

JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS CROSS-DRESSING AND ITS INFLUENCE ON STUDENT TEACHER-RELATIONSHIP

Myra R. Gatchalian
Virgilio F. Kim

Graduate School, FEU Roosevelt, Cainta, Rizal, Philippines

Corresponding author's email: myragatchalian21@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the experiences, attitudes, and behaviors of Junior High School teachers at San Jose National High School, Rodriguez, Rizal, regarding student cross-dressing and its impact on teacher-student relationships. Employing a qualitative research design, the study explored how educators navigate the intersection of traditional policies and evolving gender expressions. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with eight purposively selected teachers and analyzed using thematic analysis. The results revealed that students primarily cross-dress in non-academic spaces perceived as safe for identity exploration, exhibiting a Confidence-Behavior cycle where acceptance fosters participation while judgment triggers defensiveness. Teacher reactions were characterized by a tension between personal beliefs and professional inclusivity, with many adopting an empathetic correction or motherly approach over punitive discipline. While cross-dressing shifts traditional classroom dynamics, the study found that relationships remain professional when anchored in mutual respect and friendly discipline. Furthermore, a significant policy-practice gap was identified between binary uniform codes and national gender-fair mandates. Triangulated with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and the Kapwa philosophy, the findings suggest that inclusive practices serve as micro-affirmations that promote student self-actualization and reduce absenteeism. The study concludes that professional development regarding gender diversity and the refinement of school dress codes are essential for enhancing teacher-student rapport and fostering a culture of respect within the school community.

Keywords: *Cross-dressing, Student-Teacher Relationship, Gender Inclusive Education, School Policy, Qualitative Thematic Analysis*

INTRODUCTION

The tradition of school uniforms in the Philippines, established in the early 1900s, was originally designed to promote equality, discipline, and a unified school identity. However, as societal attitudes toward personal expression and gender identity have evolved, modern classrooms now face a significant tension between these traditional

dress codes and the emergence of cross-dressing behaviors among students. For junior high school students, a pivotal period for identity development, the response of educators to such expressions is critical. Despite legislative advancements like the Safe Spaces Act (R.A. 11313) and DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2017, which mandate inclusive and protective environments regardless of gender expression, a persistent policy-practice gap remains at the local school level (Ramos & Santos, 2023). At San Jose National High School, while the institution aligns with national mandates, the daily reality is often shaped by traditional Filipino values and gender-normative dress codes that are used as a proxy for discipline.

A significant research gap exists regarding how localized cultural norms and implicit biases specifically influence teacher attitudes in peri-urban settings like Rodriguez, Rizal. While national policies promote inclusivity, there is limited empirical data on how these mandates are interpreted by teachers who are often caught between institutional rules and the “Kapwa” philosophy of pragmatic tolerance. This study addresses this gap by investigating the lived experiences and attitudes of junior high school teachers toward cross-dressing. By exploring these dynamics, the researchers of this study aim to propose the SAFE-SPACE Program, an innovation designed to foster an inclusive, equitable, and affirming learning atmosphere for every student.

This investigation is anchored in Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). As noted in the summary by McLeod (2023), this theory explains how individuals derive self-esteem from group memberships, helping to understand how the acceptance or rejection of gender expressions affects student belonging. This theory informs the study’s conceptual framework, which investigates the connection between the independent variable—teachers’ attitudes—and the dependent variable—the quality of the student-teacher relationship. This relationship is examined through demographic lenses such as age, gender, and religion, while also identifying the challenges and Friendly Discipline coping mechanisms employed by educators to manage diverse student populations. Ultimately, this model leads to the development of a targeted intervention program aimed at enhancing teacher preparedness and promoting the creation of more inclusive and accepting classroom environments.

Related Literature

Existing literature emphasized that teacher emotional support was foundational for student success and the cultivation of a secure, inclusive classroom environment (Wang, 2024). Research indicated that when students were permitted to dress in alignment with their gender identity, their cognitive load decreased, allowing mental energy to be redirected toward academic focus and creative problem-solving (Martinez & Zhao, 2022). However, educators often experienced discomfort due to unfamiliarity bias and a lack of gender-diversity training during their own professional preparation (O’Donnell, 2022). Studies by Ullman (2023) further supported this by demonstrating that a positive gender climate within the school directly correlates to improved student cognitive performance and overall academic engagement. Studies suggested that women or individuals who identified with feminine gender roles were generally more likely to approve of cross-gender behaviors compared to men (Gonzalez-Mendiondo & Moyano, 2023).

