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# TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND CHALLENGES IN SUPPORTING LGBTQI LEARNERS IN RURAL SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the perceptions and challenges faced by secondary school teachers in supporting LGBTQI learners within the Nongoma Circuit in South Africa. Adopting a phenomenological approach, the research aims to uncover nuanced understandings and lived experiences of teachers regarding LGBTQI learners. The study employs a qualitative methodology, utilizing purposive sampling to select five Life Orientation teachers for in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis reveals varied attitudes among teachers, ranging from supportive to biased, highlighting significant disparities in acceptance and understanding. Key findings indicate that while some teachers recognize the importance of fostering an inclusive environment, others perpetuate misconceptions and biases, contributing to an unwelcoming school atmosphere for LGBTQI learners. The study underscores the urgent need for comprehensive training programmes and policy reforms to equip teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to support LGBTQI learners effectively. Enhanced teacher training on LGBTQI issues, along with a review of school policies, is recommended to promote inclusivity and safeguard the well-being of all learners. These findings are crucial for teachers, policymakers, and stakeholders in developing strategies to create a more supportive and inclusive educational environment in rural areas. The research contributes to the broader discourse on educational equity and the role of teachers in fostering a safe and inclusive learning environment for marginalized groups.

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## **Introduction.**

Various social, cultural, and legal changes have sharpened the global awareness on LGBTQI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex) people. Especially, the worldwide increase in bullying this group experiences has attracted a lot of interest. Due in great part to disproportionately high rates of prejudice towards LGBTQI learners in high school settings, their mental health and educational participation is affected (Edwards & Watson, 2020). Research shows the difficulties LGBTQI learners experience, especially in physical education courses where gender expectations are mostly homogeneous (Berg & Kokkonen, 2021). LGBTQI concerns being included into academic debate will help to define a pleasant and inclusive learning environment; this is becoming more and more clear (Msibi, 2012). Analysing non-traditional sexual and gender roles in classroom environments, however, could question current power relations and create moral questions (Piper & Sikes, 2010; Grey, 2010; Rudoe, 2010). These difficulties are highlighted in areas where strongly anchored religious and cultural traditions might not be in line with diversity in sexual orientation and gender identity. This study aims to find how Nongoma secondary school teachers see LGBTQI learners. This is an important project particularly in South Africa since the national need calls for putting ideas and initiatives to solve problems into reality (Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, 2011).

Teachers have to find a balance between personal values and building a school environment that protects learner welfare while being limited by educational requirements (Department for Education, 2013). Still, schools sometimes uphold firmly ingrained gender stereotypes that encourage power disparities (Grey, 2010). Furthermore, most agree that teachers contribute to the spread of the mistaken perception that homosexuality is contagious, which makes straight learners seem as "at risk" from LGBTQI friends (Msibi, 2012). This false view emphasises the need of thorough teacher preparation programmes addressing these preconceptions and arming teachers with the tools to construct inclusive classrooms (Kolbert et al., 2015). Studies underlining the crucial part individuals play in learning environments reveal that the academic performance of LGBTQI learners is much influenced by close learner-teacher connections (Swanson & Gettinger, 2016). As Scandurra et al. (2017) stress, teachers are vital change agents against LGBTQI stigmatising and offer every learner fair educational possibilities. Dealing with school social workers and young people will help teachers create plans to combat LGBTQI prejudice and bullying (Dessel et al., 2017). Still, there is little scholarly study on how teachers handle homophobia – especially in rural areas like the Nongoma Circuit.

Among their several obligations are first great education, daily school management (Berger, 2015), and continuous development by means of efficient role management and regular training (Scandurra et al., 2017). Good teaching goes beyond basic topic knowledge since it shapes attitudes and motivates learner involvement. Effective teachers share in common preparation, well stated standards, a positive attitude, patience, and frequent evaluation of their teaching strategies (Hopkins, 2020). These traits are fundamental in letting every learner—including LGBTQI learners—to have a rich learning environment. The study aims to find out how LGBTQI learners on the Nongoma Circuit are seen by teachers. While looking at the dynamics of their interactions with LGBTQI learners, the project intends to investigate teachers' attitudes and perspectives about this group. Given the worldwide and national calls for inclusive education that celebrates variety, this study is vital and important (UNESCO, 2016). It also respects equality and non-discrimination stated in the Constitution by following South Africa's progressive legal system (Republic of South Africa, 1996).

