

**Investigating the Experiences and Perceptions of the LGBTQIA+ Students at one
Public University regarding Access and Inclusion in Higher Education in South Africa**

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In

Educational Leadership: Inclusive Education

Adviser

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Investigating the Experiences and Perceptions of the LGBTQIA+ Students at one Public University regarding Access, Provision, and Inclusion in Higher Education in South Africa

has been approved by the Graduate School of Education Ethics Committee of Nazarbayev University.

You may proceed with contacting your preferred research site and commencing your participant recruitment strategy.

Yours sincerely,



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Abstract

This study investigated the lived experiences of students who are identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersexual or asexual (LGBTQIA+) at one South African higher education institution in terms of their perceived challenges to access and inclusion. The existing literature provides different perspectives, ranging from gender identity to social justice theories, all of which point to socially unjust discrimination and marginalization of LGBTQIA+ students based on their sexual orientation status. This qualitative phenomenological study drew on the lived experiences and perceived challenges or barriers of 10 participants who identified as members of the LGBTQIA+ community in South Africa. The research was conducted using semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. Audio recordings were used for authenticity of data generated and transcription purposes. The data was coded and analyzed thematically. Findings were that the LGBTQIA+ students experienced a variety of unjustifiable challenges including non-inclusive university policies on admission and student housing; bullying and rejection by their peers; a lack of awareness and education about the community by university faculty or general workers; and overall lack of integration and socialization to help make their university experiences more successful. These challenges were largely negative and unjust because, while LGBTQIA+ people are equally protected by the same human rights as enshrined in the South African Constitution, they are constantly stigmatized and discriminated against when it comes to fully accessing and participating in higher education.

Keywords: LGBTQIA+, students, higher education, access, inclusion, sexual orientation, social justice, and human rights

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

DEI	Diversity, equity, and inclusion
GLBT	Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersexual or asexual
POPI	Protection of Personal Information
SADC	South African Development Community

Chapter 1: Introduction

Prior to 1994, the apartheid-era South African government established laws that were discriminatory, biased, oppressive, and fostered exclusionary practices in which other ethnic groups such as African, Indian, and colored students were routinely denied entrance to higher education (Badat & Sayed, 2014). Cloete (2009) identified such exclusionary practices in the higher education system as a source of profound inequities. Although African students made up 89 percent of the total population in 1993, they only made up 52 percent of the students enrolled in South Africa's higher education institutions. White students, who made up about 1 percent of the population of South Africa, accounted for 48 percent of enrollments (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2014). Similar concerns were expressed by Schoole and Adeyemo (2016), who state that the post-1994 administration inherited a higher education system that is unmistakably non-transformative and provides limited access to the black majority.

African students enrolled in higher education surged dramatically from 65 percent to 80.1 percent of the student body between 2010 and 2015, while white student enrollment declined to 19.9 percent (Council of Higher Education, 2018). In terms of transforming the environment for student demographics in higher education, many South African universities have made great progress and achieved revolutionary milestones. The increasing number of African students enrolled in various public universities around the country demonstrates this (Matsolo, Ningpuanyeh, & Susuman, 2018).

Despite efforts by South African universities to change the higher education landscape left behind by the apartheid administration (Adonis, 2021), such transformational projects within the sector have mainly concentrated on student administration and throughput rates at the expense of human rights and social justice issues such as sexual orientation discrimination (Reddy, 2006).

Students who identify as members of the LGBTQIA+ community face a variety of barriers to entry and inclusion in higher education. Despite the overall success of increasing student demographics based on race, religion, gender, differently abled, and socioeconomic status, students of different sexual orientations, particularly the LGBTQIA+ community, are frequently overlooked in terms of access and inclusion in South African higher education institutions. This means that colleges and universities are generally failing to establish inclusive practices and social justice for LGBTQIA+ students (Michaelson, 2008).

According to a study done by Muller (2014), LGBTQIA+ students continue to face discrimination in the form of a lack of access to certain health services and information. Certain ideas and values perpetuate gaps in policy implementation and practices, preventing higher education institutions from developing an institutional culture that responds to student diversity.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

In South Africa and around the world, the subject of LGBTQIA+ students in higher education is still a contentious and contested topic. In nations such as the United States of America and Australia, studies have been undertaken on how the curriculum is constructed to accommodate students who identify as LGBTQIA+ in higher education. Many institutions in the United States, for example, have responded to government pressure by admitting students of diverse sexual orientations for equity and diversity, but not necessarily for inclusion (Berrey, 2011; Bhopal & Rhanie, 2014). This is frequently the case, according to Walling et al. (2019), when curriculum design ignores the diverse needs of the students for whom learning outcomes are intended. Discrimination and gender-based violence related to sexual orientation appear to be commonplace, especially in educational settings. It is imperative that these issues are embedded in the curricular,

government regulations, and procedures. To combat this, universities in the United States and Canada, are required to implement an inclusive and open diversity curriculum (Walling et al., 2019). This is done to raise awareness of racial, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, religion, and belief diversity. Licona et al. (2015) researched ways for higher education institutions to respond to LGBTQIA+ community¹ concerns. The findings highlight several existing gaps in service provision, including a lack of opportunities for students to acquire information about sexual and mental health that they may need during their studies (Licona et al., 2015; Muller, 2014; Walling et al., 2018). Increased queer visibility on campuses, according to Walling et al. (2019), is important for LGBTQIA+ students to have a positive experience and sense of belonging. In the context of South Africa, there is a variety of legislative frameworks and regulations designed to reflect the values of human dignity, equality, and freedom for all (Republic of South Africa, 1996).

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences and perceptions of students who identified themselves as members of the LGBTQIA+ Community regarding access and inclusion at one university in South Africa.

Many South African universities have made significant progress and achieved significant milestones in terms of transforming the landscape of student demographics in higher education. All public universities in South Africa are required by law to align internal policies with national legislative frameworks, including the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996;

¹ The LGBTQIA+ student is used interchangeably with this term, LGBTQIA+ Community.

the Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997; the White Paper 6 for Higher Education Transformation 1997;² the Policy Framework to Address Gender-Based Violence in Post-School Education and Training System, 2020; the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act No. 4 of 2000. These legislative frameworks and policies are meant to promote, support, and accomplish democratic ideals in terms of redress of past discrimination and ensuring representation and equitable access for all students irrespective of their sexual orientation.

Despite all these important legislative frameworks and rising enrollment rates for various racial groups in many public universities, the issue of access and social inclusion has been limited to race, while students of different sexual orientations, particularly the LGBTQAI+ community, are frequently overlooked in terms of access and inclusion in higher education in South Africa. Although the Constitution expressly mandates the implementation of social justice, it also forbids discrimination against people based on their gender or sexual orientation, either directly or indirectly (Republic of South Africa, 1996). According to van Vollenhoven et al. (2013), the Constitution guarantees tolerance for diversity and freedom from coercion, requiring all government schools and universities to implement social human rights policies that support these values in order to avoid

² Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, No.4 of 2000 intends: to prevent and prohibit unfair discrimination and harassment, to promote equality and eliminate unfair discrimination; and to prevent and prohibit hate speech.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996, particularly Chapter 2 (the Bill of Rights): These rights affirm the democratic values of human dignity, equality, and freedom. It specifically protects the rights of women, men, LGBTQI communities including marginalized groups.

Policy Framework – Gender Based Violence in Post School Education and Training System 2020 intends: to assist PSET institutions address the occurrence of GBV and create an enabling environment for the eradication of GBV while instilling respect, protection, promotion, and fulfilment of human rights as enshrined in the Bill of Rights.

White Paper for Higher Education Transformation, 1997 seeks to realize the Ministry’s vision of a transformed, democratic, non-racial, and non-sexist system of higher education.

violating people's social justice rights. Despite these constitutional provisions, human rights violations against LGBTQIA+ Community continue to be prevalent in higher education.

Muller (2014) found that LGBTQIA+ students continue to face prejudice in the form of a lack of access to specialized health services and information. Certain attitudes and values often create gaps in policy implementation and practices, deterring higher education institutions from pushing for human rights and social justice as a collective action in creating a non-sexist, non-discriminatory, and non-racist campus environment. As a result, understanding the extent to which these human rights and social justice breaches have framed LGBTQIA+ Community's lived experiences and views on access and inclusion in higher education is critical for this research.

1.3 Research Questions

The overarching research question underpinning this study:

What are the experiences of LGBTQIA+ students regarding access and inclusion at one South African university?

Sub-questions:

- What are the challenges that LGBTQIA+ students experience?
- How do LGBTQIA+ students perceive the criteria university uses to accommodate them in campus residences?
- To what extent do LGBTQIA+ students believe the university's admission policy in terms of its directives and guidelines caters for acceptance of LGBTQIA+ students into the university?

- In what ways do LGBTQIA+ students believe that the university can create the awareness of their community that enhances human rights and social justice at an institutional level?

1.4 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study may be relevant and appropriate for Diversity and Inclusion Office at the university where the research was carried out. It can be noted also that the finding of the study may also be of relevant to all transformation offices in various universities in the country and beyond. At policy level, the Commission for Gender Equality, Department of Higher Education and Training, may find the findings useful in addressing issues concerning LGBTQIA+ students regarding access and inclusion.

This research and my experience as an African male activist researcher for social justice were primarily motivated by the belief that my work should benefit those who are still marginalized in higher education and communities, even though other groups fully enjoy the fruits of democracy with a strong emphasis on human rights. This research aims to transform higher education to benefit previously disadvantaged students, address sexual orientation issues, and adopt inclusive principles that advocate for social justice for all students, regardless of race, gender, religion, beliefs, socioeconomic status, educational background, disability, or sexual orientation. Conclusions and recommendations will also assist educational leaders in South Africa in recognizing specific gender equality deficiencies and improving accessibility and inclusivity of LGBTQIA+ students to foster a vibrant and inclusive institutional culture.

1.5 Definition of Terms

This study focuses on the experiences and perceptions of LGBTQIA+ students regarding access, provision, and inclusion in higher education. It includes core terms such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersexual, and asexual (LGBTQIA+), as well as access and inclusion and higher education. Other literature suggests that critical approaches that are prejudiced and one-sided on what is termed as “fixed” definitions of sexuality and gender hamper the possibilities of knowing the identities and experiences of LGBTQIA+ students (Renn, 2010).

LGBTQIA+: This acronym means Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual. Even though all various identities of LGBTQIA+ are clustered as a homogenous group, there are many individual needs outside this common group. It is a heterogeneous group clustered together under the LGBTQIA+ heading in political and social areas (Hammarberg, 2011). This term is also used interchangeably with the term LGBTQIA+ Community.

Asexual: an individual who does not experience sexual attraction to any group of people but does experience romantic attraction to specific partners (Cabot, 2015).

Bisexual: refers to individuals who are sexually and emotionally attracted to both males and females.

Gay: refers to males who are sexually and emotionally attracted to other males.

Lesbian: refers to females who are sexually and emotionally attracted to females.

Transgender: refers to the individuals whose gender expression does not comply with societal normalcies and who do not identify birth (Hammarberg, 2011). with either male or female but wish to change their gender identity from the gender assigned at

Queer: refers to individuals who do not conform to gender identity such as heteronormativity and heterosexist as socially constructed norms in traditional notions of gender and sexual orientation (Haammarberg, 2011).

Higher Education Institution: means any public institution of learning that provides post-secondary education (mainly universities of technology and traditional universities) on a full-time, part-time, or open distance learning basis (Higher Act 101 of 1997, South Africa).

Inclusion: means recognizing and respecting gender and cultural differences among all students and building on the similarities (Department of Education, 2001; Makoelle, 2012).

Access: refers to the ability to approach or enter a location without any challenges.

Accessibility: means that the government must ensure that educational institutions are accessible to everyone, without discrimination.

1.6 Thesis Outline

Chapter 1 presents the statement of the problem and purpose of the study. The research questions, definition of terms, and significance of the study were also presented.