Furthermore, the enforcement of rigid, gendered dress codes was linked to increased feelings of alienation, anxiety, and distress among LGBTQIA+ youth (Lara, 2024; Barbosa, 2024). The presence of supportive teachers acted as a vital buffer against these negative outcomes, fostering a stronger sense of belonging and reducing absenteeism (Wang, 2024). In the Philippine context, teachers often navigated a complex landscape where national mandates for inclusivity, such as those from the Department of Education (2017), met traditional cultural values, requiring educators to employ Friendly Discipline or pragmatic tolerance (Ramos & Santos, 2023; Villanueva, 2025). These dynamics underscored the critical role of teacher attitudes in determining whether the school environment promoted psychological safety or reinforced exclusionary norms (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

The necessity for specialized training was a recurring theme in recent research, which suggested that educators who received formal instruction on gender diversity experienced improved relationships with non-conforming students (Koss & Sweeney, 2021). Such training was vital for raising awareness and mitigating the unfamiliarity bias that often led to teacher anxiety (Operario & Rapada, 2024). In the specific cultural context of the Philippines, the “Kapwa” philosophy played a significant role; teachers often practiced a form of pragmatic tolerance, accepting diverse expressions as long as they did not disrupt the social harmony of the classroom (Villanueva, 2025). However, this tolerance was noted to be fragile, potentially reverting to exclusion if the teacher perceived the student’s expression as a direct challenge to institutional authority (Villanueva, 2025).

Furthermore, the journey toward self-actualization was identified as a critical developmental process for LGBTQ+ adolescents, with the school environment playing a more significant role in this journey than the immediate family (Espinol et al., 2021). When students were allowed to express their true identity—such as through the choice of uniform—they demonstrated a clear understanding of their self-worth and moved more rapidly toward their full potential (Espinol et al., 2021). Conversely, instances of discrimination and the inadequate implementation of inclusive policies were found to worsen as time passed, often leading to psychological damage, social isolation, and suicidal ideation among gender-diverse learners (Operario & Rapada, 2024). Finally, the adoption of Friendly Discipline—characterized by a calm, natural talking voice—emerged as a successful coping mechanism for teachers, affirming a student’s dignity while effectively managing the classroom without escalating conflict (Dejacto et al., 2023).

Research Questions

This study specifically aimed to answer the following questions about the problem:

1. What experiences do teachers encounter with students who are cross-dressing?
2. What are the attitudes of San Jose National High School teachers regarding cross-dressing among students?
3. What is the influence of cross-dressing to student-teacher relationship?
4. What orientation program can be proposed based on the findings of the study?

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted at San Jose National High School, a public secondary institution located in Rodriguez, Rizal, Philippines, managed by the Department of Education. For the academic year 2025-2026, the locale served a diverse population of 3,296 students and 139 faculty members, providing a multifaceted social environment for investigating contemporary educational issues. Using a purposive sampling method, the researcher selected eight (8) Junior High School teachers who have direct experience teaching students who cross-dress. This cohort represented a diverse range of ages, genders, teaching experiences, and religious backgrounds across various subject areas, ensuring a rich tapestry of professional perspectives.

The research utilized a two-part researcher-made qualitative instrument designed for sequential data collection. To ensure the robustness and credibility of the tools, the instrument underwent pilot-testing and was formally validated by three (3) expert validators prior to its implementation. The first part consisted of a Background and Contextual Questionnaire featuring open-ended and fill-in-the-blank items to establish demographic profiles and preliminary reflections. The second, and core, part was an In-Depth Interview Protocol composed of semi-structured questions covering four thematic areas: Experiences, Attitudes, Influence on Relationship and Classroom, and Professional Support. To ensure the robustness of the tools, the process emphasized the creation of a safe space for dialogue, with the interview protocol designed to achieve the depth required by the phenomenological tradition.