This study discovers a valuable framework in the social constructionist theory, which critically assesses how society norms and values shape human perceptions and behaviours (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Particularly for this theoretical viewpoint, understanding how broader cultural, social, and institutional elements affect teachers' opinions about LGBTQI learners calls especially for According to social constructionism, people's upbringing shapes their view of others and themselves hence reality is created by society (Friedman, 2016). One cannot overstate the degree of teachers' impact on school surroundings and creation of inclusive settings. Research on inclusive school environments—where diversity is acknowledged and every learner feels appreciated—have showed how much academic performance and general well-being of LGBTQI learners depend on these conditions (Kosciw et al., 2018). Reaching such ideals, however, calls for intentional efforts to remove homophobia and advance acceptance of many sexual orientations and gender identities (Francis, 2017). This study intends to

assist this initiative by offering analysis of teachers' opinions and strategies for efficiently helping LGBTQI learners.

This poll aims to establish generally how secondary school teachers of Nongoma Circuit view LGBTQI learners. With a phenomenological approach, the study intends to expose the numerous impressions of teachers' encounters with LGBTQI learners and living experiences. The results will significantly influence policy and practice since they underline the importance of thorough teacher training and support systems to create inclusive and inspiring learning environments. By means of this study, we seek to contribute to the continuous conversation on educational fairness and the indispensable support of teachers in fostering inclusion and appreciation of variation in learning environments.

### **Literature Review.**

The worldwide educational scene is understanding more and more the importance of supporting LGBTQI learners and the need of knowing the special challenges they face in classroom environments. According to 2020 studies by Edwards and Watson, LGBTQI learners who experience more bullying and discrimination suffer in their mental health and academic performance compared to their straight peers. Because of engrained gender stereotypes and homonormative expectations, physical education classes in particular – according to Berg and Kokkonen (2021) – are hotspots for such bias. These findings emphasise how urgently educational initiatives aiming at these disparities should take place. Moreover, covered by Msibi (2012) is how educational discourse influences experiences of LGBTQI learners. He underlines how crucial talks on LGBTQI rights and inclusion are in enabling a welcoming classroom and therefore countering the negative consequences of bullying. This is in line with the findings of Piper and Sikes (2010), Grey (2010), and Rudoe (2010), who look at how challenging accepted sexual and gender roles in the classroom could raise moral concerns and throw off the present power dynamics. These studies highlight the need of a sophisticated grasp of how educational policy could either encourage or fight discrimination.

Even further the necessity of inclusive education policy is shown by the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development (2011), which demands the use of measures to solve discrimination against LGBTQI learners in South Africa. Though its own views, the Department of Education (2013) also emphasises the function teachers play in establishing a school environment that provides learner well-being top attention. This is very essential in cases whereby schools could unintentionally encourage gender stereotypes and power imbalances ( Grey, 2010). Kolbert et al. (2015) call attention to how supportive school staff members are in reducing bullying occurrence aimed at LGBTQI learners. Their research show that when teachers feel their colleagues treat every learner – regardless of sexual orientation – bullying clearly decreases. This conclusion is confirmed by Aguirre et al. (2020), who stress the requirement of teacher training with a queer perspective to create inclusive learning environments. Such training helps teachers to identify and support the several needs of LGBTQI learners.

Since they argue that good learner-teacher relationships significantly influence the academic success of LGBTQI learners, Swanson and Gettinger (2016) underline the significance of teachers as main change agents in fostering LGBTQI inclusivity. Good classroom environments and lessening of the negative effects of discrimination depend on sympathetic and motivating teachers. Teachers, along with young people and school social workers, Scandurra et al. (2017) stress even more how they may collaborate to design interventions that successfully tackle LGBTQI discrimination and bullying. Although LGBTQI-inclusive education is growing in significance, limited research on teachers' attitudes and perspectives towards LGBTQI learners – particularly in far-off places like the Nongoma Circuit – is accessible. Beyond merely delivering course materials, teachers' duties include managing school dynamics and motivating learner participation, notes Berger (2015). Good teachers share in preparedness, well defined criteria, a positive attitude, patience, and consistent evaluation of their instructional practices (Hopkins, 2020). Every learner needs these qualities exactly to create a friendly and motivating learning environment.

