



Secondary school LGBTQ+ EFL teachers' workplace: Insights and conundrums

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ABSTRACT

The study unfolds five Thai LGBTQ+ English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' narratives in a Thailand secondary school. One-on-one semi-structured interviews, reflective journals, and classroom observations provide data for analyzing and developing narratives. Teachers' workplace, queer theory, and intersectionality ground the study's theoretical foundation. The three lenses of narrative inquiry (contextuality, sociality, and temporality) provide a robust structure for data analysis and organization and presentation of findings. Overall, these five teachers explain, share, and negotiate definitions of their workplace realities, interpret ways of thinking and living their sexual orientation, and deal with intersectionality conundrums of social status and social hierarchy among other elements. These teachers' narratives add salient insights and conundrums to a burgeoning LGBTQ+ scholarship. More importantly, findings of this study not only call for inclusion and social justice for but also raise concerns for the well-being of every LGBTQ+ teacher.

KEYWORDS

narrative inquiry, LGBTQ+ teachers, discrimination, bullies, tensions, exclusion

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years studies on LGBTQ+ issues in English language classrooms have internationally burgeoned. For example, in Thailand, several researchers delved into university EFL classrooms and investigated learners' sexual identities. They called for a safer classroom environment where students were free to display and discuss their sexual identities (Hongboontri & Duangsaeng, 2022; Ulla & Paiz, 2024, 2025). In Japan, Moore (2016) interviewed six LGBTQ students in an English conversation class about their learning needs. The content of their English class was irrelevant to their lived experience though they had more freedom in expressing their sexual identities. In UK, Brett et al.'s (2024) focus group interview with five LGBTQ+ teachers identified LGBTQ+ teachers' threats generated principally by media and parents. Such threats impacted participants' sense of inclusion/exclusion in practice. Two reflective essays from an American researcher, Paiz (2019, 2021) emphasized the needs in preparing language educators to better manage classrooms of learners with diverse sexual identities. Other researchers from countries such as Japan (Lawrence & Nagashima, 2021), Türkiye (Güney, 2023), and Vietnam (Tran-Thanh, 2020) similarly examined the possibility of introducing and incorporating LGBTQ+ related content in EFL classrooms.

The literature focuses on the lives of LGBTQ+ learners and the incorporation of LGBTQ+ related issues in English language classrooms among EFL researchers. However, little is known about the experiences of LGBTQ+ EFL teachers in their work culture. In response, this current study explores the relationships between school culture and Thai LGBTQ+ EFL teachers' work and life. Two research questions direct the study. How does the workplace affect their gender orientation? How does the workplace influence their work and life?

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

This current research draws on three different theoretical notions including: (1) teacher workplace, (2) queer theory, and (3) intersectionality. Through these lenses, the researchers identify and analyze the lived experiences of Thai LGBTQ+ high school EFL teachers.

The theoretical notions of teacher workplace emphasize researcher's immersion into an actual context to construe how a workplace appears to teachers who inhabit them (Rosenholtz, 1991). Teachers share, exchange, negotiate, and modify their definition of the realities of their workplace realities through interactions with people in the same workplace such as colleagues, students, and students' parents, among many others. Importantly, teachers learn through such interactions of their expected behaviors. Teaching beliefs and behaviors are then molded to properly match the social organization of the school.

Queer theory offers an alternative to the traditional definition of genders. Genders are not only defined by sexual identities but also shaped by ways of thinking and living (Sedgwick, 1990). In other words, sexual identities are not what people are, but what people do. Hence, they could be constructed and formed "at specific times, in specific places, to do specific work" (Poynton, 1997, p. 17). Nelson (2002, 2009) borrowed queer theory and went into EFL classrooms to reveal the multifaceted relationships between EFL teachers' sexual identities and other concerned domains (e.g., students, curriculum, and teaching materials, among others). With this, Nelson could not only uncover the domain of teachers' sexual orientation that may be of concern to both teachers and their students for different reasons. Also, she could identify positive as well as problematic aspects of teachers' sexual identities.

The notion of intersectionality, as Crenshaw (1989) defined, offers "a metaphor for themselves and creates obstacles that often are not understood among conventional ways of thinking" (p. 161). In theory, intersectionality highlights that to achieve equality for all genders, other intersecting systems including, e.g., race, social status, and social hierarchy must be attended to as well (Warner & Shields, 2013). In adopting an intersectional approach, this research provides LGBTQ+ teachers with a lens to better understand themselves and their roles in a school as they are constantly exposed to different systems of disciplines and oppression. Each system also classifies the individual differently and imposes a variety of means of control and regulation. Hence, through the lens of intersectionality, a recognition of discrimination and bullies against LGBTQ+ teachers may be observed.

MODE OF INQUIRY, RESEARCH CONTEXT AND PARTICIPANTS, DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Narrative Inquiry

The researchers followed the notions of narrative inquiry to attend to these LGBTQ+ EFL teachers' changing experiences in terms of their interactions with their school context, other people's perceptions of their sexual orientation, and their position in relation to the school's present systems of disciplines and oppression, or as coined by Clandinin et al. (2007), (1) context, (2) sociality, and (3) temporality. Building on Schwabian notions of curriculum inquiry, Connelly and Clandinin (2006) identified "three commonplaces of narrative inquiry – temporality, sociality, and place – which specify dimensions of an inquiry space" (p. 479). Extending on such concept, Clandinin et al., (2007) emphasized the mutual interconnection of the three commonplaces and argued that "[w]e cannot focus only on one to the exclusion of others" (p. 23). In essence, the interplay of the three commonplaces would situate a better as well as fuller understanding of teachers and the extent to which they change due to their ongoing interactions with the three commonplaces.

