



Experiences of University Students Having LGBT Identities in Turkey¹

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the educational, social and individual experiences and expectations of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students at various universities in Turkey. The study evaluated whether LGBT students try to conceal their identities; have difficulties making friends without prejudices; suffer negative reactions from friends and are exposed to bullying. Additionally, the effects of these problems on them and their actions to solve those problems have been examined within the scope of sub-problems of the study. A qualitative research design is used in the study, in which the data were gathered through a semi-structured interview format from 23 LGBT students. Participants in the study were recruited through the snowball sampling method. In this method, one or a few participants are initial ones, and they are asked to recommend some other participants to join the study (Parker et al, 2019). The results showed that even in the 21st century, LGBT students experience serious problems, and are looking forward to practical solutions and responses being made to address their expectations.

Keywords: LGBT; LGBT experiences; LGBT students; expectations; gender issues

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Introduction

In the book *La Lumière Noire* (The Black Light) by Francis Carco (1934), the character says that he is writing a novel and he has some alternatives in mind, such as 'neither woman nor man, a black light, the other gender'. Murat (2006), a historian and an author, also emphasizes whether there is space for living between the two categories of female and male. She underlines that it is not possible to convince the mind to get away from symmetrical couples like female–male, left–right, inside–outside, same–different and so forth, and to imagine and define multiple and undulant concepts. Therefore, it could be stated that the 'third gender' is 'another' and 'nameless' and 'genderless' despite its obvious existence. This philosophical inquiry into the fluency of gender concepts sets the stage for a critical examination of contemporary gender dynamics and the constant challenges described in reports such as the Global Gender Gap 2021 which declares Turkey's score in the 133rd place.

Despite these disparities, the Istanbul Convention, originally conceived as a legal pact focused on safeguarding women's rights, has evolved. Now, it encompasses the broader spectrum of 'discrimination,' explicitly addressing concepts such as sexual orientation and identity. For example,

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Article 4, item 3 in the convention states that through this contract, no one would be discriminated against based on their social gender, sexual choice, sexual identity or any other status in society. On 11 May 2011, Turkey was one of the pioneer countries signing the convention and it was published in a National Official Paper on 8 March 2012, on International Women's Day. The contract with its articles had the most inclusive definitions on violence against women and discrimination about sexual identity to date. During the entry into force of the Convention, the Istanbul Convention Turkey Monitoring Platform was established by women's and LGBTI+ organizations and independent feminists (KİHD). Therefore, it was a hope for all Turkish citizens, including women and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals. However, while this convention was in progress, Turkey was reported to be at the top of the list of transgender murders in 2015 with 34 officially recorded deaths (Türkiye, Trans Cinayetlerinde Avrupa Birincisi 2015). The government of Turkey was criticised for not obeying the Istanbul Convention. While these criticisms were being made, the President of Turkey cancelled the convention on 20 March 2021 (Beyaz & Taşdan 2021).

Threats to life are not the only problem LGBT individuals experience in their daily lives. As highlighted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, education is a right for all and LGBT students need to be treated equally to heterosexual students. There are some research studies on LGBT issues, particularly about general discrimination problems (Göçmen and Volkan 2017; Biçmena and Bekiroğulları 2013; Lapinski and Sexton 2014), an inclusive curriculum (Johnson 1999; Snapp et al. 2015a; Greytak, Kosciw, and Boesen 2013; Flores 2012; Jennings and Macgillivray 2011), family acceptance (Ryan et al. 2010), the school climate (Day, Ioverno, and Russel 2019; Goldstein, Russel, and Daley 2007; Koswic, Clark, Truong and Zongrone, 2019), bullying (Bailey 2017; Kosciw and Pizmony-Levy, 2016; Swanson and Gettinger, 2016) and educational outcomes (Sansone, 2019). Özçelik (2018) states in her study on universal norms of gender separation that from ancient times, the nature of human beings is having two genders—male and female. The writer underlines that the rejection of those two genders and trying to add others is standing against the structure of the universe.