The theoretical framework of social constructionism developed by Berger and Luckmann (1966) provides a useful prism through which one may see teachers' impressions of LGBTQI learners. This perspective holds that people's impressions are shaped by their social and cultural environment; reality is thus socially produced. Friedman (2016) argues that social constructionism is particularly

relevant for examining how teachers view LGBTQI learners depending on society values and expectations.

Inclusive learning environments in which diversity is acknowledged and every learner feels valued greatly improve the academic performance and general well-being of LGBTQI learners (Kosciw et al., 2018). Reaching such values, however, requires deliberate attempts to eradicate homophobia and promote acceptance of different sexual orientations and gender identities (Francis, 2017). This study aims to support this movement by providing analysis of teachers' viewpoints and ideas for effectively supporting LGBTQI learners. At last, the corpus of studies underlines how crucial teachers are in building inclusive classrooms for LGBTQI children. It underlines the importance of extensive teacher preparation, supporting school policies, and the need of lifelong learning to grasp and overcome the special challenges faced by LGBTQI people. By examining teachers' views and attitudes towards LGBTQI learners in the Nongoma Circuit, this study aims to contribute to the more general debate on educational justice and the development of tolerance in schools.

### **Theoretical Framework.**

The theoretical basis for this work comes from social constructionism, a theory that examines the ways in which individuals build, institutionalise, and pass social events into tradition. Advocates of this idea, Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue that interactions inside their social environments allow individuals and groups to actively shape their impressions and interpretations of the world, hence forming society. Using this approach, analysing teachers' perspectives on LGBTQI learners is extremely important since institutional policies, cultural attitudes, and society expectations all significantly influence these impressions. According to social constructionism, social events create knowledge and meaning instead of they are natural. This point of view allows one to look at how teachers' perspectives on LGBTQI learners are shaped and supported by the cultural norms, society expectations, and educational surroundings. Burr (2015) emphasises that a knowledge of these socially produced realities is necessary to solve issues of discrimination and prejudice in educational surroundings.

A basic concept of social constructionism is the view of language as a tool for creating reality. Language is basic in shaping our perspective of the world and in conveying our common values and ideas, claims Berger and Luckmann (1966). Within the framework of this research, language is vitally crucial for how teachers handle and see LGBTQI issues as well as for how they show their ideas and values to their learners. Teachers' language decisions can either promote acceptance and tolerance or fuel stereotypes and prejudice. A further essential component of social constructionism is the idea that social institutions including schools mostly help to sustain and legitimise specific realities. Schools are rather crucial as social entities in disseminating cultural values and standards. using means of his work, Foucault (1978) highlights how institutions could accentuate power relations and control using linguistic means. Analysing institutional policies and practices pertaining to LGBTQI learners in this study could enable one to grasp how these realities are generated and maintained inside the classroom.

Moreover, emphasised by social constructionism is the role social interactions contribute to shape impressions and personal identities. Mead (1934) argues that social context creates interactions with people who enable one to grow personally. Teachers contribute to build the reality about LGBTQI issues by means of their daily interactions with colleagues, learners, and the wider community. Understanding these encounters can help one to develop plans to offset negative perceptions and forward a more inclusive environment. The theory also tackles how society power structures shape the way reality is generated. Butler (1990) contends that through continuous social events, gender and sexuality are enacted and reinforced instead of being fixed categories. This perspective helps one to understand how heteronormativity is maintained in schools and how it affects LGBTQI persons. By means of analysis of the current power dynamics, this study can identify the basic mechanisms sustaining discrimination and prejudice.