Chapter 2 details the theoretical framework and literature review of social justice theory.

Chapter 3 describes the research methodology used, the research design and justification for its choice, the research approach, and the researcher's role.

Chapter 4 presents the main research findings emanating from interview data analysis.

Chapter 5 focuses on the main discussion substantiated with reference to relevant literature that supports or contradicts the research findings.

Chapter 6 generally focuses on the recommendations and conclusions and further research that could be undertaken by other scholars.

1.7 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, introduction, statement of problem, purpose of the study, clarification of terms, and thesis outline. The following chapter presents a review of the literature on LGBTQIA+ issues and history and the conceptual and theoretical framework.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This study mainly focused on investigating the experiences and perceptions of the LGBTQIA+ students at one public university in South Africa regarding access and inclusion in higher education. Chapter 1 outlined background and significance of the study, statement of the problem and purpose of the study, the research questions, and concluded with the definition of key terms.

This chapter is divided into two sections: a discussion of the conceptual issues and literature that justifies and supports this research and a review of the theoretical framework used in this study. In the first part, I discuss the LGBTQIA+ Community in the African context looking at the history of the existence of this community. The discussion further looks at the context of South African Development Community (SADC) region with a specific focus on Lesotho and South Africa. I also look at the history, challenges, and experiences of LGBTQIA+ students in higher education institutions. Lastly, I reveal the significance of the theoretical framework that underpins this study.

2.2 LGBTQIA+ Community in the African Context

In countries like Senegal and Ghana, for example, Rouget (2021) paints a gloomy picture that human rights of many people in these countries are still not universally protected by the state. The Constitution of the Republic of Senegal defines the country as secular, democratic, and social thus promoting equality of all citizens irrespective of their race, sex, religion, and belief (Diagne, 2017). The Constitution further asserts that all Senegalese citizens of both sexes enjoy civil and political rights. Furthermore, the Constitution prohibits political parties from promoting any religious

discrimination which is punishable by law in Senegal (United States Department of State – Office of International Religious Freedom, 2020). In fact, Article 4 prohibits political parties from identifying themselves with race, ethnicity, sex, religion, or language as the Constitution guarantees equal rights to all political parties (Rouget, 2021). The constitutional mandate of the government is to promote equal society in terms of race and religion, where freedom of expression, of movement, and of opinion are protected. The national statistics in 2016 showed an overwhelming majority of 95.9 percent of the Senegalese citizens identified as Muslim (United States Department of State – Office of International Religious Freedom, 2020). The dominance of the Muslim religion in Senegal has led to strong campaigns by Muslim associations and politicians regarding themselves as “fundamentalists” working collectively toward preserving the Muslim values from what they referred to as “degradation of morality and disrespect for religious values” as perpetuated by the increasing homosexuality among the youth (Bop, 2008). In research conducted in South Africa regarding the legitimacy of sexual orientation and the role of religion, it was revealed that homophobia, prejudice, and discrimination is on the rise among the people, and are mostly perpetuated by religion assumptions (Kleinhans, 2018).

Fundamentalists have violated the Senegalese Constitution in several ways, first by denouncing government’s efforts at women empowerment through the promotion of women’s rights and later, homosexuals (Bop, 2008) although the Constitution advocates and promotes equal treatment for all.

Similarly in Ghana, the Constitution refers to the promotion of gender equality, protection of human rights and freedom, respect for human dignity, and educational rights for all persons, taking into consideration that transgressions on all these constitutional rights is punishable by law (The

Constitution of Ghana, 1996). Contrary to the above, the Criminal Code Act (646) of 2003 refers to that “unnatural carnal knowledge” which relates to same-sex intercourse and is punishable by a term of imprisonment of not less than 5 years (Atuguba, 2019). Although, Ghana is a signatory to various international codes, in particular, International Human Rights, and its Constitution makes explicit reference to the human rights for all, there is no protection for minority groups such as LGBTQIA+ Community.

2.3 The LGBTQIA+ Community in South Africa: The Context

The LGBTQIA+ Community refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, asexual, and other non-heterosexual and/or cisgender identities. (Cisgender means “of, relating to, or being a person whose gender identity corresponds with the sex the person had or was identified as having at birth” (Merriam-Webster, 2022). Much research is still being conducted in South Africa, the SADC region, and the African continent to contextualize the existence of the LGBTQIA+ community (Hendricks et al., 2020).

The concept of LGBTQIA is not freely spoken about in many African countries. In some, it is completely banned (Belcher, 2016). However, the South African government through the Constitution makes provision for the rights of the community to be protected and has crafted policies that cater for their recognition of the rights of the LGBTQIA+ Community. South Africa takes its rightful place as one of the first African countries to pass the legislative policy that enables same-sex marriages (Van Zyl, 2011). However, 25 years later, the pledge of protecting LGBTQIA+ Community from discrimination based on their sexual orientation has mostly been unfulfilled, and LGBTQIA+ persons continue to be victims of hate crimes (Geldenhuys, 2021).

In the SADC region there have been recent developments that advocate for inclusion and recognition of the LGBTQIA+ Community. This is evident in research conducted which illustrates tertiary institutions in South Africa and the Lesotho are more receptive and take initiatives to create a welcoming environment for the academic success of the LGBTQIA+ communities (South African Development Community, 2015). Bazarsky et al. (2020) argue that there is a rapid increase and visibility of LGBTQIA+ community in the institutions of higher learning. Dunkerly et al. (2022) further argue that many college and university agencies (for example, health facilities, counseling and psychological services, student involvement, residence life, and alumni affairs) in the SADC region have begun to look into ways to better understand and serve LGBTQIA+ students.

2.4 Brief History of LGBTQIA+ Students in Higher Education

Despite the growing body of knowledge with special emphasis on the experiences of people identifying themselves as LGBTQIA+ Community, (Joseph, 2020) paints a bleak picture of the existing frustration that higher education services continue to overlook intersectional identities especially of the LGBTQIA+ students. Beemyn (2003) looked at the history of this movement through the lens of higher education and indicates that recognition of the LGBTQIA+ Community in many US institutions of higher education started in the early 1970s. This was a radical shift from similar campaigns like the LGBTQIA+ Civil Rights Movement in the 1969 seeking social transformation and total eradication of discrimination within the LGBTQIA+ community. More and more universities' students called for safe spaces and support from their institutions (Beemyn, 2002). These student protests resulted in the University of Michigan becoming the first institution to launch an LGBTQIA+ office in 1971 and recruited two LGBTQIA+ students to coordinate the new establishment and provide services to the LGBTQIA+ students (Beemyn, 2003). Furthermore,

Beemyn (2003) shared the story of how Columbia University followed in the footsteps of Michigan University and established the first LGBTQIA+ rights organization on campus.

Many years later, the issue of the LGBTQIA+ students in higher education remains a controversial and debatable topic (Sithole, 2015). There are studies conducted in countries such as the United States of America, Canada, and Puerto Rico focusing on how the curriculum is designed to accommodate students who identify themselves as LGBTQIA+ Community in higher education, (Ferfolja & Ullman, 2021). Many universities have responded to pressure by admitting students with different sexual orientations for equity and diversity purposes, but not necessarily for inclusion, (Ferfolja & Ullman, 2021). This, according to Brisolaro (2019), is often the case when curriculum design is not cognizant of diverse needs of the students.

Although, discrimination and gender-based violence related to sexual orientation are not commonly addressed, especially in educational spaces, government policies and procedures in the United States and Canada require universities to have inclusive and open curriculum related to diversity (Rieser, 2012). The inclusive and open curriculum on sexual diversity, has subsequently raised awareness of differences in a form of race, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, religion, and disability in both countries.

Other studies have focused on discovering strategies in which higher education institutions can respond to the concerns of the LGBTQIA+ Community (Bazarsky, et al., 2020). The findings highlight several existing gaps in service provision in terms of access to information and lack of opportunities to access information related to sexual and mental health these students may need throughout their studies. According to (Kuehn, 2020; Lance, 2008; van Vollenhoven et al., 2013) maintain that LGBTQIA+ students continue to be excluded, marginalized and likely to experience

social inequalities such as homophobia and discrimination as results of being part of a minority group on campus. A study by Soria (2018) further mentions the importance of queer visibility on campuses as part of creating a positive experience and a sense of belonging for LGBTQIA+ students.

This study seeks to understand whether the LGBTQIA+ students at my university are getting same treatment as other students and whether their human rights are violated. It is, therefore, assumed that higher education institutions in South Africa, are faced with serious challenges of accommodating students who identify themselves as members of the LGBTQIA+ Community.

2.5 Scholarly Research Regarding LGBTQ+ in Higher Education Institutions

South Africa's constitutional and legislative framework, which ranks prominently among the progressive states, guarantees LGBTQIA+ Community with comprehensive recognition and legal protection. Section 9(3) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, provides that no one may be discriminated against because of their sex, gender, or sexual orientation, among other things. "Everyone has inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and maintained," according to Section 10 (Graaff, 2021). Adonis and Silinda (2021) urge that institutions of higher learning be invested with scholars who influence policy reviews through commissioned research. However, institutions of higher learning still struggle to implement policies and guidelines that protect the rights of LGBTQAI+ students within their institutional infrastructure and academic environment (Mbwana, 2020). In this study, I scrutinize the challenges that the students are facing in one university in South Africa.

2.5.1 Access and Inclusion in Higher Education

The concept of inclusion is clearly defined in the book called, '*Index for Inclusion*' by Booth and Ainscow (2002) which states that inclusion is frequently related with pupils who have disabilities or who are considered to have "special educational needs". Students are still addressed with pronouns that symbolize male or female genders and are not cognizant of their varied definitions and names that they identify with (Bratina et al., 2020). In this book, however, inclusion refers to all children and young people receiving an education (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). Their broader definition also supports the Salamanca Statement, which was adopted in 1994 in Spain, and states that the principle of inclusion, as defined by diversity, support learning, and reasonable accommodation of individual needs, makes an important contribution to the agenda for achieving Education for All and making educational institutions more effective (UNESCO, 1994).

Azarsky et. al. (2020) argue that LGBTQIA+ Community centers were established in the US with the intention of creating access and a platform for communities to have a voice that influence policies that will ensure inclusion. This resulted from the pressure exerted by the LGBTQIA+ community through protests in which LGBTQIA+ people demanded that institutions should create an environment that is protective and supportive of their inclusion. The World Declaration on Education for All, adopted in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, sets out a broad vision to ensure universal access to education for all children, youth, adults, and disabled persons, and promoting equity, (UNESCO, 1990). This means that institutions must be responsive in identifying the barriers that vulnerable groups face in accessing educational opportunities, and identifying the resources required to overcome those barriers should be prioritized (UNESCO, 1990). Ultimately, this will lead to increased active participation in education. As a result, adults must be provided with learning

opportunities, because the ultimate goal of inclusion in education is to ensure an individual's effective participation in society. The policy also emphasizes that promoting inclusion is another way of encouraging positive attitudes and improving educational institutions to meet new demands in educational structures and governance. This can be ascribed to promoting social justice and ensuring that everyone's human rights are respected, with the goal of eradicating gender stereotypes in education (UNESCO, 2009). As a result, it is critical for higher education institutions to adopt this as an overarching principle and revise education policies and practices in light of the fact that education is a fundamental basic human right and the foundation for a more just and equal society (UNESCO, 1990)

South African institutions of higher learning preach inclusivity; however, the policies and guidelines procedures still need to be revisited to accommodate LGBTQIA+ Community. It is the responsibility of institutional policy makers and reviewers to incorporate this community of the minority students with social justice programs, policies, and procedures (Higher Education, Act, 1997). Research argues that the institutional executive is culpable if they ignore the need to review the practices, processes, rules, and regulations that perpetrate and perpetuate acts of social injustice (Adonis & Silinda, 2021; Anderson, 2020; Beemyn, 2003).