The data gathering procedure followed a systematic qualitative approach. After securing administrative permits and informed consent, participants first completed the background questionnaire. This was followed by audio-recorded, in-depth interviews which were later transcribed verbatim, noting non-verbal cues. For data analysis, the study employed Moustakas' Modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen (SCK) method. This phenomenological approach involved horizontalization (treating all statements with equal value), clustering significant statements into themes, and developing both textural and structural descriptions. These were ultimately synthesized into a Composite Account to reveal the universal essence of the teachers' shared experiences.

The scope of this research was limited to the lived experiences and attitudes of the eight selected educators at San Jose National High School regarding student cross-dressing and its impact on teacher-student dynamics. A significant limitation of the study was the sensitivity of the topic, which required the researcher to practice *epoché* (bracketing)—the documentation and setting aside of personal biases in a reflexive journal. Ethical considerations were paramount; all participants were provided with informed consent, and their identities were protected through anonymization and the use of pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality throughout the reporting of the findings.

RESULTS

The results of this study were derived from a rigorous thematic analysis of interview transcripts from eight (8) teacher-respondents at San Jose National High School. The

analysis followed the phases of familiarization, coding, and theme generation to identify common patterns across the participants' experiences and perspectives. To provide a clear overview of the findings, the themes and sub-themes generated from the three Research Question areas, along with the proposed intervention for Research Question, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Themes and Sub-themes on Teacher Experiences and Attitudes Toward Student Cross-dressing*

Research Component	Generated Themes	Sub-themes
Research Question 1: Teacher Experiences	1. Cross-dressing context	Informal or non-academic
	2. Behaviors and Expressions	Confidence; Inappropriate behaviors
	3. Interactions with Students	Gentle correction; Motherly approach; Coordination with parents
	4. Grade-level context	Grades 9-10; Peer influence
	5. Professional perspectives	Personal; Religious
Research Question 2: Teacher Attitudes	1. Comfort and Discomfort	(None)
	2. Empathetic correction	(None)
	3. Minimal academic impact	(None)
	4. Promoting inclusion and respect	(None)
	5. Moral beliefs	(None)
	6. Growth Orientation	(None)
Research Question 3: Relational Influence	1. Balancing discipline and inclusion	(None)
	2. Neutral professional interaction	(None)
	3. Equality and professionalism	(None)
	4. Change in relationships	(None)
	5. Policy-based discipline	(None)
Research Question 4: Proposed Orientation Program		

The following sections provide a comprehensive narrative of the themes summarized in the table above. These findings are organized according to the three primary objectives of the study: (1) the lived experiences of teachers regarding student cross-dressing, (2) the professional and personal attitudes they hold toward this expression,

and (3) the perceived influence of these dynamics on the student-teacher relationship, and (4) the proposed intervention program derived from these insights. By detailing the specific perspectives shared by the respondents, this qualitative presentation seeks to uncover the nuances of how educators at San Jose National High School navigate identity expression. Ultimately, these results culminate in the development of the SAFE-SPACE Program, a structured framework designed to transition the school environment from individual teacher empathy toward institutionalized inclusion.

Research Question 1: Experiences Encountered by Teachers

The data revealed five major themes regarding teachers' encounters with cross-dressing students.

Theme 1: Cross-dressing context

The study identified that the visibility of cross-dressing is highly dependent on the perceived safety of the environment.

Sub-theme 1: Informal or non-academic: The researchers of this study found that teachers primarily encounter cross-dressing in settings outside the formal classroom structure, such as school corridors, during special events, or via social media platforms. These areas are viewed by students as safe spaces where they feel less restricted by the rigid expectations of academic settings, allowing for a more authentic expression of their gender identity.

Theme 2: Behaviors and Expressions

The findings highlighted a distinct dichotomy in how student behaviors are manifested and perceived by educators.

Sub-theme 1: Confidence: It was observed that when students feel accepted in their choice of expression, they exhibit higher levels of confidence and academic participation. Participants noted that these students appear happier and more comfortable, which positively influences their engagement in school activities.

