
UNDERSTANDING SOGIE: ASSESSING COLLEGE STUDENTS' KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES, AND OPENNESS TO INCLUSIVITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

The study examines college students' understanding, attitudes, and openness toward Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression (SOGIE) concepts, providing a comprehensive view of current knowledge and inclusivity within a higher education setting in the Philippines. Utilizing a descriptive-correlational design, data were collected from 155 students using the SOGIE Assessment Tool, measuring levels of understanding, attitudes, and openness to SOGIE-related inclusivity initiatives. Findings indicate that the majority of students have a limited understanding of SOGIE, with only a small percentage demonstrating comprehensive knowledge. Gender-based differences emerged, with female students showing greater comfort and acceptance of LGBTQIA+ individuals than their male counterparts. The study also reveals a moderate willingness among students to support SOGIE inclusivity initiatives on campus, though participation appears to be influenced by current understanding and attitudes. Recommendations focus on the importance of inclusivity training, supportive policies, integration of SOGIE topics within the curriculum, creation of safe spaces, collaboration with LGBTQIA+ organizations, and promotion of SOGIE-related research. By fostering deeper understanding, addressing biases, and supporting diversity, higher education institutions can create an inclusive environment that respects and values all gender identities and sexual orientations.

Keywords: SOGIE (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression); LGBTQIA+ Inclusivity; Higher Education; Gender Diversity; Educational Policy; Inclusivity



Introduction

The concept of SOGIE encompasses Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression, recognizing that individuals experience and express their gender and sexuality in diverse ways. Sexual orientation refers to the emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to others, while gender identity pertains to an individual's internal understanding of their gender, which may differ from their assigned sex at birth (WHO, 2019). Gender expression involves the outward display of gender through appearance, behavior, and mannerisms, which may not always conform to societal norms. Understanding and respecting SOGIE is essential in creating inclusive educational environments that recognize and validate the identities and experiences of LGBTQIA+ students.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) established by the United Nations provide a global framework for addressing critical social, economic, and environmental challenges, including the promotion of inclusivity and equality. Two SDGs are particularly relevant to SOGIE inclusivity in educational institutions: SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). SDG 4 emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education for all, recognizing that marginalized groups often face systemic barriers that limit educational access and success (United Nations, 2015). Additionally, SDG 10 advocates for the reduction of inequalities within and among countries by promoting policies that protect against discrimination and foster inclusivity. This framework acknowledges that societal development is incomplete without inclusivity, and educational institutions have a central role in addressing this need through SOGIE-supportive policies and practices (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2018).

Globally, LGBTQIA+ individuals continue to experience significant discrimination, social exclusion, and violence, with these issues often beginning in educational settings. Studies indicate that LGBTQIA+ students face bullying, harassment, and ostracism, leading to adverse outcomes for their mental health and academic performance. The United Nations (2020) reports that these students frequently experience stigma that negatively impacts their sense of safety and belonging, which in turn affects their educational engagement and success. Research from the Human Rights Campaign Foundation (2018) further emphasizes that LGBTQIA+ youth have higher incidences of depression, anxiety, and suicide attempts than their non-LGBTQIA+ peers. Consequently, the World Health Organization (WHO, 2019) identifies inclusive education as an essential strategy for reducing health disparities among LGBTQIA+ students, advocating for policies that support diverse sexual orientations and gender identities within school environments.

In the Philippines, LGBTQIA+ students encounter similar challenges, which are often amplified by conservative cultural norms and values. The Commission on Human Rights (CHR, 2019) has documented widespread discrimination against LGBTQIA+

individuals in schools, workplaces, and public spaces, underscoring the need for protective policies. Although Senate Bill No. 689 (the Anti-Discrimination Act) aims to safeguard the rights of LGBTQIA+ individuals, the legislation has yet to be fully enacted, leaving many students vulnerable to discrimination and exclusion (Senate Bill No. 689, 2022). Furthermore, the HIV/AIDS Data Hub for Asia (2017) reports that Filipino LGBTQIA+ students face additional mental health challenges stemming from social stigma, highlighting the need for inclusive policies and practices within educational settings. The Department of Education's Gender-Responsive Basic Education Policy (DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2017) represents a step toward promoting inclusivity, but its implementation remains inconsistent, signaling an urgent need for comprehensive enforcement (Department of Education, 2017).