Research context and participants

Sawasdee is a regional public secondary school located in northeastern Thailand. The school has over 120 teachers and supporting staff with a student population of approximately 3,000. *Sawasdee* offers three main programs to its students including science, mathematics and science, and language arts. In the language arts programs, several foreign languages are offered, including Chinese, English, French, Korean, and Japanese. English is the only required subject whereas other languages are elective.

After attaining permission to collect data from the principal of *Sawasdee*, the researchers recruited participants with a snowball sampling and a purposive sampling technique. Five self-identified LGBTQ+ Thai EFL teachers at *Sawasdee* consented to participate in the study. Three of them were between 30–39 years old; one was in his early forties; and one was in his mid-fifties. In relation to their qualifications, all the participants held a BA degree in English language education. Their teaching experience ranged from 30 to less than 10 years. Importantly, the researchers ensured all the participants privacy and confidentiality (Eisner, 2017).

Research data collection tools

The researchers followed the notions of qualitative research, especially narrative inquiry (i.e., Clandinin et al., 2007) and designed and developed three data collection tools to gather data, including: (1) one-on-one interviews (2) reflective journals, and (3) classroom observations. These three diverse data collection tools would enhance the researchers' understanding of these five LGBTQ+ EFL teachers' evolving experiences in their simultaneous interactions with other teachers in the same context.

The researchers used one-on-one semi structured interviews to elicit these five LGBTQ+ EFL teachers' insights and conundrums relating to discrimination and bullying within their workplace. All interviews were audiotaped, and fieldnotes were taken with

participants' permission. They were later transcribed verbatim for further analysis. Importantly, interview data enabled the researchers to explore the participants' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs on such sensitive issues (Jamshed, 2014). Moreover, all participants were required to keep reflective journals detailing their perceptions toward their workplace. Forty entries were kept (eight from each teacher participant) for further analysis. With these entries, the researchers could better capture the complexity of the studied issues with these entries (Edward, 2023). Lastly, the researchers observed each participant three times during their teaching. These observations allowed the researchers to gain a better understanding of the effects that a workplace had on these teachers' life and work (Merriam, 2009).

Data analysis

The researchers analyzed and laced the story of each individual participant with Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) notions of narrative inquiry. First, the researchers read the transcribed data, and unified them to create a cohesive narrative with a plot. Then, the data were read and re-read to identify themes or concepts that most closely aligned with the three theoretical concepts underpinning the study and the research questions. Next, the researchers heeded the patterns of narrative writing and wove the lives of these participants to depict their perceptions and conundrums of their workplace. In so doing, the stories of these five LGBTQ+ EFL teachers were individually presented and put together to reveal their perceived understandings and interactions with themselves, their students, their principal, their colleagues, and their students' parents, among others. It grounds research in the experiences and is expressed in the voices of these EFL teachers themselves. This helps situate a better understanding of how these LGBTQ+ EFL teachers were treated in a school, how they were positioned, and whether these teachers could possibly reposition themselves. More importantly, this narratively inquiring into these teachers' lives and well-being at a school made,

the known and the familiar strange and open to new possibility. Teachers and teacher educators have an opportunity to come to understand more fully our school landscapes and ourselves as shaping and shaped by these landscapes, and thus, to shift our practices in relation to teaching and learning, teachers and students, parents and families, and curriculum making. (Clandinin et al., 2007, pp. 33–34)

FINDINGS

LGBTQ+ EFL teachers, sexual orientation, sexual orientation, and discrimination

Blake

An openly LGBTQ+ teacher, *Blake*, was a YouTuber and a TikTokker. His two channels had large followers. His English language teaching channel on YouTube had more than 500,000 subscribers and his short clips on TikTok were watched by millions. On his two social media channels, *Blake* displayed, "my full-on gay persona. I put on my colorful wigs, heavy make-up, and outrageous costumes." Such persona, *Blake* shared, "helps me become more famous

and recognizable. People do remember me. Some come up and say ‘hi’ with me on a street.” His social media fame also increased his popularity among the students at *Sawasdee School*.

I am loud; I am friendly. These personas make students feel easier to approach me. They give me nicknames such as ‘Mama,’ ‘Big Sis,’ or ‘Queenie.’ These might sound odd to some people. They might think that the students are disrespectful of me. But I don’t find these offensive at all.

Blake opined; “This has a lot to do with how the students use these words. I could feel their admiration and respect when saying all these words.” *Blake* continued and explained how his appearances captured students’ attention. “Some students would be waiting by the school gate just to see how I would turn up. Some say ‘Hi’ and compliment my look.” He further noted;

My character and my look probably make students feel more comfortable in a personal sort of way. As they are more relaxed, they sort of open themselves up and become more attentive to what is happening in the classrooms. They are not only more motivated but also become more interested in English.

Classroom observations of *Blake* documented his heavy reliance on the given curriculum and the textbook, the students’ more active role, and the classrooms’ relaxed atmosphere. In his classrooms, *Blake* covered the required grammar points, finished grammatical seat-work exercises, read and translated the reading passage, and completed the reading comprehension exercise with the students. The students appeared to be attentive to *Blake*’s teaching and focused on whatever *Blake* assigned. Communications in the classrooms were abundant. *Blake* and his students constantly exchanged jokes and teased each other in Thai. For example, before the class ended, one female student complimented *Blake* on his make-up and his dress. He laughed, thanked the student, and told her to have her eyes checked. She might need glasses as she only paid attention to his look just a few minutes before the class was over. The class then erupted with laughing.

Yet, teacher colleagues, supporting staff, and students’ parents reacted to *Blake*’s personas differently.

