



Czech Teachers' Attitudes Towards LGBT+ Students¹

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Abstract: *Many studies report that sexual and gender minority youth face homonegativity at school. Today schools are expected to uphold the principle of inclusive education for all students, including LGBT+ students. It is well established that LGBT+ students often encounter negative experiences. This has negative effects on their well-being and cognitive learning. Teachers, therefore, should support LGBT+ students. This study presents findings from a survey taken by 548 teachers in Czech lower secondary and higher secondary schools. The teachers described the climates in their schools, responded to statements about educational requirements, and evaluated three school case scenarios. Most of the teachers indicated that respect and the safety of all students, including LGBT+ students, are paramount. However, attitudes toward sexual and gender minorities were found to vary among the teachers. As a result, it appears that more training about sexuality and gender topics in Czech schools is warranted.*

Keywords: *LGBT+, teachers, attitudes, secondary schools, inclusive education*

INTRODUCTION

One of the traditional issues constituting educational psychology has been teachers' attitudes and expectations towards students. Since the 1960s it has been shown that teachers' expectations have a major influence on the way they communicate with students and on the arrangement of learning situations (Dusek & Joseph, 1983; Rubie-Davies, 2006; Gentrup et al., 2020).

In the long run, teachers' attitudes and expectations can influence students' self-concept and self-efficacy and the knowledge and skills they acquire. The relationship between attitudes and behaviour is not direct – a particular attitude is not always realised in one particular behaviour (Armitage & Christian, 2003). Nevertheless, attitudes create a certain readiness for certain types of behaviour (while the realisation of others is unlikely). Therefore, educational

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psychology includes a long tradition of research on teachers' attitudes and expectations towards different groups of students, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT+) students.

LGBT+ STUDENTS

One of the distinctions among groups that has been examined is based on gender. The research studies have looked at how teachers' expectations and attitudes differ for girls and boys, as well as at the effect of the gender gap on school achievement. There is extensive literature documenting differences in the behavioural and academic outcomes of girls and boys in elementary and secondary school (Buchmann, DiPrete, & McDaniel, 2008; Holder & Kessels, 2017). Currently, tracking gender differences is standard in most educational and school psychology studies.

Gender, however, is a complex concept that should be used in research with sufficient theoretical insight and not as a dichotomous descriptive trait. Gender represents a set of characteristics that are expected of women/girls and men/boys in a particular society. For some students, gender may also be related to sexual orientation. In the context of a heteronormative society, the majority expect the "true woman" and the "true man" to be heterosexual (Kimmel, 2000). When mediated by other personality-psychological processes, individuals develop their identity in relation to these cultural expectations.

Gender and sexual identity, therefore, act as an interface with student identity (Simons, 2021). If students feel unaccepted at school because of their gender identity and/or sexual orientation, their academic performance may deteriorate. This is often due to experiencing minority stress related to the actual or perceived presence of physical or verbal assaults or resulting from their specific experiences and needs being ignored (Meyer & Frost, 2013; Bundick, Lipinski & Meidl, 2017). A meta-analysis by Toomey and Russell (2016) showed that LGBT+ students face victimisation in schools more often than their heterosexual peers. Kosciw et al. (2010) found that more than 80% of sexual and gender minority students had experienced verbal harassment, 40% reported physical harassment, and more than 50% had experienced cyberbullying. Outcomes like these tend to result in a higher prevalence of depressive symptoms among LGBT+ students (Lucassen et al., 2017).

TEACHERS AND LGBT+ STUDENTS

The principle of inclusive education brings with it the requirement of a sensitive approach to all students. Teachers are supposed to address all individual educational needs. Such an approach should include not only students with learning difficulties but all students with specific challenges related to their



salient identities. These might also be students with sexual orientation and gender identity issues.

Unfortunately, many LGBT+ individuals have reported mixed interactions with educators (Kosciw et al., 2016; Simons & Russell, 2021). Many students report that educators do not treat them negatively, but neither do they feel supported by them. The quality of social support is marginal at best (Alemi et al., 2003). Students trust that teachers would not tolerate open attacks against them. However, students often refrain from confiding in teachers about unpleasant experiences because they are unsure whether they would intervene sensitively. Simons et al. (2017) reported that failed interventions with LGBT+ youth take on a variety of different forms, including both an unintentional and intentional lack of intervention. More research is warranted in this area.

