducted. This approach enabled the identification of recurring meanings, which were then grouped into conceptual categories and subcategories. These categories were interpreted within the framework of the interpretive paradigm, understanding that each participant's discourse not only expresses an individual experience but also a way of constructing meaning in the face of educational structures that regulate sexual and gender diversity (Flick, 2014).

After analyzing the four narratives, six emerging categories were identified: discovery and acceptance of sexual identity, stigmatization and fear of rejection, self-protection through silence, spaces of academic and social support, personal and professional resilience and relation to teaching and education. Josué's (pseudonym) narrative underscores the discord between the personal journey of self-discovery and the public dimension of social acknowledgement. Silence can be regarded as a strategy for self-protection, but also as a limitation imposed by the educational environment. This coincides with Foucault's notion of



disciplinary power, which regulates bodies and identities through discourse (Foucault, 1978).

The second narrative, attributed to Juan (pseudonym), underscores the processes of gradual self-acceptance, experiences of symbolic violence and bullying, and the absence of inclusive institutional policies. In this case, the concept of resilience emerges as a central category, articulating the experience of suffering with the ability to resist and transform adversity into self-knowledge. This capacity for resilience, understood as a form of agency, coincides with Butler's (2004) ideas on the performance of the subject, who re-signifies their vulnerability as a source of power and authenticity.

The third narrative, corresponding to Spencer (pseudonym) highlights the institutional invisibility of discourse on diversity, teacher self-censorship, and performative resistance to heteronormative norms. The author's account offers a critical reflection on teaching practice, conceptualizing education as a political space where identity becomes an act of pedagogy and resistance. In accordance with the principles espoused by Freire (1970), the participant conceptualizes pedagogy as a transformative praxis, endowed with the capacity to interrogate structures of oppression through the acknowledgement of difference and the cultivation of empathy. Daniela presents an interesting narrative about situations she experienced at school due to her sexual identity, as well as being a victim of rejection because of her status as a non-migrant student.

The following table provides a synopsis of the qualitative findings, which are based on the narratives of four participants (Josué, Juan, Spencer, and Daniela). It is evident that the table under consideration here functions in a manner that facilitates the description of individual experiences, whilst simultaneously demonstrating common patterns and tensions that are pervasive in both the school experience and the teaching aspirations of the subjects in question.

Table 1.
Synthesis of emerging patterns in the school experience and the construction of teacher identity

Thematic axis	Josué	Juan	Spencer	Daniela
Discovery and acceptance of identity	Self-discovery mediated by the internet and early experiences.	Gradual acceptance during the pandemic; growing family recognition.	Introspection and later acceptance.	Self-identifies as a "bisexual woman" yet resists rigid labels; embraces gender fluidity.
Discrimination/stigmatization & institutional silence	Fear of rejection; homophobic remarks from teachers.	Bullying and offensive peer language; absence of inclusive policies.	Institutional invisibilization of the topic ("this is not discussed here").	School gender norms (uniform codes, expectations of "how girls should be") experienced as coercive; role pressures.
Self-protection/concealment	Selective silence in academic settings.	Modulates identity according to context.	Everyday self-censorship within teaching spaces.	Deploys status/class as a symbolic shield to reduce ridicule (performing "acceptable" masculinity/femininity).
Safe spaces and support networks	Empathic teachers and one supportive peer.	Counseling groups and supportive friendships.	Peer solidarity in the absence of institutional support.	Commits to building classrooms as spaces of freedom and understanding.
Resilience/personal growth	Re-signifies experiences as sources of learning.	Overcomes discrimination through authenticity.	Converts repression into pedagogical resistance.	Positions herself in resistance; sustains a fluid identity beyond the binary.
Relation to teaching/education	Envisions an empathic, inclusive teaching practice.	Contributes through respect and authenticity.	Conceives teaching as a political act of resistance.	As a (prospective) teacher, it makes identities visible and safeguards classroom climate.

Note. The thematic axes of identity, discrimination, self-care, support networks, resilience, and relationship with teaching facilitate a comparative analysis of how individuals navigate the construction of their identity, forms of violence and institutional silence, and strategies of resistance and pedagogical agency.