Sub-theme 2: Inappropriate behaviors: Conversely, some expressions were categorized by teachers as inappropriate or attention-seeking. The researchers noted that these behaviors are often perceived as unnecessary distractions that may challenge the social harmony of the learning environment, leading teachers to intervene.

Theme 3: Interactions with students

Teacher interactions are characterized by a balance of disciplinary duty and emotional support.

Sub-theme 1: Gentle correction: The researchers of this study observed that when teachers address issues related to the school's dress code or student behavior, they intentionally avoid public confrontation. Instead, they utilize private dialogues to deliver gentle correction. This approach ensures that the student is made aware of the school's expectations without being subjected to embarrassment or shame in front of their peers, which preserves the student's dignity and keeps the lines of communication open.

Sub-theme 2: Motherly Approach: The data revealed a significant reliance on what the participants described as a motherly approach to student-teacher interactions. In this dynamic, teachers view their role as being more than just academic instructors; they act as second parents who provide emotional warmth and nurturing support. The

researchers found that this maternal perspective allows teachers to connect with cross-dressing students on a deeper level, offering guidance that is rooted in genuine care and protection rather than strict institutional authority.

Sub-theme 3: Coordination with parents: A key component of teacher interactions involves maintaining a collaborative relationship with the student's family. The researchers identified that teachers prioritize coordination with parents to ensure that the support the student receives at school is mirrored at home. By aligning their guidance with parental expectations and home dynamics, teachers seek to create a consistent and stable environment for the student, reducing the potential for conflict between the student's personal identity and their domestic or academic life.

Theme 4: Grade-level context

The data revealed that gender expression and social dynamics fluctuate significantly depending on the student's developmental stage.

Sub-theme 1: Grades 9-10: The researchers of this study found that encounters with cross-dressing students are most prevalent among those in the Grade 9 and 10 levels. This specific period was identified as a critical developmental stage characterized by the peak of identity exploration. During these years, students are more likely to experiment with their outward appearance as they navigate their self-concept and seek to establish an authentic identity within the school community.

Sub-theme 2: Peer influence: The data revealed that peer dynamics serve as a powerful mediator for the well-being and social experiences of cross-dressing students. The researchers observed that while peer acceptance acts as a protective factor that fosters a sense of belonging and confidence, negative peer interactions—referred to as social policing—present a significant challenge. This social policing from other students can lead to detrimental outcomes, including instances of bullying, social withdrawal, and increased anxiety for gender-diverse learners.

Theme 5: Professional perspectives

The analysis revealed that teachers' professional views are a synthesis of personal values, institutional ethics, and spiritual beliefs.

Sub-theme 1: Personal perspective: The analysis revealed that teachers strive to maintain a delicate balance between their individual belief systems and their professional duties. The researchers of this study observed that participants often view their role as mentors who prioritize human rights and the Filipino "Kapwa" philosophy. For instance, participants noted that while they strictly adhere to school rules and regulations, they personally believe that every student deserves fundamental respect and dignity regardless of their chosen gender expression. This perspective allows teachers to fulfill their institutional roles while remaining true to their personal values of equality.

Sub-theme 2: Religious: The data suggests that spirituality plays a significant role in shaping teacher perspectives within the Philippine educational setting. Many respondents described their professional approach as being heavily guided by faith, specifically utilizing a Christian perspective that emphasizes compassion, love, and understanding over harsh judgment. The researchers found that this religious foundation often informs the teachers' gentle correction approach and it allows them to uphold school discipline and standards while maintaining a kind-hearted, empathetic connection with the student.

Research Question 2: Attitudes of Teachers

The second component of this study explores the internal perspectives and emotional stances held by educators at San Jose National High School. Teacher attitudes serve as a critical bridge between school policy and the actual classroom climate, as their personal and professional outlooks directly influence how they perceive and respond to student diversity.

Theme 1: Comfort and Discomfort

The researchers of this study observed a spectrum of emotional responses among the teacher-participants. While several educators expressed being entirely at ease with the presence of cross-dressing students, others admitted to experiencing a little discomfort often rooted in their personal or religious upbringing. However, the findings indicate that these teachers consciously maintain a neutral and respectful stance in their professional capacity, ensuring that any personal discomfort does not translate into discriminatory behavior or biased treatment within the classroom.