Studies on LGBT people in Turkey generally include topics outside of educational issues such as gay identities and their choices (Bereket and Adam 2006; Özyeğin 2012), the social problems of LGBT individuals in terms of different variables (Biçmena and Bekiroğulları 2013), same-sex sexual behaviours in three different cultures including Turkey (Cardoso 2009), political, governmental and military issues for LGBT citizens (Yılmaz, 2013), how homosexuals can manage heterosexuality in Turkey (Bakacak and Öktem 2014), rent boys (Özbay 2010) and family attitudes (Oksal 2008). These are in addition to the somewhat educational issues such as attitude changes of students towards a lesbian person and homosexuality (Sakallı and Uğurlu 2002; Gelbal and Duyan 2006; Yüzgün, 1986), discrimination against LGBT students in education (Göçmen and Yılmaz 2017) and the religiosity level of students and their attitudes towards lesbians and gays (Saraç, 2015).

In addition to the national studies mentioned above, some international studies on the educational issues of LGBT students could be classified as focused on inclusive education and curriculum (Johnson 1999; Larrabee and Morehead 2008; Greytak, Kosciw, and Boesen 2013; Flores 2012; Snapp et al. 2015b; Jennings and Macgillivray 2011; Page 2017; Stone and Farrar 2020), the school climate (Day, Ioverno, and Russel 2019; Goldstein, Russel, and Daley 2007; National School Climate Survey 2019; Lapinski and Sexton 2014; Allen 2013; Ressler and Chase 2009; Goodenow, Szalacha, and Westheimer 2006), family acceptance (Ryan et al. 2010; Poteat et al. 2011), bullying (Wyss 2004; Poteat and Espelage 2007; Varjas et al. 2008; Goldstein and Davis 2010; Lombardi et al. 2002; Russel et al. 2012; Kosciw and Pizmony-Levy 2016; Swanson and Gettinger 2016; Bailey 2017; Valido et al. 2021) and educational outcomes (Sansone 2019). These studies have some common and overlapping aspects as well as some other details, such as discrimination, emotional distress and dropping out of school.

Studies conducted in Turkey support the perceptions that students feel under pressure due to their sexual orientation and identity, that they feel demotivated and tend to quit school as in the concept of 'dual education', which is based on males and females only, and in which LGBT students are ignored (Uluyol 2016). Since the number of studies on this issue is very limited, the intensity of the pressure and negative effects of being ignored are adequately clarified (Uluyol 2016; Çavdar & Çok 2016). This study places emphasis on engaging with LGBT students across diverse universities and academic



departments within the Turkish context. The anticipated outcome of this investigation is to make a valuable contribution to the existing body of literature within this academic domain.

The study has been particularly based on "human relations" approach and theories of 'critical pedagogy', 'inclusive education' and 'inclusive democracy'. The human relations approach fosters a sense of positivity among students from diverse backgrounds, encourages group identity and inspires the students pride about their color, alleviates stereotypes, and endeavors to eradicate prejudice and biases (Grant & Sleeter, 2010).

Informed by critical theory and critical pedagogy, critical educational discourse has, for over two decades, served as a source of inspiration for a group of activist educators coming together in the for educational and social justice. This traces its origins to Freire's attempts to promote justice, equality, democracy, and freedom through the practice of liberation to support the concept of nurturing, fortifying, and altering one's awareness (Freire, 2000). As McLaren and Jaramillo (2009) point out, critical educators must struggle for inclusive education and democracy to include all people, including so-called 'marginal' groups in education, so that the capitalist and neo-liberal frames enslaving people could more effectively be eliminated from societies. Apple (2019) argues that the critical pedagogy movements in education should be wisely implemented because the schools and other social institutions and even our identities are closely related to the inequalities in the structures of society. Therefore, acting relationally is necessary to put a stop to those inequalities. Apple (2011) discussed the simple reproductive role of schools and criticised the overt and/or covert messages on the dominant culture, gender or class in the curriculum at schools supporting critical education in a more complex manner of schools. Freire (2005), seen as the father of critical pedagogy, underlines the importance of critical thinking and pedagogy in an inclusive environment by stating that whatever the background of human beings, they are all capable of thinking with a critical dialogical approach. Critical pedagogy, as an educational framework, provides a powerful lens through which to examine the experiences of LGBT students within educational institutions. This will result in critical education and critically dealing with all issues. Steinberg (2007) strengthens the reality, which underlies the connection of this study and critical pedagogy by expressing that it is normal to get annoyed with all types of power and injustice that breach human rights in any aspect. By critically analysing the systemic biases, stereotypes, and discrimination that LGBT students may encounter, critical pedagogy aims to empower these students to voice their unique perspectives and experiences.