Several teachers and staff criticizing me for being too gay. ‘You are setting a bad example for our students.’ They told me to tone it down as this damaged the school’s reputation. Some parents of the students are complaining and petitioning to remove me from teaching. They are worried that I would put ‘gay thoughts’ in their children’s mind.

Nonetheless, *Blake* relayed it was the principal who requested that *Blake* portray his social media’s personas at school.

The ideas of wearing dresses and make-up to school never came across my mind. I wanted to separate my social media personas from my regular teaching. I do all those things on social media because I need to compete with other YouTubers to attract more subscribers. The larger subscribers mean more money. However, when the school principal learned about my

popularity on social media, he asked me to wear my social media personas to the school. This, he believed, could help make the school more recognizable. It is one way to help promote the school, but at my expense. I feel that the principal is riding on my reputation and my popularity.

Blake eventually conformed to such idea due to his fear of losing his job, though he disagreed with the principal's request.

I am not happy with these ideas at all. But what choice do I have? He's evaluating my performance. In the interest of maintaining good relationships with him, I begrudgingly oblige to his ideas. But I couldn't help but see the bitter irony of the whole situation. I don't want to end up selling cosmetics.

Blake felt vulnerable and exposed to the predominance of what he perceived as discrimination and bullying against LGBTQ+ teachers. *Blake* was exhausted in dealing with gay slurs and derogatory language particularly from the principal and teacher colleagues. "They openly refer to me with names such as 'bender,' 'queen bee,' 'mamasan,' or 'tootsie.' Feeling much exhausted, *Blake* ignored them and isolated himself from other heterosexual teacher colleagues.

I never converse with these teachers. I never work with them. Their uses of gay slurs and derogatory language are disturbing, and they really upset me. As I can't stop them, I distance myself from them.

In turn, the fragmentation between *Blake* and his heterosexual colleagues substantiated his relationship with other LGBTQ+ EFL teachers. Within the group, *Blake* mutually shared and exchanged, for example, communication, information, and assistance. Psychological and professional support was also available for all the group members as *Blake* claimed.

I've become closer with the LGBTQ+ EFL teachers. We often exchange conversation as well as information and assistance. We provide each other with psychological and professional support. I usually confide with them my dissatisfaction and frustration with the dominant discrimination and bullying within the school.

Blake admitted that he never considered leaving his teaching job despite the discrimination and bullying. He outlined three reasons for wanting to keep his job; they were: (1) love of teaching, (2) job stability, and (3) employment discrimination against LGBTQ+ in Thailand.

I love to teach, and I want to continue with this. Teaching online is not the same as teaching in a classroom. In a classroom, you could feel that you are making a difference in a student's life. I could make some students like and enjoy English. That's a great reward.

He continued.

This job gives me a sense of security and stability. My YouTube channel and my TikTok have thousands of followers. The number of my followers depends on my popularity. And this certainly comes and goes. There is always someone fresher, newer, and more popular. And you could be replaced just like that.

Then, he criticized.

Employment discrimination against LGBTQ+ in this country is real. Newspapers in Thailand have often reported about this. Two years ago, one Filipino EFL teacher was removed from teaching and assigned to work in a library because he was gay. One LGBTQ+ was told to withdraw her job application for teaching and to look for selling cosmetics. 'Teaching is not your job.' I am one of the very few lucky ones that got a job and I very much intend to keep it.

Carter

A self-identified LGBTQ+ teacher, *Carter*, always embraced his sexual orientation and orientation. *Carter* never worried about being out to the *Sawasdee*'s students as he felt many of the school's students were friendly to LGBTQ+. "The students are very open. I hardly feel threaten or violated." This helped strengthen his relationship with the students which, in turn, influenced *Carter*'s classroom practice. The fieldnotes of *Carter*'s three classroom observations are summarized below.

In his teaching, *Carter* routinely and rigidly followed the given curriculum and textbook sequences. He covered the required grammar points and completed the grammatical exercises in the textbook. Then he read and translated the reading passage and finished the reading comprehension exercise in the textbook. The overall classroom atmosphere was rather relaxed. Communications between *Carter* and the students and among the students were abundant. Such communications were in Thai. There mainly were constant exchanges of jokes and teasing between *Carter* and the students.

Carter's openness of his sexual orientation and orientation received, however, rather negative reactions from heterosexual teacher colleagues and supporting staff. *Carter* recounted numerous incidences demonstrating the types of discrimination and bullying targeting him.

The school principal and teacher colleagues frequently ask me questions, such as, 'Are you gay? You look so manly.' 'You've just added a new member to your power puff girl group. What color are you?' 'Are you on hormones? Your chest is big.' 'We saw you at the market last night with a

nice-looking boy. Is he your boyfriend? How long have you two been together?"

He further added. "I've been called with inappropriate gay slurs such as 'queer,' 'faggot,' and 'tootsie.' This makes me furious. I feel degraded and insulted."

Carter found sexual orientation stereotypes a challenge at *Sawasdee*. Such stereotypes, as *Carter* criticized, "violates my freedom of expressions and living as they conform me to live in a prejudiced box." In his own words,

Most teachers here believe that gay men are feminine and lesbian women are masculine. They also have the cliché of gay men being better at handicraft, cooking, or flower arrangement when compared to woodwork, building, or any sports. We are usually assigned to organize and arrange dancing shows for school events. When we go on a school camping trip, we are assigned a cooking job. We are compelled to dress as a woman for a school event. This violates my rights.