Effective teacher approaches correspond with attitudes and with knowledge. Many authorities argue that teachers must have certain competencies regarding the natural diversity among students. Teacher competencies always include a set of knowledge and skills, but also attitudes. The European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2012) requires that teachers value learner diversity and support all learners. Supporting and using students' diversity for more effective learning is referred to as inclusive competence or competence for

inclusive education. It includes valuing learner diversity, supporting all students, cooperation with others, and continuing personal and professional development (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2012). Educators who are inclusive adapt curriculum materials, develop behavioral management skills, identify special needs, modify content, and ask questions effectively (Kuyini et al., 2016). The dominant concept of inclusive education applies only to students in special education. However, we consider it important to use a broader concept that embraces overall diversity and promotes a personalised approach to all learners. This broad concept, therefore, also includes learners who are perceived as, or identify as, sexual and gender minorities.

Bauman and Del Rio (2006) showed that teachers are more likely to subscribe to an LGBT+ ally identity and thus intervene if they feel greater empathy toward LGBT+ students. Other studies showed that educated and experienced teachers support LGBT+ students more frequently and efficiently than those who lack knowledge and possess low levels of self-efficacy in this area (Silveira & Goff, 2016; Swanson & Gettinger, 2016; Toomey & Russell, 2016; Kull, Kosiw & Greytak, 2017; Hall & Rodgers, 2019; Stargell et al., 2020). Findings from special education research have reached similar conclusions. For example, Low, Lee, and Ahmad (2019) indicated that teachers



with better knowledge about special needs feel more competent to embrace inclusive education for special needs children.

Stargell et al. (2020) measured the beliefs and behaviours of 144 teachers before and after they participated in training on sexual orientation and gender identity. The training resulted in significant increases in both areas and involved learning about the needs of LGBT+ youth, the impact of beliefs, and basic intervention skills. Hall and Rodgers (2019) surveyed 305 teachers about their attitudes toward LGBT+ students and discovered that favorable attitudes were significantly related to being younger, living in the Northeast and Pacific Northwest regions in the United States, possessing a liberal political orientation, identifying as White in terms of race/ethnicity, and being less religious. Swanson and Gettinger (2016) surveyed 98 teachers in middle and high schools to examine the relationships between teachers' attitudes and knowledge, the presence of Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), training on sexual orientation and gender identity, and explicit anti-bullying policies.

Significant differences in attitudes were found for teachers on the basis of their degree of participation in professional development and whether they worked in schools with or without GSAs. Silveira and Goff (2016) gathered and analysed data from 612 music teachers in elementary, middle, and high schools who completed an online

questionnaire about their attitudes toward transgender students. The teachers held positive attitudes towards the students, and these attitudes were significantly related to gender and political affiliation. Females and those who were liberal held more positive attitudes than males and those who were more conservative.

Across the studies mentioned above, the validity of the contact hypothesis, the premise of intergroup contact theory, is supposed. One of the factors that cause individuals, including teachers, to hold more positive attitudes is the amount of contact they have with the LGBT+ community. The intergroup contact theory, building on Allport's concept, posits that prejudice and stereotyping between two groups can be reduced by intergroup contact (Brown & Hewstone, 2005). However, the contact must take place under certain conditions, particularly involving a higher number of people, so as not to confirm the stereotype but rather to build up the perception of heterogeneity among the members of the stereotyped group. A meta-analysis of 515 empirical studies by Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) confirmed that contact leads to reducing anxiety and increasing empathy and perspective-taking. Conversely, enhancing knowledge about the outgroup proved less powerful.

Herek and Capitanio (1996) confirmed the contact hypothesis in a study focusing on gay men. In their study, heterosexuals reporting interpersonal



contact manifested more positive attitudes towards gay men than those without contact. Their attitudes were more favorable to the extent that they reported more relationships with gay men, closer relationships with them, and experiencing gay men disclose about their sexual orientation. Smith, Axelton, and Saucier (2009) conducted a quantitative synthesis of 41 papers and showed a significant negative relationship between lack of contact and sexual prejudice.

Teachers' attitudes towards different groups of students are an important issue because of their strong impact on perceptions, assessments, behaviour, and communication. In the Czech context particularly, we know very little about teachers' attitudes toward sexual orientation and gender identity minorities in education. This study follows this research question: *What are the attitudes of Czech teachers towards LGBT+ students?* The study addresses teachers' attitudes through case scenarios concerning sexual and gender minorities in schools. For each scenario, teachers rated several components that corresponded to affective, cognitive, and behavioral components tied to attitude.