This study aimed to raise awareness of the views and expectations of LGBT students at universities and emphasise the importance of such studies so that similar studies could follow. The study also underlined that educational, social and individual problems and the expectations of LGBT students are just as significant and essential as all other issues in education that are taken into consideration. The study will also have a leading impact on the universities of the participant students as a model so that more academics could feel encouraged to conduct similar studies or at least gain awareness of sexual orientation facts. Within the scope of these objectives of the study, the educational, social and individual experiences and expectations of LGBT students at various universities in Turkey were analysed.

We are looking for responses to the following questions to serve this objective:

What are the views of LGBT students at the university about the problems they face during their educational life and their expectations of the solutions to those problems?

Probe questions

- (1) What are the views of LGBT students at universities around the issue of concealing their identities during their educational lives?
- (2) What are the views of LGBT students at university about having difficulties making friends without prejudices?
- (3) What are the views of LGBT students at university about being bullied?
- (4) What are the views of LGBT students at university about the pressures of the educational problems they face?
- (5) What are the views of LGBT students at university about their reactions to the problems they face during educational life?



(6) What are the views of LGBT students at university about their expectations of the future solutions to the problems during their educational lives?

Method

Research Pattern

This study adopted a qualitative approach, employing the phenomenological research method, which delves into the shared meanings of individuals' experiences with a specific concept (Creswell, 2021). Given the nature of the research, the choice of a phenomenological research design was deemed suitable for a comprehensive exploration of the perspectives, experiences, and recommendations of LGBT students concerning educational challenges.

Study Group

The research cohort comprises 23 LGBT students hailing from diverse academic departments across different Turkish universities. The selection of participants was accomplished through the utilization of a snowball sampling technique. The snowball sampling method as one of the purposive sampling models was used to select the participants. It is particularly used in qualitative studies by identifying cases of interest to the study from people who know and including other cases who have information about the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2018). Demographic information including the nicknames of participants is given in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Information of Participants

	Code	Age	Gender	University	Department
1	Şeyma	22	Lesbian	Sitki Koçman	Cosmetics
2	Buse	20	Lesbian	Sitki Koçman	Computer Teaching
3	Berke	20	Gay	Ege	Psychological Counselling
4	Ismail	21	Gay	Ege	Business Administration
5	Birsu	22	Transgender	Ege	Fine Arts
6	Meral	20	Lesbian	Ankara	Architecture
7	Cenker	21	Gay	Dokuz Eylül	English Teaching
8	Talha	24	Gay	Celal Bayar	Medicine
9	Selin	20	Transgender	Ege	Agriculture
10	Hasan	20	Bisexual	Dokuz Eylül	Nursing
11	Ulaş	20	Gay	Yaşar	Prep School/Fine Arts
12	Tibet	24	Bisexual	Süleyman Demirel	Technical Education
13	Pelin	23	Lesbian	Yeditepe	Psychology
14	Sude	20	Lesbian	Karadeniz Teknik	History of Art
15	Cemre	20	Lesbian	Gazi	Dentistry
16	Figen	23	Lesbian	Celal Bayar	Food Engineering
17	Fehmi	20	Gay	Adnan Menderes	Communication
18	Muhsin	20	Gay	Ege	Nursing
19	Celil	20	Gay	Ege	Communication
20	Giray	24	Gay	Yıldız Teknik	Physics
21	Şeyhmus	20	Gay	Ekonomi	Political Science
22	Ayberk	20	Gay	Ankara	Landscape Architecture
23	Cem	20	Gay	Adnan Menderes	Preschool Teaching

Data Collection Tool and Data Collection

Data were collected by means of semi-structured interviews with the participants of the study. The semi-structured interview approach was chosen for its flexibility in research design. To facilitate this, the researchers developed a 7-question "Interview Form on the Educational Challenges of LGBT Students and Their Recommendations for Solutions."