2.5.2 Bullying and Rejection in the Institution of Higher Learning

According to studies, LGBTQIA+ youth face more harassment and victimization than their non-LGBTQIA+ counterparts. Compared to their heterosexual peers, a considerably higher percentage of LGBTQIA+ (85 percent) youth face some form of bullying at school, including homophobic name-calling and physical assault, according to a study conducted by Napolitano (2010). This frequently occurs in educational environments, where young people spend most of their

time socializing. For students who could be attracted to the same gender, anti-gay calling, verbal abuse, and physical attacks are a serious challenge (Kosciw, 2004; Michaelson, 2008). Although, educational institutions are supposed to be safe havens for all students, regardless of their sexual orientations, rejection from social and peers' groups, as experienced by LGBTQIA+ students, is often a source of distress in sexual minorities (Jones & Hillier, 2013). Higa (2014) who also discovered negative and positive characteristics in a school-based sample, claimed that individuals who are additionally at risk of sexist bias face a higher probability of rejection. While LGBTQIA+ students are stigmatized in communities, including educational institutions, increased exposure to sexual minority populations may help to change attitudes regarding sexual minorities (Pattman, 2018).

Despite significant social, cultural, and political constraints, scholarly research on harassment and victimization of LGBTQIA+ Community in Africa is increasing (Cloete, 2009). LGBTQIA+ communities may be found in practically every school and institution of higher learning across the country, yet many educational institutions have yet to recognize their identities, access, and inclusion while they face abuse and harassment (Berrey, 2011).

Despite the fact that both Department of Basic Education and Department of Higher Education and Training in South Africa have established guidelines on how to deal with homophobic bullying in educational institutions, this sort of harassment, victimization and bullying persists (Abrahams, 2022). A report by de Oliveira Toledo et al. (2020) depicts that over half of LGBTQIA+ South Africans surveyed said they had encountered discrimination in view of their sexuality or sexual orientation status while going to class.

2.6. Challenges within Higher Education Institutions

2.6.1 University Policies and Guidelines on LGBTQIA+ Community

Higher education institutions in South Africa not only enroll a diverse student population in terms of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, race, and religion, but also in terms of gender identity and sexual orientation (Nduna, 2017). Graziano (2014), on the other hand, claims that in most South African higher education institutions, lectures, administration, residences, sports, campus health services, and social clubs are uncomfortably heteronormative and cisgender.

To ensure that universities play a critical role in identifying existing inequalities and discriminatory practices based on race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other differences, university policies for public institutions are drafted and aligned with national legislative frameworks such as the Higher Education Act of 1997. As a result, the policies are expected to be transformative, resulting in equal opportunity for everyone, regardless of color, gender, financial status, religious beliefs, disability, or sexual orientation (Jugănaru, 2018).

Students enroll at the institutions of higher learning with the intention of self-empowerment and broaden their opportunities to contribute professionally to the economy of the country. They also want to be all-rounded and empowered future employees in the employment setting. Hlalele and Alexander (2021) argue that policies and procedures governing university access provide students with a 'label'. Intrinsically and unavoidably students are often divided and stigmatized since they are seen as a distinct group that needs 'illegitimate' attention and special treatment (Van Vollenhoven et al., 2013).

LGBTQIA+ Community as students in particular parts of the education system are routinely subjected to “negative and inequitable treatment.” Inclusion requires that students never be viewed in isolation from larger societal developments and constitutional imperatives (Chataika et al., 2012) The concept of participation is important to comprehending inclusion (Napolitano et al., 2010). This study acknowledges that university authorities are tasked with and continuously experience daunting challenges such as increasing throughput rates and securing subsidies, as well as student strikes and riots; however, arguing from a social justice perspective, and taking socio-political considerations into account, there must be guidelines and policy protections intended to create a cooperative environment for the student community identified.

2.6.2 Residence Placement and Arrangement

While LGBTQIA+ students have emerged as a new equity group in the higher education sector, the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment (2020-2021) indicates that higher education sector has historically excluded these students from the existing officially defined equity groups. However, there is an increased number of domestic LGBTQIA+ students that are comparable to other students (e.g., students with disability) or greater in number than some of the traditionally defined equity groups (e.g., Indigenous students). Evidencing the unique vocational challenges LGBTQIA+ students face in general and in extreme conditions such as during COVID-19, the project has served to advocate for explicit policy attention for this emerging equity group (Dunkerly et al., 2022).

2.6.3 Lack of Education About LGBTQIA+ in the Institutions

Currently, research on the subject of homosexuality in educational institutions is exploding due to lack of awareness for many decades, especially on the topic itself which has significantly

been excluded in the South African educational curriculum (Van Vollenhoven & Els, 2013). Such practices can be attributed to violation of LGBTQIA+ rights because even The National Education Policy Act of South Africa exists to transform the national education system to respond to the fundamental rights of all individuals as stated in Section 4(a)(i) of the Constitution, and seeks to eliminate any form of discrimination against sexual orientation (The Republic of South Africa, 1996). Furthermore, Section 9(3) of the Constitution asserts that the government may not discriminate against anyone based on their sexual orientation, among other factors. This shows a gap between government agencies tasked with promoting universal human rights and social justice, and educational institutions which should be driving government progressive policies through curricula as part of creating educational awareness about discrimination against LGBTQIA+ students (Goodrich, 2020). Despite the development of an inclusive education policy in South Africa to address exclusionary practices primarily experienced by LGBTQIA+ Community and differently abled students, one of the issues impeding progress is a lack of teacher skills in adapting the curriculum to meet a variety of learning needs (Chataika et al., 2012). This emphasizes the importance of frameworks that provide teachers with the skills they need to cater for students with a wide range of needs, thus creating awareness toward the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ students.

Despite all the evidence that LGBTQIA+ students are denied equitable access to educational opportunities, educational institutions are hesitant to develop efforts that integrate LGBTQIA+ students in learning communities, thereby raising campus awareness (Michaelson, 2008). Since the continent has lagged behind its Western counterparts in terms of LGBTQIA+ issues, it is necessary for educational institutions (particularly in Africa) to embrace critical methodologies and examine the current condition of LGBTQIA+ discourse. While it is true that Africa's hesitation might be traced to hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity, this is insufficient justification. Africa needs

to reconsider its one-size-fits-all approach to LGBTQIA+ concerns. Indeed, tertiary educators should work to teach African students how to transcend heteronormativity and engage in investigative analytical approaches to LGBTQIA+ concerns (Okpadah, 2020).

2.6.4 Lack of Integration and Discrimination

Because of several counter-discourses, movements, and the adoption of oppositional cultures, the fight to decriminalize LGBTQIA+ students and behaviors is gaining ground around the world. Although these sexual identities and communities have received less criticism in the West (evidently, they have been given the right to life with the legalization of all identities in some Western nations), discrimination against members of the LGBTQIA+ students has been rampant in many countries, particularly those on the African continent (Anderson, 2020). It is critically important that institutions of higher learning should revisit their policies and accommodate the LGBTQIA+ students.

Tinoco-Giraldo et al. (2021) found that other students will discriminate against LGBTQIA+ students because they are not familiar with the sexual practices of this community. Additionally, they argue that this form of prejudice has a well-documented impact on many aspects of students' lives, both personal and social. This is particularly concerning in terms of mental health, as discrimination frequently generates various stressors that obstruct the LGBTQIA+ Community's access to employment opportunities as well as inclusion in other social contexts (Tinoco-Giraldo et al., 2021).

2.6.5 Registration of Student Organizations

Student governance in the institutions is mandated to register student associations that represent respective communities on campus. This is evident in the University of Michigan becoming the first institution to launch an LGBTQIA+ office in 1971 where two LGBTQIA+ students were recruited to coordinate the new establishment and provide services to the LGBTQIA+ students on campus (Beemyn, 2003). Furthermore, Beemyn (2003) shared the story of how Columbia University followed in the footsteps of Michigan University and established the first LGBTQIA+ rights organization on campus.

According to Piasecki (2021), the goal of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) has become a focal point for universities all around the world. The statement is further supported by Shelton's (2019) observation that LGBTQIA+ communities are almost everywhere – in the business sector, the industrial areas, schools, and tertiary institutions – and it should not be a challenge for the institutions to start to support the awareness of this community on their campus as they need a voice to represent their views (Ferfolja & Ullman, 2020).

2.7 Awareness of the Existence of LGBTQAI+ Community

It may be especially important to investigate the impact of university training programs aimed at creating awareness of student communities on campus. Increasing student awareness of LGBTQIA+ issues may be an important part of encouraging the development of more positive attitudes toward LGBTQIA+ students, changing the campus climate to be more supportive of LGBTQIA+ students, and breaking down barriers to friendship between heterosexuals and LGBTQIA+ students (Booth & Ainscow, 2002).

Exposure to and awareness of LGBTQIA+ people may be a new experience for first-year students when they arrive at university (Worthen, 2011). Institutions have first-year experience programs that immerse students in their surroundings. According to research, LGBTQIA+ awareness should be incorporated into the curriculum. Most prominent public institution of higher learning are adopting measures to better serve the rising numbers of LGBTQIA+ students on campus (Worthen, 2011).

Okpadah (2020) opines that African cinema's depiction of LGBTQIA+ students, specifically queer lives, can be utilized as a platform. Discourse in Africa teaches students about queer persons and why they should not be oppressed. By focusing on the lives of LGBTQIA+ culture and characters, queer cinema breaks down the barriers imposed by heteronormative cultures (Graziano, 2004).

2.8 Summary of the Theoretical Framework

2.8.1 Conceptual Framework: Social Identity

Several researchers have engaged in robust discussions around issues related to social identity theory in different ways and these are discussed in the ensuing paragraph:

Sexual orientation cannot be confused with gender identity, which, according to Nadal (2017), Hines and Sanger (2010), and Winfield (2019), refers to the knowledge of being a boy or girl or being neither a boy nor a girl or not able to identify entirely as such. Hines and Sanger (2010) further state that it becomes generally difficult to determine who is gay and who is lesbian when it is not clear who is male or a man, and who is female or a woman. The classification of people

according to their sexual orientation, in the views of Nadal, Hines and Stanger and Winfield, may require further investigation so that issues of social identity can also be clearly articulated.

According to Mpholo (2015), the affiliation that people belong to is called the in-group, and groups that are outside this known group are referred to as out-groups. This implies that the existing dissimilarity found in the groups often leads to bias, prejudice, conflict, and social identity discrimination. These intergroup behaviors and attitudes are always preceded by some form of categorization in the view of Brown and Capozza (2000) and may also lead to the creation of some constructs such as a gender non-conforming clusters like LGBTQIA+ Community. The American Psychological Association (2015) defines gender-conforming as portrayed by children who personally choose sex-typical activities and same-sex playmates. This social categorization within the in-group enjoys shared meaning and interconnectedness with each other within the same group and subsequently behave differently toward those representing the out-group.

Herek (2002, cited in Smith et al., 2012), states that heterosexism refers to the cultural belief that preserves social prejudice against LGBTQIA+ communities. According to Pallotta-Chiarolli (2005), these acts of prejudice, discrimination, and harassment against sexual minorities such as LGBTQIA+ persons instill fear in those who prefer and sexually desire members of the same sex. In brief, it is ideas of fear that are being experienced by the LGBTQIA+ community because it is socially unjust for other people be subjected to any form of discrimination, prejudice, or harassment while they too have fundamental human rights as enshrined in the Constitution, which seeks to advocate social justice for all.

Other scholars like Tollini and Herbstr (2016) define heterosexism as “attitudes, myths, and beliefs that function by denying, denigrating, stigmatizing, and segregating any non-heterosexual

form of behavior, identity, relationship, or community”. Gredig and Bartelsen-Raemy (2021) define heterosexism within the differential behaviors and practices in which society reflects preferential treatment of heterosexuals and demonstrates prejudicial treatment of non-heterosexual people. Similarly, to institutionalized racism or discrimination, this is institutional oppression and segregation displayed by members of the in-group against those who are members of the out-group. This suggests that the heterosexual group is superior to non-heterosexual people based on the sexual diversity that comes with heterosexual privilege. It is clear that members of the LGBTQIA+ Community especially those who are students in higher education institutions have greater challenges beyond academic achievements or performance, but also have to deal with systemic social identity discrimination and prejudices perpetuated by non-heterosexual students. At the same time, this provides sufficient evidence that university policies remain highly heterosexist and do not advocate access and inclusion practices. The sad reality is that vulnerable people such as LGBTQIA+ Community do not enjoy sufficient protection of their human rights. This further puts the principles of social justice that promote social cohesion through equitable access and wide participation for all is at risk.