Carter complained that stereotypes created a social stigma marking him undesirable. Such feeling brought *Carter* extensive distress and lessened his sense of belongingness and commitment to the school. In his own words,

I've been unjustly criticized and openly rejected because of my sexual orientation. 'You're too girly.' 'Man up.' During one school event, I was told to sit at 'a gay table' where 'all the feminine' sat. Another time I went to a group of teachers and asked whether I could join their team for the school's annual trip. Originally, I thought this was a perfect time to get to know other teachers. I went to one group of teachers and was told 'You need to look for a new group. I don't like to talk to the gays.' Then I walked to another group and was told 'I am not sharing a bedroom with the gays.' I thought the whole purpose of this trip was to build teamwork. But these heterosexual teachers just tossed me aside because I was gay.

Carter observed further the exclusion of LGBTQ+ teachers lay within the school's plans concerning the distribution and allocation of resources. These plans often discriminated against LGBTQ+ teachers which resulted in inequality toward LGBTQ+ teachers. More promotions and resources including opportunities for professional development, support, and rewards were, *Carter* noted, distributed to heterosexual teachers. "I've been told that heterosexual teachers make better representatives of the school. They've been often funded to attend training programs. LGBTQ+ teachers, on the contrary, receive much smaller opportunities." He then warned of such unequal treatment.

This reinforces the disparity between heterosexual and LGBTQ+ teachers and entrenches more fractions between these two groups of teachers. Worse yet, this reiterates the belief that LGBTQ+ are inferior to heterosexual.

Carter insisted on staying at *Sawasdee* despite discrimination and bullying at the school. He identified three reasons for such a decision, including: (1) joys and satisfactions of caring

for and working with students, (2) relationships with other LGBTQ+ teacher colleagues, and (3) job security. He truly enjoyed working with students.

When discrimination and bullying at the school has become too overbearing, it is being with them that keeps me going. Our relationships are better than good. They are respectful of me. They make jokes of me sometimes; they tease me. But these jokes and teases are unharmed.

The close-knit relationships within the group of LGBTQ+ EFL teachers offered him, *Carter* coined, “a buoy” that kept him with the school. Mutual assistance and support were commonly accessible for all members in this group. In his own words;

LGBTQ+ EFL teachers here have anchored me. We’ve given each other mental and professional support. We’ve exchanged assistance. We’ve listened to each other’s complaints and whines about the workplace.

Lastly, *Carter’s* fear of unemployment heightened his endurance with the discrimination and bullying he perceived at the school. Employment discrimination against LGBTQ+ in Thailand made it more difficult for LGBTQ+ to find a teaching job.

Job discrimination against LGBTQ+ is real in this country. Overall, people see you as ‘defective’ and you are not fit for teaching. To keep my job, I must endure all those unpleasant experiences.

Kayden

Kayden always embraced his queerness. He was in his mid-fifties with more than 30 years of EFL teaching experience. He had been with *Sawasdee* for nearly 30 years. *Sawasdee* was not hostile to LGBTQ+ teachers and students, given how he described. Nonetheless, it was not that welcoming to the LGBTQ+ either. School’s assistance and support for the LGBTQ+ were rather insufficient. *Kayden* wrote in one of his journal entries.

Sawasdee is not a battle ground for both LGBTQ teachers and students. Yet, it is not a lavender field either. Homophobia remarks are commonly heard; stereotyping is adamant; LGBTQ+ resources are inadequate, almost non-available; and support and assistance for LGBTQ+ rarely exist.

Overall, the relationships between *Kayden* and his students were good. His long years of teaching at the school might earn him some respect from the students. “I have been here for longer than 20 years. I might have taught their parents, their aunts and uncles, or their older brothers or sisters. They may be more respectful of me.” He felt safe with students as they seldom harassed or bullied him. “I feel very OK with the students. They always tease me by calling me ‘Mamm,’ ‘Madam,’ or ‘Auntie.’ These teases are, however, unharmed. I would do anything to support them.” *Kayden’s* commitment to his students was evident in his teaching. His instruction was planned and prepared in accordance with the given curriculum and sequential order of the textbook. This was to prepare the students for both

high school examinations and the national entrance examination. *Kayden* described his typical classroom instruction in one of his journal entries.

I prepare and plan my teaching around the given curriculum and textbook. My primary object is to prepare students for exams – school exams and the national entrance examination. I cover all the grammar points; I complete all the exercises in the textbook. I never bring any LGBTQ+ issues into my classrooms as I don't think I need to discuss these with my students.

Kayden's relationships with school personnel (e.g., the principal, teacher colleagues, and supporting staff) may be rather mediocre as he often experienced discrimination and bullies from these personnel. The principal, as *Kayden* vociferously criticized, did not support LGBTQ+ teachers to any great extent. Worse, the principal regularly harassed LGBTQ+ teachers with either homophobia remarks or derogatory language. Such behaviors provoked and upset *Kayden*.

The principal often calls me with nicknames, 'big mama,' 'queenie,' 'tootsie,' or 'little sister.' He once asked one of my colleagues – 'Where is the Queen?' During a conversation with the parents of one student, he pointed at me and spoke. 'This is our big mama. He takes loving care of our students.' Then he laughed. This is insulting and degrading.

In addition, *Kayden* felt being abused and victimized by this principal's authority. The principal coerced him to dress as a woman during school events to publicize the school. Such imposition humiliated and devalued him. He complained:

Last year during the Chinese Festival, I and a few other LGBTQ+ teachers were told to dress as a woman. On that day, the principal paraded us around the school and introduced us to students' parents. They either openly laughed at us or had a smirk on their faces. Some came up to me and gave me a compliment. 'You look beautiful.' To me, it is an insult, not a compliment. That day was very awful. I felt publicly humiliated, used, and exploited. The principal might revel to making us embarrassed.

Kayden felt he had no means to defy the principal despite his fury with the principal. The principal, as *Kayden* shared, had total control of his career.

