Expanding LGBTQ+ Inclusivity: An Ecological Model of School Library Practice in Addition to Collection Development

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Abstract - **This research explores the critical need for a holistic approach to LGBTQ+ inclusivity in school library services, moving beyond the traditional focus on collection development to address underexplored areas such as cataloguing practices, purchasing procedures, programming, policies, and community outreach. The school libraries often become a place of social stigma for LGBTQ+ students, and availability of fewer resources and institutional biases typically discourage them from accessing information and support from such libraries. For this purpose, this study will carry out research using a qualitative research design with the help of content analysis and case studies to identify the best practices and policies of selected school libraries in regard to addressing such matters. It sets much importance on cataloguing in such a way so that these LGBTQ+ resources, materials, etc. should be visible and accessible besides discussing budget limitations and community force behind acquiring the LGBTQ+ resources as a part of the library collection. This also emphasizes the requirement of an LGBTQ+ inclusive program with efficient community outreach that builds safe spaces for the student population LGBTQ+. The study further stresses the need for library policies and how librarians can become great advocates of LGBTQ+ rights and representation. A careful consideration of any aspect of library services described in this paper will help guide principles for making school libraries more inclusive and equitable. The implications are considered crucial for future research and practice, toward further development of library services to support the needs of LGBTQ+ students completely, which will enhance their well-being and academic success.**

Keywords: **LGBTQ+ Inclusivity, Cataloguing Practices, Community Outreach, Policies, Programming**

I. INTRODUCTION

The importance of school libraries is highlighted as vital places in academic support that meet the needs of students identified as LGBTQ+ through their services. School librarians take the intermediary role of providing access to information within school settings. As intermediaries, they take the key role as providers for diversity and inclusiveness services within school settings (Dresang, 2013). Pecoskie & Desrochers, (2016) identify that although there is awareness of the needs of LGBTQ+ students in education (Llopiz-Guerra et al., 2024; Arasu et al., 2024) the provision of school libraries to meet specific information needs of the group remains a challenge because of the lack of resources, prejudice and constraints (Chandra Das, 2019). An analysis of the current state of school libraries for this community cannot allow for mere access to the resources available but should extend to the understanding of the kind of literacies being promoted inclusively (Adams & Borycz, 2020).

Current knowledge about the promotion of LGBTQ+ in school libraries is quite limited and is mainly concerned with collection development which underscores the need to use books that explore the lives and experiences of sexual minorities (Hughes-Hassell et al., 2013; Rawson, 2018). However, efforts towards the collection development sometimes fail to address other elements of the library service delivery that significantly determine the inclusion of queer students including cataloguing, programming, outreach and policy (Slater & Jones, 2019). Restricting the vision of collection development weakens the libraries' potential to contribute to developing an inclusive society. Thus, defining the scope of knowledge gaps in these underdeveloped directions is critical to elucidating a more diverse approach to the employment of services for LGBTQ+ minorities (McNicol, 2016).

The main research question of this work is to discover how school libraries provide services to students with liberal sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression other than cisgender, male, and heterosexual beyond collection development The limited information on the matter can be considered in the context of the following research questions: This study explores the specific areas of Librarianship like Cataloging, Purchase order services, Programming and

services, Policies and community service with the overall goal of coming up with a holistic approach that will help school libraries improve on the support given to the oppressed group of learners who are the Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBTQ+) students (Kraemer et al., 2013). The relevance of this study is in the ability to contribute to policy and practice in school libraries and guarantee support for LGBTQ+ students through each facet of library services (Adams & Borycz, 2020; Ronald et al., 2024).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

LGBTQ+ students face specific information needs that are often unmet due to social stigma, limited access to relevant resources, and a lack of awareness among library staff about the unique challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals (Robinson, 2016; Wallace & Cohen, 2019). These barriers may more particularly undermine the academic and personal wellbeing of LGBTQ students as they can easily get alienated in their school settings if their information needs are not adequately met (Hughes-Hassell & Hinckley, 2001). Meeting the information needs, therefore requires a multifaceted approach that goes beyond material provision on LGBTQ+ themed issues. It involves providing supportive and affirming spaces such that all students feel seen and valued (Garcia & D'Angelo, 2017).