As illustrated in Table 2, thematic axes identified in the participants’ accounts are articulated with analytical definitions constructed from those axes, together with representative fragments of the narratives and the theoretical frameworks that underpin them. This organization demonstrates, in an integrated manner, how individual experiences of identity, discrimination, self-care, support, resilience, and intersectionality are not isolated events, but social phenomena that can be explained by critical theories of gender, power, and education.

Table 2
Thematic analysis matrix of participants’ narratives

Category	Conceptual Definition	Narrary Evidence (Representative Excerpt)	Main Theoretical Reference
1. Discovery and Acceptance of Sexual Identity	An introspective and relational process through which individuals recognize and legitimize their sexual orientation, negotiating tensions between self-awareness and social norms.	“I discovered my sexual orientation during adolescence... since then, I began to realize that I was also attracted to boys.” (Josué). Daniela described her identity as fluid and resisted rigid labels, stating that her experience could not be reduced to fixed categories.	Butler (1990): Gender Trouble. Sexual identity is a performative practice constructed through discourse and social interaction.
2. Discrimination and Institutional Silence	A set of symbolic, discursive, and structural practices that reproduce the exclusion of non-heteronormative identities within the educational environment.	“At school, they called me ‘girl’ or ‘fag-got’; teachers did not intervene, and the topic was never discussed.” (Juan)	Foucault (1978): The History of Sexuality. Power operates through discourse, regulating what can or cannot be said.
3. Self-Protection and Identity Concealment	A psychological and social defense strategy used by individuals to preserve their emotional integrity in hostile or discriminatory contexts.	“I prefer not to talk openly about my orientation in academic spaces... that way I feel safer.” (Josué)	Butler (2004); Sedgwick (1990). Visibility and silence operate as identity negotiation practices within the heteronormative regime.
4. Safe Spaces and Support Networks	Interpersonal or institutional environments provide recognition, empathy, and support, allowing free expression and emotional containment.	“I found people and safe spaces... classmates and teachers who supported me and made me feel accepted.” (Juan, Spencer). Daniela also emphasized the importance of creating educational environments where students can express their identities freely and feel understood, reinforcing the role of safe spaces in fostering well-being and inclusion.	Meyer (2010); Kosciw et al. (2018). Inclusive environments and adult allies reduce minority stress and promote student well-being.
5. Identity Resilience and Pedagogical Projection	The ability to transform experiences of exclusion into personal strength, social agency, and an educational commitment to inclusion.	“Being LGBTI within the educational space is an act of resistance... it motivates me to be a different kind of teacher.” (Spencer)	Freire (1970): Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Liberating education transforms lived pain into critical awareness and transformative praxis.
6. Intersectionality (Social Class and Migration as Modulators)	Social position and migratory status mediate visibility, exposure to violence, and protective tactics; class may operate as a “symbolic shield.”	References to migration and privilege/status shaping exposure to critique and strategies of self-protection. (Daniela)	Crenshaw (1989; 1991). Intersectionality explains how overlapping social positions (e.g., gender, sexuality, class, migration) produce interdependent systems of privilege and disadvantages that shape lived experience.

The integration of the four cases reveals a cross-cutting theme: the coexistence of institutional silence and identity resilience. In the extant literature, educational institutions are depicted as settings in which sexual diversity is rendered invisible or superficially tolerated, but also as spaces in which individuals learn to resist, adapt and construct meaning. It is evident that the analysis of categories enables a comprehensive understanding of the LGBTIQ+ experience. This experience is not merely

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characterized by a narrative of vulnerability; it is also understood as a narrative of formation, growth and social agency.