Theme 2: Empathetic Correction

The data suggests that teacher attitudes are fundamentally grounded in a sense of empathy and the validation of the student as a human being. When addressing issues related to school uniform policies, teachers choose a path of empathetic correction rather than strict punitive measures. The researchers noted that this attitude allows teachers to validate the student's identity first, creating a supportive atmosphere where reminders about school rules are delivered with kindness and an understanding of the student's self-worth.

Theme 3: Minimal Academic Impact

There is a significant consensus among the respondents regarding the cognitive and academic potential of gender-diverse learners. The researchers found that teachers generally hold the attitude that cross-dressing has minimal to zero impact on a student's actual learning ability or academic performance. The prevailing view among the participants is that a student's capacity for intellectual excellence and classroom participation is independent of their outward gender expression or identity.

Theme 4: Promoting Inclusion and Respect

The findings reveal a strong commitment among teachers toward fostering a school culture defined by mutual respect. The researchers observed that educators prioritize creating a safe space where diversity is acknowledged rather than hidden. This attitude is driven by the belief that inclusion is a prerequisite for a healthy and productive school climate, leading teachers to actively model respectful behavior to encourage a similar attitude among the rest of the student body.

Theme 5: Moral Beliefs

The researchers of this study observed that teachers' attitudes are often filtered through a framework of moral and ethical convictions. These beliefs are frequently rooted in traditional or cultural values that define right conduct and appearance within a school setting. While these moral stances may initially create a sense of hesitation regarding cross-dressing, they also manifest as a moral duty to protect and guide students. The findings indicate that teachers prioritize the moral development of the learner, often viewing their role as a compass for character building, which influences

how they approach the balance between personal values and the student's choice of expression.

Theme 6: Growth Orientation

The data revealed a distinct orientation toward professional and personal growth among the educators. This theme highlights the capacity of teachers to evolve their perspectives when presented with new information, such as gender sensitivity training or direct experience with diverse student identities. The researchers found that rather than remaining fixed in old mindsets, many teachers demonstrate a growth mindset, acknowledging that education in the 21st century requires staying attuned to social changes. This orientation ensures that their attitudes remain relevant and that they continue to provide a supportive environment that mirrors the evolving needs of the student population.

Research Question 3: Influence on Student-Teacher Relationships

The final component of the results examines how the presence of cross-dressing students shapes the interpersonal dynamics between the teacher and the learner. This section highlights the shifts in relational management required to maintain a professional yet supportive educational environment amidst evolving social expressions.

Theme 1: Balancing Discipline and Inclusion

This theme addresses the complex task teachers face in maintaining school order while fostering an inclusive environment. The researchers found that teachers do not see discipline and inclusion as opposing forces; rather, they seek a middle ground where students feel accepted but still understand the importance of boundaries. The relationship is strengthened when a student feels that the teacher's guidance is rooted in care for their personal growth rather than a desire to suppress their identity.

Theme 2: Neutral Professional Interaction

The data revealed a deliberate effort by teachers to maintain a high level of objectivity. In this relational dynamic, teachers intentionally keep interactions focused on academic goals and classroom standards. By adopting a neutral stance, the researchers observed that teachers prevent their personal biases—or the student's gender expression—from becoming a point of friction, thereby preserving the professional integrity of the student-teacher bond.

Theme 3: Equality and Professionalism

This theme highlights the ethical foundation of the relationship. Respondents emphasized that fairness is the cornerstone of their interaction with cross-dressing students. The researchers noted that by treating these students with the same level of academic rigor and professional courtesy as their peers, teachers foster a sense of equity. This prevents the student from feeling singled out and ensures that the relationship is built on mutual respect rather than special treatment or discrimination.

Theme 4: Change in Relationships

The researchers examined how the introduction of cross-dressing into the classroom dynamic affects existing bonds. The findings suggest that while the core professional connection remains, the relationship often undergoes a transition toward deeper

emotional trust. When a teacher responds with empathy, the motherly approach, the student-teacher relationship often evolves into one where the student feels more secure and open to guidance, though teachers must work harder to shield this bond from negative peer influences.

