

THE Integration of Gay Language in the Classroom Setting: Prospects and CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological qualitative study explores the integration of gay language, locally known as "swardspeak", within the classroom settings of selected senior high schools in Tagum City, Philippines. Anchored in Queer Theory and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, this research investigates the prospects and challenges that emerge when this LGBTQ+ associated sociolect is used during English language learning and classroom interactions. Through in-depth interviews with student participants, the study identifies frequently used gay language expressions and analyzes their role in fostering inclusivity, enhancing student engagement, and affirming identity. While gay language serves as a linguistic tool for community-building and self-expression among LGBTQ+ students, it also presents challenges such as cultural resistance, miscommunication, and questions of appropriateness in formal education. Findings suggest that the thoughtful integration of gay language can enrich the classroom environment by validating diverse identities and promoting empathy, but it requires teacher sensitivity, institutional support, and a culturally responsive pedagogical approach. This research also offers practical insights for educators, school administrators, and policymakers seeking to create inclusive educational environments that reflect and respect linguistic diversity.

KEYWORDS: *Gay language, inclusive education, classroom interaction, LGBTQ+, Philippines.*

INTRODUCTION

Gay language, often referred to as swardspeak or gayspeak in the Philippines, is a vibrant sociolect characterized by linguistic creativity, playful metaphors, and cultural references, blending local languages and English. It emerged as a means of identity and resistance among LGBTQ+ individuals, allowing them to navigate societal stigma and foster solidarity (Gonzales &

Bautista, 2022). However, its integration into classroom discussions by teachers can pose unique challenges for students.

A qualitative study by Johnson and Rivera (2021) in Canada explored the integration of gay language within classroom settings, examining its potential in promoting inclusivity while addressing societal stereotypes. It reveals that the incorporation of gay language into the classroom discussions have created a more inclusive learning environment for everyone especially those LGBTQ+ students. However, the research has noted significant challenges, including resistance from conservative groups, lack of teacher familiarity with LGBTQ+ sociolects, and concerns about the appropriateness of informal language in academic settings. The findings emphasized that teacher training and sensitivity programs are critical to addressing the barriers. Supporting the mentioned findings, studies in Asia echo the complexity of such integration. In Thailand, a study of Sumetprasit et al. (2019) examined LGBTQ+ linguistic expressions in educational contexts and found that while such integration encouraged cultural inclusivity, many educators and students lacked familiarity with the terms, leading to misunderstandings. Similarly, a study conducted by Liu and Zhang (2020) in China revealed that integrating elements of LGBTQ+ language in classroom discussions fostered a sense of belonging among LGBTQ+ students. However, the study also highlighted the difficulty of navigating the cultural taboos and societal resistance, which has limited the broader acceptance.

In the Philippines, a study conducted by Gonzales and Bautista (2022) in Metro Manila examined the integration of gay language into classroom discussions and its implications for teaching and learning. The research highlighted that in urban educational settings, the use of gay language can foster inclusivity and empower LGBTQ+ students by validating their identities and encouraging dialogue about diversity. However, significant challenges were also observed, such as the alienation of students due to the unfamiliarity with the sociolect, potential misinterpretation of terms due to their informal and dynamic nature, and the difficulty educators face in balancing inclusivity with maintaining formal academic standards. Teachers in Metro Manila reported that while the use of gay language added cultural depth to discussions, it often required careful contextualization to avoid perpetuating stereotypes or causing discomfort among students.

In the context of local study, published research of Lopez (2023)

conducted in Davao City revealed that while there is a visible presence of gay language in the everyday communication of students, especially within peer groups, its integration into formal education remains challenging. Teachers in Davao City often face dilemmas, as they strive to create an inclusive classroom environment that acknowledges the diverse linguistic expressions of their students, including gay language, while also adhering to conservative societal expectations. Many educators expressed concerns about the potential backlash from parents and school administrators, who may view the use of gay language in educational settings as inappropriate or controversial. This apprehension often leads teachers to either avoid or cautiously approach the inclusion of gay language in their teaching, which can result in missed opportunities for meaningful engagement with students. On the student side, while many are comfortable using gay language informally, they may feel uncertain or even stigmatized when these expressions are brought into the classroom setting, affecting their confidence and, consequently, their ability to retain and apply the material being taught. The study underscores the need for professional development programs that equip teachers with the tools and confidence to navigate these issues and promote a more inclusive and effective learning environment.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore and understand the nuanced experiences of students within educational settings where gay language is incorporated into the teaching and learning process. By examining its use in academic discussions, the study seeks to understand how this linguistic inclusion impacts students' engagement, comprehension, and comfort levels during classroom interactions.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design. This study employed a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to deeply explore and understand the lived experiences of students regarding the use of gay language in English classroom discussions. Rooted in qualitative methodology, which emphasizes the exploration of human experiences and social phenomena through rich, descriptive data (Creswell & Poth, 2018), the phenomenological approach specifically aims to uncover the shared essence of participants' experiences. By conducting in-depth interviews, the researcher was able to capture how students

perceived, interpreted, and were affected by the presence of gay language in the educational setting. This method involved identifying significant statements and recurring themes to construct a comprehensive and coherent understanding of the phenomenon.