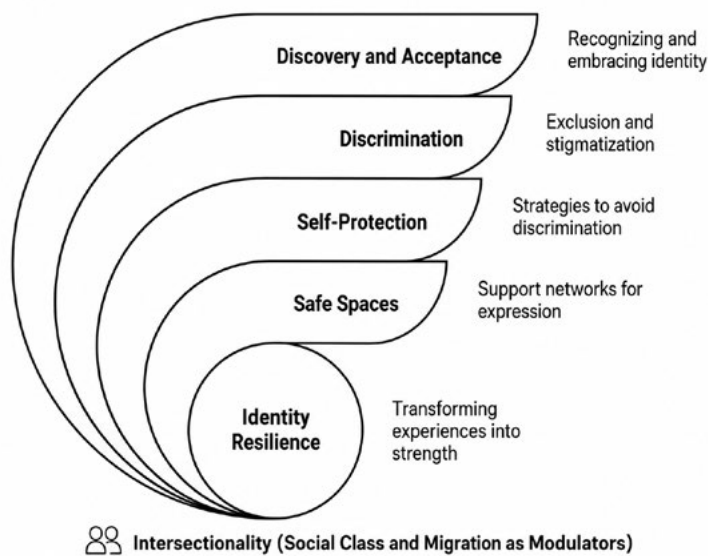
These findings are consistent with recent research suggesting that the visibility of LGBTQ+ teachers should not be viewed from perspectives center of vulnerability or deficit, but rather as a source of professional strength and pedagogical transformation, since the presence of teachers belonging to this community could challenge heteronormative discourses, contribute to the creation of more inclusive environments and foster relationship based on respect, empathy and recognition of diversity (Brett, 2024). In the same way, Llewellyn (2023) affirms that LGB teachers themselves could become an important pedagogical resource able to offer authentic support based on their lived experience and legitimized knowledge, they also could be exceptional school leaders to mitigate stigmatization (Lee, 2020).

Categorical analysis of narratives

As illustrated in Figure 1, the findings constitute a layered model: The following five factors must be considered when analyzing the issue:

The process of discovery and acceptance of identity; the experiences of discrimination and silencing; the adoption of visibility management as a method of self-protection; the establishment of safe spaces and support networks that cushion minority stress; the concept of identity resilience, understood as the transformation of experience into strength and pedagogical projection; intersectionality (i.e. the interaction between social class and migration) cuts across all layers, modulating exposure to risk and access to support. The present framework provides a theoretical underpinning to the discussion, elucidating the rationale behind the assertion that trajectories which appear similar may nevertheless yield divergent outcomes with respect to agency and teaching commitment.

Figure 1.
Sexual identity journey



1. Discovery and acceptance of sexual identity

This category refers to the process by which participants recognize, explore and accept their sexual

orientation as a constituent part of their personal and social identity. In all four cases, this discovery occurs in the early stages of life, primarily during adolescence, when feelings of attraction towards people of the same sex emerge and an incipient reflection on difference begins. This process is influenced by a combination of internal factors, including curiosity, self-observation, and the need for authenticity, as well as external factors such as social and religious norms. In heteronormative contexts, these external factors can act as impediments to full self-acceptance. In Butler's (1990) theory of performativity, sexual identity is not considered to be a fixed trait; rather, it is a practice that is continuously constructed and re-signified in interaction with the environment. In this sense, the act of discovery can be conceptualized as an act of symbolic resistance against the structures that seek to normalize desire and the body. In Daniela's case, this process was expressed through a fluid understanding of identity. Daniela described her identity as fluid and resisted rigid labels, stating that her experience could not be reduced to fixed categories.

2. Discrimination and institutional silence

The second category pertains to the experiences of exclusion, stigmatization and symbolic violence that participants encounter within educational spaces. Discrimination manifests itself in two distinct ways. Firstly, there is the attitudes of peers towards individuals who are perceived to be different, which can take the form of bullying, mockery or homophobic language. Secondly, there is institutional silence, understood as the absence of inclusive policies, care protocols or teacher training in diversity. This silence, therefore, cannot be assumed to indicate neutrality; rather, it constitutes a form of power that renders difference invisible and reproduces hierarchies of legitimacy. This argument is in line with that of Foucault (1978), who argued for the disciplinary nature of discourse. Consequently, the educational institution is structured as a social control apparatus, wherein the absence of recognition for diversity serves to perpetuate established norms. This category underscores the pressing necessity for educational policies that unequivocally acknowledge sexual and gender plurality as an integral component of citizenship and human rights.