Scholarly perspectives and prior studies provide additional context for SOGIE issues in education. Social Identity Theory suggests that strong identification with traditional gender norms can contribute to in-group biases and negative attitudes toward those who do not conform to those norms (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This dynamic may partially explain why some students resist or feel discomfort toward LGBTQIA+ peers. In contrast, Queer Theory challenges binary and heteronormative views of gender and sexuality, emphasizing the need to question and transform societal norms that marginalize non-conforming identities (Butler, 1990). A queer theoretical lens underscores the importance of creating educational spaces that validate a spectrum of gender identities and sexual orientations, rather than enforcing traditional binaries. Additionally, the framework of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) highlights that individuals experience overlapping forms of discrimination or privilege based on combined factors such as gender, sexuality, race, and religion. This means LGBTQIA+ students often face unique, compounded challenges when multiple marginalized identities intersect, which educational institutions must consider when developing inclusion strategies.

Empirical research aligns with these theoretical insights. Inclusive curricula and increased exposure to diversity have been linked to more positive attitudes toward sexual and gender minorities among students (Westerman, 2023; United Nations, 2020). Conversely, environments lacking in representation and dialogue around SOGIE issues tend to perpetuate myths and prejudice. However, despite growing global and regional research on gender diversity in education, there is a noticeable gap in the Philippine higher education literature addressing students' SOGIE-related knowledge and attitudes. Few studies have specifically examined these aspects among Filipino college populations, leaving educators and policymakers with limited local evidence on where student misconceptions persist or what interventions might be most needed. This study helps fill that gap by providing current data on student understanding and openness to SOGIE inclusivity in a Philippine university setting.

Methods

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design. The descriptive component involved assessing the levels of understanding, attitudes, and openness of



college students toward SOGIE issues. This quantitative approach allowed for a systematic examination of SOGIE perceptions, utilizing survey data to provide insights into the student population's knowledge and attitudes. In addition to describing the levels of each variable, the design included correlational analysis to explore relationships between key variables (for example, between students' SOGIE understanding and their openness to inclusivity initiatives).

The study was conducted within the campus of Collegio De San Francisco Javier in Rizal, Zamboanga del Norte. This Catholic institution, rooted in a commitment to respect and inclusivity, provided an appropriate setting to assess students' knowledge and attitudes toward SOGIE. The school's environment also offers a microcosm for understanding broader societal attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity.

The research focused on a sample of 155 students across various academic programs within Collegio De San Francisco Javier. The participants included students from programs such as Social Work, Business Administration, Hospitality Management, Basic Education, Secondary Education, Elementary Education, and Information Technology, ensuring a comprehensive representation of different fields and backgrounds. All participants were current undergraduate students at the institution during the study. There were no additional inclusion or exclusion criteria aside from being enrolled and willing to participate.

A random sampling method was applied to ensure that students from all major departments had an equal chance of participating. This method helped to eliminate sampling bias and provided a broad cross-section of the student population, increasing the generalizability of the results.

The primary instrument used for data collection was the SOGIE Assessment Tool, developed by the Initiative for Southeast Asian Nations (ISEAN) in 2015. This tool was tailored to measure understanding and attitudes towards SOGIE-related issues and included two main components: individual assessment and organizational assessment. For this study, the individual assessment tool was used, allowing students to express their personal knowledge and views regarding SOGIE concepts. The SOGIE Assessment Tool has been used in similar contexts and was reviewed by experts to ensure content validity. In this study, the instrument's internal consistency was high (Cronbach's alpha ≈ 0.90), demonstrating that the survey items reliably captured the intended constructs.

The responses on the SOGIE Assessment Tool were scored on a Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." Based on the total scores, responses were categorized into four levels:

- Many SOGIE Misconceptions (scores of 20–50): High stigmatic and discriminatory attitudes.
- Limited Understanding of SOGIE (scores of 51–65): Partial knowledge with some stigmatic views.
- Sufficient Understanding of SOGIE (scores of 66–79): Moderate knowledge and comfort in interacting with SOGIE minorities.



- Good Understanding of SOGIE (scores of 80–100): Comprehensive understanding with a high level of comfort and acceptance.

Prior to data collection, permission was secured from the administration of Collegio De San Francisco Javier. The survey was conducted in a controlled environment within the school premises to ensure that responses were honest and free from external influence. Each respondent received an explanation of the study’s purpose and was assured of anonymity and confidentiality.