The principal is the mightiest. He signs my evaluation form; he determines whether I get a raise and how much. Given his power, I often quietly swallow my dissatisfaction and anger. I don't want to risk making him mad at me as he pretty much determines my teaching career. He never knows how his words and his actions have offended me.

Kayden relentlessly encountered stereotyping as another form of discrimination, especially from his heterosexual teacher colleagues and supporting staff. Such stereotyping, *Kayden* found, caused exclusion of LGBTQ+ teachers, which eventually made him feel fractured at the workplace. Stereotyping at work often manifested through derogatory language, name-calling, and pity-talks, among many others. *Kayden* explained:

The teachers and supporting staff have a very fixed idea of what an LGBTQ+ is. For example, every gay boy's ultimate dream is to become a woman. I am often asked whether I would seek a sex change operation and when. Every gay boy is OK with foul language. Some staff think it's OK to call me 'a bitch.' 'Bitch, have you had lunch?' They never dare call other heterosexual teachers with that term. Pity-talks also annoy me. 'I am worried about you. You are getting older, but you have no family and no kids. Who's going to take care of you when you get sick?'

Kayden did find some camaraderie, both emotionally and professionally, with some of the LGBTQ+ teachers. *Kayden* described; "We eventually become a group and we try to give each other support lifting each other up. We offer each other mutual assistance." Their close-knit relationship was obvious and was even recognized by the students. "One student came up to me and told me that their friends nicknamed us 'Power-puff Ladies.' This name was to run in parallel with his group 'Power-puff Girls.'"

Kayden summed up his overall perceptions of *Sawasdee* and explained why he still remained at the school despite all the discrimination and bullying from the principal, teacher colleagues, and supporting staff. Overall, he felt his career opportunities were limited due to the employment discrimination against LGBTQ+ in Thailand.

Despite discrimination, bullying, and lack of support, I decide to stay. Jobwise, our choice is limited due to our gender orientation. Discrimination is obvious. Newspapers in Thailand report about this all the time. Though qualified, one applicant was rejected and was told to look for a job selling beauty products. One university professor's contact was not renewed. He wore a dress and was considered unfit for the job.

Rico

Rico never hid his sexual orientation. His family especially his mother was very supportive and encouraged him to embrace his orientation. "I am a loud and proud LGBTQ+. My family especially my mum has always been supportive of me. She tells me never to be ashamed of who I am." At *Sawasdee*, *Rico* noted further, "everybody knows that I am gay." In particular, the students, as *Rico* observed and felt, "seem to be very friendly and very welcoming of my gayness. My relationships with the students are quite good." Such relationships were transferred into his teaching.

Rico's classroom atmosphere, as the observational data recorded, was overall relaxed. Interactions between *Rico* and the students were abundant. Gay slurs, derogatory language, and gay jokes were prevalent. Ironically, *Rico* appeared to be neither offended nor provoked. Instead, his reactions to these were rather positive. He either smiled, talked back, or jokingly told the students to behave. *Rico* planned his teaching on the given curriculum and typically implemented his plan according to textbook sequences. He explained grammar points and gave sentence samples. He completed seat-work exercises in the textbook; he read and translated the reading passage and finished the reading comprehension exercises. In his interview, *Rico* explained.

In classes, students often call me ‘Sister *Rico*,’ or ‘Mama.’ They mock and ridicule me from time to time. However, I don’t feel harassed. Because of the relationship between me and the students, I view these as ‘friendly teases.’ They bring neither harm nor hatred.

Rico noted, “This has a lot to do with how the students use those words. I could sense a lot of respect from them.”

Yet, *Rico*’s responses to discrimination and bullying from the school principal, teacher colleagues, and supporting staff were rather different than with the students. *Rico* felt provoked whenever he heard these gay slurs or derogatory language from the principal and teacher colleagues. These people used these terms with a purpose, he felt, to belittle or taunt him.

I often heard of the words ‘fag,’ ‘sissy,’ ‘poofte,’ or ‘ass bender’ from the principal and teacher colleagues. These people are ignorant and inconsiderate about gender issues. They all are at their prime age and have been teaching for years. Surely, they have met quite a few LGBTQ+. Yet their behaviors are immature and demonstrate their disrespect and hatred toward LGBTQ+. They still make fun of LGBTQ+ people. These include name-calling, asking inappropriate questions, or stereotyping. They should have known better.

Dominant stereotyping at *Sawasdee* was another excruciating experience that *Rico* thought that LGBTQ+ teachers had to tolerate; *Rico* criticized some, “teachers’ ignorance, pity and hatred of LGBTQ+, prejudices, or even downright stupidity.” *Rico* experienced stereotyping at *Sawasdee* through “verbal bullying, name-calling, spreading rumors, and just plainly excluding and banning.” Such stereotyping, *Rico* warned, “shapes teachers, puts teachers into boxes created mainly by prejudices, and divides and excludes teachers.” *Rico* went on to describe the incipient dangers of stereotyping with which he encountered. Not only did stereotyping belittle him but also made him feel inferior to his heterosexual colleagues.

Many heterosexual teacher colleagues have questioned my gayness. I’m a big fella and I do not conform to their stereotypes of a gay male – petite and feminine. They give me a nickname ‘Rambo gay’ to distinguish me from other LGBTQ+ teachers. Several have questioned my relationships. Many questions are offensive. ‘Why can’t you like girls?’ ‘When you’re with your boyfriend, do you play the role of the guy or the girl?’ They tend to believe that I am defective, and I am inferior to those heterosexuals.

Rico continued.

Several heterosexual teachers here have made it clear that they don’t want anything to do with us. There’s not much I can do about this. There’s nothing much you can do about them. I have limited interactions/conversations with them, and they are mostly to serve socializing purposes. Except that, I have very little to do with them. Also lessened was my sense of belongingness and my commitment to the school.