3. Self-protection and concealment of identity

The third category emerges in response to dynamics of exclusion and is expressed in individual strategies of self-care, silence, or concealment. In academic spaces, participants have been observed to engage in the partial or complete concealment of their sexual orientation, a strategy employed to evade potential rejection or stigmatization. This behavior, although it can be interpreted as a form of submission, also represents a strategy of agency within oppressive contexts. In the context of Butler's (2004) and Sedgwick's (1990) theoretical frameworks, the concept of identity is understood to be in a constant state of negotiation, characterized by the dynamics of risk and safety. The metaphorical utilization of the 'closet' serves to illustrate the inherent tension between visibility and survival, which is a fundamental aspect of the identity construction process. Concealment should therefore not be understood as a lack of authenticity, but rather as an adaptive mechanism that allows individuals to preserve their emotional integrity while gradually developing safer forms of self-affirmation.

4. Safe spaces and support networks

This category pertains to the significance attributed to the establishment of emotional bonds, the cultivation of friendships, and the formation of relationships characterized by trust, which participants undergo within or outside the educational institution. Safe spaces are defined as environments, whether formal or informal, where students can express themselves without fear of discrimination, finding recognition, support, and empathy. In the accounts analyzed, these spaces are typically characterized



as small groups of friends or empathetic teachers who promote respect and openness. The provision of such support networks has been demonstrated to play a protective role against experiences of exclusion, thereby contributing to emotional well-being and a sense of belonging. It is evident from the works of Meyer (2010) and Kosciw et al. (2018) that the presence of inclusive school climates and supportive adult figures is a pivotal factor in mitigating the impact of minority stress and promoting the positive development of LGBTIQ+ youth. This category underscores the significance of institutional support as a pivotal element in the pursuit of educational inclusion.

5. Identity resilience and educational projection

The category of identity resilience is defined by the ability of participants to transform experiences of discrimination into learning, strength, and ethical commitment. Resilience is not merely a matter of resisting harm; rather, it encompasses the process of transforming adverse experiences into catalysts for personal and professional development. In this process, students adopt their identity as a central component of their prospective teaching performance, thereby projecting values of empathy, respect, and diversity. From Freire's standpoint (1970), this reinterpretation of pain in pedagogical practice signifies a liberating act, insofar as it transforms personal experience into critical awareness and commitment to social transformation. In this manner, resilience is manifested not only as a mechanism for emotional survival, but also as an ethical principle that guides educational action towards justice, inclusion and gender equality.

6. Intersectionality (Social Class and Migration as Modulators)

Daniela's narrative exemplifies how the gender experience at school is co-determined by migrant status and class status/privilege, which modulate visibility, exposure to stigma, and self-protection repertoires. She explicitly presents herself as a migrant and explains that her "place of privilege" and certain status allow her to "climb a couple of steps where criticism cannot reach me," thus using symbolic and material capital as a "shield" to manage the public exposure of her identity. This reading is consistent with the article's framework on institutional silence/invisibility as a form of power/discourse that regulates what can be said and seen in school, which conditions strategies of (in)visibility and agency in non-normative subjects.

In terms of implications, the intersection of migration and class complicates previous categories such as self-protection and safe spaces: it is not just a matter of "saying or hiding," but of who can choose contexts of lesser exposure and what support they must sustain their identity. This underscores the necessity for situated policies that foster inclusive school climates and the role of adult allies, aspects that the manuscript's own discussion links to the reduction of minority stress and student well-being (Kosciw et al., 2018; Meyer, 2010). This perspective is integrated with the notion of resilience/pedagogical praxis as a transition from the experience of exclusion to transformative educational engagement, in line with Freire. Moreover, the dynamics of discrimination must be understood from situated experiences, not just as indicators reinforcing the relevance of incorporating intersectionality into the results.

The narratives converge on a shared sequential pattern: discovery/acceptance, discrimination and silence, self-protection, the search for safe spaces, and finally, identity resilience, which is consistently observed in Table 1 and summarized in Figure 1. This pattern demonstrates that identity is not experienced as a fixed state, but rather as a relational process shaped by norms, recognition, and power. Across the four narratives, identity emerged as a relational and evolving process shaped by recognition, institutional practices, and personal agency. Table 2 also shows that each thematic axis is supported by



robust conceptual frameworks (gender performativity, power structures, minority stress, intersectionality, and critical pedagogy), which helps explain why similar experiences lead to distinct subjective trajectories.