The initial draft of the interview form, created following a comprehensive literature review, underwent a review process by presenting it to a research assistant, an associate professor, and a professor affiliated with the Institute of Educational Sciences at Ege University, Faculty of Education, Curriculum and Instruction Program, as well as an associate professor from Dokuz Eylül University, Institute of



Educational Sciences, Educational Management Program and an English Instructor at Ege University, School of Foreign Languages. Incorporating their expert opinions, the interview form was refined. The interviews were conducted in person by appointment with the participants, with their permission for audio recording. The interview sessions ranged from 30 to 45 minutes in duration. Prior to the interview questions, a brief warm-up included inquiries about personal information such as age, school, and overall well-being.

The interview form included queries such as, 'Have you felt obliged to hide your identity during your educational life, including university education?', 'Have you ever experienced bullying as an LGBT student?', 'How did you react to the problems you experienced in your educational life?' With this form, detailed and deep experiences of the participants were obtained.

Analysis of Data

The data collection process is conducted and explained within three stages including pre-data collection, while data collection and post-data collection.

In the pre-data collection, a pilot interview was conducted with three LGBT students to get feedback on the interview questions in addition to the two expert reviews. Afterwards, the questions were revised and made ready for the live interviews.

The first participant was a student of the researcher and in the first meeting, the details about the study were shared. The participants who agreed to take part in the study expressed the opinion that it would not be difficult to ask a friend to participate in it, too. Data collection started with that first participant and the process continued with the suggestion of another participant for the following interview. Online meetings were carried out with the participants from Sitki Koçman, Karadeniz Teknik and Süleyman Demirel Universities, as those universities are not located near the city of the researcher. The other participants at nearby universities were interviewed face to face. Interviews started with an informal chat to make the participant feel comfortable and safe and they were initiated the interviews when they were ready. Each participant confirmed that they were voluntarily involved in the study and agreed that their responses could be recorded or written down. The researcher asked seven main questions and several follow-up questions, as necessary, to get deeper details and wrote down the responses.

At the end of the interview, the participants and researcher felt relaxed and started chatting about daily life issues. All participants expressed their willingness to take part in any further studies. When all responses had been obtained, they were input into a computer so that the analysis could be started.

A total of 34 pages of data were collected, formatted with one-and-a-half line spacing and 12-point font. The findings were generated through a content analysis of the data. Content analysis involves a thorough examination of the content, focusing on the meanings, contexts, and intentions conveyed in the messages (Prasad, 2008). To extract concepts that can elucidate the collected data, similar data were initially conceptualized, emerging concepts were logically organized, and then overarching themes were established to interpret the data (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). This process facilitated the categorization of words into fewer, content-related groups (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). To achieve this, all researchers individually coded the interview data, and they later collaborated to reach a consensus on the codes and compile a code list. Subsequently, each researcher independently coded all the data, and the final coding was reviewed collectively. As a result of the analysis, seven overarching themes were identified, with various categories falling under these themes.

Reliability and Validity

It is critically significant to examine the methods and the results of a study for bias which requires the researchers to pay great attention to validity and reliability (Creswell, 2003). Reliability' refers to the degree of consistency in categorization of the instances in the same way by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions (Hammersley, 1992). Therefore, in the study, the data were categorized by an observer who was not involved in the research. Afterwards, the first researcher



started categorization process and meanwhile the second researcher categorized the data. In the end of the process, all three categorization results were compared and the process was finalized by the first researcher.