METHODS

Sample

The respondents were 548 teachers, 57% (312) from lower-secondary schools, 16% (88) from gymnasiums (upper secondary comprehensive schools), 21% (115) from secondary

vocational schools, and 5% (27) from vocational schools. The sample included 72% (394) females, 21% (115) males, and 7% (39) people who opted for "I do not want to answer". Given the high representation of women, arguably some teachers could have been susceptible to indicating inflated positive attitudes that did not accurately reflect the real situation in the schools for LGBT+ youth. The low representation of men roughly corresponds to the imbalance of women and men in the target teacher population. The slightly lower proportion of men is probably also related to the topic of the study. For example, men's attitudes toward sexual minorities are more negative than women's attitudes.

The length of the respondents' teaching careers varied between one and 37 years, and only 6% of the teachers (33) indicated a career shorter than five years. With respect to professional training and certification, 70% of the teachers (384) reported graduating from a teacher education programme. The respondents were from all the regions of the Czech Republic. Approximately 10% of the teachers came from Prague, where we could assume a greater number of teachers holding more tolerant attitudes on the evidence of public opinion polls (CVVM, 2019).

The existing research confirms that positive attitudes toward sexuality and gender topics are related to the existence of close relationships with LGBT+ people. As a result, the questionnaire



asked teachers if they knew any LGBT+ individuals, or if they self-identified as LGBT+. A total of 92% of the respondents (504) confirmed the former. LGBT+ people with whom the teacher respondents had contact included the following: (a) 31% of the teachers (170) reported a close friend, 10% (55) reported a family member, 50% (274) reported an acquaintance or colleague, and 9% (49) reported a former student. Four percent (22) of the teachers identified as LGBT+ themselves.

The survey was conducted online. Teachers were invited to complete the questionnaire both through a general email to school principals and through recruitment messages posted on social media. The participating teachers may have felt a strong motivation to respond and wanted to express their views (either positive or negative). We did not use non-probability sampling, and therefore the impact of bias was taken into account when interpreting results.

Measurement

The study used an online questionnaire with case scenarios. Teachers were asked to evaluate a situation based upon their own experience in terms of how they might feel and respond. The teachers' attitudes were identified on the basis of their answers.

Each scenario contained an initial description of a situation followed by three multiple-choice questions. The first question explored if teachers had experienced

a similar situation based upon their own experience (did they know of similar situations from their own practice?). The second question ascertained whether they perceived the situation as negative, positive, or neutral. The third question explored what behavior they would have been most likely to adopt in the situation.

The scenarios (situation and potential behaviour) presented situations that were identified as most important to assess based upon findings from the analysis of literature and from qualitative data that was collected earlier as part of focus groups conducted with secondary school students and teachers. The questionnaire was piloted.

The three case scenarios were as follows: (1) *In class, you hear a conversation in a group of teenagers during a break. In this conversation, the words "homosexual" and "gay" are said several times as a designation for one of the students. The dialogue shows that the students are trying to make fun of how the student is dressed.* (2) *At the beginning of the lesson, a student who is known to be gay enters the classroom. The student says that the class is starting to make fun of him, and they all look at him and laugh, but he is not laughing.* (3) *During a meeting, a colleague presents a proposal to involve the school in a primary prevention programme that addresses prejudice against LGBT+ people. Some support the proposal, others are against it, but most remain silent (do not share an opinion).*

The list of possible answers for the choice of the respondents' own behav-



our is given in Tables 2–4 below. The individual answers were scored 0, 0.5, or 1, according to whether they were in line with the principles of inclusive education. The evaluation was carried out by a group of five experts. In the questionnaire, each teacher selected one or more behaviours that they would have been most likely to adopt in a given situation.

Besides the scenarios, the questionnaire contained other items on demographics such as grade level, school size, region, length of the teacher's career, and knowledge of LGBT+ people defined as having an understanding of the unique challenges and experiences faced by LGBT+ people. The questionnaire was distributed to the teachers online via teachers' associations and various teachers' social media platforms during January and February 2022. The questionnaire was completed in the online application Survey Monkey.