Rico further complained the impacts of marginalization extended to the distribution of resources and privileges in the school. "School resources including funding are not evenly distributed. Heterosexual colleagues tend to receive more rewards and funding than the LGBTQ+ teachers." Support was rarely available for *Rico*; opportunities for professional development were as well scant. These, in turn, affected *Rico*'s teaching. He attributed his adherence to the given curriculum and textbook sequences to lack of support from the school. *Rico* wrote in one of his journal entries, "I feel the school's support for LGBTQ+ teachers is inadequate. I have no access to LGBTQ+ related resources. There's no LGBTQ+ theme books in the school library."

Nonetheless, *Rico* had no intention to leave the school despite the discrimination, bullying, and stereotyping in shared about teaching at *Sawasdee*. *Rico* identified three reasons for his staying at *Sawasdee*. They included: (1) students, (2) employment discrimination against LGBTQ+, and (3) relationships with other LGBTQ+ teachers. He first talked about the pleasures of being with the students.

My personalities and my teaching style might be much different from their previous English teachers. My personalities come off as funny, friendly, approachable, and easy-going. And my teaching style doesn't say 'Quiet. Pay attention. Listen to me.' I feel that students especially those ones in my classes might feel more comfortable with me. They are learning in my class. My personalities and teaching style might provoke students' interests in English.

Rico was also concerned about his job security. *Rico* was worried that he might not be able to find another teaching job because of employment against LGBTQ+ in Thailand. Due to discrimination and bullying against LGBTQ+ teachers, LGBTQ+ teachers were destined to become a beautician, an entertainer, a dressmaker, or a hairdresser. *Rico* criticized:

Discrimination of employment against LGBTQ+ is real in this country. If you are an LGBTQ+, you are expected to play a certain role. And teaching is not one of them. You could be an entertainer, a beautician, a hairdresser, a dressmaker, or a florist. I consider myself lucky to have this teaching job. The discrimination and bullying at school must then be endured. They will never go away; all you could do is to learn how to tolerate them at your best.

Rico had close relationships with other LGBTQ+ EFL teachers at the school. Within their group, they provided each group member with mutual support and assistance. They shared and exchanged assistance. "At the school, I spend more time with other LGBTQ+ teachers. They give me comfort and both professional and emotional support. We also share and exchange assistance."

Zeid

Zeid never closeted his sexual orientation and orientation. He came out at a young age to his parents who gave him unconditional love and full support. He said, "My parents show me

love and they fully accept my being gay. I can fully live my life a gay person.” At the school, he was also fully out. “Everybody knows that I am gay. I never hide it. If they have a problem with my being gay, it’s their problem, not mine.”

Zeid did not feel that *Sawasdee School* entirely welcomed LGBTQ+ teachers. He complained about the school’s lack of support for its LGBTQ+ teachers and predominant exclusion of LGBTQ+ teachers at the school. He noted,

Sawasdee overall is not hostile to LGBTQ+. However, it is not that welcoming either. Supports for LGBTQ+ teachers are inadequate. It is lacking, in fact. Exclusion of LGBTQ+ teachers is very much common.

Lack of school support affected his instruction, to some extent. *Zeid* related how he had to abandon his ideas of introducing his students to LGBTQ+ related topics.

I once had an idea of introducing my students to some LGBTQ+ issues. However, I didn’t really follow it through. I didn’t have any access to LGBTQ+ related materials. Plus, I was not sure whether the school principal and other teachers would have my back if something went horribly wrong.

In his classrooms, *Zeid* routinely followed the assigned teaching materials. He read a reading passage with the students, translated it to Thai, and assigned the students to complete the exercises in the textbook. The conclusion of *Zeid*’s classroom observations was summarized in the fieldnotes below:

Typically, *Zeid* began by greeting students with some small talk. Then, he told students to open the book and routinely followed the textbook sequence. He assigned the students to read the reading passage out loud. He then translated the passage into Thai and wrote the vocabulary along with its meaning on the board. The students were told to copy it and memorize these words for the exam. asked the students to remember the vocabulary. *Zeid* then assigned the students to complete the exercises in the textbook and went over them with the students. Following that was *Zeid*’s focus on the required grammar points. He explained these grammar rules and wrote example sentences on the board. The students were required to take note and remember these rules for the exams. *Zeid* then asked the students to complete the exercises in the textbook and went over them with the students. Interactions/communications between *Zeid* and his students and among the students themselves were inadequate (almost non-existent). Seatwork was heavily used.

Zeid’s own observations of the students endorsed his practice.

Students are happy with what I am doing. I prepare them well for their exams. Their grades are good. The school is happy; their parents are happy.

Zeid went further to describe the students’ overall reaction to his queerness.

Students are very well aware of my sexual orientation as I never hide it. They seem to be OK with it. My sexual orientation least affects my relationship with the students. They never make me feel unwelcome or awkward. They often refer to me as 'Big Mama,' or 'Auntie.' Some jokingly mock the way I speak or walk. Some give me a compliment on my dress. They never use any form of homophobia language or gay slurs with me. Overall, our relationship is good.

Zeid's perceptions of his teacher colleagues and the supporting staff were rather negative due to his long endurance with the constant discrimination and the bullying in his workplace. *Zeid* did not appreciate when he heard the principal, teacher colleagues, and supporting staff call him with derogatory terms or gay slurs. He explained, "I once overheard the principal call me 'that queer.' He asked one of my friends 'Where is that queer friend of your?'" *Zeid* continued,

Other teachers and supporting staff are the same. The teachers call me, 'Hey, sissy...' I once told the staff not to call me 'Bitchy *Zeid*' as it showed that she was disrespectful of my profession. Her rebut was, 'I was just kidding. Don't take it too seriously.'