Social constructionism helps one to examine critically how knowledge is produced and validated in educational settings. Often overlooked or contested in the classroom, awareness of LGBTQI issues reflects broader widespread social perceptions. This study aims to find how teachers' social environment impacts their knowledge and understanding of LGBTQI issues as well as how this knowledge shapes their interactions with their learners. Relevant for this research is also the concept of intersectionality, which examines how several social identities interact and generate unique



experiences of oppression and privilege. People experience many, overlapping kinds of discrimination depending on race, gender, sexuality, and other factors Crenshaw (1991) notes. By means of an intersectional lens, this study will enable one to have a more sophisticated awareness of how teachers' perspectives are shaped by their own crossing identities and how LGBTQI learners' experiences are formed by their many identities.

Social constructionism underlines reflexivity, that is, the ability to scrutinise one's own beliefs, attitudes, and actions. Teachers examining their own impressions of LGBTQI learners should thus consider how their social and cultural background impacts these concepts. Teachers should become more aware of their prejudices and more committed to promote diversity and equity in their classrooms by means of this reflexive approach. Conversely, social constructionism encourages social activity as method of transformation. Since community activity is socially produced, Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue that it can also serve to recreate reality. This paper aims to assist this process by highlighting strategies for teachers to challenge unfair policies and create a more friendly environment for LGBTQI learners. Knowing the social structure of teachers' perspectives of view allows this study to clarify how best to promote positive change in educational surroundings.

### **Methodology.**

The method applied in this study is meant to analyse in great detail how Nongoma Circuit secondary school teachers regard LGBTQI learners. A qualitative research approach was selected since it can provide complete understanding of social events and personal experiences (Creswell, 2013). This approach notably helps one to grasp the several and complex perspectives of teachers towards LGBTQI learners, which are shaped by their personal experiences, cultural surroundings, and social contacts. The paradigm of research guiding this study is interpretivism. Interpretivism underlines the significance of recognising the meanings and interpretations people attach to their experiences and social reality (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2015.). This paradigm allows one to analyse teachers' subjective impressions and the factors influencing them completely, so it matches this research. The study intends to reveal the underlying meanings and contextual variables impacting teachers' perceptions about LGBTQI learners by means of an interpretive framework.

Phenomenology is the selected approach of investigation. Phenomenology concentrates mostly on analysing and elucidating personal experiences (Van Manen, 1990). This design was chosen to mirror teachers' real encounters on the Nongoma Circuit with LGBTQI children. With regard for LGBTQI learners, the phenomenological technique enables the researcher to investigate the experiences of the participants, grasp their points of view, and identify the essence of these interactions.

The method this research uses is intentional sampling. Purposive sampling involves selecting participants most likely to provide rich, relevant data in line with the objectives of the research (Patton, 2015). Five Life Orientation teachers from Nongoma Circuit secondary schools were especially chosen for this study. These teachers were chosen because of their direct participation in courses on social issues and diversity, therefore situating them to provide insights on the points of view of LGBTQI learners. Semi-structured interviews directed data acquisition. Perfect for exploring participants' viewpoints and allowing freedom to examine relevant areas, semi-structured interviews let Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009 Designed as an interview guide with open-ended questions, it developed to assist in discussions concerning teachers' opinions of LGBTQI learners, their experiences, and the challenges they have establishing an inclusive atmosphere. The participants in face-to-face interviews can be more engaged and pick on nonverbal cues.

Applied in this work, the method of data analysis is theme analysis. Theme analysis is a methodical procedure used in qualitative data to identify, investigate, and record trends (themes) (Braun & Clarke, 2006.). The research consisted in six phases: familiarising with the data, developing first codes, looking for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and getting ready for the final report. This method was chosen for its flexibility and ability to present a rich, complete, and intelligent story of the acquired data. Ensuring the validity of the study was a main concern all through the research procedure. In qualitative research, trustworthiness comes from believability, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985.). Credibility was raised by member checking—that is, by presenting the preliminary findings to ensure the participants' points of view were fairly conveyed. By allowing readers choose whether the results would be useful in other

contexts, extensive explanations of the research environment and participants' experiences helped to solve transferability.