Since the institutions of higher learning are an extension of the communities where many students come from, these negative attitudes and perceptions are often characterized by inhumane acts of harassment, discrimination, hatred, and violence against individuals with a sexual orientation that is different from the heterosexist individuals.

2.8.2 Social Justice as a Theoretical Framework

This section makes the connection between social justice and inclusion of students who identify themselves as members of the LGBTQIA+ group in higher education. This link is based on

the premise that social justice and human rights cannot be achieved in educational contexts where LGBTQIA+ students are excluded and mistreated based on their sexual orientation, and hence are not accommodated in formal curriculum and instruction (Theoharis, 2007). Gewirtz (1998) views social justice as disrupting and subverting structures that foster marginalization and discriminatory processes. As a result, social justice promotes a process based on mutual respect, concern, acknowledgment, and acceptance (Theoharis, 2007). Similarly, Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002) describe social justice as the act of actively promoting intrinsic human rights of equity, equality, and fairness in social, economic, educational, as well as personal dimensions through altering institutional structures.

For this study, I define social justice as the redress of past imbalances of race, class, gender, disability, and sexual orientation, as well as other historically discriminatory and marginalizing practices. Jugănar (2018) regards the application of social justice as central to the promotion of inclusive practices. Because it is used to identify what mutual obligations flow between the individual and society, social justice is, therefore, a model that welcomes inclusiveness through which societies can create equitable opportunities and treatment for all (Sapon-Shevin, 2003). This definition focuses on addressing and eliminating all forms of marginalization and discrimination in higher education, necessitating inclusive practices for students who identify as LGBTQIA+, including differently abled individuals to be covered in this definition.

Scholars have written extensively about social identity, for example (Brown & Capozza, 2000; Herek, 2002; Hines & Sanger, 2010; Nadal, 2017) and their views are incorporated in this study as they are relevant to provide the background to understating of the LGBTQIA+ communities. However, the theories represent the views of the researchers who focused more on the

identity of this community referred to here as LGBTQIA+ (Brown & Capozza, 2000). This study is focused on investigating the experiences and perceptions of the LGBTQIA+ students at one public university regarding access and inclusion in higher education in South Africa. The aim of the study is to contextualize access, institutional policies that deal with equality and the challenges that LGBTQIA+ community face in South African higher education environment. Hence the relevance of social justice in this study as it advocates and champions the call for equality, fairness, and access for all the groups. Thus, minority groups, LGBTQIA+ community also enjoys protection as enshrined in the Bill of Rights in the South African Constitution (South African Development Community, 2015).

2.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a review of existing literature by detailing the history of LGBTQIA+ community and students and outlined the challenges in both African and South African context. Lastly the chapter focused on the conceptual framework. Under this section, the ideas are defined as in-group, out-group, gender-conforming. The theoretical framework emphasizes that “a model that welcomes inclusiveness through which societies can create equitable opportunities and treatment for all”. Social Justice requires looking at the human being by creating inclusive, equitable, and opportunities for all human beings irrespective of race, gender, sexual orientation to be used as a lens to view this study. Politics, religion, and justice have all played an important role in the LGBTQIA+ discourse, which has resulted in the criminalization of LGBTQIA+ identities in several nations including Nigeria, Cameroon, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. Consistent with the United Nations’ Sustainable Goals Vision 2030 and the African Union’s Agenda 2063, African states should be focusing on reducing inequalities, promoting peaceful and inclusive societies that strive for access to

justice for all, and ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all (United Nations, 2015). Hence, Africa's decriminalization objective should be realized, since LGBTQIA+, like any other minority group, should find a place to exist without prejudice. At all levels of education, inclusion requires no discrimination based on disability, culture, gender, or other societally significant characteristics of students or employees. It involves all members of a community irrespective of their intellectual, physical, sensory, or other abilities. Regardless of differences, all students should have equal access to the standard curriculum and classroom. The concept of inclusion emphasizes diversity above assimilation, regard and care for human rights, social justice, and equity.

In Chapter 3, I detail the methodology to be used in the study. The research design, sampling and participants recruitment strategies are discussed, and data collection and analysis are described.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study is to understand the experiences and challenges perceived by students who identify themselves as members of the LGBTQIA+ Community and barriers they experience in terms of access and inclusion at one public university in South Africa. In this chapter, I will present the research design and rationale for its selection. Additionally, this chapter will describe the role of the researcher, research methodology used, description of the sampling strategy and criteria used to select the participants. This chapter further describes the explanation of the data collection instruments, how data collection was conducted and analyzed, including issues related to ethical considerations.

3.2 Research Design and Rationale

The overarching research question aligned with this study was the following: What are the experiences and perceptions of LGBTQIA+ students regarding access and inclusion at one public university in South Africa?

The sub-questions are:

- What are the challenges that LGBTQIA+ students experience?
- How do LGBTQIA+ students perceive the criteria university uses to accommodate them in campus residences?

- To what extent do LGBTQIA+ students believe the university's admission policy in terms of its directives and guidelines, caters for acceptance of LGBTQIA+ students into the university?
- In what ways do LGBTQIA+ students believe that the university can create the awareness of their community that enhances human rights and social justice at an institutional level?

As a researcher, I realized that the best data collection method to answer the overarching research question was by means of semi-structured interviews (see Appendix B – Interview protocol). The selection of the semi-structured interview allowed me to understand the lived experiences and perceptions of the LGBTQIA+ students as they were asked to share their opinions of the phenomenon and relate their experiences (Turner, 2010).

3.3 Research Approach

3.3.1 The Qualitative Approach

The voices of LGBTQIA+ students were heard as they expressed their viewpoints and experiences about accessibility and inclusivity and how these challenges and barriers impacted on their academic performance, university experiences and general well-being. The participants provided valuable information regarding their lived experiences and perceived challenges of access and inclusion in higher education environment.

According to Creswell (2009), a phenomenological, qualitative inquiry describes the meaning of people's lived experiences of a phenomenon. Phenomenology is a philosophical approach to looking at the universe. Shi (2011) highlights that the purpose of the phenomenological design is to

to understand the essence of a phenomenon through generating “detailed textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue” (Mack et al., 2005).

3.4 Researcher’s Role

The researcher is an important instrument in a qualitative study. Creswell (2014) asserts that researchers collect data themselves through interviewing respondents. This involves interacting with participants at the site where participants experience the phenomenon under study. During data collection procedure, I explained to all participants that I was working in the Diversity and Inclusion Advocacy Office which deals with human rights and social justice issues. I indicated my interest in the phenomenon; however, I explained that I would not be taking part in the study other than assuming the role of an interviewer. I emphasized to all participants that I was not interested in their sexual preferences or gender identities, but perceived challenges and barriers they experience in the campus environment regarding access and inclusion. I further explained that any responses were acceptable, and they would not be evaluated as right or wrong, and it was important to share their true feelings and experiences in terms of access and inclusion. Although, I tried to disassociate myself from the study, I seemed to concur with Creswell (2014) that when you gather data by talking directly to participants and observing them you achieve a close-up perspective. The participants were interviewed individually and given space to share their personal experiences. To ensure confidentiality while also minimizing possible risks, I anonymized the names of the participants, (Creswell, 2014). The interviews were conducted in an office on campus other than my own. Each participant was interviewed at a time that was convenient for them.

3.5 Methodology

3.5.1. Research Site

The research site was a public university in South Africa. It has four faculties namely, Management Sciences (FMS), Engineering, Built Environment & Information Technology (FBEIT), Health & Environmental Sciences (FHES) and Humanities (FHUM). The university has over 22 000 full-time and part-time students registered across its two campuses of which 103 are considered differently abled students according to the 2021 academic year. Female students make up 51 percent of the total student population and male students comprise 49 percent. Although, minority groups such as LGBTQIA+ students are visible on campus, the university does not have head count statistics of this group because the admission policy does not provide non-binary information on the enrollment forms. The reason for selecting the public university was based on the researcher's current professional work in higher education. The researcher interviewed 10 members of the LGBTQIA+ students in all the faculties and on both campuses.

3.6 Sample and Sampling Procedure

I used snowball sampling and purposively selected students who are identified as members of LGBTQIA+ community for this study. A non-probability sample was selected from the four faculties, namely, FMS, FBEIT, FHES and FHUM across two different campuses.

According to Johnson (2003), snowball sampling refers to a non-probability sampling method commonly used where participants make referrals to recruit others. Purposive sampling, also referred to as judgmental sampling, occurs when the researcher determines specific criteria that the sampled participants needed to satisfy (Mack et al. 2005; Vehovar et al., 2016). The selected sampling

methods were suitable and appropriate for a phenomenological study where the aim was to have participants who were representative of the general population of LGBTQIA+ students (Cohen et al., 2007). According to Yin (2011), the participants can be asked to find other individuals with similar characteristics and who could potentially participate in the study, and the researcher can follow such leads for their inclusion in the interviews. In this case, the researcher asked the first participants already interviewed to refer him to other members of LGBTQIA+ available on campus to participate in the study.

Therefore, through the chosen sampling technique, the researcher conducted interviews with 10 LGBTQIA+ students at one university in South Africa (See Table 3.1). Castillo (2018) indicated that interviewing 10 or more participants to attain their perspectives on a particular problem is deemed sufficient. Of the 10 participants, 60 percent were lesbians, 30 percent were gays and 10 percent were queer. Although this group of students is not homogenous given their varying sexual orientations, the researcher used a semi-structured interview protocol enabling participants to share their perceptions and experiences regarding access to, and inclusion in higher education.

Table 3.1:

Demographic details of study participants

Codes	Gender	Sexual Orientation	Age	Faculties
Participant 1	Female	Lesbian	20	Management Sciences
Participant 2	Female	Lesbian	21	Humanities
Participant 3	Female	Lesbian	23	Health & Environmental Sciences
Participant 4	Female	Lesbian	19	Humanities
Participant 5	Female	Lesbian	20	Humanities

Codes	Gender	Sexual Orientation	Age	Faculties
Participant 6	Female	Lesbian	24	Management Sciences
Participant 7	Male	Gay	21	Management Sciences
Participant 8	Male	Gay	20	Management Sciences
Participant 9	Male	Gay	23	Humanities
Participant 10	Non-binary	Queer	24	Humanities

Notwithstanding, that LGBTQIA+ community is not a homogenous group, most South African universities currently do not have records of non-binary groups in their enrollment figures, thereby making it impossible to trace all students with such characteristics. This exercise could also present constraints in terms of time, cost and the resources needed to carry out the research (Cohen et al., 2007). Though this is a master’s thesis, funding was needed to travel between campuses during data collection. I used my personal funds to achieve the intended outcomes of this research. However, in terms of access to the sample, the researcher was employed in the higher education sector, in the office that deals with transformational agendas on special projects such as human rights and social justice. As a result, I had the background to be able to access and invite the potential participants.

3.7 Instrumentation

The instrument used in this research was a semi-structured interview because it was ideal for gathering data on participants’ personal narratives, perspectives, and experiences (Mack et al., 2005). This data collection method allows the interviewer to interact with the individual participants by asking questions in a neutral manner, listening attentively to responses, asking follow-up questions, and probing accordingly (Mack et al., 2005). The 10 sampled participants were asked open-ended

questions to understand their common experiences and perceptions regarding access to and inclusion in higher education. Other researchers like Turner (2010) support the use of open-ended questions because they provide participants with an opportunity to fully express their viewpoints and experiences. It was crucially important to use this data collection method which led to gathering sufficient information to address all the research questions of the study.