The differences lie in the biographical triggers (e.g., the internet, the pandemic, family recognition), in the type of violence (ranging from direct insults to institutional invisibility), and in the tactics used to manage visibility (selective silence, daily self-censorship, symbolic “shields”). The pedagogical approach also varies while everyone agrees on inclusion, some frame it as an explicit political act, while others express it as an ethic of care and respect. Finally, intersectionality (class and migration) acts as a cross-cutting modulator, conditioning exposure to risk, access to support, and the speed of transition toward resilience. In short, the findings reveal a single map with unique paths; and suggest that university policies must move beyond declarative “non-discrimination” to curricular and support designs that reduce minority stress and enable inclusive teaching practices from initial teacher training onward.

Inter-narrative triangulation

To strengthen the credibility and interpretative consistency of the study, we applied an inter-narrative triangulation process (Denzin, 1978), comparing the emerging categories systematically across each case. This technique enabled us to identify similarities, differences and cross-cutting patterns in the accounts of Josué, Juan and Spencer. This led to the construction of integrative, higher-level analytical categories. From a qualitative perspective, triangulation does not seek statistical validation but rather aims to achieve a deeper understanding of the phenomenon by contrasting multiple perspectives (Patton, 2015). The triangulated analysis yielded three broad integrating categories: institutionalized silence, self-protection and identity resistance, and pedagogical resilience.

Institutionalized silence: it was a constant feature in all four narratives. Participants perceive that educational institutions avoid, or suppress topics related to sexual diversity. This institutional omission serves to reinforce the notion that power is exerted through discourse, as proposed by Foucault (1978), who posits that what is not expressed also constitutes a form of control. In this sense, the invisibility of diversity can be considered a mechanism for the normalization and disciplining of identities.

Self-protection and identity resistance: it is configured as a subjective response to exclusion. Participants adopt strategies of silence, self-censorship, or discursive selectivity as means of emotional survival within hostile contexts. However, this very strategy is transformed into an exercise in symbolic resistance, whereby subjects claim agency over their personal narrative by determining the timing and way they disclose their identity. This phenomenon aligns with Butler’s (1990) theoretical propositions, in which the concept of identity is theorized as a performative praxis that challenges prevailing norms while simultaneously reproducing them.

Pedagogical resilience: this category represents the deepest level of triangulation, in which personal experience translates into educational commitment and social transformation. Drawing upon their experiential knowledge, the four participants have conceptualized their identity as a pedagogical resource, with the objective of cultivating empathy, inclusion, and respect in their future teaching practice. From Freire’s standpoint (1970), this conversion of pain into a liberating praxis signifies a shift from individual suffering to collective critical consciousness, wherein education is recognized as an act of emancipation.



When considered collectively, the triangulation reveals that the four narratives are characterized by a shared logic of resistance within a framework of exclusion. Notwithstanding the absence of inclusive policies, the subjects establish their own spaces characterized by safety, affection and learning. It is important to note that experiences of discrimination do not destroy an individual's identity; rather, they serve to consolidate it as a source of strength. Triangulation of findings serves to corroborate individual results, whilst simultaneously broadening the understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. This is achieved by revealing that resilience and resistance are not isolated responses, but structural dimensions of the formative process of LGBTIQ+ pre-service language teachers in higher education.

This triangulation process enabled the consolidation of an interpretative model in which sexual diversity is understood as a source of educational agency and ethical care. The integrative categories proffered herein offer a complex and humanizing perspective on the LGBTIQ+ experience, demonstrating how individual narratives can be articulated into a collective account of pedagogical transformation. In accordance with the interpretative paradigm, the analysis does not seek to generalize the results, but rather to deepen the understanding of the meanings that subjects attribute to their educational trajectory within a social context that still stresses difference and inclusion.