Through careful recording of the research process, dependability was reached such that, should so desired, other researchers might follow and replicate the study. Maintaining an audit log of all study activities and decisions aided to confirmability by ensuring that participant replies affected the outcomes instead of researcher bias or assumptions. Additionally done was peer debriefing to provide an objective assessment of the results and method of research. Researching this topic gave ethical concerns first importance. The relevant authorities gave ethical permission; informed permission was requested from each participant. Participants were assured anonymity and confidentiality; their participation was voluntary. They were cautioned of their right to stop the study at any point without worrying about consequences. These moral standards were followed to protect the rights of the volunteers and ensure the validity of the research.

All told, the method of this study was painstakingly designed to probe how Nongoma Circuit secondary school teachers saw LGBTQI learners. Using a phenomenological approach, interpretivism as the research paradigm, and phenomenological design, the study aimed to have complete knowledge of teachers' lived experiences. Purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis taken together provide a robust framework for examining this important issue in line with rigorous approaches to guarantee trustworthiness and ethical behaviour.

### **Findings.**

#### *Theme 1: Teachers' Understanding of Diversity.*

The findings revealed that teachers have a broad understanding of diversity, encompassing various social and ethnic backgrounds, and extending to include sexual orientation and gender identity. Participants consistently emphasized the importance of creating an inclusive environment that respects and celebrates differences. Teacher A noted, "Diversity means when you have a range of people with different racial or cultural backgrounds, and also different lifestyles," highlighting the multifaceted nature of diversity (Ajani, 2023). This aligns with existing literature which underscores the necessity of fostering inclusive educational settings that recognize and respect all forms of diversity (Banks, 2019).

Moreover, the teachers recognized the specific challenges LGBTQI learners face within the school environment. Teacher C mentioned, "Diversity in an LGBTQI learner means the right to an education that is free of violence and discrimination and that promotes human rights and fundamental freedoms." This perspective is supported by research indicating that LGBTQI learners often face significant barriers to achieving an equitable education, including higher rates of bullying and discrimination (Kosciw et al., 2018). By acknowledging these challenges, the teachers demonstrated an awareness of the need for targeted support to ensure the well-being and academic success of LGBTQI learners.

Furthermore, the teachers highlighted the role of education in promoting human rights and combating discrimination. Teacher D added, "Diversity is the realization and the understanding of individual differences not only based on gender, age, race, religion, and sexual orientation." This view is consistent with the principles outlined in the South African Constitution, which emphasizes the importance of equality and non-discrimination in all aspects of public life, including education (Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, 2011). The teachers' understanding of diversity reflects a commitment to these constitutional values and the promotion of an inclusive school culture.

#### *Theme 2: The Realities of Diversity in the Classroom.*

Teachers reported a variety of experiences related to managing diversity in the classroom. They frequently mentioned language barriers, different cultural backgrounds, and varying levels of academic preparedness as key aspects of diversity they encounter daily. Teacher D explained, "I face diversity in the classroom by creating an environment that values and supports the contribution of all learners. I usually give group activities to expose them to diverse perspectives." This approach aligns with the inclusive pedagogical strategies advocated by scholars like Gay (2018), who emphasize the importance of culturally responsive teaching to address the diverse needs of learners.

Participants also pointed out the importance of treating all learners equally, regardless of their background or identity. Teacher E stated, "I treat them all equally because they all come from different

backgrounds, and they have different attitudes. So, if I am the one who discriminates against them in the classroom, it will not be a good place for learners." This commitment to equity is crucial, as research indicates that teacher attitudes and behaviours significantly impact learner outcomes, particularly for marginalized groups (McGrath & Bergen, 2015). By fostering an equitable classroom environment, teachers can help mitigate the adverse effects of discrimination and bias.

Additionally, teachers emphasized the need for practical involvement and inclusivity in classroom activities. Teacher C highlighted, "This involves inclusivity where learners are practically involved in their learning regardless of their sexual orientation or identity. Every child deserves to go to school excited to learn without fear of bullying, violence, or discrimination." This sentiment echoes the findings of Kosciw et al. (2018), who stress the importance of creating safe and supportive learning environments for LGBTQI learners. Ensuring that all learners feel valued and included in the classroom is essential for their academic and personal development.