Past literature suggests that library services for LGBTQ+ should include such services as program and outreach and services as well as collection development (Chapman, 2015; Matthews & Rhoades, 2021). However, depending on the extent to which these libraries deliver these services, some institutional libraries are exceptionally good in supporting this community while others are quite poor (Elkordy, 2019; Bauer & Gillespie, 2021)). Such inconsistency points to the need to provide a thorough assessment of the library services in a bid to favour the needy students especially the minorities whose rights are infringed in societies such as the gay individuals (Spencer & Takashima, 2020). Examining the effects of the policies and services that are provided in the schools regarding the extensiveness of the library's support for the LGBTQ+ students can help in identifying the ways in which school libraries can improve this support (Matthews & Rhoades, 2021).

Unfortunately, much has been done to exploring the development of collections dedicated to or of interest to the LGBTQ+ community; however, many questions about libraries, such as cataloguing policy, acquisition procedures, and the service to the community, remain tantalizingly open (Bosman, 2017; Slater & Jones, 2019). This leads to another research question for future research, which is that while these aspects of library services have a great impact in shaping the kind of environment that could either welcome or alienate the LGBTQ+ learner, extremely limited works exist in library science that address this concern (American Psychological Association, 2020). To be more specific, it's worth expanding on these areas to get a clearer picture of how

the librarians at school bring activeness to the members of the LGBTQ+ community (Bosman 2017).

III. METHODOLOGY

Since this paper evaluates the existing understanding and embracing of inclusive school libraries to the LGBTQ+ students amongst the school library professionals this kind of research is qualitative Down the content analysis and cases case studies are used as the primary data collection and analysis tools down (Hesse-Biber, 2017; Lichtman, 2013). Through the use of qualitative research, the researchers realise practices, policies, and different experiences that help school libraries to embrace LGBTQ+. As a result, content analysis and case study that are non-empirical research approaches move the research further and contribute to the identification of specific contexts and experiences of selected school libraries and provide a rich description of the functions of such institutions in the education and support of LGBTQ+ learners (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). This approach also allows for an implementation of the analysis to determine and derive findings which may be useful in other setting of school library.

Questionnaires include: Gathering of documents, and documents analysed include the current policies, procedures and programmes that have been implemented in the selected school libraries to understand the practices that promote or obstruct the inclusion of the LGBTQ+ (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Patton, 2002). This entails evaluating library catalogues, acquisition records as well as; programming schedules to recognize inclusiveness or lack of it (Saldaña, 2016; Yin, 2018). The study ensures a complete and more accurate picture of how school libraries are currently meeting the needs of the LGBTQ+ students in need of the service; and where further service delivery can be enhanced (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). To this effect, purposive research design is utilised in the present research because of the following reasons: The above research strategies address the complexity of data collection by providing a multi-designer qualitative approach; The findings of the research are credible and diverse on how school libraries can embrace LGBTQ+; (Patton, 2002).

Collected data is analyzed by the method of thematic analysis, which helps to identify the main topics and patterns in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This helps in the process of isolating practices which make school libraries more inclusive to the LGBTQ+ and those practices which potentially exclude LGBTQ+ students inadvertently. Furthermore, there is also a comparative approach that compares different libraries and thus discusses the strengths and weaknesses and gives detailed recommendations on how LGBTQ+ inclusiveness can be enhanced in different contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is well suited for this study because it allows for a rich analysis of the data while giving a detailed understanding of how school libraries can improve the experience of LGBTQ+ students (Eisenhardt, 1989).

IV. CATALOGUING PRACTICES

Contrary to what one may expect, the physical and virtual organization of a school's library helps to a very large extent to define the discoverability of LGBTQ+ material by the children (Adler, 2013; Knowlton, 2005). Inaccuracies in how to index resources related to LGBTQ+ such as the use of old and prejudiced classification systems are some of the difficulties that lead to under-representation of the LGBTQ+ materials in catalogues (Drabinski, 2013). This lack of visibility leads to the marginalisation of LGBTQ+ students, who in any case have a limited number of resources available to them that are sensitive to their orientation (Ciszek, 2017). These are some of the issues that need to be met to enhance findability of the LGBTQ+ materials in the school libraries to address the inequity in accessing resources that would suit the students (Foskett, 2004).