Researcher triangulation, which means using several different researchers or evaluators in a study is implemented in this study to strengthen the reliability. To provide this, multiple researchers with different backgrounds and perspectives can independently analyse and interpret the data. This helps reduce the potential for bias and subjectivity that may arise from a single researcher's viewpoint (Patton, 2014). To be able to provide triangulation, three experts from different fields were involved in the analysis and interpretation process. In research and data analysis, involving multiple researchers with different backgrounds and perspectives is a common practice to enhance the quality and credibility of the findings. In this way, the research findings were ensured to be as accurate and reliable as possible.

Role of the Researcher

The first researcher of the study is an academician who has conducted the research and is an expert at teaching academic English. The researcher has been teaching English at different departments at Ege University for nearly 20 years and a doctorate student in educational management. The second researcher is an academician and an associate professor and an expert at educational management. The researchers decided to work on this topic while discussing the educational issues in Turkey during a lesson at the doctorate class. The first researcher had several LGBT students who were experiencing difficulties due to their genders. This inspired the researchers to work on this topic, contribute to the field and share the experiences of LGBT students.

Findings

The findings of the study were analyzed so that the experiences and views of the LGBT students about their educational problems at different universities could be revealed. During the interviews, the participants of the study expressed their opinions and experiences about their educational problems related to their gender and also they brought their solution suggestions to fore. The findings are presented below under the title of themes and each are explained in a detailed way.

1. Hiding the Identity Theme

The participants stated that they frequently felt obliged to hide their identities at school. Under this theme, three categories, "exclusion", "feeling guilty" and "family pressure" take place.

Fehmi, one of the gay participants of the study stated what he experienced when his classmates and the lecturers learned his sexual identity as follows:

"My classmates learned that I am gay. I don't know how because I was always careful. In the lesson, the lecturer asks us to work in groups, most people don't want me. the lecturer learned about the reason, maybe a student told him, he said to me that I could work alone. I felt so ashamed and insulted, lonely. I wished to be normal."

Giray expressed himself as follows:

"I am from Diyarbakir and very shy there and I hide it. I have to act. I have masculine clothes and I act masculine in them. there are times when I return to my essence. Sometimes I get surprised looks from people. I make a joke out of it, as if it is not understood because I am normally funny."

A transgender individual, Sude explains herself as follows:

"I had to hide my identity, especially from my family. But they learned and they rejected me and I had to leave home. I tried to hide it, but I was not successful, they always understood. It is impossible to hide after the surgery."



2. Socialization Theme

In this theme, categorization is in three headlines as "prejudice", "perceived as sick" and "accused of being a pervert".

One of the gay participant Cem's statements are below:

"As long as I don't explain it, it's fine, they don't understand, but after my relationship with B, they started to understand and I confessed. And yes, there was prejudice. Once, I found a note in my book, written by friends. It said that I was sick and go and get healed by a doctor"

Bilge, another gay participant has similar concerns:

"They like me when they don't know. Girls are interested in me and they try to be friends. I'm more comfortable with them. I can't make friends with boys, They can laugh at me. Some really thought this is a disease."

Şeymus expresses himself:

"Because, for example, I like men, but men see it a perversion. Sometimes there are girls who propose and I feel disgusted and they feel bad. But, if we were normal, no one would hurt anyone."

3. Being Bullied Theme

"Being bullied" has three categories, such as "verbal bullying", "abuse" and "physical bullying".

Ayberk stated his experience as a gay as follows:

"Once I was sitting in a bar with my boyfriend, in an place I was felt relaxed, a couple called the manager and looked us in the eye and accused us of immorality. He said his wife and young people not witness this perversion and asked him to throw us out."

Muhsin expresses his thoughts and experiences below:

"I think the word "faggot" is bullying in itself. Teachers don't pay attention to me. My dress, clothes and hairstyle were different. I was constantly warned and verbally harassed"

Cemre has dramatic experiences as a lesbian:

"Those who see and understand F, my girlfriend, and me immediately avert their eyes from us and start talking among themselves, thinking that we don't notice their side glances. we often encounter "let's see you kiss" or further harassment from men. There are also gropers. when we were walking with F. Let's see what it's like with a lesbian."

Ulaş's words are really striking:

"Just now, even coming here, someone punched me, look, it's bruised. I've been beaten many times. ... The teacher dropped me from the class. He didn't even answer when I asked him why. ... I received many warnings from the principal before. He talked to me to be normal, get treatment."