*Theme 3: LGBTQI in Schools.*

Teachers demonstrated varying levels of awareness and understanding of LGBTQI issues within the school context. While most participants could define the acronym LGBTQI and identify its relevance to their learners, there were discrepancies in their ability to recognize and support these learners effectively. Teacher B explained, "LGBTQI is Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex. I do have a lesbian learner in Grade 10A and also one lesbian learner in Grade 10B." This basic recognition is a critical first step, but it also highlights the need for more comprehensive training and support (Msibi, 2012).

The responses indicated a need for improved professional development to equip teachers with the skills and knowledge necessary to support LGBTQI learners. Teacher D mentioned, "There is this boy in Grade 9C who sits with girls and is friends with them. Every time he speaks, he uses his hands. He is better at verbal and gesture communication." Such observations suggest that teachers are aware of the presence of LGBTQI learners but may lack the training to understand and address their specific needs effectively. This aligns with findings from Kitchen and Bellini (2012), who advocate for more robust teacher education programmes focused on LGBTQI issues.

Moreover, the findings underscored the importance of school policies that explicitly support LGBTQI learners. Teacher A stated, "LGBTQI is defined as the grouping of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender, queer, and intersex. Yes, I do. I have only one lesbian in my classroom." Research indicates that inclusive school policies and practices are crucial for fostering a supportive environment for LGBTQI learners (Kosciw et al., 2018). By implementing comprehensive policies that address the needs of LGBTQI learners, schools can create safer and more inclusive educational spaces.

*Theme 4: Challenges Faced by LGBTQI Learners.*

Teachers identified several challenges that LGBTQI learners face within the school environment, including bullying, discrimination, and a lack of support. Teacher C highlighted, "LGBTQI learners should be free from violence that is based on sexual orientation and gender identity in education." This aligns with numerous studies showing that LGBTQI learners experience higher levels of harassment and violence compared to their heterosexual peers, which can significantly impact their academic performance and mental health (Russell et al., 2011).

Participants also noted the psychological impact of discrimination on LGBTQI learners. Teacher B observed, "Some LGBTQI learners suffer from depression and anxiety due to the constant bullying and discrimination they face." Research supports this, indicating that LGBTQI learners are at a higher risk of mental health issues due to the stress of discrimination and marginalization (Meyer, 2015). Addressing these mental health challenges is critical for ensuring the well-being and academic success of LGBTQI learners.

Furthermore, the lack of teacher training on LGBTQI issues emerged as a significant challenge. Teacher A remarked, "We need more training on how to handle LGBTQI issues in the classroom. Most of us are not equipped to deal with these situations." This sentiment is echoed in the literature, which underscores the need for comprehensive professional development programmes to prepare teachers to support LGBTQI learners effectively (Payne & Smith, 2011). Without adequate training, teachers may struggle to create inclusive environments and address the specific needs of LGBTQI learners.



*Theme 5: Recommendations for Supporting LGBTQI Learners.*

Teachers provided several recommendations for improving the support for LGBTQI learners in schools. One key suggestion was the need for ongoing professional development and training. Teacher D emphasized, "The Department of Basic Education should provide regular workshops and training sessions for teachers on LGBTQI issues." This recommendation is supported by research indicating that continuous professional development is essential for equipping teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to support LGBTQI learners (DePalma & Francis, 2014).

Another recommendation was the implementation of inclusive school policies. Teacher E suggested, "School policies should explicitly include LGBTQI learners and address issues like bullying and discrimination." Inclusive policies are critical for creating a supportive environment for LGBTQI learners, as they provide a framework for addressing discrimination and promoting equality (Kosciw et al., 2018). By adopting comprehensive policies, schools can ensure that all learners feel safe and supported.

Additionally, teachers highlighted the importance of fostering a school culture that values diversity and inclusion. Teacher C noted, "We need to create a school culture that values diversity and promotes inclusivity. This means celebrating differences and educating learners about the importance of respect and acceptance." This aligns with the findings of Verhoeven, Poorthuis, and Volman (2019), who emphasize the role of school culture in shaping learners' attitudes and behaviours. By promoting a culture of inclusion, schools can help reduce discrimination and create a more supportive environment for all learners.