Some of the things that could be done to increase the number of items about lesbians, gays, bisexuals and trans in the library catalogues are updating existing cataloguing conventions to produce identifiable records of gay pics, making sure that the relevant items are easily searchable (Foskett, 2004). This may entail changing or enriching current classification systems, for example, the Dewey Decimal System or the Library of Congress Subject Headings to incorporate more inclusive and queer-friendly topics for the community (Ard & Gibson, 2019). Further, it trains liberals to categorise materials in a way that is sensitive to the queer community and makes the resources available to every learner (Drabinski, 2013). The library is also one way of trying to make school a better place for students' needs to be met to foster equal learning opportunities and to try and make the educational spectrum as broad and diverse as possible which in the end will relieve the burden placed on students to search for the material they need in a library setting on their own (Foskett, 2004).

V. PURCHASING PROCEDURES

Intner & Weihs, (2014) posit that the selection of materials with LGBTQ+ content is made with factors such as financial constraints, prejudice and community demands into consideration. Such factors pose a challenge to the stocking of LGBTQ+ resource in school libraries thus slowing the process of putting together a library collection that addresses the needs of all students (Rao, 2013). Several issues arise from budget limitations since to achieve the goal, the librarian may exclude some valuable content, and, therefore, decisions on which to buy may be made against the interest of the clientele group (Buschman, 2003). Finally, it also becomes a challenge to acquire the resources since librarians may also be prejudiced and receive pressures from other communities in their society not to buy the LGBTQ+ materials (Rubin, 2010). The above barriers call for a critical assessment of the purchasing processes to determine areas which may hinder the inclusion of LGBTQ+-related materials in libraries (Ettarh, 2018).

Recommendations that have been advanced toward enhancing the purchasing procedures for leveraging the interest of the LGBTQ+ communities include calling for separate funds for procuring LGBTQ+-related products and materials and defining policies by following adequate avenues (Rubin, 2010). This is where librarians step in by, taking the initiative to look for materials for LGBTQ+, making the right better purchase decisions, and ensuring that these resources are included in the library (Curry & Copeland, 2020). Besides, librarians can collaborate with school authorities and other decision-makers to advance policies, which would enhance the purchasing of more materials, including those which illustrate the gay community (Rao, 2013). These strategies help in the development of policies for library collections that would allow for the awakening of the multi-dimensional aspects of the various students especially the LBGTQ+ ones (Rubin, 2010).

VI. PROGRAMMING AND OUTREACH

Extending school library collections and resources to be inclusive of LGBTQ+ concerns is critical in making school environments more accepting of students who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans or questioning and offers them learning and social/emotional support and self-expression (Nichols, 2014). Creating and maintaining such programs is not an easy thing given the fact that there will be scarce resources, a lack of institutional support and little community sponsorship (DeWitt 2018). These issues make it hard to provide for the necessary and wanted LGBTQ+-friendly programs (Burgess, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). However, there are certain challenges that LGBTQ+-inclusive programming has on student learning, which include; Nonetheless, homosexual positive programming has a positive effect on students by providing them with a niche in the school society (Mathieson, 2018). It is critical to learn from other library programs when it comes to the implementation of LGBTQ+ programs because it brings out best practices and ways forward in handling issues that arise when doing programming in the school library (Burgess, 2017).

Loving and supporting LGBTQ+ organizations/clients is important for library mobilization among marginalized students especially the LGBTQ+ because it also captures patrons from other areas that the school don't directly access (Mathieson, 2018). Some of how libraries make interventions include availing events, workshops, and support groups whereby the young DNC students can meet and interact with other students, mentors, and resources that will embrace them (Lamb & Johnson, 2014). Such promotion enhances awareness of the issues affecting LGBTQ+ persons within the general school population to ensure that all students and staff accept LGBTQ+ individuals without prejudice and discrimination (Hughes-Hassell & Hinckley, 2001; Graybill et al., 2015). Thus, acting as the link between the school and the outside world, school libraries can be very supportive of students who identify as homosexual and include them in the list of priorities which should be addressed by a school library (Mathieson, 2018).

VII. POLICIES AND ADVOCACY

Library policies significantly support or hinder LGBTQ+ inclusivity in school libraries—they provide the framework for service delivery in libraries (Rubin, 2010). Reviewing current policies related to LGBTQ+ issues in school libraries reveals the areas that still need optimization to fully provide for LGBTQ+ students the alignment of library services with best practices in inclusivity (Sullivan, 2008). Inclusive policies function as a fundamental basis for advocacy initiatives, equipping librarians with the necessary resources and support to champion LGBTQ+ rights and representation within their organizations (Buchanan, 2017). Analyzing current policies and recognizing areas for enhancement aids in the formulation and execution of inclusive library policies that more effectively cater to the needs of LGBTQ+ students (Rubin, 2010).

