Environmental Awareness and Capacity Building for Sustainable Development in Sulu: Among Local Government Employees' Perspective

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Abstract

This study examines the environmental awareness and capacity building for sustainable development in Sulu during the Fiscal Year 2025. It employed descriptive-correlational research design with 200 respondents taken through purposive sampling procedure, and treated data through weighted mean, standard deviation, t-test for independent samples, one-way ANOVA, and Pearson's test of correlation. The following are the findings: 1) Nearly three-fourth or majority of the are within the 31-39 years old of age range, mostly female, with almost equal number of single and married employees, majority have Bachelor's degree, have in service for 5 years & below, and mostly with permanent status; 2) On the average, employees are highly aware of environmental issues and challenges, including their causes and effects; 3) On the average, Local Government agencies in Sulu are apt in developing and enhancing the skills, knowledge, and resources of individuals and organizations to improve their ability to address specific challenges; 4) Employees within 40-49 years old, with master's and doctorate degree, and with casual status of appointment are better perceivers of the level of environmental awareness for sustainable development; 5) Employees within 40-49 years old, with bachelor's degree with master's units, and with casual status of appointment are better perceivers of the level of capacity building for sustainable development; 6) High environmental awareness is related to high capacity building for sustainable development among Local Government agencies in Sulu. This study seems to support Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and the Capacity Development Framework. Social Cognitive Theory, developed by Albert Bandura, emphasizes the dynamic interplay between personal factors, behavioural patterns, and environmental influences. It posits that individuals learn and develop their capabilities through observation, imitation, and experience.

Keywords: *Environmental awareness, sustainable development, employees 'perspective, government employee*

INTRODUCTION

Transgender and gender-diverse individuals encounter multifaceted challenges that impact many aspects of their life, including in educational settings (Bartholomeus & Riggs, 2017).

Similarly, in the survey of 2260 Filipino students of whom 3% were gender- diverse and whose average age was 11 years old, McGuire et al. (2010) found that 82% of the participants reported hearing negative comments about gender. Such negative comments were associated with lower perception of safety within the school for gender- diverse participants.

In the study of Russel et., al (2020) entitled "Gender Diversity and Safety Climate Perceptions" it was found out that there is a lack of research investigating the safety needs and perceptions of gender-diverse youth across youth-serving organizations and schools and the focus of school-based settings in four of the measures used in the current analyses—it is pertinent to review literature specifically based on school settings.

As cited by Raymunda L. Apostol is a Public Schools Supervisor in the Baganga North District, Davao Oriental, Philippines. Lovelle Shayne P. Delos Santos is a Teacher II at Sta. Filomena Elementary School in Cateel, Davao Oriental, "The Mediating Effect of School Climate on the Relationship Between Academic Self-Concept and Student Engagement" examined public secondary schools in the Cateel I District of Davao Oriental, Mindanao. The research revealed that school climate partially mediates the relationship between academic self-concept and student engagement, suggesting that a positive school climate can enhance student engagement and self-concept. Although the study does not focus specifically on gender-diverse students, its findings underscore the importance of a supportive school climate for all students.

Therefore, there is a pressing need for research that focuses on the adjustment and acceptance of gender-diverse students and its impact to school climate. This research may provide insights into the unique experiences and challenges faced by these students in a rural Philippine setting and has the potential to inform educational policies and practices that promote inclusivity and support the well-being of gender-diverse students. This, in turn, can help create a culture of acceptance and respect for individuals, regardless of their gender identity or express.

METHODS

A quantitative descriptive correlational approach will be used in this study. In this approach, the researcher will collect data to explain the variables of interest and will figure out how they are related. The study was conducted in four secondary schools of President Roxas Central District particularly Grade 10 gender-diverse students. Raosoft (2004) was utilized to determine the respondents of the study. By considering population size, confidence level, and margin of error, this calculator aids in the precise determination of sample sizes necessary for obtaining statistically significant results. From two hundred eighty-six (286) grade 10 gender-diverse students, one hundred sixty- five (165) of them selected using stratified sampling. A survey questionnaire was used in data gathering. To ensure that the instrument was validated by six (6) evaluators who are acknowledged authorities in teaching Social Studies and test construction. Item (I-CVI) and scale content validation (S-CVI) indices will be computed. The researcher used an acceptable CVI of .979 (Yosuff, 2019). In this study, the Cronbach alpha was computed to determine for this purpose. Reliability of the tool was facilitated through a pilot test of the instruments in the secondary school under President Roxas Central District. The result of the reliability test was 0.91 which considered as excellent. The ratings of 0.91 grade 9 students who were involved in pilot testing was encode in Microsoft Excel software. Cronbach Alpha was computed and used to estimate the reliability of the survey questionnaires. After finding out that the research instrument was valid and reliable, approval of the Graduate School to conduct the study was secured. Subsequently, upon securing the request from the College of Graduate School, a letter request was forwarded to the Schools Division Superintendent of Cotabato Division for approval. With the consent of the Division Superintendent, a similar letter was drafted and sent to the District Supervisor and School heads for recommendation. After getting the approval of the secondary school heads of President Roxas Central District to conduct the study under their jurisdiction, the distribution of the

research instrument to the respondents was automatically followed. The researcher took a brief orientation to respondents before answering the survey questionnaire. They were given ample time to answer the survey questionnaire. Retrieval of the research instrument was done as soon as the respondents finally answered all items of the survey questionnaire. When all quantitative information was encoded and tabulated, the presentation of data followed. Once data are gathered from the respondents, the responses from the accomplished questionnaires were properly encoded, processed, and analyzed using Microsoft excel software. The data were computed using the appropriate statistical tools. The rank was used to analyze the level of adjustment and acceptance of gender-diverse students and its relevance to school climate.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Level of Adjustment of Gender-Diverse Students in President Roxas Central District Secondary Schools

The somewhat higher mean for social integration points to everyday contacts and peer relationships helping pupils to adjust. Studies by Ryan et al. (2010) shown that among LGBTQ+ students, positive peer relationships improve mental health and academic performance. The standard deviation (0.796), however, shows considerable discrepancies in the degree of inclusion, which would result from different school environments and peer perceptions.