**Discussion.**

This study aimed to find how secondary school teachers felt of LGBTQI learners on the Nongoma Circuit using social constructionist theory as its theoretical framework. Especially with relation to LGBTQI learners, the findings revealed a complex relationship among knowledge, challenges, and perspectives on diversity. The social constructionist theory—which claims that interactions and social processes generate reality—is one helpful prism through which to see these outcomes. From racial and cultural backgrounds to sexual orientation and gender identification, the teachers saw variance in a broad sense. This is in line with the perspective of knowledge and reality as developed by social interactions as up by Berger and Luckmann (1966). The way teachers define diversity reflects how more general society expectations and values impact their impressions. Although teachers saw the need of diversity, their ability to support LGBTQI learners differed significantly, implying a disparity between knowledge theory and real-world experience.

One of the main acknowledged challenges is the lack of enough professional development and training for teachers on LGBTQI issues. Teachers find it challenging to create inclusive environments and to support LGBTQI learners in this difference. According to the social constructionist theory, institutional frameworks and social interactions contribute to define the meaning and understanding of concepts such as diversity and inclusivity (Burr, 2015). The findings suggest that without sufficient training, teachers' manufactured reality can be limited, therefore compromising their capacity to fully satisfy the needs of LGBTQI learners. The study also showed how much the experiences of LGBTQI learners depend on school policies. Inclusive policies provide a framework for overcoming discrimination and promoting equality, so they define a helpful environment (Kosciw et al., 2018). Emphasising how institutional actions shape social reality, the social constructionist theory Inclusive policies help to create a school atmosphere that celebrates variety and inclusiveness; hence its presence or absence will significantly influence the opinions and behaviour of teachers towards LGBTQI learners.

Another crucial awareness came from the psychological consequences of discrimination on LGBTQI learners. Teachers observed among these learners that discrimination and bullying resulted in more degrees of depression and anxiety. This is in line with Meyer's (2015) minority stress theory, which holds that the extra stress impoverished people go through from prejudice and stigma can have detrimental impacts on mental health. The social constructionist perspective reveals how social interactions and society perceptions towards LGBTQI individuals help to develop these negative experiences. The study also underscored the significance of supporting diversity and inclusion in the classroom. Teachers stressed the need of actual involvement and diversity in classroom activities to ensure that every learner feels appreciated and participated. This outcome is consistent with the

social constructionist viewpoint according to which interactions and social surroundings greatly define people's identities and experiences (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). By fostering an inclusive culture, which so enhances their learning environment, schools can assist LGBTQI learners develop good identities.

Furthermore, emphasised in the results were the significance of extensive professional development programmes for teachers. If teachers are to give LGBTQI learners the knowledge and skills needed to adequately serve them, they must be always professional developers (Payne & Smith, 2011). Social constructionist theory holds that professional development can help teachers rebuild their reality, so enabling them to adopt more inclusive policies and attitudes towards LGBTQI learners. Moreover, underlining the importance of language in building social reality is the idea of social constructionism. The way teachers address and allude to LGBTQI issues can greatly affect their opinions and behaviour. Using inclusive language and vocabulary, for instance, can allow LGBTQI identities to be normalised by reducing stigma. Conversely, negative or excluding language could encourage discrimination and prejudice (Foucault, 1978). The findings suggest that encouraging inclusive language and discourse in classrooms could be a quite successful tool for generating a good surrounds for LGBTQI learners.

Policy and practice greatly depend on the findings of the study. Above important, school policies should explicitly assist LGBTQI learners and address issues including prejudice and bullying. This is in line with the social constructionist view held according to institutional policies and practices significantly shapes social reality. By putting inclusive policies into effect, schools can promote equality and reduce discrimination, therefore enhancing the surroundings.