Theme 5: Policy-Based Discipline

This theme focuses on the use of institutional rules as a tool for relational stability. Teachers rely on established school policies to navigate potential conflicts regarding dress codes and hair lengths. The researchers found that by referencing the student manual or school guidelines during corrections, teachers remove the personal element from the conflict. This allows the teacher to uphold discipline without the student feeling personally attacked, which protects the long-term health of their relationship.

Research Question 4: Proposed Orientation Program

Based on the thematic findings regarding teacher experiences, attitudes, and relational influences, the researchers proposed a comprehensive intervention titled the SAFE-SPACE Program (Support, Acceptance, Fairness, and Empathy – Student Protection and Climate). This program is designed to bridge the gap between individual teacher empathy and institutionalized inclusion at San Jose National High School.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide a deep understanding of the multifaceted experiences and attitudes of teachers toward student cross-dressing at San Jose National High School. The following discussion interprets these results in relation to existing literature and the theoretical framework of the study.

Research Question 1: Experiences Encountered by Teachers

The results revealed that teachers primarily encounter cross-dressing in informal or non-academic settings, such as corridors and social media, which students perceive as safe spaces. This indicates that the visibility of gender expression is highly dependent on the perceived safety of the environment. This finding is consistent with Ulla and Pernia (2023), who emphasize that LGBTQ+ identity formation relies heavily on the availability of spaces where students feel less restricted by rigid academic expectations.

Furthermore, the study highlighted a dichotomy in student behaviors; while acceptance fosters confidence and academic participation, some expressions are still viewed as inappropriate distractions. This mirrors the Gender Climate theories of Ullman (2023) and is supported by Kim et al. (2024), who linked authentic aesthetic expression to the psychological safety required for classroom engagement. The reliance on a motherly approach and gentle correction further suggests that teachers view their role as second parents who prioritize emotional warmth. This maternal perspective is supported by Wang (2024), while the emphasis on coordination with parents aligns with La Salle-Finley et al. (2024), who argue that mirrored support between home and school is essential to reducing identity-based conflict for the learner.

Research Question 2: Attitudes of Teachers

Teachers' attitudes were found to be grounded in a balance between personal values and professional duties. While some respondents admitted to a little discomfort due to religious or personal upbringing, they maintained a neutral and respectful professional stance. This is an example of unfamiliarity bias, a concept explored by O'Donnell (2022), where educators consciously manage internal biases to prevent discriminatory behavior. When teachers choose validation over punitive measures, they are practicing what O'Keefe et al. (2024) describe as micro-affirmations—small acts of support that are essential for student existence within institutional frameworks.

The consensus that cross-dressing has minimal to zero impact on academic performance aligns with the research of Marquez et al. (2023). Additionally, the shift toward a growth orientation and the commitment to fostering respect reflects the work of Watson et al. (2023), who argue that supportive teacher behaviors are the primary drivers of classroom inclusivity. This shows that educators at San Jose National High School are successfully moving toward more inclusive practices despite traditional cultural backgrounds, effectively bridging the policy-practice gap identified by Ramos and Santos (2023).

Research Question 3: Influence on Student-Teacher Relationships

The findings suggest that the presence of cross-dressing students necessitates a shift in relational management, focusing on neutral professional interaction and equality. Teachers strive to treat all students equally to ensure the relationship remains centered on academic growth. This strategy is consistent with Martinez and Zhao (2022), who state that maintaining professional rigor and fairness is the cornerstone of effective student-teacher dynamics. Furthermore, the necessity of balancing institutional rules with individual student needs to maintain this bond is a key finding supported by Watson et al. (2023).

To maintain stability, teachers advocate for policy-based discipline. By referencing the student manual, teachers remove the personal element from conflict, protecting the long-term health of the relationship. This mirrors the friendly discipline documented by Dejecto et al. (2023), where teachers use institutional frameworks as a tool for relational stability.

Research Question 4: Proposed Orientation Program

The proposed SAFE-SPACE Program (Support, Acceptance, Fairness, and Empathy – Student Protection and Climate) serves as the practical application of these findings. It addresses the systemic need for institutionalized inclusion by integrating policy support, awareness training, and relational frameworks. This output directly addresses the gaps identified in the teacher experiences and provides a structured way to transition from individual empathy to a school-wide culture of respect and safety.