3.8 Data Analysis

Data analysis is described as the process of arranging the codes into patterns and making sense of the meaning of collected data with an intention of interpreting such collected data into categories and common themes (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). For this study, the interviews were recorded with permission of the participants, and transcripts were later analyzed. Mack et al. (2005) write that interview data consist of audio recordings, written transcripts of recordings, including the interviewer's notes covering observations made about the interview content, the participant, and the context. The notes are necessary during transcription of interview recordings, to clarify and put context on what the interviewees have mentioned. Since qualitative data analysis is regarded as a personal process by Rogers (2018), I was guided by Saldana (2013)'s coding procedures, whereby the recorded interviews were transcribed from the analytic memos taken during the interview session and similar codes were grouped together and interpreted to generate patterns, categories, and common themes.

The LGBTQIA+ semi-structured interviews were transcribed for analysis. After completing data transcription, I checked all 10 transcriptions against the original recordings to ascertain the accuracy.

Skjott and Korsgaard (2019) define coding qualitative data as a process of converting rough data into clear, understandable, and trustworthy narrative. This requires a researcher to identify segments of meaning in the data collected and assign them with a specific code in a form of a word or short phrase. The data was thematically analyzed, using open coding.

Therefore, the first step involved transcribing the semi-structured interview recordings, organizing data as per research questions asked to each participant, and reading each transcribed sentence/phrases to make sense of the meaning. The second step involved putting data into different columns for coding and interpretation. All data collected was put into one table so that I could easily read and re-arrange data into different codes and categories. Each coding segment included direct quotations from the participants, and I immediately interpreted what the data meant. At this stage, I had already identified several themes, so I then referred to relevant literature that supported or possibly contradicted each finding. The most discussed themes were “lack of education or awareness about LGBTQIA+ community”, “student housing, application form and admission policy”, “bullying and rejection”, “socialization and sense of belonging”, and “sensitivity about diversity in the lecture hall” respectively. In the last step, I wrote a narrative paragraph describing each theme.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

The issue of risk to the participants was taken into consideration, especially while conducting the study with sample participants who were already experiencing gender bias, stigmatization, and other forms of vulnerability. The following elements are key ethical considerations:

3.9.1 Access to the Research Area

Before conducting the interviews, the researcher received ethical clearance from the Nazarbayev University Ethics Committee and once approval has been issued, the ethical clearance letter was submitted to the university's registrar office which provided access to the research site.

3.9.2 Confidentiality

According to Creswell (2014), one of the ethical issues to consider when conducting research involving people is that researcher needs to avoid revealing information that would compromise participants. Similarly, Kumar (2014) totally opposes the idea of identifying participants and the information supplied by them as it is considered "unethical". Therefore, the names of the participants were not mentioned. Instead, I replaced them with pseudonyms when coding and recording responses (Creswell, 2014; Creswell, 2007). I maintained confidentiality by not disclosing any personal information shared by the participants. To maintain confidentiality and protect the participants from any harm, I renamed the participants as P1, 2, 3, 4, 5 etc. instead of using any personal details throughout the interviews. During the interview session, participants were informed that information gathered or collected would be treated as confidential, would not be disclosed to any third party and that they could freely decide whether or to take part (Cohen et al., 2007). The information collected during the interviews will be kept safe in my personal archives for at least three years after the completion of the study for audit purposes. Finally, the researcher assured participants that they could refuse to answer any questions or discuss any topic that made them feel uncomfortable.

3.9.3 Informed Consent Form

The researcher also made sure that each individual participant completed a consent form indicating that the participation was completely voluntary, and that the process was completed before conducting the interviews. The participants were also furnished with a copy of the informed consent form (Appendix A). Before conducting an interview session, I went through the informed consent to ensure that permission had been given, and again informed the participants about the voluntary nature of the study.

3.9.4 No harm and protection

The researcher was working in higher education sector where data collection was conducted. Therefore, one of the campus offices (not the researcher's office) was used to conduct the interviews sessions where all sampled participants had easy access, felt safe, comfortable, and familiar with the surroundings.

3.10 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the research design and methodology were outlined. A phenomenological inquiry approach underpinned this study as a guide to understand the lived experiences of the participants. Qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 members of the LGBTQIA+ Community. Data was analyzed thematically. To ensure that ethical guidelines were followed throughout the interviews, I outlined the ethical considerations of this study. The next chapter presents the findings captured in the form of narratives for LGBTQIA+ students.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

Around the world, LGBTQIA+ Community is recognized as a non-homogenous group with similar experiences. However, each category includes unique experiences linked to inequality, discrimination, and marginalization based on their sexual orientation status (Glazzard et al., 2020). The students who are members of LGBTQIA+ participated in this research and shared their lived experiences and perceived challenges in terms of access and inclusion in higher education in South Africa. The participants in this research described their challenges and barriers regarding accessibility and inclusivity in higher education space, suggesting that creating awareness, and educational campaigns across campuses about the LGBTQIA+ Community is crucial.

Although issues around discrimination and marginalization against LGBTQIA+ students are sensitive, 10 participants openly shared their stories. This analysis of the interviews revealed four dominant themes:

- University policy on inclusion.
- Lack of awareness and education campaigns about LGBTQIA+ community.
- Bullying and rejection of the LGBTQIA+ community.
- Lack of integration and socialization.

This chapter presents findings derived from semi-structured interviews conducted with students who identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community. The researcher used a phenomenological approach as the most appropriate methodology to describe the stories of

LGBTQIA+ students. The participants shared their stories in English. Finally, the findings were written and discussed in the third person. The researcher used pseudonyms for the students and focused his attention on the participants' experiences.

4.2 Research Findings

The findings of this study are summarized in two sections in terms of themes, parallel with research questions and demographic information.

4.2.1 Section 1: Demographic Information

The first section of the interview captured background information of the LGBTQIA+ students in the study. All participants in the study were asked about their sexual orientation, age, year of study, and faculties where they were enrolled.

4.2.1.1 Sexual orientation status and age

All 10 participants were members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Six study participants identified themselves as females, but their sexual orientation status was *lesbian*. Three male participants identified themselves as *gay*. Of the 10 participants, only one participant identified as a queer (Figure 4.1). In terms of the age category, study participants who were identified as *lesbians* ranged between the age of 19 and 24 years. Participants who were identified as *gays*, were between the ages of 21 and 23. The participant who was identified as *queer* was 24 years old.

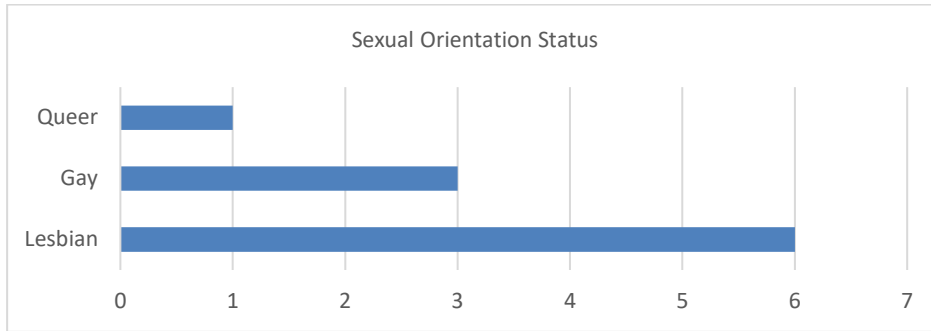


Figure 4.1: *Sexual orientation status among participants*

The findings showed that about 60 percent of female participants identified themselves as lesbians compared to 30 percent of male participants who identified as gay students. Only 10 percent of the participants indicated their sexual orientation status as queer.

Most of the participants were in their early 20s, and the most senior students were over the age of 24, compared to only one participant below the age of 20.

All 10 participants were students enrolled across three university faculties of their program choice or specialization. About 50 percent of the participants indicated that they enrolled in the Faculty of Humanities compared to 40 percent of the Faculty of Management Sciences participants. Of the total, 10 percent of the participants were enrolled in the Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences. Although, the university in question had four faculties including Engineering, Built Environment, and Information Technology, no referrals were made, hence no participants came from this faculty.

4.2.2 Section 2: Themes

This section addresses the main themes aligned to the research questions to further understand the lived experiences and perceived challenges/barriers that LGBTQIA+ students were confronted with, in terms of access and inclusion, largely based on their sexual orientation.

4.2.2.1 University policy on inclusion

The participants had stories regarding their lived experiences and perceptions of the university policy. The issue of an application form, student accommodation, and institutional culture emerged as common themes. According to one participant, confusion prevails in completing the application form for admission to the university, which accommodates male and female students but ignores the intersexual group. For instance, to illustrate this, P4 referred to the application form and said that:

To start with, there is a big confusion that the institution does in the application forms, they ask for gender rather than sex and provide only two options which is male and female, which are the only options available thus making it impossible for LGBTQIA+ students indicate their sexual orientation status in the application form as such. We have males, females, or intersexual group on campus. Those are the three sexes that should be asked at first, then institution should rather more ask for gender and leave a blank space where the prospective students will provide them with their gender the person that they are comfortable with, for instance in my case if they ask for my sex I may say I am male but when they ask for my gender that is when I may specify that I am a transgender woman.

The university policy falls short on its admission procedures, which are seemingly not explicit in terms of addressing gender equality and creating equal participation for all students, particularly those who wish to disclose their sexual orientation status during the admission phase. This puts the university in serious contravention of equal rights, as it is unable to account for the LGBTQIA+ population on campus and is unable to holistically address their needs as part of creating access and widening the participation for all. Similarly, P10 also shared:

I think the university is not inclusive or accommodating because the application forms for admission do not accommodate the LGBTQIA+ community and that was supposed to be a starting point to show the LGBTQIA+ community that they are welcome at this university. I think, there are other LGBTQIA+ members who are strictly males but identify themselves as females, so on their application form, they do tick off female box/column. There are also lesbians who do identify themselves as males within the institution. Basically, this provides university with inaccurate statistics because the number of LGBTQIA+ members is misappropriately represented.

Notwithstanding that university policies cut across teaching and learning, research and innovation, human resources administration and physical infrastructure/resources, such policies should provide direction for how the university intends to create equal access and participation through expanding the existing infrastructure or resources meant to meet diverse needs of all students. For example, lack of access to user-friendly toilet facilities for LGBTQIA+ in all student housing or accommodation around campus was raised by two participants as the primary concern, basically highlighting that campus accommodation remains largely “heteronormative”, with little

reasonable accommodation for all students where their dignity, privacy, and respect as part of their fundamental human rights are restored. The following comment was made by P1:

So, basically our campus residences are divided into male and female dormitories and within them, toilet facilities are designed based on a status of the residence being for male or female students. This becomes problematic when gay students, especially drag queens who wear female clothes, are not allowed to use female toilets. They are forced to use male toilets, and this makes them feel uncomfortable and disrespected. Again, I do not think it would be a problem for a gay student to share a room with a girl for instance, because gay students feel like they are females, so to them, sharing a room is not a problem, but according to the university rules and policies such arrangements are prohibited.

Similarly, P8 narrated how these heteronormative rules that favor strictly male and female students, while exacerbating unfair discriminatory practices against LGBTQIA+ students are biased, thus are not promoting equal opportunities for all. P8 said that:

We need the toilets for LGBTQIA like we have toilets for males and females. The university do not allow us to use opposite toilets. The campus residence rules do not allow us to share a room with a male student if you are a gay or share with a female student if you are a lesbian, for example. In fact, we need residence managers specifically responsible for LGBTQIA+

It is clear that study participants felt despondent because resources were mainly heteronormative by structural design and did not create a reasonable accommodation for all students. Although, sexual minorities wish to be treated with respect and dignity like heterosexuals, they did not call for separate student housing as this would lead to further discrimination and marginalization, thereby defeating efforts to create an inclusive campus environment for all. P3 and P10 also

mentioned some challenges presented by university criteria used for student housing. In addition, P7 reiterated that due to the lack of inclusive guidelines on student housing, current discriminatory measures led to students resorting to living in unsafe places outside campus:

Another challenge is that there are no student housing facilities to least accommodate LGBTQIA+ students, they may say LGBTQIA+ students are allowed to stay on campus residences, but the question remains, how will they stay in the residences that were not designed for them in the first place? We are not saying we are different and need special treatment but now we need policies that will accommodate us and that will conform with who we are.