At last, the data highlight the requirement of a team approach for supporting LGBTQI learners. Establishing a whole support system calls for including many stakeholders, including legislators, administrators, teachers, and the local community. Emphasising the role social interactions and cooperation play in producing shared reality, the social constructionist perspective sees By working together, stakeholders can create the learning environment that welcomes every learner, regardless of their gender identify or sexual orientation, more inclusive and motivating environment. At last, this study presents perceptive examination of teacher impressions of LGBTQI learners on the Nongoma Circuit. Analysing the outcomes via the prism of social constructionist theory highlights the challenge of understanding and supporting heterogeneity in learning surroundings. LGBTQI learners' educational possibilities will be considerably enhanced by addressing the discovered challenges and implementing the recommended solutions, therefore enabling a more inclusive and fair school environment.

### **Implications of the study.**

With a view towards establishing a more inclusive and motivating learning environment for LGBTQI learners, the results of this study have substantial repercussions for many stakeholders, including teachers, legislators, and school administrators. The results highlight the need of comprehensive professional development programmes for teachers, which are quite important for arming them with the tools and knowledge required to help LGBTQI learners in their successful support. Training courses should mostly focus on helping teachers to better understand LGBTQI identities, challenge their preconceptions, and provide achievable strategies for creating inclusive classrooms.

The report underlines for legislators the need of developing and putting inclusive educational policies firmly supporting LGBTQI learners. Such rules should address bullying and prejudice and thus ensure a safe and motivating environment for every learner. Policymakers should also ensure that these laws complement the constitutional values of South Africa and therefore support equality and non-discrimination. This alignment will help schools to fulfil their ethical and legal obligations to protect the rights of LGBTQI learners.

Policy execution primarily depends on school administrators to bring ideas to life. The poll suggests that school administrators should strongly promote respect of diversity and inclusivity inside their buildings. One can achieve this by means of regular training courses, seminars, and awareness campaigns aiming at a friendly school climate. Administrators should also ensure that specific rules address bullying and discrimination against LGBTQI learners as documented instances.

The outcome of the research also influences the curriculum and the teaching plans. If we are to create acceptance and understanding among all the children, LGBTQI issues must be taught in the curriculum. This integration should be done such that respect of cultural sensitivity is respected while keeping values of equality and non-discrimination intact. Teachers should be provided the tools and help they need to correctly introduce these topics into their courses.

The study underlines for parents and guardians the significance of building a friendly and motivating home. Parents should encourage open and respectful dialogues on diversity and LGBTQI issues for their children. Schools may help this by providing resources and organising parent seminars to improve knowledge and support of their LGBTQI learners.

Moreover, quite significant are non-governmental groups (NGRs) and community organisations. They can support educational institutions by means of knowledge, tools, and LGBTQI problem training. Working with educational institutions to suggest and implement projects fostering inclusivity and support for LGBTQI learners would help to create a more all-encompassing and motivating environment for these learners.

The report also supports greater investigation and gathering of information on the experiences of LGBTQI learners in many contexts. This knowledge helps one to grasp the specific challenges and needs of these children, hence guiding the development of targeted treatments and support networks. Researchers should focus on both quantitative and qualitative studies if they are to really comprehend the issues faced by LGBTQI learners.

At last, the study underlines the need of a coordinated plan involving all stakeholders — teachers, legislators, school administrators, parents, community organisations, and academics – to appropriately address the problems experienced by LGBTQI learners. Regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identification, together these participants can create an inclusive, motivating learning atmosphere suited for the academic performance and wellbeing of every learner. This combined effort will help to ensure the respect and preservation of rights and dignity belonging to LGBTQI learners.

### **Conclusion.**

This paper stresses the need of comprehensive measures to help LGBTQI learners in Nongoma Circuit secondary schools. Analysing teacher viewpoints reveals clear variations in understanding and support as well as both positive and negative attitudes towards LGBTQI learners. The outcomes call for inclusive laws, better teacher preparation, and a cooperative approach among teachers, legislators, and community organisations to produce an instructional environment that is both inclusive and appreciative of difference. Dealing with these challenges would allow LGBTQI learners to ensure their welfare and academic success, which finally helps to produce a more fair and equal educational system.

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