Data Analysis

The data were cleaned and analysed using SPSS version 26. We ran Welch's ANOVA to compare attitudes toward LGBT+ people to levels of LGBT+ inclusive competence, tied to the quality of the responses to each of the three case scenarios.

There were no outliers in the data, as assessed by inspection of a boxplot for values greater than 1.5 box lengths from the edge of the box. However, the assumption of homogeneity of variances

was violated, as assessed by Levene's test for equality of variances ($p < .0001$). As a result, the Games-Howell post hoc test was used to identify differences. Subsequently, Welch's ANOVAs were calculated to make comparisons across school characteristics in attitudes toward LGBT+ students. ANOVAs are considered tolerant of skewed data with large group sizes. That is, non-normality has a limited to no effect on the Type I error rate. Spearman's correlation was used to compare attitudes and LGBT+ inclusive competence. Chi-square Tests of Independence were used to compare levels of inclusive competence across all the study variables, including attitudes. Bivariate linear regression was used to predict LGBT+ inclusive competence in response to the three case scenarios by attitudes toward LGBT+ individuals. Bootstrapping was used to examine the relationship between attitudes and LGBT+ inclusive competence while controlling for school characteristics and the level of subscription to ten LGBT+ inclusive actions. To test the hypotheses further, SPSS AMOS was used for path analysis and structural equation modelling.

RESULTS

Overall, 45% of the teacher respondents reported having a recent direct experience in their schools in which one or more students came out openly as LGBT+. Another 30% of the teachers believed that some students in their



schools were LGBT+ by appearance but were not out to others. This suggests that 75% of the teachers need to deal with sexual orientation and/or gender identity while developing pedagogical relationships with their students. In contrast, only 21% of the teachers were unable to identify if any of their students were LGBT+ and 4% of the teachers did not believe that any LGBT+ students existed in their schools. It is especially concerning. Earlier research results indicate that at a minimum two percent of any student population would identify as LGBT+.

Ninety-eight percent of the teachers thought that their schools were inclusionary of LGBT+ students, thus being open and respectful of differences between people linked to sexual and gender topics. Similarly, 97% of the teachers believed that their schools were just as safe for LGBT+ students as for all other students. The teachers from Gymnasia believed most strongly, in comparison to teachers from other schools, that their school climates were respectful of LGBT+ students.

When asking teachers about the extent of openness, respect, and school

safety, the influence of social desirability should be kept in mind. Some teachers might have indicated inflated positive attitudes that did not accurately reflect the real situation in the schools for LGBT+ youth. The survey included three case scenarios that teachers might encounter (for the full versions of the scenarios, see above). The first two school case scenarios addressed the presence of homonegative discourse within student statements. The first one addressed the use of homonegative slurs, the second one made use of commentary related to a student that ridiculed his LGBT+ identity, and the third scenario addressed the reactions of school staff to a proposed prevention initiative addressing homonegativity among students. The items aimed at capturing attitudes (including the implicit level) and preferred response behaviour. In addition, the items examined the individual perspectives of teachers. Two items asked the teachers to evaluate the overall school climate. For each case study, the teachers indicated if they had encountered such a situation, how it made them feel, and how they would

Table 1. Teachers' Evaluations of the Three Case Scenarios

	Situation unfamiliar from teachers' experiences	Negative perception of the scenario
Scenario 1 – conversation disparaging gays	58%	89%
Scenario 2 – gay student entering the classroom	87%	94%
Scenario 3 – prevention of LGBT+ stereotypes	84%	27%

**Table 2.** Responses to Scenario One with Point Values and Teacher Response Rates

Answer	Points value	Prevalence
1. Since this is a discussion not related to class content, I am not affected.	0	4%
2. The situation does not seem serious enough to require intervention.	0	8%
3. I will try to join in the discussion and find out more information.	1	30%
4. I intervene and say that I don't like how he talks about his classmate and what words he uses.	1	58%
5. I will include the topic of homosexuality in my teaching, its prevalence and the disparaging remarks associated with it.	1	41%
6. I will consult an experienced colleague or someone from the school counselling department about the situation.	0.5	24%

handle it. See Table 1 for the teachers' evaluations of each case scenarios.