6. DISCUSSION

A systematic review of previous studies identified the following as the main factors affecting the well-being and acceptance of LGBTIQ+ pre-service language teachers in educational settings: institutional discrimination; social and religious prejudices; absence of inclusive policies; lack of teacher training; and resilience in the face of adversity. A comparison of these findings with the empirical results of this narrative research reveals substantial overlap in the structural categories, but with a key difference in the level of depth and contextualization. In the preceding studies reviewed, these factors were addressed from a macro and documentary perspective. In contrast, the narratives analyzed in this study offer an experiential, emotional and situated understanding of the impact that these dynamics have on students' daily lives. Consequently, discrimination can no longer be regarded as a statistical indicator; rather, it becomes a personal experience of exclusion, silence and identity reconstruction.

One of the most notable points of convergence is the presence of institutional silence as a mechanism of symbolic control. In the extant literature, authors such as Cuéllar and Rivera (2016) have highlighted the lack of regulatory frameworks and institutional omission as forms of structural discrimination. The narratives analyzed in this research corroborate this observation but also deepen it by demonstrating how silence is internalized by the subjects themselves, thereby engendering self-censorship and concealment strategies. This empirical finding introduces a psychological and pedagogical dimension that complements extant literature on the subject: students are not merely passive recipients of norms, but also agents who negotiate their visibility within the limitations imposed by institutions. In this manner, the qualitative data serves to enhance the theoretical outcomes by illuminating the subjectivity inherent in the processes of exclusion.

Another salient point of contrast relates to the figure of the teacher and the pedagogical role. In the preceding article, a few studies including those by Tiusaba Rivas (2023) and Cruz Rios (2026) indicated that a paucity of training and awareness among teachers functioned as a structural impediment to inclu-



sion. Whilst the prevailing discourse corroborates this deficit, it concomitantly proffers a more nuanced perspective, namely the presence of allied educators who function as conduits of respect and support. This finding indicates progression from the negative outlook described in the literature review, as it demonstrates the emergence of micro-spaces of resistance and care within the same institutional structures. Consequently, narrative research has the capacity to broaden our understanding of the role of teachers, shifting from a focus on their shortcomings to a view that recognizes their transformative potential.

A synthesis of the preceding studies reviewed, and the findings of this research reveals a conceptual evolution of the construct of resilience. In the studies analyzed, resilience was understood primarily as an individual ability to cope with rejection and discrimination (Koch et al., 2025). In contrast, the results of the present study redefine it as identity and pedagogical resilience, a collective and political process that transcends the emotional sphere to become educational praxis. Participants do not merely survive exclusion; they transform it into a professional commitment to inclusion, shaping their teaching identity based on the experience of difference. This reinterpretation of the concept makes an original theoretical contribution to the field of inclusive education, aligning with the vision of Freire (1970), who conceives of education as a practice of freedom and the construction of critical consciousness. Consequently, the present study not only corroborates earlier research but also enhances its findings by demonstrating how processes of resistance can evolve into sources of pedagogical knowledge and social transformation.

Previous studies point out religion as a factor that can affect the well-being of LGBTIQ+ youth in educational contexts. However, no references to religious influences were found in the narratives analyzed here. This absence may be due to the characteristics of the institutional context, the composition of the sample, or the focus of the interviews, and does not necessarily imply that the phenomenon does not exist. In the context of this study, religion was not a prominent theme for the participants. It is recommended that future research explicitly explore this dimension to clarify its scope and contextual variability.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this research indicate that the experiences of LGBTIQ+ pre-service language teachers in teacher training programs are characterized by a persistent tension between institutional exclusion and identity resistance. The narratives analyzed demonstrate that educational institutions persist in reproducing heteronormative discourses, which are expressed through omission, silence and a lack of inclusive policies. However, these same institutions are also settings where supportive bonds, safe spaces, and forms of pedagogical agency emerge. Participants find themselves navigating a delicate balance between the fear of judgement and the pursuit of authenticity, reframing their experiences as opportunities for personal and professional growth. In this sense, diversity is not merely presented as a condition of vulnerability, but as a field of possibility and ethical construction within teacher training. The experiences of the four participants revealed that identity formation, discrimination, self-protection strategies, support networks, resilience, and intersectional factors are interconnected dimensions shaping the educational trajectories of LGBTIQ+ pre-service language teachers in teacher education programs.