Research Participants. This study utilized purposive sampling to intentionally select 14 Senior High School students from various private schools in the Division of Tagum City for School Year 2024–2025, ensuring participants had relevant experiences with the incorporation of gay language in classroom discussions. Participants included both LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ students from different academic strands to provide a diverse range of perspectives. The criteria required that participants be in Grade 11 or 12 and have experienced at least one instance where a teacher intentionally integrated gay language into academic discussions, particularly in subjects like literature or gender studies. Verification was done through student interviews and teacher confirmations to ensure the intentional and contextual use of gay language. Seven students were selected for in-depth interviews (IDI) and another seven for a focus group discussion (FGD).

Data Analysis. Data analysis in qualitative research involves systematically examining and interpreting non-numeric data to identify patterns, themes, and insights. The process typically begins with data preparation, which includes transcribing interviews or coding observational notes. Transcription involves converting audio or video recordings into written text, while coding involves labeling sections of text to identify key concepts or patterns. Thematic analysis is a common method used to analyze qualitative data. This involves identifying and examining themes or patterns within the data.

Trustworthiness. To demonstrate the reliability of this qualitative content analysis, using concepts like credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability adopted from Lincoln and Guba's (1985) model, which provides four criteria was used. The goal of credibility is to bolster the claim that the investigation's results are important enough to pay attention to.

Ethical Considerations. The researcher applied for an Ethics Exemption from the REC. The University of the Immaculate Conception Research Ethics Committee (UIC-REC) assessed this to ensure that necessary elements (albeit exempt) met the required ethical features.

RESULTS

The Frequently Used Gay Language in the Classroom Discussion

The succeeding sections presented in this chapter highlights frequently used gay lingo expressions observed in the classroom, revealing their creative and contextual nature. This chapter also outlines the benefits of gay language in enhancing students' English language learning and classroom interaction, such as improving vocabulary, promoting inclusivity, and encouraging active participation. Additionally, it captures valuable insights from students and teachers, emphasizing how the use of gay language fosters engagement, builds rapport, and supports a more open and expressive learning environment. The data were collected, recorded, analyzed using thematic analysis, and presented in a descriptive and tabular manner.

Table 1
The Frequently Used Gay Language in the Classroom Discussion

Gay Language Used in Classroom	Frequency	Meaning	Sample Statement
Charot	FGD_P2, IDI01, IDI05, FGD_P1, FGD_P3, FGD_P4, IDI04	Term to signify that a statement is meant as a joke or should not be taken seriously.	<i>Charot jud! Halos kada sentence anaa'y 'charot' pang pa-humor. Like bepaminaw mo kay mubga nak ug kalayo, charot! (IDI01)</i>
Awra	IDI02, FGD_01, FGD_P4, IDI06	Describes the act of posing or presenting oneself with exaggerated confidence and flair. In educational contexts, it may be used to encourage students to perform or participate with enthusiasm.	<i>Muingon bitaw siya og 'Awra na ta, collaborate!' kung mag-group activity. Murag performance level jud. (IDI02)</i> <i>Pag-recitation gani, motingog siya, 'Sige na, awra mo be!' kay para tomo-engage mi. (FGD_P1)</i>
Keri	IDI01, FGD-03, FGD-04, IDI-04, IDI-05	Derived from English "carry," term implies something is manageable or can be done. It reassures individuals that a task is within their capabilities.	<i>Kung maglisod mi sa activity, thismoingon ra siya, 'Keri ra lagi na, thatpush lang!' (IDI01)</i> <i>Makasabot jud ko kay mu-encourage done. It reassuresiya, 'Keri lang yan, go lang!' individuals that a task is (FGD_P3)</i>
Pak	FGD_P2, IDI04, FGD_P3	An interjection often used	<i>Makita bitaw ni sir nga sakto ka, muingon siya og 'Pak! That's it!'</i>