A transgender participant, Selin's experience is as follows:

"There is constant violence. Verbal, physical, psychological. I went to the hospital at night, to the emergency room, I was in a lot of pain. Next to me was the man who employed me. Then, while I was waiting in line, a man came and punched me. Then he broke the window. Everyone saw it, but they found me guilty. The man stole my necklace from my bag and left. I had to pay for the glass."



4. Future Anxiety Theme

Feeling of pressure theme stands out in the categories of “fear of dropping out from school”, “fear of dismissal” and “finding a job”.

Şeyma, a lesbian participant, has serious concerns about her future career:

"The same thing will happen at work. Maybe the boss or the employees will file a complaint as soon as they realize. There is no state and no law to protect our rights."

Muhsin points out similar worries:

"This puts a lot of pressure on me. Pressure that my life will not be easy. Will I graduate? Will I find a job? Will they warn me or fire me because of my appearance?"

Celil underlines his concerns as follows:

"It scares me when the lecturer leaves me and shows negative attitudes towards me. I am worried about what if I don't graduate. I am worried about what if they find him right and not me and burn my education life."

5. Reaction to the Problems Theme

There are five categories under the reaction to the problems themes. These are “feeling upset”, “negligence”, “annoyance to oneself”, “violence” and “escaping”.

Figen’s reactions are as follows:

"It's sad. Frustrating. It's life-denying."

Meral states her feelings in the words below:

"At first I was devastated. I felt so angry at this damn system. But then I think my skin thickened, I became indifferent over time."

Ulaş expresses his feelings as follows:

"I pretend I don't care and go on with my life. No one understands my distress. When I am alone with myself, I feel so sad, I wonder what I did to deserve this."

Selin expresses her reactions in the words below:

"I cry, I shout. Sometimes I fight back against violence. I carry sharp objects with me. Once I stabbed the arm of a man who was beating me. They threw me in jail. It was just to protect myself."

Table 2
Solutions and Expectations

Political	General	Educational	Expectations			
			Social	From peers	From family	From academics
Acceptance	Not to be judged	Teachers	No fear	Friendship	Love and understanding	Model
Model and support	Self-confidence	Seminars	Respect	Acceptance	No violence and pressure	Studies
Gay politicians	Respect	Curriculum	No violence	No violence	Expert collaboration	
Permission for activities	Peace with oneself	No discrimination	No prejudice	Respect		
Protection and rights	Being left alone		No discrimination			
Be trustworthy and honest	Acceptance					



Solution, suggestions and expectations, as shown in Table 2, were classified as general, political, educational, social and from academics and researchers, families and peers.

In general, expectations of 'not being offended, respect and understanding' were the most frequently mentioned concepts, and they also expressed their desire to be 'more secure' and 'to be at peace with themselves'. Additionally, 'being left alone' was emphasised while one participant added that they had no expectations.

Being accepted by politicians and their role as models and support were often mentioned. Likewise, it was determined that they wanted to be protected and their rights to be defended. They hope to see politicians having different sexual orientations. They expect politicians to be reliable and honest, and they do not want to be hindered in their activities, but expect to be supported.

Berke's suggestions are as follows:

"Maybe it would be effective if someone who is gay went into politics, came out and was embraced, and did good work. If municipalities, politicians organized events, LGBTI marches were allowed..."

The most frequently mentioned point in the field of education is the wish for teachers not to marginalise or discriminate, and to be a model.

Berke states the following ideas:

"Teachers should give examples, there should be reading material on LGBTI issues, there should be no gender distinction between men and women, even homosexuality should be taught as a third subject in biology or science classes, and it should be explained that it is normal."

It has also been suggested that regular training should be given to educators, families and heterosexual individuals, especially those who are either homosexual or heterosexual. Society should be unprejudiced, understanding, respectful and non-violent.

Ulaş has clear words on this:

"Give us a chance, we're normal, we're fine. Our only goal is to survive and be ourselves."

Selin expresses her ideas below:

"As long as they don't show violence. I get beaten even when I just stand still."