Scenario one

The first scenario concerned commenting on gender non-conforming appearance (e.g. clothing) and behaviours that did not correspond to the majority social norm for males. A boy was punished by his peers because he did not conform to expected gender norms. They communicated to him as a perceived sexual minority person in a derogatory way. The boy's true sexual orientation was not relevant because the main goal was to convey to him that a heterosexist view of the world was superior. However, the implications were clearly homonegative. The words "homosexual" and "gay" were used to punish and single the boy out. In response

to this scenario, teacher respondents were offered six possible reactions to the situation. They chose one or more of the answers that corresponded to their favoured probable action(s).

For 42% of the teachers, the situation was the same as, or similar to, one or more they had experienced. Across the responses individually, the most frequently reported response, selected by 58% of the teachers, was response four – for the teacher to intervene and show their position. At the same time, 41% of the teachers opted for response five, which means integrating the issue into upcoming lessons. These measures were identified as representative of proactive intervention and prevention practices. The prevalence of these responses appear to respond to the fact that 89% of the teachers perceived the case scenario as negative. However,



30% of the teachers selected response three – to enter the conversation and gather more information. Unlike the more proactive responses, this response appeared to downplay the seriousness of the observed bullying and do less to prevent its recurrence. Twelve per cent of the teachers indicated that they would not intervene at all concerning the scenario because they did not consider the situation a concern, or because the homonegative occurrence did not take place during class (i.e., it took place during student break). This is of concern because if teachers choose to overlook the seriousness of bullying based on actual or perceived sexual or gender identity because it occurs in one space rather than another, they may miss out on opportunities to teach young people about how its occurrence affects everyone in a negative way.

Across all combinations of responses, the teachers favoured similar responses: responses four (21%) and five (10%) were endorsed the most, followed by response three (8%). Only 3% of the sample achieved the optimal point value of 3.50 across all the response choices (multiple selections), suggesting that more training is warranted to increase the likelihood that teachers will display higher levels of LGBT+ inclusive competence when encountering situations similar to case scenario one.

Scenario two

The second scenario featured explicit derogatory comments about a classmate's perceived sexual orientation. Prejudice against LGBT+ people exists in the background, as does homonegativity in the classroom; a student utters a negative comment towards a student

Table 3. Responses to Scenario Two with Point Values and Teacher Response Rates

Answer	Points value	Prevalence
1. The situation does not seem serious enough to require my intervening.	0	1%
2. I would intervene and declare that I do not like (a) the presumptions the student has made about a peer and (b) how the others have reacted.	1	78%
3. I will put the topic of homosexuality, its presence, and the use of slurs in connection with it on the agenda of the upcoming lessons	1	41%
4. After the class, I will ask the student who was the target of the comment how s/he/they felt and discuss how others could react.	1	47%
5. I will consult an experienced colleague or someone from the school counselling centre about the situation.	0.5	24%



who appears to be gay. The student expects that the negative “bullying” comment will be viewed as acceptable by the other students.

The responses made by the teachers to this case scenario indicated that only 13% of them had experiences like this occur in their classrooms, but 94% of the teachers perceived the situation negatively. Ninety-nine percent would intervene if it happened in their presence.

Across responses individually, the most frequent answer, given by 78% of the teachers, was reaction two, in which teachers intervene and show their position. Relatedly, 41% of the teachers indicated that they would try to prevent similar situations from happening. They indicated that they would integrate the issue into upcoming lessons (response three). Almost half of the teachers felt it was important to support the negatively affected student (response four).

Across all combinations of responses, the teachers favoured similar responses: response two (28%) was endorsed the most, followed by various combinations of responses two, three (3%), and/or four (3%). Only 11% of the sample achieved the optimal point value of 3.50 across all response choices (multiple selection), suggesting the same as was found for scenario one: more teacher training is warranted to increase levels of LGBT+ inclusive competence among teachers when they encounter situations similar to case scenario two. Some teachers did not indicate having the ability, desire, or need to have classroom discussions on

sexuality and gender topics, regardless of having bullying incidents brought to their attention by a victim (case two) or witnessing a bullying (case one). Some teachers did not indicate having the ability, desire, or need to explore the impact of incidents on a personal level to gather more information (case one), or to solicit feedback from students about the quality of interventions (case two). Lastly, how the teachers interpreted the severity of a bullying related to actual and perceived sexual orientation varied (cases one and two). More research is called for in this area to discern how perception of bullying target identity influences upstanding.