These systematic discrimination practices do not redress past injustices, but instead promote unequal societies where the rights of LGBTQIA+ students are often violated. Such students end up feeling disgruntled and choose to stay off campus.

I think there are a lot of systematic issues when it comes to student accommodation at our campus. For example, I remember there was one student who did not feel comfortable sharing a room with anyone else because she was lesbian. Instead, she wanted to stay alone, she was from Y campus and came to stay at residence at X campus. And then, she was asked; if I don't want to share the room what is going to happen to me? [We all know that staying at dormitories requires sharing rooms with others due to limited facilities]. And then, that is when she took the matter to the current student council of equity and transformation. The student council fought on her behalf her, and it was resolved that the student should stay alone. However, this created tension among other students calling for equal treatment. And

due to homophobic attacks, she eventually left campus accommodation and stayed outside campus.

Contrary to all negative comments made by other participants regarding unbiased criteria used for allocating student housing and challenges that LGBTQIA+ students experienced in campus accommodation, P6 commented:

The criteria are fair, transparent and I think they do apply inclusivity within the... I don't think they are being discriminated against in terms of being chosen when being allocated to residences, whether it is ladies or boys' residence. At least they are placed like any other students, so in this regard I don't think they are being discriminated against. I have seen gay people at Males Residences, and I do not know anyone who has raised up a point of staying uncomfortably or being bullied or discriminated against while staying within campus residences. They always feel safe, have freedom to be themselves even within the residence space.

4.2.2.2 Lack of awareness and education about LGBTQIA+ Community

With incidents of stereotypes and myths around the LGBTQIA+ community becoming more prevalent on university campuses, there is consensus that lack of education about this community contributes to adverse effects. For example, the P1, P5 and P6 shared their thoughts on social education:

There is no education that is offered to students at this university regarding the LGBTQIA+ community, sexuality, gender, and sex, so that is the biggest challenge we have on this university campus. (P1).

I think university's curriculum should include classes or lessons or something that educates lecturers and students about the LGBTQIA+ community. Because I think most people still don't understand how the LGBTQIA+ community operate and came into existence. So, maybe if they get educated about the LGBTQIA+ community, they won't be any problems...for example I am a female, but my pronouns can be "he, or him" so if they get educated about all that, I do not think we will get experience such things where they do not address us correctly. Either the university or the institution can just have a group or whatsoever to educate lecturers and students about the LGBTQIA+ community, it will be much better and easier for everyone, we won't get to experience such problems again. (P5).

I think it is all about the institution educating the whole campus about the LGBTQIA+ community because we still have people who do not understand how the members of LGBTQIA+ operate and what are the don'ts within this community. You understand? (P6).

While the provision of education for the LGBTQIA+ community is highly recommended by many, institutions of higher education should create awareness campaigns around campus that are meaningful and highlights gender discrimination, as P8 shared:

I think the university should raise an awareness by having campaigns on campus. Yeah, having LGBTQIA+ campaigns where they will be educating people about our rights. If they can have campaigns on campus that is where they will be able to raise awareness. Currently, we have political campaigns on campus, we also have sports, so if the campaign is extended to the community, that is where LGBTQIA+ community will get noticed, will get the attention because we want to be heard, we also have our rights. Everyone has their rights, so if I feel

like I want to get dressed like this, I want to behave in this manner, it is my freedom of choice. So, I think the institution should have an LGBTQIA+ campaign.

4.2.2.3 Bullying and rejection of the LGBTQIA+ Community

Members of the LGBTQIA+ faced constant challenges in being accepted as members of society. In many instances, they experienced unjustifiable abuse in different ways based on their sexual orientation. One participant mentioned that it often happens during their first year into university when there is so much to adjust and adapt to. Their sexuality is often questioned; for example, P10 shared some dehumanizing moments, and said:

I think it was in 2018 when I was doing my second year, then someone approached me and said, I would make such a beautiful girl, but why am I lesbian? This was very offensive as if I had just woken up and decided to be a lesbian. How do they think that person is going to feel when you are asking such kind of questions?

There is also another element of discriminatory practices occurring in the lecture halls where students who identify as members of LGBTQIA+ are not recognized, accepted, and respected even by those who should be their role models, “faculty members”. For example, there were times when LGBTQIA+ students were ignored when trying to actively participate in the discussion. Instead, the faculty members continue to perpetuate stereotype attitudes toward sexual minority groups in the classrooms.

Acceptance also within the lecture room. Lecturers also need education in this area. For example, you'll raise your hand when the lecturer has asked a question, but then they move on to the next person. (P6).

The participants made comments pointing out that cis male or straight students were the most common perpetrators of homophobic violence against students whose sexual orientation was different. P2 mentioned that:

I have witnessed and experienced bullying from mainly male figures who will just suppress you to make feel otherwise of yourself because you are male, they will make funny comments like, why are you trying to be a woman? He mentioned that there is a shortage of men, just nasty comments that will make you feel small, make you feel uncomfortable.

Negative comments such as like this have far-reaching consequences for the actual victims who receive disparaging homophobic remarks and might also not feel safe around the university campus which, depending on the person, could lead to their dropping out.

4.2.2.4 Lack of integration and socialization

When discussing specific issues on promoting human rights and social justice in a higher education environment, several incidents were described as socially unjust and discriminatory practices confronting LGBTQIA+ students, ranging from: lack of respect, recognition, acceptance, and socialization. Study participants did not have a sense of belonging around campus. This included being excluded from all campus life activities which were highly heteronormative. Other participants claimed that they feel unwelcomed and not recognized by other students. P10 explained:

I think most first year students are not comfortable to disclose their identity in terms of their sexual orientation status. They do not come out in order to be accepted by heterosexual students. So, most of them live a lie just to impress other students.

The experiences of being isolated on the basis of one's sexual orientation had become everyday occurrences for students who identified as members of the LGBTQIA+ Community and such treatment led to far-reaching psychological problems like mental health due to constant homophobic attacks. P8 said that:

I think, once other students noticed that you are a gay or lesbian, they isolate you and they do not want to be associated with us. This is hurting because it is not like we are not humans or what.... So, sometimes people understand this community, but majority of them do not. This is a problem that needs to be fixed.

Like P8, other participants' privacy had been breached and sexuality status questioned by those who did not want to accept and treat the LGBTQIA+ as normal human beings. P7 shared:

I feel like we are not seen as human beings. For example, I used to attend a particular class with this other male student who was fully aware of my sexual orientation or preference, but he would constantly try to flirt with me. He went to a point where he retrieved my mobile numbers from the WhatsApp Group. I felt insulted by his actions as he tried to convince me otherwise. I really felt undermined, so these are some of the challenges we experienced at campus. Others even resort to using some derogatory words against us.

Although there is increasing awareness of LGBTQIA+ people, many still encountered systematic discrimination and stigmatization in the higher education space. For example, P1 and P2 explained:

The real challenge is discrimination because we find ourselves sitting alone instead of being part of social groups involving straight people. We are being discriminated against on many

things, whatever the other students do, we are unable to join them. If it happens that let's say, there is sports activity and there are other students who are members of the LGBTQIA+ interested in playing basketball. But based on who they are, they are excluded from that sport. They are told that they cannot take part in lady squad. (P1).

I think our challenges would be, there should be, like we are not recognized let me put it that way. It is like we do not exist; we have been trying to be recognized, raising awareness to say there are minority group like us on campus. The thing is, we want to be recognized, not that we want to seek attention, but other students should be educated about us that we are part of the campus community and society. We will be here for generations to come. (P2).

Higher education institutions are expected to be exemplary when it comes to creating a campus environment conducive to teaching and learning, while imparting valuable knowledge to students to be socially responsible citizens and become competitive graduates. Some student leaders such as those in Student Council, seemed to manipulate minority groups such as LGBTQIA+ students by appealing to them for votes onto the Student Council and later forgot about their plight once elected to student governance. Participants mentioned that the Student Council was fully aware of serious challenges confronting the LGBTQIA+ students. In fact, student leadership usually appealed to the LGBTQIA+ vote by aligning their elections campaigns with related right issues, but this was often short-lived once they made it onto the Student Council. P5 claimed:

I think you always know how selfish, and manipulative student leaders are. They are so corrupt. I do not know their reasons for misleading students, especially LGBTQIA+ group. Because they know more about our challenges, they only recognize us when it is going to

benefit them during campaigning period. They usually disappear right after being elected and propelled into student council.

4.3 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, challenges, and barriers that members of the LGBTQIA+ had experienced and shared with the researcher were highlighted. This was presented as a set of themes substantiated with supporting quotations that attempted to address and answer the main research questions. All participants indicated a need for the university to embark on extensive awareness campaigns geared toward creating safe campuses where every student, irrespective of their gender or sexual orientation, is treated with respect and dignity. Some participants viewed institutions of higher education as not inclusive and accommodating of diversity because minority groups such as LGBTQIA+ students were still vulnerable and marginalized. The next chapter presents a discussion of the findings.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences and perceptions of students who identified themselves as members of the LGBTQIA+ Community in one public university regarding access and inclusion in higher education. Findings from the semi-structured interviews were presented. This chapter focuses on the findings from the previous chapter to better understand the experiences and perceptions of the LGBTQIA+ students in terms of access and inclusion in higher education in South Africa.

This chapter aims to discuss the main overarching research question about the experiences and perceptions of LGBTQIA+ students at one South African university regarding access and inclusion. Sub-research questions included: What are the challenges that LGBTQIA+ students experience? How do LGBTQIA+ students perceive the criteria used by the university to accommodate them in campus housing? To what extent do LGBTQIA+ students do believe the university's admission policy caters for the acceptance of LGBTQIA+ students into the university? Finally, how do LGBTQIA+ students believe the university can raise community awareness in ways that improve human rights and social justice on an institutional level? (See 1.3).

To analyze data collected from the participants' responses which generated specific themes, the following key concepts from the conceptual framework on social identity (in-group, out-group, and gender-conforming) were used. The theoretical framework on social justice by Sapon-Shevin (2003) which states that social justice is a model that welcomes inclusiveness through which societies can create equitable opportunities and treatment for all) was used as a lens in the discussion.

5.2 Process of the Data Analysis

The researcher used a thematic approach to inductively interpret qualitative data. The data was organized into themes, similarities and contrasts were noted, and the data was coded into understandable units. The themes provided highlighted how individual participants faced challenges and barriers to higher education access and inclusion, mostly due to their sexual orientation (Robson, 2011).

5.2.1 University Policy on Inclusion

The university policies for public institutions are drafted and aligned with national legislative frameworks to ensure that universities play a critical role in identifying any existing inequalities and discriminatory practices based on race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other forms of discrimination (Higher Education Act, 1997). As a result, the policies are supposed to be transformative, resulting in equal opportunity for all students, regardless of race, gender, socioeconomic background, religious belief, disability, or sexual orientation. One public university was selected as a case study. However, the findings of this study revealed that participants face challenges with the university's application forms and on-campus student housing, which has a negative impact on the university's ability to achieve equity and access for all students, particularly marginalized groups like members of the LGBTQIA+ Community. One of the university's strategic goals is to "promote good governance, human rights, and social justice". This is in line with the university's core values of "diversity," which includes race, class, multilingualism, ethnicity, national origin, religion, freedom of conscience, gender, age, socioeconomic status, disability, and sexual orientation. However, the admission application form as informed by the university policy is only provides space for information on race, gender (heterosexual), disability, and ethnicity. This,

according to Sapon-Shevin (2003), is not a model that embraces inclusiveness because the application form does not include other aspects such as sexual orientation. Thus, university admission procedures do not promote equitable opportunities for all, especially for those students with a different sexual orientation from the binary male and female classification, which is not included in the application form.