Center reveals his thoughts with the words below:

"It leads to catastrophes. How many people have been killed or committed suicide because of social pressure. I expect them to have some conscience."

Support is expected from researchers and academics in conducting similar studies and sharing them with society.

Buse conveys her message about what they expect from academics as follows:

"More studies like this. Interviewing heterosexuals as well. Conducting seminars, communicating with families."

Selin expresses similar ideas:

"Let them do a lot of research like you. Let our voices be heard."

Berke states his opinions below:

"Let them support our work. I make beautiful drawings. I even got an award from a small company abroad. I shared it with our lecturers. They didn't even look at it. I'm very sad. Maybe I'll win a scholarship abroad and go. My family sends money though. They even send me extra money so that I don't return home during the holidays, they say go sightseeing."



It is expected of families to be understanding, display love and accept their children as 'normal'.

Muhsin's expectations from families are below:

"Everyone misses their child studying far away, visits them, looks forward to them coming home for the holidays. My family doesn't want me at all. Okay, they send money, they could have done without that, but they don't love me, they are ashamed of me. Families should not be like this. Can't a child be loved? They should love me no matter what. I love them."

Figen states her opinions as follows:

"They have to love their children no matter what. None of us decided to come into the world on our own, they have no right to exclude or reject us. If my family knew, maybe they wouldn't reject them, but I am sure they would be very sad and ashamed to have such a child. But there is no need. They should be proud of me for being me."

Expectations from peers that emerged in the study are establishing friendships, acceptance, not using violence and harassment and respect.

Figen's statements are worth thinking:

"Let us all be good people and good models. No one is better than the other. I can't see, some can't hear, some can't walk, some are too shy, some are too scared and so on... We may all have shortcomings or mistakes. But we should embrace each other."

Muhsin says:

"If the family and education improve, peers will be much more aware and understanding."

Discussion, Conclusion, And Suggestions

This research critically examined the educational, social, and individual experiences, as well as the expectations of LGBT students within diverse university settings across Turkey. The findings of this study carry implications that extend beyond their immediate scope, aiming to exert influence on the broader academic community, administrative bodies, and educators. Through disseminating and applying the insights collected from this research, it is envisaged that a more inclusive and informed approach to educational policies and practices can be cultivated, fostering an environment that supports the diverse needs of LGBT students.

As the data gathered show, being an LGBT student at school has numerous negative effects on personal, social, educational and psychological lives. It is explicitly understood through this study that LGBT students have crucial expectations of all stakeholders influencing their lives including teachers, academics, managers, friends, families and all other members of society which is parallel with the conclusions drawn by Leung et al, 2022.

While the problems LGBT students live with could have been approached as an educational problem, the paucity of studies on this area resulted in disregarding the issue and an increase in the problems of those students, as Çavdar and Çok (2016) also underlined. The under-examination of the challenges faced by LGBT students, despite their potential characterization as an educational predicament, has led to a notable oversight of the issue within academic discourse. Çavdar and Çok (2016) highlighted this deficiency, emphasizing that the scarcity of scholarly investigations in this domain has contributed to a dismissal of the predicaments encountered by LGBT students.

In the interviews and data analysis, being excluded, not respected, being described as sick or perverted, being exposed to harassment and violence, being humiliated and all these things manifest as pressure, fear, unhappiness, helplessness and loneliness are extremely sad. It is the most natural right to expect equality of opportunity in education, to include everyone and not to be marginalised. There can be no more natural expectation than asking families, society, politicians and educators to display a sensitive and fair attitude and not to use any kind of violence. This is explained by some studies. Şentürk and Turan (2012) claim that 'educational institutions' tend to adopt a mission to