Scenario three

The third case scenario concerned the overall approach of the school with respect to rejecting homonegative conduct. The scenario highlighted a situation in which the school staff members did not have a clearly stated and unified position with respect to supporting actual and presumed LGBT+ students. The teachers were not familiar with the situation – only 16% reported experiencing the same or similar in which the benefits of introducing a prevention programme for LGBT+ students in Czech schools were brought up among staff members. Moreover, these teachers were indifferent to the need for an initiative like this.

Across the responses individually, we found that of the entire sample,



Table 4. Responses to Scenario Three with Point Values and Teacher Response Rates

Answer	Points value	Prevalence
1. I will not support the proposal because I do not think this topic should be addressed in the school.	0	2%
2. I will not support the proposal because I think there are more important issues that need to be addressed.	0	12%
3. I will support the proposal because I consider it important for pupils to be familiar with this topic.	1	75%
4. I will support the proposal because I perceive that there are negative attitudes towards LGBT+ people in our school.	1	8%

14% of the teachers felt that it would be negative to introduce these types of prevention programmes. Up to 75% of the teachers indicated that they would support the person who introduced the idea in a staff meeting. The teachers selected response three in which the issue is considered as important for student development. Conversely, 14% of the teachers indicated that they would not support the proposal for an LGBT+ prevention programme because they thought that sexuality and gender topics should not be a part of curricula, or other topics should be discussed instead of LGBT+ topics.

Across all case scenario responses, the teachers endorsed response three (72%) the most, followed by response two (9%) and responses three and four together (7%). Only 8% of the sample achieved the optimal point value of 2.00 across all response choices (multiple selections). Many teachers indicated “other” responses concerning the introduction of a prevention programme (case three). This suggests that best

practices for how teachers should respond in this instance should be further refined. While some teachers indicated the need for a prevention programme because they perceived negative attitudes concerning LGBT+ students, more teachers indicated the need because they believed the students needed to be exposed to the topic. This suggests that training and continuing education programmes should include content about what influences attitudes both in and outside school settings and how attitudes influence behaviour, whether the attitudes held by individuals are known by others or not.

LGBT+ INCLUSIVE COMPETENCE AND ITS CONTEXT

On the basis of the responses chosen in the scenarios, we infer levels of LGBT+ inclusive competence among teacher respondents. The individual responses were scored on the basis of expert judgment. Higher scores are indicative of higher levels of LGBT+ in-



clusive competence. Levels of LGBT+ inclusive competence among teachers were rather high. In all the scenarios, most of the teachers chose one of the responses that were considered supportive. However, in each situation, multiple steps could have been taken that, in combination, have intervention and prevention effects, both at the individual and group levels. Conversely, the combination of all desirable responses that would indicate a maximum level of LGBT+ inclusive competence occurred for only a few teachers. Across the scenarios, this ranged from 3% to 11%. Chi-Square Tests of Significance indicated that LGBT+ inclusive competence was interconnected ($p < 0.001$) with the following items: (1) the importance of addressing sexuality in education; and (2) being comfortable around LGBT+ people. Additionally, other items were found to be significantly related to LGBT+ inclusive competence: (1) teaching about sexuality in the classroom, (2) having sufficient knowledge and skills to teach about LGBT+ topics, and (3) welcoming more LGBT+ education.

Using Welch's ANOVAs, the relationships between the LGBT+ inclusive competence and school culture and the position of school principals were also found. Teacher respondents were more likely to think positively about LGBT+ students in schools when they knew that they would not be prevented from supporting LGBT+ youth, Welch's $F(3,275.491) = 6.734, p < .0005$. If the teachers felt supported by their prin-

cipals regarding use of inclusive approaches towards LGBT+ students and in addressing gender and sexuality issues, they reported more positive attitudes towards LGBT+ students.

Most of the teachers noted that they had not encountered any of the proposed scenarios in real life. This is surprising; up to 75% of the teachers were employed in schools with LGBT+ students. This could mean that the actual and perceived presence of LGBT+ students in the schools were related to a positive evaluation of the school climate, or that homonegative behaviour in schools but not witnessed or ignored was present but ignored or not seen. Our findings are supported by the teachers' responses to two other items focusing on the school context in which teachers gain their professional experience. The teachers evaluated a measure of their agreement with statements describing the support for LGBT+ topics in their schools. Concerning the statement "*Students in our school are rather open to LGBT+ topics and accept them,*" 69% of the teachers agreed and 22% strongly agreed with the statement. Concerning the statement: "*Teachers in our school avoid everything which has anything to do with LGBT+ topics,*" 15% agreed and 3% strongly agreed. Moreover, 83% of the teachers indicated that their school staff did not avoid topics relating to sexuality and gender. This latter finding corresponded to the evaluation of the statement: "*It is important also to address topics concerning*



sexuality during school education.” with which 34% of the teachers agreed and 60% strongly agreed.