Identity affirmation received the highest mean, suggesting that schools are making strides in acknowledging and respecting gender diversity. This finding supports Kosciw et al. (2020), who argue that policies promoting gender inclusion—such as pronoun affirmation and LGBTQ+ representation in the curriculum—significantly enhance students' sense of belonging. However, the variability suggests that affirmation is not uniform across all settings.

The overall mean of 3.68 indicates a generally positive adjustment level, reinforcing the importance of inclusive educational environments. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory suggests that students' development is shaped by their interactions with social structures, including schools, peers, and institutional policies. The standard deviation (0.719) reflects some disparities in experiences, suggesting that while some students thrive in affirming environments, others may still face challenges.

Level of Acceptance of Gender-Diverse Students of President Roxas Central District Secondary Schools

The overall mean score (M = 3.67, SD = 0.694) suggests that gender-diverse students generally perceive moderate to high levels of acceptance within their schools, particularly in inclusive policies, peer relationships, and community engagement. These findings align with scholarly discussions on school climate, social acceptance, and protective factors for gender-diverse students.

The relatively high mean score indicates that school policies and institutional practices play a crucial role in fostering inclusivity for gender-diverse students. Research by Kosciw et al. (2020) emphasizes that explicit anti-discrimination policies, inclusive dress codes, and restroom accommodations contribute to a safer school environment. However, variability in responses (SD = 0.771) suggests that while some schools have well-implemented policies, others may lack enforcement or awareness.

The lower mean score in this dimension suggests that while peer relationships are generally supportive, active peer advocacy and allyship may not be consistent. Russell & Fish (2016) argue that peer support is a critical protective factor for gender-diverse youth, reducing the negative impact of minority stress. However, inconsistent peer interactions could indicate barriers to forming strong social networks, possibly due to implicit biases or lack of peer education on gender inclusivity.

Community engagement received the highest mean score, indicating that schools are making efforts to connect with external organizations, host inclusive events, and educate parents. Bronfenbrenner's (1979)

ecological systems theory suggests that community involvement enhances students' sense of belonging by integrating them into broader support networks. However, the standard deviation (0.694) suggests disparities in access—some students benefit from strong community partnerships, while others may experience a lack of local advocacy efforts.

The overall score reflects a generally positive level of acceptance, but variability in responses indicates that experiences are not uniform across all students and schools. Hatzenbuehler (2009) emphasizes that inconsistent support can contribute to stress and mental health challenges for gender-diverse students.

Summary of the General Acceptance of Gender -Diverse Students IN President Roxas Central District

President Roxas NHS (M = 3.70, SD = 0.69) had the highest level of acceptance, indicating a more supportive school climate for gender-diverse students. This aligns with research by Kosciw et al. (2020), which emphasizes the importance of school policies and peer relationships in shaping acceptance levels.

Kamasi HS (M = 3.51, SD = 0.397) had the lowest mean score, suggesting that gender-diverse students may experience less acceptance or fewer inclusive practices. However, the low standard deviation (SD = 0.397) suggests that responses were relatively consistent, meaning most students at Kamasi HS had similar perceptions.

Greenhill HS and Idaoman HS had moderate levels of acceptance, with mean scores of 3.65 and 3.62, respectively.

The Shapiro-Wilk test results indicate whether responses follow a normal distribution:

Non-normal distributions were found in Greenhill HS (p = 0.011) and President Roxas HS (p < .001). This suggests that student experiences of acceptance may be highly varied, with some feeling strongly accepted while others may still face challenges.

Extent of School Climate in President Roxas Central Secondary Schools

The Spearman's rho correlations between school climate dimensions and the adjustment of gender-diverse students suggest moderate to strong positive relationships across all variables (p < .001). This indicates that a more inclusive and supportive school climate is significantly associated with higher levels of emotional well-being, social integration, and identity affirmation among gender-diverse students.

The relatively lower correlation with identity affirmation ($\rho = 0.342$) indicates that security measures alone may not be sufficient for fostering identity affirmation—affirming policies and representation are also necessary (Greytak et al., 2013).

Correlational Analysis between the level of Acceptance of Gender-Diverse Students and School Climate

The Spearman's rho correlations between school climate dimensions and the level of acceptance of gender-diverse students reveal moderate to strong positive relationships (p < .001) across all variables. This suggests that a more inclusive and supportive school environment enhances the acceptance of gender-community.

Overall Correlation ($\rho = 0.766$, p < .001) The strongest correlation in the study, indicating that a positive school climate significantly increases the level of acceptance of gender-diverse students.

Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight that the level of acceptance of gender-diverse students is positively influenced by the overall school climate. Schools that promote inclusivity, ensure safety, encourage

supportive peer relationships, and provide strong teacher supp While acceptance levels are generally favorable, there are areas needing improvement, particularly in peer relationships and safety and security. Although teachers and policies contribute positively to inclusivity, students still report moderate challenges related to bullying, discrimination, and a lack of safe spaces.

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