support the concept of 'normal' according to the society and control and reinforce 'normality', define the situations and individuals out of the framework of standards as 'pathological'. They also add that those institutions consider themselves responsible for discarding or normalising 'pathological' ones. Furthermore, teachers and administrators at schools observe the manners, attitudes and behaviours and praise the 'normal' ones while punishing the so-called 'pathological' ones. Therefore, education, as an ideological device, normalises social inequalities and even legalises them (Altunpolat 2017). Freire (2000) supports this by claiming that no educational implementation could ever be wholly objective and that the traditional education system supports the oppressed in the struggle between oppressor and oppressed. According to Göregenli (cited by Çavdar and Çok, 2016), schools, unfortunately, play an undeniable role in the behaviour of the wider society towards LGBT students and this creates numerous difficulties stronger than fears by affecting the intergroup processes of homophobia and transphobia supported by institutions and social traditions. Çavdar and Çok (2016) suggest that as the students spend their critical adolescent and teenage years at school, more studies should be done on the issues LGBT students struggle with and their solutions to them.

The examination of challenges faced by LGBT students within the educational context has been framed predominantly as an educational dilemma. Despite the perceivable relevance of these challenges to the educational context, a discernible pause in scholarly investigations focused on this specific domain has precipitated a systemic disregard for the multifaceted issues confronted by LGBT students (Human Rights Watch, 2016). The paucity of rigorous academic inquiries and empirical analyses in this sphere has not only impeded the clarification of the unique challenges faced by LGBT students but has also intensified the existing challenges experienced by this demographic. Consequently, the imperative for a more expansive and robust scholarly discourse, characterized by an in-depth examination of the educational tribulations faced by LGBT students, becomes evident as a prerequisite for informed and effective interventions within the educational landscape (United Nations Human Rights, 2019).

Sensitivity towards LGBT students can be ensured and necessary precautions regarding bullying and harassment can be taken. Legal protection can be provided to homosexual groups, without any discrimination, LGBT individuals can be recruited in government and public institutions, and quotas can even be reserved for them. The state, schools and families can cooperate on the identification and correct behaviour towards their children with a homosexual orientation.

Teachers, academics and parents are strongly recommended to support their LGBT students, colleagues and children and perceive their sexual orientation as normal, as it is already. Unless teachers, academics and parents regard this as odd, they will feel more self-confident and stronger to cope with other external challenges.

In the study, participants came from diverse groups in terms of family background, hometown, university, department and sexual orientation and this variety could be considered a significant contribution to the determination of experiences and expectations of university students with different sexual orientations. The results show that LGBT students in the contemporary world are experiencing serious problems within the education system and that they need solutions to be offered to them within the system because of their identities in order to overcome these problems.

As the study has been conducted by academics, it might draw the attention of other academics from the universities of the authors, and it might have a leading and encouraging impact on them to conduct similar studies or at least talk about the issue with their students, colleagues and family members. Furthermore, with the findings of the study being compatible with the studies done in Turkey and abroad, they might have a reinforcing effect on similar results that could lead the authorities in Turkey to consider the topic once more, particularly if the study creates a snowball action by giving academics the impetus to study similar issues.

In conclusion, this research underscores the pressing need for a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and expectations of LGBT students in Turkish university settings. The findings shed light on the multifaceted challenges these students face, encompassing personal, social, educational, and psychological dimensions. Importantly, the study highlights the crucial role played by various



stakeholders, including teachers, academics, administrators, friends, and family, in shaping the well-being of LGBT students. The identified gaps in research, as echoed by Çavdar and Çok (2016), emphasize the urgent necessity to address the under-examination of the challenges faced by this demographic group within academic discourse. By disseminating and applying the insights gleaned from this study, there is an opportunity to instigate positive change and cultivate a more inclusive and informed approach to educational policies and practices. The research calls for heightened awareness and proactive measures within the academic community, administrative bodies, and educational institutions to create an environment that supports the diverse needs of LGBT students, mitigating the negative effects on their lives and fostering a more inclusive educational landscape.

Limitations

Although the study has a variety of participants and the number is statistically meaningful with 23 participants (Patton, 2018), some limitations should be considered, particularly for further studies. The initial limitation could be mentioned as the scarcity of previous studies on a similar issue in Turkey as previous studies are important to establish the basis of the current study. Additionally, only interview questions were used to collect data and if observation and focus group meetings could be incorporated in a further study, this would enhance the reliability of the findings.

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