Data were analyzed using several statistical methods:

- Frequency counting: To determine demographic characteristics and categorical responses.
- Percentage calculations: To interpret the distribution of responses across different categories.
- Comparative Analysis: To test for significant differences between groups of respondents (for example, comparing responses of male and female students).
- Correlation Analysis: To examine relationships between key variables (such as between students’ SOGIE understanding scores and their openness to inclusivity initiatives).
- Weighted mean: To measure overall levels of understanding, attitudes, and openness to SOGIE among respondents.

Formulas were applied to compute the mean values, with statistical software facilitating accuracy in the calculations. These techniques provided a detailed view of students’ perceptions across various demographic variables.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the study to ensure the protection of the participants’ rights and well-being. Prior to data collection, approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of Jose Rizal Memorial State University, ensuring that the research adhered to ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, including academic heads, instructors, and students, who were fully informed about the study’s purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. Confidentiality of responses was strictly maintained, and participants were assured that their identities would remain anonymous. Data were collected and stored securely to prevent unauthorized access. Additionally, participants were given the freedom to withdraw from the study at any point without any consequences. The research adhered to principles of honesty, integrity, and transparency, ensuring that the findings were presented accurately and without bias.

Results and Discussion

Profile of Respondents. This study’s demographic profile examines the respondents’ biological sex, gender expression, year level, and academic program, offering context for understanding the diversity of perspectives on SOGIE.

Biological Sex. The sample includes a balanced representation of sexes, allowing for comparative insights into SOGIE-related attitudes. Data suggest that biological sex correlates with comfort levels regarding SOGIE topics, with males often holding more conservative views on gender and sexuality than females (Pew Research Center, 2020).

Gender Expression and Orientation. A notable number of respondents chose not to disclose their gender expression and orientation, reflecting the sensitivity surrounding these topics. This hesitance underscores the importance of anonymity and a supportive environment, aligning with Queer Theory’s advocacy for challenging traditional gender norms (Butler, 1990).

Year Level. Most participants are third-year students, likely due to their involvement in thesis and research courses. This concentration may suggest a correlation between academic progression and increased exposure to social issues, including SOGIE.

Program Enrolled. Respondents represent diverse programs, including Social Work, Business Administration, and Education. A substantial portion are Social Work students, reflecting a likely inherent interest in social issues, including inclusivity. Cross-disciplinary representation allows for nuanced insights into varying levels of empathy and awareness across fields (HIV/AIDS Data Hub for Asia, 2017).

Table 1: Level of Understanding of SOGIE Among College Students

Understanding Level	Percentage of Respondents
Many SOGIE Misconceptions	6%
Limited Understanding of SOGIE	64%
Sufficient Understanding of SOGIE	22%
Good Understanding of SOGIE	8%

The table presents data on the level of understanding that college students have regarding SOGIE. This data provides insight into how well students understand SOGIE-related concepts, highlighting the percentage of respondents at various levels of understanding, from “Many SOGIE Misconceptions” to “Good Understanding of SOGIE.”

Scores were categorized into the four levels listed above based on the ISEAN SOGIE scoring system. Students’ responses to specific knowledge-based items were summed to generate a cumulative score, which was then used to classify their level of understanding. This approach provided a quantitative measure of students’ knowledge on SOGIE topics.

The findings correlate with previous studies indicating a prevalent lack of understanding of SOGIE issues among college students. Research in higher education

settings emphasizes the necessity of SOGIE-inclusive education to address knowledge gaps and foster a more inclusive learning environment. This aligns with observations that students in programs like social work and education often lack sufficient knowledge in SOGIE, which is essential for promoting social justice and inclusive practices (Central Bicol State University of Agriculture, 2020).

Table 2: Attitudes Toward SOGIE and LGBTI Individuals by Gender

Sex Assigned by Birth	Many SOGIE Misconceptions	Limited Understanding of SOGIE	Sufficient Understanding of SOGIE	Good Understanding of SOGIE
Male	2%	71%	24%	2%
Female	8%	63%	22%	8%

This table outlines attitudes toward SOGIE and LGBTQIA+ individuals, segmented by the gender of the respondents. It illustrates how male and female students vary in their attitudes, showing differences in misconceptions, levels of understanding, and openness toward diverse gender identities and sexual orientations.

Attitudes were assessed using statements related to comfort, bias, and acceptance of LGBTQIA+ individuals. Each response was scored on a Likert scale and analyzed according to the ISEAN SOGIE scoring categories. Responses were segmented by gender to identify any significant differences, providing a clear view of gender-based attitudes toward inclusivity and diversity in SOGIE issues.