Zeid concluded.

Of course, I am angry. I am furious. Their uses of those derogatory terms and gay slurs carry hate and disgust. In a way they tell me that 'I am more superior; you are more inferior.'

He relented his anger and dissatisfaction in one of his journal entries.

Truth be told, I've tried to put that 'I don't care' persona upfront but their words still really hurt me. The ways they say those words - 'Hey, queer,' or 'Girly fag,' just makes me feel inferior to them. I could not fathom how people who call themselves teachers could have such an insensitive mentality.

More examples from *Zeid's* responses indicated further that his relationships with teacher colleagues were even more vulnerable. *Zeid* complained about teacher colleagues' disrespectful of personal boundaries; they, in his own words, "love to buzz their noses into where they don't belong." His interactions with two newly hired teachers in the teacher lounge turned into heated arguments when the two teachers began to attack his gender orientation.

One morning I went into the teacher lounge. There were two new faces there. I said, 'Hi.' Then, one of them asked, 'Are you gay?' 'Do you have a boyfriend?' The other teacher was laughing. This was too much. They were invading my privacy. I turned to face them and told them to shut up and mind their own business.

He explained his rebuttal.

These teachers showed no respect of other teachers. They had no boundary. They should have known that it is not OK to go around asking people these personal questions.

Bullies and stereotyping from teacher colleagues upset and exasperated *Zeid* further. Often, his colleagues bullied him on his physical appearances as they did not fit these teachers' imaginary concepts of LGBTQ+. Bitterly and furiously, he relented:

I am a big person. Many teachers here give me nicknames such as 'Rambo gay,' 'Macho gay.' Or 'Ironman fag.' Some look at me and ask whether I am gay. When I say yes, their reaction is 'Really? You don't look like one. You're huge.' To them, gay boys must be skinny, very feminine, and must have flamboyant personalities. Frankly speaking, I am sick of this. How I look and what I am are certainly not their business.

Zeid further added that the predominance of stereotyping and bullying excluded and limited his role at the school. Nonetheless, they cemented his relationships with other LGBTQ+ teachers. As *Zeid* put it:

My role at the school is limited and is much determined by the traditional concept of homosexuality. That is, all gay males must be excelled in cooking, dancing, flower arranging, or any domesticated tasks. I've been frequently assigned all these tasks for school events, scout camps, or school outings. At the school's scout trip, I overlooked the whole cooking thing. For the Sport Day, I led the cheer leading. I have neither abilities nor passion for them. As I can't possibly release myself from these jobs, I just complete them.

Zeid further discussed his strong relationships with other LGBTQ+ teachers. *Zeid* metaphorically compared such relationships to "a bolt. It helps hold me down and keep me still. Better yet, I know that I have a group to go to for help, assistance, and support, both professionally and emotionally."

In many respects, *Zeid* drew his strength from the group of LGBTQ+ teachers and found constructive ways of coping with discrimination and bullies at the school. "I now just ignore all those remarks and seek refuge in those LGBTQ+ teachers?" At the end of the interview, *Zeid* criticized the school for doing little to address and to prevent the problems of discrimination and bullying of LGBTQ+ at the school.

The school does very little to resolve the problems of discrimination and bullying of LGBTQ+ teachers and students. Ironically, it tends to perpetuate some of the stereotypes people hold of the LGBTQ+. These include feminine-like behaviors and physiques, and flamboyant characteristics. Instead of They are just myths. The school its events to emphasizes such beliefs. The lady-boy contest in which LGBTQ+ students parade around in high-heels and makeup is a good example. Such event reinforces the stereotypes of the LGBTQ+. They enjoy wearing makeup

and high heels; the more they are like female, the better they are. The school may have good intentions, but, nevertheless, fortify the stereotyping within the school.

DISCUSSION

Throughout this paper, the researchers revealed the perspectives of five LGBTQ+ EFL teachers in one public northeastern Thailand high school. By attending to the rich rigor of the five stories of these LGBTQ+ teachers' experiences, the researchers unfold how these five teachers live their daily school environment experiences. The multiple dimensions prevalently presented above include the teachers' various data sources that bring "theoretical ideas about the nature of human life as lived to bear on educational experience as lived" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 3). The researchers share through their narrative inquiry the five teachers' thoughts, actions, and interactions that help give meaning to these teachers' three commonplaces of context, sociality, and intersectionality. What is clear to highlight is that narrative inquiry's three commonplaces may not necessarily be mutually exclusive. Importantly, it needs to be mentioned that journal word limits may hinder fuller written discussions. Yet, the researchers invite readers to further examine the narratives to consider other possible understandings and inferences. This section is framed by the commonplaces of narrative inquiry (Clandinin et al., 2007), additionally tapping ideas about writing qualitative research (e.g., Wolcott, 2009).

Contextuality

The current findings observed workplace's influences on the work and life of these LGBTQ+ teacher participants. These five teachers felt marginalized; the LGBTQ+ teachers shared how they felt seemingly isolated themselves from other heterosexual teachers while balkanizing themselves into a group. These teachers criticized inequalities within a school. Such inequalities led to unfair distribution of school resources such as LGBTQ+ related resources and fundings and less opportunities for professional development for LGBTQ+ teachers. For example, the school's lack of LGBTQ+ related resources lessened these teachers' commitment to their teaching. These teachers relied on their assigned curriculum and the teaching materials but were unable to introduce their students to LGBTQ+ related topics due to the school's lack of such resources. These teachers' opportunities for professional development were perceived as fewer, compared to those of heterosexual teachers. They criticized the school (i.e., the school principal or the head teacher) for not nominating them to attend professional development courses outside of worktime due to their gender orientation. These five teachers became especially attached to one another within this balkanized culture. Together, they shared mutual engagement and assistance such as mental support for dealing with gay slurs and derogatory language and exchange of pedagogical knowledge and classroom management strategies. These findings give further nuanced meaning while corroborating previous research (e.g., Lineback et al., 2016; Poynton, 1997; Stones & Glazzard, 2019; Toledo & Maher, 2021). Such findings raise more queries. For example, how could marginalization and isolation of teachers in terms of gender orientation and sexual orientation be narrowed? How could inclusion of LGBTQ+ teachers be promoted and by whom? How could LGBTQ+ teachers' commitment with the wider school community and its various members be increased?