The findings regarding safe spaces and support networks partially contrast with research that describes schools and educational institutions as unsafe environments for many LGBTIQ+ teachers and stu-



dents. Some studies indicate that constant exposure to heteronormative discourse and experiences of exclusion can lead to the internalization of feelings of marginalization, fostering a deficit-based view of themselves and their place within the educational institution (Brett et al., 2024). From this perspective, individuals may come to perceive themselves as problematic or out of place within school contexts that prioritize normative identities. However, the narratives analyzed in this study show that, even in contexts where forms of discrimination and invisibilization persist, the presence of meaningful friendships, allied teachers, and support networks fosters processes of recognition, emotional well-being, and the positive construction of professional identity.

The voices of the participants articulate the concepts of gender performativity, discursive regulation of power and the liberating praxis of education, resisting and transforming the structures that seek to silence them. The research demonstrates that sexual and gender identity is a dynamic practice, negotiated in language and experience, and that its recognition in the educational sphere cannot be reduced to tolerance, but must be inscribed in an ethic of recognition and social justice. The present study contributes to the consolidation of a critical and queer pedagogy in Latin American contexts by demonstrating how personal narratives become spaces for epistemological and political reflection.

From a pedagogical perspective, research underscores the pressing necessity to re-evaluate pedagogical practices and institutional frameworks from an inclusive standpoint. Despite the existence of regulatory frameworks designed to oversee the education system and evaluate its quality from preschool to high school, there remains a paucity of regulatory mechanisms to assess the manner in which institutions of learning are accessed and the extent to which they cater to the needs of the population. It is imperative that teacher training explicitly integrates reflection on sexual and gender diversity, not as a complementary topic, but as a cross-cutting theme in educational practice. In a similar vein, it is imperative to emphasize the necessity of fortifying the socio-emotional competencies of prospective educators. The role of educators as mediators of respect, empathy and equity is of paramount importance. The participants' experience demonstrates that inclusive education is not solely contingent on institutional regulations but is also influenced by the ethical and pedagogical attitudes of those who occupy the classroom. In this sense, the act of teaching is configured as a political act of transformation, where the visibility of diversity contributes to the building of more democratic and supportive communities.

This research consequently poses the question of the necessity to transition towards comprehensive educational policies that acknowledge and safeguard diversity at all levels of education. The life stories analyzed in this study invite us to rethink higher education not only as a space for the transmission of knowledge, but also as a territory of mutual recognition and symbolic reparation. It is recommended that future studies consider the potential for expansion of this line of research. Such expansion could take the form of further exploration of the experience of practicing teachers or the impact of institutional discourses on everyday teaching practice. The findings, when considered collectively, demonstrate that the realization of inclusive environments is not solely contingent upon the presence of diverse individuals within educational institutions. Rather, it is an outcome that is contingent upon a collective commitment to ensuring the dignity, voice, and visibility of all the identities present within these spaces.

Based on the perspectives and findings of this study, researchers firmly believe that educational institutions can choose to increase the visibility of LGBTIQ+ teachers rather than perpetuate heteronormative discourses that lead to exclusion. Instead, they should draw on the life experiences and perspectives of these teachers to foster more equitable school environments where an increasing number of LGB-



TIQ+ students are coming together, seeking to be understood and represented. According to Betancourt (2023), undergraduate EFL teaching programs in Colombia promote professional profiles characterized for the development of pedagogical, research, intercultural and human competencies aimed at responding to the demands of an increasing diverse society. However, findings of this research suggest the need to strengthen the preparation of future teachers in aspects related to sexual and gender diversity, so that the principles of inclusion and recognition of difference transcend the curricular discourse and are reflected in the formative experiences of students.

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Conflicts of interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest related to the conduct, analysis, or publication of this research. The study was carried out independently and solely for academic purposes, without any financial, institutional, or personal influence that could have affected its outcomes or interpretations.



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