The transition from individual empathy to institutionalized inclusion through the SAFE-SPACE Program aligns with the transdisciplinary approach of La Salle-Finley et al. (2024), which advocates for promoting school climate and social-emotional learning to ensure positive developmental outcomes for diverse youth.

Conclusions

The study concludes that student cross-dressing at San Jose National High School is both a personal expression of identity and a social phenomenon that does not inherently disrupt the academic or relational fabric of the classroom. In line with Social Identity Theory, these behaviors reflect students' efforts to negotiate their identity within their peer groups and academic contexts. Teachers' experiences highlight that while the presence of cross-dressing students does not weaken student-teacher relationships, it does emphasize the urgent necessity for structured programs that reinforce empathy, consistency, and student protection.

Regarding teacher attitudes, the study reveals a sophisticated balance between personal belief systems and professional obligations. Educators demonstrate a strong commitment to inclusive practices, characterized by motherly and fairness-oriented approaches, even when individual comfort levels vary. These attitudes align with established research on psychological safety, suggesting that teachers are capable of adapting effectively to gender-diverse expressions when they are provided with opportunities for professional reflection and guided learning.

The influence of cross-dressing on student-teacher relationships was found to be largely stable or improved through the use of consistent, respectful communication. The study concludes that maintaining neutral professionalism and adhering to dress codes does not diminish rapport, provided the interactions are grounded in clarity and fairness. Furthermore, cross-dressing was not found to hinder academic performance, confirming that a student's success is shaped more by the interpersonal support and the overall school climate than by their gender expression alone.

Ultimately, the research concludes that the school's Gender Climate acts as the primary mediator for a student's psychological safety. While individual teacher empathy currently provides a vital buffer for students, the lack of formalized, inclusive policies creates inconsistent pockets of support. To ensure that student well-being and relational stability are guaranteed outcomes rather than a matter of chance, the study concludes that the institution must transition from relying on individual tolerance toward a structural framework of institutionalized empathy, supported by clear policies and community-wide education.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, it is recommended that the school administration prioritize the establishment of a formal, confidential reporting and support system to document interactions related to gender expression and ensure non-judgmental referrals to counseling services. To address the diverse attitudes among faculty, mandatory and regular professional development training focused on SOGIE (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression) awareness should be implemented to mitigate unconscious biases and equip educators with practical skills for inclusive communication. Furthermore, existing dress code and conduct policies should undergo a thorough revision to become gender-neutral, shifting the focus from restrictive gendered norms toward safety and decorum to foster trust within student-teacher relationships.

Finally, the proposed orientation program should be fully integrated into the school operations, with specialized modules for students, parents, and school personnel to ensure community-wide acceptance of gender diversity. Given the qualitative nature of this study, future research is necessary using larger samples or a quantitative approach to verify if these findings are consistent across other national high schools within the region. Investigators may also consider a comparative study to explore the underlying reasons for varying teacher attitudes in different socio-economic or geographical contexts to further refine institutional inclusivity practices.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

The researcher hereby declares that this study was conducted with a firm commitment to ethical research practices. Before commencement, the researcher obtained informed consent from all participants, ensuring they fully understood the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any time without any consequences. To protect participant identities, the researcher maintained strict anonymity and followed data privacy protocols throughout the entire process. The well-being of the respondents was made a priority, ensuring a safe and respectful environment for all discussions.

The researcher also certifies that there is no conflict of interest in this work. Plagiarism was strictly avoided by ensuring all sources are properly credited, and an objective approach was maintained to ensure no bias in the interpretation of the findings. The results of this study are intended purely for academic and research purposes. Finally, this research was conducted following the formal ethical clearance and guidelines set by the FEU Roosevelt Institutional Research Ethics Board.