Sociality

These openly LGBTQ+ teachers never considered closeting their gender orientation, despite perceived discrimination and, at times, bullying from their school principal, heterosexual teacher colleagues, some supporting staff, and some students' parents. These teachers perceived gay slurs or derogatory language such as "faggot," "poofier," or "ass bender" coming variously from the school principal, their colleagues and supporting staff as an attack targeting them for failing to conform to traditional stereotypes of masculinity (e.g., Daley et al., 2007; Plummer, 2001). These teachers were frustrated but chose to deal with these differently. They often ignored gay slurs or derogatory language from the school principal due to what they perceived as structural power within the school but rebuffed those from their colleagues and supporting staff. Yet, the current findings recognized these teacher participants' positive reactions to either gay slurs or derogatory language from their students. These teachers perceived students' uses of gay slurs and derogatory language as a sign indicating a stronger bond between the students and them. The various ways these teachers perceived students' and others' use of gay slurs provide grist for future pragmatic and discourse analysis. Applied linguists would be wise to carefully craft future investigations that specifically focus on how LGBTQ+ teachers accept and reject similar use of language and perceive acceptance or rejection depending upon various groups and how such groups react to them and they to other members of groups. Such research questions might include how LGBTQ+ teachers perceive gay slurs from various perspectives and persons with whom they interact? To what extent are various stakeholders' perceptions and interactions of discrimination and bullying within a workplace related to homophobia? To what extent (or not) do gay slurs affect LGBTQ+ teachers? In what way are gay slurs used causing different reactions within among and between LGBTQ+ teachers?

Temporality

Stories of each of the five LGBTQ+ EFL teachers portrayed the temporal transition of relationships within their context, including the affordances of students' acceptance of these teachers and challenges of discriminating, sometimes abusive relationships from administration and colleagues in this school. Such relationships offered multiple social identities that provided data portraying complex contextual meanings and insights. In his almost 30 years at *Sawasdee*, Kayden revealed various relationships with students, colleagues, and administration. Kayden particularly shared agony and humiliation perceived from endless discrimination by school principal, teacher colleagues, and school personnel staff. Interestingly, the subsequent four teachers' experiences as they each were hired to join the school followed similar interactions and relationships providing ample evidence of induction to their community at various times, overlapping identities, and overarching systems within this particular institution—all elements that extend the contextual meanings of temporality, theoretically and practically. Despite cumulative discrimination (e.g., bullying) in their school, these five LGBTQ+ EFL teachers decided to stay with *Sawasdee*. Their voices amplify reasons they shared as why they remained in this school included: fears of losing their jobs and wider employment discrimination nationwide against LGBTQ+ teachers (see also, e.g., Lin et al., 2020; Winter et. al., 2019), (2) joys and satisfactions of caring for and working with students (Burić & Moè, 2020; Toropova et al.,

2021), and (3) mutual relationship and engagement among LGBTQ+ EFL teachers (Sølvik & Roland, 2025).

Some closing thoughts

While limited by the small; sample size, this narrative inquiry unfolds the multidimensioned, ever-changing teachers' interactions with context, sociality, and temporality regarding teachers' sexual orientation. The emancipatory feelings that these five Thai LGBTQ+ EFL teachers revealed exposed the persistence of bullying and discrimination at the school. These bullying and discrimination came principally from the school principal, teachers' colleagues, school personnel staff, and students' parents. The nuanced findings here enhance the understanding of LGBTQ+ teachers' experiences in relation to their interaction with their school culture, their perceptions of their own sexual interaction, and the effects of school's present system of disciplines and oppression on these teachers. More importantly, this current research raises attention to the use of narrative inquiry to capture the interplay of the three commonplaces (context, social, and time) and its effect on teacher's sexual orientation (Clandinin et al., 2007). In consequence, effective actionable practices then could be established and implemented to tackle difficulties and problems arising from positive and negative work environment interaction (Pharr, 1997).

Hence, many pertinent questions and perhaps a direction for future research could be posed. Are discrimination and bullying forms of homophobia? What might school administrators do to work toward eliminating discrimination and bullying against LGBTQ+ teachers? What might school administrators do to include LGBTQ+ teachers more inclusively? What must school administrators do to better the relationship between LGBTQ+ teachers and heterosexual teachers? Further research exploring, in depth, LGBTQ+ teachers' positive reaction to students' uses of gay slurs and derogatory language is also vital. What might school administrators and various groups within a school learn from their students by how the students support LGBTQ+ teachers and students? Applied linguists have fertile ground for investigating and uncovering discourse and pragmatic possibilities, among others. Data addressing these and other issues may more effectively empower communities that are LGBTQ+ teachers and student friendly and increase the potential of inclusive communities for all.

More importantly, whilst attending to these five LGBTQ+ teachers' stories, readers may be wakened to consider and re-consider issues related to LGBTQ+ teachers in much wider contexts. Such wakefulness may lead to the futile pursuit of transforming an LGBTQ+ unfriendly school environment to a safe haven for everyone regardless of their sexual identity and orientation, race, and religion differences.

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