From the findings in the results section, it is noted that participants experienced different challenges on campus. The results show that the participants claimed that confusion prevailed in terms of completing the application form for admission into the university, which accommodates only male and female students, and ignores intersexual groups. Pattman (2018) also discusses the exclusion of intersexuality on application forms, stressing the fact that university spaces make LGBTQIA+ community invisible. The finding could be attributed to the university's decision not to include gender non-conforming groups in the application form as a strategy for creating campus environment that is accessible and inclusive for all students. In a similar study for a doctoral thesis, Casson (2014) investigated the implications of asking LGBTQIA+ applicants to reveal their sexual orientation during the admission process and found that applicants had noticed that, although diversity in terms of race, sex, and ethnicity was immediately visible on the application form, sexual orientation was conspicuously absent. As one participant mentioned, the university application forms do not cater for the sexual minority group such as LGBTQIA+ students, because there are no relevant options for indicating sexual orientation status other than gender which is biologically assigned at birth. A small number of institutions, on the other hand, have made a serious effort to address LGBTQIA+ inclusion, by using their application forms to identify LGBTQIA+ students directly. For instance, three of the 26 universities in South Africa ask for sexual identification

(female, male and trans) on their application forms. The universities provide examples of “inclusiveness” practices where gender non-conforming groups are being accommodated.

Most importantly, without an LGBTQIA+ demographic, an institution cannot assess LGBTQIA+ access and inclusion rates. As a result, such institutions cannot claim to be diverse or inclusive. This can be considered institutional discrimination because such institutions discriminate against some students based on their sexual orientation which is a barrier to educational participation and may hamper learning.

The other challenges raised by participants living in the student housing on campus was access to the toilet facilities. For example, students who identify as LGBTQIA+ would prefer to use neutral toilet facilities. However, the participants were forced to use facilities that were gendered either male or female. Taulke-Johnson (2010) confirms similar challenges which provided evidence that university accommodations can be intolerant, unwelcoming, hostile, and homophobic, such as anti-gay attitudes inscribed on room doors, resulting in homosexual students changing their behavior such that their “gayness” was not known in the accommodation. Here the author’s perspectives can be aligned to the features of social identity where the in-groups are commonly known for their biased, prejudicial, and discriminatory attitudes against the out-groups.

Furthermore, Beemyn (2005), Pomerantz (n.d.), Krum (2013) and Singh (2013) support the above statement by indicating that, in the context of the UK’s and the US’s higher education system, concerns have been raised about the lack of gender-neutral facilities and shared bedrooms for students who identify as trans or gender non-conforming. Although the studies were based in the UK and the US, the findings can be replicable in the context of South Africa where lack of gender-neutral facilities as attested by participants affects their personal dignity because they do not feel

comfortable and safe to use facilities that are not designed for their needs (See 4.2.2.3 & 4.2.2.4). It is important to note that the participants do not want special treatment by having bathrooms dedicated to LGBTQIA+ students, but gender neutral restrooms would signal inclusiveness on campus.

However, bathrooms that are gender-neutral accommodate everyone could make everyone to feel welcomed. In this context, the LGBTQIA+ community who, according to the conceptual framework of social identity find themselves being denied, denigrated, and segregated, are raising their voices because they want to be accepted, and recognized, thus calling for inclusiveness where campus facilities are user-friendly to all students.

5.2.2 Lack of Awareness and Education about LGBTQIA+ Community

Education as a fundamental human right is one of the key indicators educational institutions can focus on as part of creating equal access and equity, promote active participation of all students, irrespective of their race, age, religion, belief, disability, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation. However, research shows that the rights of students with different sexual orientations are often violated by their peers and faculty due to lack of diversity education. In this study, participants indicated that stigmatization and victimization are prevalent in terms of accepting and recognizing the sexual minority groups where stereotypes characterized by ignorance and negative attitudes towards LGBTQIA+ Community were documented. The above narration finds expression in social identity with the emergence of in-groups that always dictate terms to the gender non-conforming out-groups. Other research studies (Metro, 2015; McKinney, 2005) confirm this by indicating that stereotypes and ignorance can lead to marginalization, and curriculum invisibility is worse for LGBTQIA+ students who have reported a lack of LGBTQIA+ experiences and history reflected in

their curriculum. According to Formby (2015), higher education institutions' curricula are not universal, and literature implies that programs are still highly heteronormative. Study participants indicated how the curriculum on LGBTQIA+ rights in higher education is lacking (See 4.2.2.2 & 4.2.2.3). A study conducted in Europe by O'Flaherty (2015) supports the above statement. He found that lack of information and awareness about LGBTQIA+ people's rights and needs limits their ability to deal effectively with phenomena like bullying and exclusion. These incidences have led to the emergence of in-groups with little information about the LGBTQIA+ Community being generally biased against the out-groups (i.e., the LGBTQIA+ Community) because the dissimilarities associated with these two groups are not addressed in the curriculum. According to Sapon-Shevin (2003), this does not meet the model for social justice which strives for inclusiveness for all. In this case, LGBTQIA+ issues are not embedded in the curriculum.

Inclusive curriculum that caters for the needs of all students irrespective of their sexual orientation should be offered as universal programs intended to change social attitudes. Glazzard (2020) also supports study participants' sentiments and suggests that curriculum diversity be fostered in all student courses irrespective of the specialization as a strategy to address issues around LGBTQIA+ equality. There are inclusive practices that institutions of higher education should adopt; for example, curriculum inclusion of LGBTQIA+ with related themes has been identified as a way to acknowledge diversity, notably in management, humanities, and social sciences (Formby, 2013; O'Flaherty, 2015; Snapp, 2015). Developing inclusive curriculum is important because it will educate people about the LGBTQIA+ Community while also reducing stigmatization.

5.2.3 Bullying and Rejection

According to Booth and Ainscow (2002), creating inclusive cultures and implementing inclusive policies greatly contribute to an atmosphere that is accepting, secure for all, and supports diversity as a strategy to reduce any discriminatory attitudes within educational institutions. The Salamanca Statement, as noted by Hernandez-Torrano et al. (2020) represents 92 member countries' commitment to a widely agreed goal of universal education. Even though many countries are dedicated to reaching the universal aim of "Education for All", literature reveals that LGBTQIA+ students continue to experience constant bullying and rejection by their peers based on their sexual orientation. Ellis (2009) agrees with the above statement indicating that many academic studies describe LGBTQIA+ students as victims, emphasizing their experiences with bullying, harassment, and discrimination in higher education. The participants further mentioned that getting constant negative remarks about their sexuality as demonstrated by other students can contribute to ones' low self-esteem and ultimately not feeling safe around campus (See 4.2.2.3). The issue of safety because of non-affirmation of sexual orientation is also highlighted within the frame of bullying as a big problem, causing public worry about a lack of safety in educational institutions in South Africa (Ncontsa, 2013 as cited in Juan et al., 2018, p.1). Although the study participants for this research were LGBTQIA+ Community, it must be noted that safety is generally safeguarded for the LGBTQIA+ community, women, and differently abled persons in the context of South Africa by the South African Constitution and Human Rights.

Participants in the study also described how they experienced psychological setbacks citing "homophobic attacks" that are dehumanizing because of environment connected with the higher education space. The statement above is supported by Formby (2015), Keenan (2015), and

Lough Dennell (2015) who state that homophobic abuse results in LGBTQIA+ students feeling isolated and depressed as well as feeling obligated to educate their housemates in attempt to change their negative beliefs. Due to lack of formal educational programs in higher education institutions, the situation is quite frightening, as it forces the same victims, namely, LGBTQIA+ students, to assume the role of educating their peers about the community although HEIs are expected to implement inclusive policies that promote gender equality, in particular, sexual orientation. According to research conducted in New Zealand by McGlashan (2017), educational institutions are expected not only to address bullying and marginalization of LGBT students, but also to drive initiatives intended to engender diversity through gender-neutral uniform policies and the introduction of inclusive sports and extra-curricular activities for same-sex, eventually eliminate bullying and rejection attitudes. These are some of the inclusive practices that HEIs can adopt and infuse in their transformative policies to increase access and widen participation for all students irrespective of their sexual orientation. It should be noted that McGlashan's recommendation does not promote full inclusion because it excludes the QIA+ Community and, therefore, falls short on advocating inclusiveness.

5.2.4 Lack of Integration and Socialization

The study participants largely commented on experiencing socially unjust treatment perpetuated by non-LGBTQIA+ students on campus. Lack of integration and socialization in the absence of social interactions occurring between the LGBTQIA+ Community and the heterosexual group, has led to LGBTQIA+ students not being respected, recognized, and accepted due to their sexual orientation. HEIs do not exclusively separate classrooms based on individual gender: all students irrespective of their race, religion, age, socioeconomic status, language, and sexual

orientation attend similar classrooms. Cross (2004) agrees that South African higher education institutions are increasingly reflecting the social, educational, cultural, linguistic, religious, and racial diversity of the country. Nevertheless, the study participants stated that their freedom of expression and their freedom to belong had been curtailed because even first-year students expressed a fear of “coming out” or “disclosing” their gender identities in order to be accepted by non-LGBTQIA+ students, who are notorious for their homophobic remarks (See 4.2.2.1). However, Formby (2015) asserts that recent scholarship has stressed university as a good experience that allows individuals to explore their gender and sexual identities.

Michaelson (2008) supports the assertion that homophobia is a major issue in school settings where most of the socialization occurs among the youth. This is especially true for students who identify with others of their sexual orientation. Notably, homophobic attacks can harm the LGBTQIA+ students’ mental health (Mason, 2001; Wilson & Cariola, 2019). It is possible that the lack of integration and socialization between LGBTQIA+ and heterosexual students is influenced by the fact that individuals are more likely to associate with those who share similar levels of prejudice based on shared political, cultural, or religious views on homophobia.

5.3 Chapter Summary

Lack of knowledge and understanding of the challenges facing the LGBTQIA+ community leads to ignorance and violations of the rights of the LGBTQIA+ community. Regardless of gender or sexual orientation, universities have a responsibility to promote learning environments that are conducive to all students’ learning. Students who identify as LGBTQIA+ Community have a fundamental right to feel accepted and protected in institutions of higher learning. Students’ visibility should not be restricted to satisfy heterosexual students. Instead, HEIs should revise and

adapt policies that embrace change, great access and widen participation to all students. The next chapter presents the conclusions and recommendations of the study.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the interpretation of the findings, supported by relevant literature, regarding the experiences and perceptions of LGBTQIA+ Community students at a South African higher education institution regarding access and inclusion.

This chapter draws conclusions emanating from the findings of the study and discusses the implications of the findings on which recommendations related to the lived experiences and perceived challenges of access and inclusion of LGBTQIA+ students at a South African higher education institution are based. Additionally, this chapter discusses the limitations of this study, and makes recommendations for further research.

6.2 Conclusions of the Study

The findings of the investigation led to the following study conclusions.

6.2.1 University Policy on Inclusion

It was found that inclusion of students who identified as members of the LGBTQIA+ Community within the higher education environment still faced challenges when filling out the university's application forms, which do not provide options for students who wish to indicate or disclose their sexual orientation. These options are limited to male and female. It was also pointed out that student accommodation facilities, previously built for specific genders, are still heteronormative in their design. Every university's student housing complex lacks restrooms accessible to both male and female students. This suggests that inclusive practices are not fully

implemented at this university under investigation. All HEIs have a responsibility to promote equal opportunities and participation for all students, irrespective of race, religious beliefs, socioeconomic status, language, gender, and sexual orientation. Although, there were participants who felt that accommodation facilities were not necessarily discriminatory and were not in favor of the designated student housing for the LGBTQIA+ students, perhaps, they did not understand “accessibility” which meant access to appropriate facilities available to all. This applies to students referred to as “differently abled persons”, who also live in the similar student housing; however, special restrooms, elevators and ramps are provided for their access.