Although most of the teachers considered the topic important, 40% rated their knowledge and skills regarding an LGBT+ inclusive approach and intervention as lacking. Only 18% reported that they had participated in professional development (e.g., a seminar) on LGBT+ topics. As a result, approximately 80% of the teachers must rely on only general knowledge of sexuality and gender topics acquired from lay sources. Thus, we were not surprised to find that 59% of the teachers wanted more education concerning LGBT+ topics.

DISCUSSION

The study did not meet the strict criteria of representativity because only those who were interested in the topic completed the questionnaire. Our results were skewed slightly, especially toward more positive attitudes (e.g., by those who found the topic important and subsequently participated in the study). Teachers who found the topic fundamentally problematic refused to participate. Several sent their reasons for this to the research team.

The study focused on the experiences of teachers from lower and higher secondary schools in Czech schools with sexuality and gender topics in education. Most of the participating teachers considered it important that LGBT+ students felt safe and accepted

in schools. The teachers' answers painted a more positive picture than the findings from previous studies, both Czech and international. Toomey and Russell's metaanalysis (2016) revealed a high prevalence of victimisation of LGBT+ students. According to Kosciw et al. (2016), more than 80% of LGBT+ students had experienced verbal harassment; similar findings show other studies as well (Bundick, Lipinski & Meidl, 2017, f.e.). However, the teachers in our study did not report bullying concerning sexual orientation and gender identity topics among students at the same levels. Approximately half of the teachers perceived their schools as safe enough for LGBT+ students. On the other hand, this suggests that the other half considered that their schools were not safe enough for LGBT+ students. As research shows, this may lead to compromised development of cognitive skills among those students who do not feel supported (Myers et al., 2020) and an increase in depressive symptoms (Luccassen et al., 2017).

In our study, 42% of the teachers (230) had witnessed implicit homonegative comments among students, and 13% (71) reported encountering explicit comments. Naturally, it may also be the case that the teachers did not witness more of these unfortunate situations because they happened in peer groups. According to Toomey and Russell (2016), students reported a higher prevalence of bullying than teachers. We consider it hopeful that most teachers in Czech schools



see that it is important to address gender and sexuality in schools. While some teachers may not be competent enough to address sexuality and gender issues in classes and to communicate about them with students, nearly 60% of the teachers in our sample were willing to receive more training on how to do so. Kull et al. (2017) found that teachers with more knowledge of sexual orientation and gender identity issues handled these topics better and communicated about them more effectively.

The importance of high-quality training is also supported by our findings. Most of the teachers indicated that they were willing to support LGBT+ students; teachers in Czech schools appear to view bullying of LGBT+ youth and lack of resources for them as negative. That is, they do not think it should be permissible for people to be bullied on the basis of their actual or presumed sexual orientation. Bauman and Del Rio (2006) found that teachers were more likely to intervene if they felt greater empathy towards LGBT+ students. However, the findings from empathy studies have been mixed, studies on how to foster more empathy for LGBT+ individuals are sparse (Clayton, 2017) and the construct continues to be poorly defined in studies (Baldner & McGinley, 2023). One of the effective ways of limiting stereotyping and challenging prejudice toward some social group, including LGBT+ people, seems to be intergroup contact (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) place; between Pettigrew and Smith citations (Smith et al., 2009).

Our study showed that teachers who reported more contact with LGBT+ people selected more supportive behaviour across our three scenarios.

In our study, the teachers would intervene in response to homonegative peer communication. In doing so, they would consider which follow-up measures to use to improve students' attitudes and foster a positive social climate for LGBT+ students. However, a minority of the teachers (10–20%) would avoid any involvement because they thought it was irrelevant to address sexual orientation and/or gender identity at school. Simons and Russell (2021) found that the most favourable form of intervention is explicit and positive, such as speaking out directly against witnessed bullying of sexual minority youth. Saarento, Garandeau & Salmivalli (2015) confirmed that effective teacher interventions like this challenge negative social norms and signal that the bullying of LGBT+ youth is unacceptable. Delivering anti-bullying and LGBT+ inclusive programming also helps (Kull et al., 2017).