Librarians serve as influential proponents of LGBTQ+ rights and representation through the advancement of inclusive library services and policies, striving to guarantee that LGBTQ+ students receive support across all facets of their educational experiences (Fischer, 2016). Advocacy programs would encompass working with school administrators, teachers, and the wider community to create sensitivity to LGBTQ+ issues and promote inclusivity, in concert with programs and services specifically designed to meet the needs of LGBTQ+ students (Collins & Metzger, 2014). In addition, librarians support changes to the policy that promote LGBTQ+ inclusiveness by modifying discriminatory policies and procedures, creating safe spaces, and ensuring access and availability of LGBTQ+ materials (Buchanan, 2017). By taking on the role of advocate, librarians contribute to creating a more inclusive and equitable learning environment where all students feel valued and supported (Fischer, 2016).

VIII. CASE STUDIES AND BEST PRACTICES

A study of case studies related to school libraries with exemplary incorporation of LGBTQ+-inclusive services provides immense insight into best practices; it demarcates strategies and techniques that prove most useful in supporting LGBTQ+ students (LaRue, 2017). Such case studies demonstrate, in a practical manner, how the library manages its obstacles in the form of limited resources, community outcry, and institutional barriers. This provides some framework for other libraries wanting to enhance their support for LGBTQ+ students (Garry, 2022). Reviewing these case studies helps to define factors which can affect the effectiveness of inclusive library services for LGBTQ+ patrons as well as potential errors in developing such services (LaRue, 2017). The information compiled from these case studies helps in giving the pointers and policies that other library services may need in order to enhance their commitment to the needs of the LGBTQ+ students (Garry, 2022).

The best practices identified from the case studies are synthesized to provide constructive guidelines for the librarians who wants to enhance the LGBTQ+ appreciation in their services based on actionable steps that would make library environments more welcoming for the LGBTQ+ students (Adams & Borycz, 2020). The guidelines include several domains, with social issues in collection development, cataloguing and classification, programming, outreach, and advocacy for policy; these domains constitute a comprehensive framework for improving the LGBTQ+ inclusiveness of educational library (Kraemer et al., 2013). Following the aforementioned recommended practices ensures that the libraries shall always provide an inclusive, equitable and responsive approach towards the needs of all students especially those who identify as LGBTQ+ (Adams & Borycz, 2020).

IX. CONCLUSION

This is one of the major reasons why its important to practice the concept of LGBTQ inclusion in school libraries in the broadest sense including collection development from cataloging to outreach services (Hughes-Hassell & Hinckly, 2001), McNicol, 2016). Making school library more gay friendly to serve the queer students effectively ensures that their information needs are met and they are valued and respected in the learning institutions (Garcia & D'Angelo, 2017). They offer numerous insights into the current status of LGBTQ+ welcome in and school libraries and guidelines for change (Slater & Jones, 2019).

As such the findings in this regard have immense value in the continuation of future research pertaining to LGBTQ+-inclusive library services and opens up avenues that should be examined in order to push forward this line of scholarly inquiry (Bosman, 2017). Areas of research enlargement provided for future research are the lack of sufficient quantitative studies that focus on evaluating the extent to which the implementation of practices friendly to the members of the LGBTQ+ community positively influences student outcomes and the growing domain of novel and developing practices in the implementation of LGBTQ+ friendly practices (Adler, 2013). The findings of this study must be useful in subsequent studies as they seek to help improve the schooling process and elucidate the inequalities that exist with relation to access to school libraries (Bosman, 2017).

This is indication that, as been as discussed and proved, a comprehensive approach towards manner in which LGBTQ + is addressed among the library of educational institutions is capable of enhancing considerably the health and performance of the students in question (Garcia & D'Angelo, 2017). Should all the parts of the library services on cataloguing and outreach programs not forgetting the circulation service be taken into account each school library would be a significant player in promoting diversity and equity in the education system (Adler, 2013). This level of impact emphasizes the preposterous that existing effort has to be made towards advocating for the gay students to be provided educational resources and support that they need

regardless of their orientation/ gender expression (McNicol, 2016).

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