6.2.2 Lack of Awareness and Education About the LGBTQIA+ Students

This theme highlighted LGBTQIA+ rights being frequently infringed by their peers and, in some cases, faculty members due to a lack of diversity education entrenched in the curriculum across faculties or schools. The participants stated that stereotypes and misconceptions can lead to marginalization due to LGBTQIA+ Community experiences and history not being reflected in the curriculum, among other things. Lack of awareness-raising programs such as Pride Month, which educational institutions might employ to promote awareness about the importance of diversity and appreciating all differences, was also reported.

6.2.3 Bullying and Rejection of the LGBTQIA+ Students

The study revealed that LGBTQIA+ students experienced psychological setbacks fueled by anti-gay name-calling. The use of derogatory words aimed at LGBTQIA+ students led to their not feeling respected, recognized, unwelcomed, and isolated, and not feeling safe on university premises. Bullying and rejection as opposed to “accepting” requires a pragmatic approach because it does not only look at the negative environment. There is always a cry from the members of the

LGBTQIA+ to be recognized, accepted, and respected. If acceptance was common across the hierarchy (management, governance structures, faculties and human resources), the environment would be conducive for all, and bullying and rejection including other forms of discriminatory practices would be eliminated.

6.2.4 Lack of Integration and Socialization

This research found a significant lack of integration and socialization between the LGBTQIA+ population and the heterosexual group, mostly due to a lack of common values and views between the two groups. Students who identify as members of the LGBTQIA+ Community are hesitant and scared of “coming out” in order to avoid more victimization and homophobic attacks, according to the study.

6.3 Recommendations on Creating Inclusive Practices

This study recommends that for higher education institutions to create equitable access and opportunities for all, they should consider the following:

6.3.1 Recommendation 1: University Policy on Inclusion

According to the social justice model of Sapon-Shevin (2003), universities need to create equitable opportunities for all without targeting heterosexual students only. The policy mandate should be clear, explicit and unambiguous especially on issues related to sexual orientation. To give appropriate meaning to the policy, I recommend that universities establish a specialized office (Gender Equity Office) to provide support services related to sexual orientation.

6.3.2 Recommendation 2: Bullying, Rejection, Awareness, and Education including Integration and Socialization

I recommend that curricula should be about social awareness by prioritizing issues of gender and sexual diversity across the LGBTQIA+ Community. It should be noted that, when driving awareness, such campaigns should have educational programs across all faculties, students, management, the executive, Council, Senate, professional support staff, protection services and general workers. During these awareness initiatives intended to discard myths and stereotypes about LGBTQIA+ Community, the broader picture is to eliminate bullying and rejection, so that LGBTQIA+ students are accepted, recognized, and respected for who they are. This will promote an institutional culture where all university community members have a sense of belonging and feel safe on the university campus.

6.4 Limitations

The following are some of the study's limitations. First, the LGBTQIA+ community in higher education was not randomly selected, instead, a purposive sampling method was used. Therefore, the findings of the study could not be applied to the entire higher education sector in South Africa. Secondly, the study did not intend to explore the sexual behaviors, patterns, or preferences of LGBTQIA+ individuals, but rather interested in the challenges and barriers this community experienced because of their sexual orientation.

6.5 Further Research Study

- It is suggested that further studies could be done on a large scale with representative samples from other universities and campuses in order to reach a wider population of LGBTQIA+ students.
- It is also suggested that future research could be inclusive with more members of the LGBTQIA+ community representing, particularly, bisexual, queer, asexual and intersexual as their voices are also important.
- A more in-depth study on how diversity and inclusion contribute to creating inclusive educational institutions is recommended.
- The Directorate of Inclusive within the Department of Higher Education and Training needs to research inclusive environments, learning, and education and practices aimed at developing inclusive policies and practices at all levels.
- The university needs to collaborate with other universities and organize colloquiums to discuss strategies needed to promote human rights and social justice for all students irrespective of their race, gender, socioeconomic, religion, belief, language, age, disability, and sexual orientation.

6.5 Conclusion

Finally, the purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences and perceptions of the LGBTQIA+ students at one South African university regarding access and inclusion in higher education. This study was premised within the phenomenological qualitative approach with the aim of understanding the lived experiences and perceived challenges by the LGBTQIA+ students. This

was done through asking research questions (See 1.3) which ultimately generated the themes (See 4.1) as informed by participants responses as discussed above. The research questions were centered around the experiences and challenges that LGBTQIA+ students are faced with in a particular university. The study reflects findings which were aligned with the perspectives of other researchers discussed in the literature review which indicated that institutions of higher learning as an extension of the community experience institutionalized challenges where students coming from different backgrounds, political affiliations, cultural beliefs, and values joined groups on campus that are significantly similar to their social identities. These group formations often promote heterosexism which in turns develop negative attitudes toward non-heterosexist groups such as the LGBTQIA+ Community. The prejudices and myths held by the in-group not only disassociate them from the out-group but also stigmatize and marginalize the non-conforming group with preconceived ideas based on preferential treatment. Data collected from the study participants through semi-structured interviews concurs with the literature regarding challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ communities that find expression in the institutionalized prejudices and discrimination. This suggests that university policies have not been fully revised and updated to create user-friendly environments that cater for all students without discrimination on the basis of specific socioeconomic background, racial, cultural, linguistic, gender, sexual orientation, and class grouping. In a nutshell, the aims of this research which was about investigating the experiences and challenges of LGBTQIA+ students have been achieved.

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Appendixes

Appendix A: Consent Letter

Consent Form

Investigating the Experiences and Perceptions of the LGBTQIA+ Students at one Public University regarding Access, and Inclusion in Higher Education in South Africa.

Introduction: You are being asked to take part in a research study entitled “*Investigating the experiences and perceptions of the LGBTQIA+ students at one public university regarding access, provision, and inclusion in higher education in South Africa*”. The issue regarding LGBTQIA+ students in higher education remains a controversial and debatable topic in South Africa and elsewhere around the world. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the experiences and perceptions of students identifying themselves as members of the LGBTQIA+ Community regarding access, provision, inclusion, and perceived challenges they face at one university in South Africa. The study will contribute to assessment of how higher education institutions are reshaping existing policies to cater for all students irrespective of their sexual orientation and gender as stipulated in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996, Higher Education Act 101 of 1997, and White Paper for Higher Education Transformation, 1997. As university student belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community you are in a position to provide me with insight on your lived experiences and perceived challenges regarding access, provision, and inclusion in higher education and I would appreciate it if I could interview you.

Procedures: The format of the interview will be a discussion between the interviewee (yourself) and interviewer (myself) using semi-structured interview protocol to guide the discussion.

I expect that this semi-structured interview will take no longer than one hour. With your permission, I will use an audiotape to record the interview mainly for the purposes of accurately transcribing the conversation and analyzing my data.

Compensation: No tangible compensation will be given. A copy of the research results will be available at the conclusion of the study and shared with the Diversity and Inclusion Office to learn about the findings and consider some relevant recommendations.

Confidentiality and Risk: The information you will provide will be treated with strict confidentiality. I will use pseudonyms to protect your privacy and confidentiality and comply with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPI Act is South Africa's equivalent of the EU GDPR). Finally, I assure you that you will not be requested to answer any questions or discuss any topics that make you feel uncomfortable.

Withdrawal of Participation: Should you decide at any time during the interview or discussion that you no longer wish to participate, you may withdraw your consent without prejudice. No data you have provided will be used should you decide to withdraw your consent.

Points of Contact: It is understood that should any questions or comments arise regarding this project, or a research related injury is received, the Principal Investigator, **Mr. Teele Bernard Matsoso, +27 78 737 8826, Teele.Matsoso@nu.edu.kz** should be contacted. Any other questions or concerns may be addressed to the Graduate School of Education Ethics Committee, gse@nu.edu.kz.

Signature and Consent: I confirm that the purpose of the research, the study procedures, the possible risks, compensation, and discomforts as well as benefits have been explained to the participant. The participant has agreed to participate in the study.

I agree for the study to be audio recorded. Yes No

Signature of Participant.....**Date**.....

I understand that the information collected during this study will be treated confidentially.

Signature of Researcher:..... **Date**.....

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Project Title: Investigating the Experiences and Perceptions of the LGBTQIA+ Students at one Public University regarding Access, and Inclusion in Higher Education in South Africa.

Time and Date of Interview: November – December 2021	Place: Public University, South Africa
Interviewee:	Gender: Non-binary:
Campus:	Faculty:
Contact details:	

This study is about exploring experiences and perceptions of LGBTQIA+ students at one public university regarding access, provision, and inclusion in higher education in South Africa. As part of this study, you have been invited to participate in an interview. During the interview session you will be asked some open-ended questions related to your lived experience and perceived challenges in terms of access, provision, and inclusion in this higher education environment. With your permission, the interview session will be recorded using audiotape for the purpose of transcription and data analysis. As part of protecting your confidentiality and privacy, a pseudonym will be used when referring to any personal experiences you share. The results of the study will be utilized solely for completion of research purposes. The interview will take no longer than one hour.

Interview Questions:

- In your personal views, what do you believe are the experiences of LGBTQIA+ students regarding access, provision, and inclusion at one South African university?
- What are the challenges that LGBTQIA+ students experience on campus?
- How do you believe LGBTQIA+ students perceive the criteria university uses to accommodate them in campus residences?
- To what extent do you think LGBTQIA+ students believe the university's admission policy in terms of its directives and guidelines, caters for acceptance of LGBTQIA+ students into the university?
- As an LGBTQIA+ student how do you believe the university can create the awareness of this community that enhances human rights and social justice at an institutional level?

Thank you for your cooperation and participation in this interview.

Appendix C: Interview Transcript Sample

Interviewer: What do you believe are the experiences of LGBTQIA+ students regarding access and inclusion at this university?

Respondent: To start with, there is a big confusion that the institution does in the application forms. They asked for gender rather than sex and provide two options which is male and female – the options that are supposed to be provided at a situation where institution is asking for sex then they will have to provide...

Respondent: Another thing is when you are in the lecture halls, that's where you will get this challenge of not being addressed the way that you are comfortable. Also, the language used in class is usually not gender sensitive at all, therefore, you often get offended each and everyday by the language. I can say that campus environment is not welcoming because both students and faculty (heterosexuals) do not understand the LGBTQIA+ community. Basically, there is no education that is offered to students at this university regarding the LGBTQIA+ community, and sexual diversity, so that is the biggest challenge we have on campus.

Interviewer: Ok! Do you want to share more challenges in this regard?

Respondent: Another challenge is that university student housing does not cater or accommodate LGBTQIA+ students. They may say LGBTQIA+ students are allowed to stay in the campus residences, but now the question is, how will the LGBTQIA+ students stay in residences that were not designed for them in the first place? We are not saying that we are different and therefore, we need special treatment. However, we need policies or practices that will accommodate us and feel comfortable with roommates. This will eliminate being discriminated and bullied...

Appendix D: Confirmation of Professional Language Editing



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3 May 2022

Declaration of professional edit

**Investigating the Experiences and Perceptions of the LGBTQIA+ Students at one Public University
regarding Access and Inclusion in Higher Education in South Africa**
Teele Bernard Matsoso

I declare that I have edited and proofread this thesis. My involvement was restricted to language usage and spelling, completeness and consistency and referencing style. I did no structural re-writing of the content.

I am qualified to have done such editing, being in possession of a Bachelor's degree with a major in English, having taught English to matriculation, and having a Certificate in Copy Editing from the University of Cape Town. I have edited more than 300 Masters and Doctoral theses, as well as articles, books and reports.

As the copy editor, I am not responsible for detecting, or removing, passages in the document that closely resemble other texts and could thus be viewed as plagiarism. I am not accountable for any changes made to this document by the author or any other party subsequent to the date of this declaration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Baumgardt'.

Dr J Baumgardt
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