We recommend focusing future research in this area on factors moderating the relations between teachers' attitudes, behavioural intention, and actual LGBT+ advocacy behaviour (Simons et al., 2017). It is important to gain stronger evidence on how teachers most effectively help — to use the best inclusive intervention. In utilizing quantitative research methods, scenarios are helpful



instruments. In doing so, researchers should continue to ask respondents to select all plausible intervention choices versus selecting just one best response. This allows respondents to reflect on the complexities of intervention from a variety of angles on the basis of their expertise. As a result, it will help researchers continue to investigate both the professional and private factors to examine the nuances of intervention aimed at protecting and supporting LGBT+ youth.

While some teachers may seem to lack competence to support LGBT+ students, this may not be accurate because they chose to resort to lower-/different-level interventions to compensate for the lack of LGBT+ inclusion where they work. For example, they want to do more but cannot (e.g., because of the risk of losing their job), so they do what they can strategically versus implementing all best practices for supporting LGBT+ youth. Finally, answers to these questions should be sought by examining responses to case scenarios in relation to gender differences among students and teachers, as well as by examining aggregate responses to case scenarios. It is plausible to consider responses to each of the three scenarios as three intercorrelated dependent variables in a general linear model. Three different LGBT+ inclusive competencies may not exist, but possibly only one, which manifests itself in different ways depending on the scenario.

CONCLUSION

The study focused on teachers' beliefs and experiences concerning sexual orientation and gender identity topics and students. Czech schools subscribe to inclusive education. However, their declared definition of inclusivity is rather narrow. It is usually limited to children with special educational needs. Nevertheless, we would argue that it should cover all types of students, including LGBT+ youth. It is well established that students who identify as LGBT+ might face homonegativity and transnegativity in schools. This has a negative impact on their well-being and cognitive learning.

Our study was motivated by the lack of knowledge about Czech teachers' experiences and attitudes concerning sexual orientation and gender identity issues. The analysis showed that most of our teacher respondents subscribed to the value of respect and safety for all students, including LGBT+ students. Many also thought that it was important to teach about sexuality and gender. Nevertheless, there was still a substantial number of teachers who were not in agreement that these topics should be taught as part of school curricula as part of prevention programming. In both groups, many reported that they were not competent enough to address sexual and gender issues when they encountered them.

In the Czech education system, the official bodies (such as the Ministry of



Education) are not transparent enough in their requirements about how (and whether) sexuality and gender education should be incorporated into mandatory school curricula. As a result, it makes the situation very tense, confusing, and uncomfortable for some teachers. The findings of the present study indicate that teachers in Czech schools appear to lack the knowledge to act in accordance with their beliefs that LGBT+ youth deserve support.

More special training concerning sexuality and gender topics should be offered to teachers in the Czech Republic. These teachers are certainly willing to teach about these issues, stand up for equality, and to increase their own professional competence in this field. Transparent and enumerated school policies that explicitly mention LGBT+ youth would also be of help to teachers so that they feel more supported.

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SMETÁČKOVÁ, I., SIMONS, J. D., PAVLÍK, P. Postoje českých vyučujících k LGBT+ studujícím

Od současných škol se očekává, že se budou řídit principy inkluzivního vzdělávání pro všechny studující. To zahrnuje také studující s menšinovou sexuální orientací a genderovou identitou (LGBT+ studující). Řada studií uvádí, že mladí LGBT+ lidé čelí ve škole homonegativitě a odlišnému zacházení. To snižuje efektivitu jejich školního učení a psychickou pohodu. Učitelé a učitelky by proto měli podporovat LGBT+ studující. Tato studie představuje zjištění z dotazníkového šetření, kterého se zúčastnilo 548 vyučujících. Vyučující popisovali klima ve svých školách, reagovali na baterii tvrzení o vzdělávacích nárocích a hodnotili tři scénáře s popisem konkrétních situací ze školního prostředí. Většina vyučujících indikovala, že jsou pro ně respekt a bezpečí všech studujících, včetně LGBT+ studujících, důležitou hodnotou. Až polovina vyučujících si však není jistá svými kompetencemi a uvítala by možnost školení o sexualitě a genderových tématech.

Klíčová slova: LGBT+, vyučující, učitelé, studující, studenti, postoje, školy, inkluzivní vzdělávání