REFERENCES

- Barbosa, R. (2024). Hair and dress codes, a detriment to LGBTQIA+ students. *Manila Today*.
<https://manilatoday.net/hair-and-dress-code-a-detriment-to-lgbtqia-students>
- Cailing, V. R. (2024). An analysis of school climate towards homosexuality: Basis for creating safe and gender-inclusive school. *Psychology and Education: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 18(3), 255–263. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10875435>
- Dejacto, L. B., Valmorida, F. M. S., & Naparan, G. B. (2023). Navigating nuances: Intermediate teachers' experiences handling Generation Z learners. *Journal of Elementary and Secondary School*, 1(2), 40–53.
- Espinol, S. M., Maranan, C. R., Manalo, R. M., & Marcelo, R. (2021). Lived experiences of gay and lesbian adolescents on their way to achieving self-actualization: Basis for the development of U-Bahaghari: A university-based LGBT advocacy program. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*.
- Gonzalez-Mendiondo, L., & Moyano, N. (2023). Teachers dealing with non-conformity: Development of the attitudes toward childhood gender identity questionnaire for educational settings. *International Journal of Education Research*.
- Kim, H., et al. (2024). Aesthetic expression and psychological safety: A study of gender-diverse youth in Asia. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 27(1), 45-60.
- Koss, K. J., & Sweeney, L. E. (2021). Supporting gender-inclusive schools: Educators' beliefs about gender diversity training and implementation plans. *Professional Development in Education*, 47(5), 789–804.
- Lara, C. J. (2024). Hair and dress codes, a detriment to LGBTQIA+ students. *Manila Today*.
<https://manilatoday.net/hair-and-dress-code-a-detriment-to-lgbtqia-students/>
- La Salle-Finley, A., Thompson, S., & Medina, P. (2024). Inclusive school policies and emotional safety in secondary education. *International Journal of Educational Equity*, 19(1), 55–73.

- La Salle-Finley, T., Yang, C., Espelage, D., & Jimerson, S. R. (2024). Understanding and promoting school climate, bullying, and social-emotional learning: Transdisciplinary and transnational science advancing positive youth outcomes. *School Mental Health*, 16(3), 417–424. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2372966X.2024.2386235>
- Marquez, J., Lazcano, L., Olavarrieta, M. C., Lopez, C., Giráldez, E., Rivas-Borrell, P., & Arroyo-Barriguet, J. L. (2023). Class participation and feedback as enablers of student academic performance. *SAGE Open*, 13(2), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440231177298>
- Martinez, L., & Zhao, X. (2022). Identity masking and cognitive performance in gender-diverse youth. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 70(3), 442–450.
- McLeod, S. (2023). Social identity theory in psychology (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). *Simply Psychology*. <https://www.simplypsychology.org/social-identity-theory.html>
- O'Donnell, K. (2022). Unfamiliarity bias: Addressing educator discomfort with gender non-conformity. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 115, 103–118.
- O'Keefe, J., et al. (2024). Micro-affirmations and the inclusive campus: Beyond the classroom. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 57(1), 89–104.
- Operario, J. B., & Rapada, V. P., Jr. (2024). Attitude towards cross-dressing of LGBTQI+ community among senior high school students in Llorente National High School, Eastern Samar Division. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*.
- Ramos, J. L., & Santos, M. T. (2023). The policy-practice gap: Inclusive education in the Philippine context. *Journal of Southeast Asian Educational Research*, 18(2), 112–129.
- Ulla, M. B., & Pernia, E. E. (2023). Labor migration and queer sexuality exploration: A narrative inquiry of Filipino queer teachers in Thailand. *Asia-Pacific Social Science Review*, 23(2), 45
- Ullman, J. (2023). Gender climate and student mental health in secondary schools: A review. *Journal of School Health*, 93(5), 389–400.
- Villanueva, R. (2025). Kapwa and gender: Negotiating interpersonal relations in Filipino classrooms. *Philippine Social Science Review*, 77(1), 22–40.
- Wang, F. (2024). The relationship between students and teachers and its implications. *Journal of Education Humanities and Social Sciences*, 29, 390–395.
- Watson, J. H., Dubay, C., & Jackson, N. (2023). Cultivating preservice teachers' culturally responsive classroom management self-efficacy through case-based learning. *Teacher Education Quarterly*. 50(2), 31–54. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1383619.pdf>