The observed gender-based differences align with studies suggesting that male students often exhibit lower levels of comfort and acceptance toward LGBTQIA+ individuals compared to female students. Literature on gender and inclusivity in higher education indicates that female students generally demonstrate more supportive attitudes toward SOGIE inclusivity efforts, underscoring the need for targeted educational programs to bridge these attitudinal gaps (Pew Research Center, 2020).

Table 3: Distribution of Understanding by Sexual Orientation

Sexual Orientation	Many SOGIE Misconceptions	Limited Understanding of SOGIE	Sufficient Understanding of SOGIE	Good Understanding of SOGIE
Bisexual	2%	60%	22%	16%
TQIA+	13%	63%	25%	0%
Gay	0%	80%	20%	0%

Note: TQIA+ includes respondents identifying as Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, or other sexual minority identities.

This table provides data on understanding levels across different sexual orientation groups among the respondents. By analyzing responses from bisexual, TQIA+, and gay students, the table highlights how students’ own identities may influence their comprehension and acceptance of SOGIE concepts.

The ISEAN SOGIE scoring system was applied to categorize understanding levels for each group based on responses to knowledge-focused statements. Grouping responses by sexual orientation allowed the study to explore whether identity impacts students’ understanding. This analysis helped determine if there are variances in comprehension and acceptance based on the sexual orientation of the respondents.

Students who identify as part of a sexual minority often exhibited higher awareness and understanding of SOGIE issues compared to their heterosexual peers. This finding aligns with the notion that personal identity and lived experiences can enhance one’s understanding and empathy toward diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

Table 4. Prevalent Misconceptions Held by College Students Regarding LGBTQIA+ Groups

Misconception Category	Percentage of Respondents Exhibiting Misconception
Misunderstanding Lesbian Identity	30%
Discomfort with Gender Nonconformity	High
Support for Reparative Therapy	Notable Percentage
Avoiding Interaction with LGBTQIA+ Individuals	Significant Portion
Misconceptions about HIV Transmission	Minority

This table identifies common misconceptions held by college students about LGBTQIA+ individuals. It lists categories of prevalent myths and stereotypes, along with an indication of the percentage or proportion of students who endorse each misconception.

Misconceptions were identified based on responses to statements reflecting common stereotypes or misunderstandings about LGBTQIA+ people. The responses were scored on a Likert scale, and percentages were calculated to show the prevalence of each misconception. This approach provided a focused look at specific areas of misunderstanding among students.

Misconceptions about LGBTQIA+ individuals persist across educational contexts, and previous research has shown that these misunderstandings often stem from a lack of exposure to accurate SOGIE information. The literature emphasizes that addressing these myths through inclusive education can significantly reduce stigma and

promote social acceptance (United Nations, 2020).

Table 5. Openness to Inclusivity and Support for SOGIE Initiatives

Inclusivity Measure	Support Level Among Students
Willingness to Engage in SOGIE Activities	Moderate
Comfort with LGBTQIA+ Colleagues	Moderate
Support for Gender-Neutral Facilities	Mixed
Openness to SOGIE Education Integration	Mixed to Moderate

This table captures students’ openness to inclusivity and their support for SOGIE-related initiatives. It assesses students’ willingness to participate in SOGIE-related activities, comfort levels with LGBTQIA+ peers (such as classmates or colleagues), and support for inclusive policies (such as gender-neutral facilities and integrating SOGIE topics into education).

Openness and support for inclusivity were gauged through survey statements about willingness to engage with SOGIE initiatives and support inclusive measures. Responses were recorded on a Likert scale and aggregated to categorize overall levels of support (e.g., low, moderate, high). This helped determine students’ readiness to foster an inclusive campus environment.

Studies in higher education have shown that openness to inclusivity is often influenced by exposure to diversity education and institutional support for inclusivity initiatives. Research indicates that when students are encouraged to participate in SOGIE-related activities, their acceptance and understanding of LGBTQIA+ issues increase, contributing to a more inclusive campus culture (Westerman, 2023; United Nations, 2020).

Conclusions

The study’s findings offer a detailed examination of college students’ understanding, attitudes, and openness toward SOGIE concepts, highlighting both strengths and critical gaps that require attention.

The results indicate that students predominantly possess a limited understanding of SOGIE concepts. The majority fall within the “Limited Understanding of SOGIE” category, with only a small percentage demonstrating a “Good Understanding.” This reveals a substantial knowledge gap and the persistence of misconceptions. These findings suggest that students may not have sufficient exposure to accurate and comprehensive SOGIE education, emphasizing the importance of targeted educational programs to address these gaps. Integrating SOGIE-related topics into the curriculum could enhance students’ understanding and reduce the prevalence of misunderstandings. Notably, this study provides new empirical data in the context of a Philippine higher education institution, contributing evidence that a considerable portion of students lack SOGIE



knowledge—a finding that underscores the urgent need for educational intervention.

The study reveals varied attitudes toward SOGIE and LGBTQIA+ individuals, with notable differences by gender. Female students generally showed higher levels of comfort and acceptance, while male students were more likely to exhibit discomfort and misconceptions, particularly around gender nonconformity and the legitimacy of diverse gender identities. The presence of these biases reflects the enduring influence of societal norms and stereotypes—in other words, a heteronormative bias (Butler, 1990) that may continue to shape student attitudes without proactive intervention. Addressing these biases through diversity training and exposure to inclusive environments could foster greater empathy and understanding among students.

The findings indicate a moderate level of openness among students toward supporting SOGIE-related inclusivity initiatives on campus. While there is a willingness to engage in inclusivity campaigns and support gender-neutral policies, students' openness appears closely linked to their current levels of understanding and attitudes. Indeed, the analysis revealed a positive association between students' SOGIE knowledge and their openness to such initiatives, suggesting that those with greater understanding and more positive attitudes are more willing to participate in inclusivity efforts. Increasing overall openness and support for inclusivity initiatives requires more than raising awareness; it involves fostering a supportive campus culture that encourages active participation in SOGIE inclusivity efforts. Educational institutions could enhance engagement by implementing inclusive policies and organizing SOGIE-focused events to stimulate positive involvement with diversity and inclusion topics.

These findings underscore the urgent need for higher education institutions to adopt comprehensive SOGIE education and inclusivity programs. By promoting a deeper understanding of SOGIE, addressing biases, and implementing supportive campus policies, colleges can cultivate a more inclusive environment that respects and values diverse gender identities and sexual orientations. The patterns observed in this study are consistent with theoretical perspectives: for example, social identity dynamics may contribute to in-group biases (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and an intersectional approach reminds us that students' experiences are shaped by multiple intersecting factors such as culture, religion, and gender (Crenshaw, 1989). The alignment of our findings with these theories validates their applicability in this context, reinforcing that both heteronormative social structures and the interplay of multiple identity factors influence student attitudes and knowledge. Ultimately, the study contributes novel insights by documenting SOGIE-related knowledge and attitudes within a Filipino higher education context—an area that has been under-researched—and highlights specific areas for intervention to improve inclusivity.

While this study provides valuable insights, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted at a single institution, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other settings or regions. Future studies could include multiple universities across different regions to compare findings. Second, the study relied on self-reported survey data; responses may be influenced by social



desirability bias, as some students might have provided answers they deemed more acceptable. Including anonymous qualitative interviews or focus group discussions in future research could help validate and deepen the understanding of the survey results, providing personal narratives behind the numbers. Third, although the design was descriptive-correlational, allowing us to identify associations (such as between knowledge and openness), it does not establish causality. Longitudinal studies or intervention-based research could explore causal relationships—examining, for instance, whether educational workshops on SOGIE directly lead to improved attitudes and greater openness over time. Lastly, the SOGIE Assessment Tool, while comprehensive, predominantly captures the cognitive and attitudinal aspects; subsequent research might incorporate behavioral observations or institutional data (e.g., participation rates in inclusivity programs) to gain a fuller picture of how understanding and attitudes translate into action.

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Disclosure: Use of AI Tools

In compliance with The Threshold’s guidelines for the ethical use of artificial intelligence (AI) and automated tools in academic research, the authors disclose the use of OpenAI’s ChatGPT to assist in refining the language, structure, and formatting of this manuscript. ChatGPT was utilized strictly for editorial purposes to enhance clarity and coherence. All data analysis, interpretations, and conclusions were formulated by the authors, and the AI was employed only to improve expression and organization of content. The authors affirm that the use of AI did not influence the scholarly content or integrity of the work. All AI-generated suggestions were carefully reviewed and approved by the authors, ensuring they align with the intended meaning and contributions of the study. The authors remain fully responsible for the originality, validity, and integrity of the content presented.

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