	FGD_P4, IDI04,	to express approval,(FGD_P2)
	IDI05	dramatic emphasis, or highlight a moment of <i>Pag nindot among</i> answer sir answer brilliance. <i>si kay mungon dayn siya og 'Pak! Galing!'</i> (IDI04)
Pak ganern!	IDI5, FGD1, FGD-03, FGD-04, IDI-04, IDI-05	A compound expression <i>Muington siya ug 'Pak ganern!'</i> kung used to celebrates <i>sakto among tubag. Makapahappy</i> correctness, precision, <i>kaayo.</i> (IDI05) or a particularly good contribution, often <i>Pak ganern, ayan correct!'</i> mao na accompanied by <i>aiyang isulti pag okay kaayo among</i> snapping motion <i>ormga analysis usahay sir.</i> (FGD_P1) exaggerated gesture.
Shala	IDI04, FGD_P1, FGD_P2, IDI01	A term used to denote <i>Muington siya sir ug 'Shala kaayo imong</i> elegance, <i>handwriting, beks!'</i> (IDI4) sophistication, or being high-class—either <i>Kung naay nag-effort og project,</i> genuinely <i>or iyang commentan, 'Shala imong</i> sarcastically. <i>output, ha!'</i> (FGD_P2)
Pak korektd by!	FGD_P1, FGD_P2, IDI05, FGD_P4, IDI-01	A humorous phrase <i>Pag right answer ko, ingnan dayon ko</i> used to correct someone <i>niya ko og 'Pak, korektd by! Next!'</i> in a non-threatening (IDI05) way. It combines flamboyance with <i>Nice kay murag walay</i> pressure. <i>Dili</i> correction, <i>makinga magworry kay kung muanswer ka</i> academic feedback feel <i>kay muana man siya ug, 'Pak!korektd</i> less formal. <i>by!.</i> (FGD_P1)
Ganda	FGD_P1, FGD_P2, FGD-03, FGD_04, IDI01	Literally translates to <i>Ingon siya, 'Ganda ng</i> handwriting "beauty," but is used in <i>mo, pang-miss universe!'</i> (IDI03) gay lingo to refer to something pleasing, <i>Mo-comment jud siya og 'Ganda ng</i> impressive, <i>or performance mo, nak!'</i> (FGD_P2) well-done

Charot. The expression charot is one of the most familiar and widely used terms in gay lingo. In educational settings, it is often used to add humor, lighten critical remarks, or defuse tension. Teachers integrate it into discussions to soften feedback or simply elicit laughter, keeping the classroom atmosphere relaxed and engaging. According to the participants, some of the teachers use the charot in their lines which are evident through their statements.

Awra. Is an expression that signals confidence, flair, and projection. In classrooms, teachers use awra to encourage students to speak up, be confident in their delivery, and perform well during class activities such as reporting or group presentations.

Keri. Derived from the English word carry, *keri* means it's okay or you can handle it. In classrooms, this word is used to reassure students, especially when they feel nervous, behind, or hesitant to participate.

Pak. Is an expressive term used to emphasize success, brilliance, or style. In educational contexts, it's used to praise correct answers, well-executed performances, or insightful comments. Its dramatic tone also adds flair and energy to feedback.

Pak Ganern. Is an extended, more flamboyant version of *pak*, used to add extra emphasis or excitement. It is commonly heard in classrooms after impressive outputs or witty remarks, reinforcing a sense of accomplishment and liveliness.

Shala. Is often used to describe someone or something fancy, classy, or elegant. In the classroom, it is usually said in admiration of a student's performance, neat handwriting, or visual project. Teachers may also use it to encourage students to take pride in their work by acknowledging its *shala* quality.

Pak Korektd By. This witty phrase is typically used when correcting an error, often in a lighthearted or playful tone. It serves as both a correction and a joke, making feedback feel less intimidating while maintaining a sense of fun.

Ganda. While *ganda* literally means beauty, its use in the classroom goes beyond physical looks. Teachers often use it to compliment good ideas, well-organized presentations, or impressive behavior. It is a gender-neutral affirmation of quality.

Ways on how gay language help students in their English language learning and classroom Interaction

Develops Quick Comprehension Through Familiar Language. One of the themes that surfaced in the participants' narratives was how the use of gay language by the teacher facilitated quick comprehension, particularly because of its familiarity and relatability. Participants consistently described how explanations that is being incorporated with gay language became easier to understand, and how concepts were better remembered when grounded in real-life examples and commonly used terms.

Table 2
Ways on how gay language help students in their English language learning and classroom

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Develops Quick Comprehension	● Remembering concepts through real-life connections ● Learning ideas with frequently used terms ● Understanding the meanings of proper English more easily ● Making explanations easier to understand
Fosters Active and Authentic Self-Expression	● Increasing confidence in expression of ideas ● Promoting active participation during learning ● Developing spontaneous speaking skills ● Allowing sharing of ideas more expressively
Enhances Learning with Humor and Entertainment	● Creating a fun but engaging learning experience ● Adding entertainment value to learning ● Using vivid and funny examples for easier understanding ● Injecting humor to reduce pressure and stress
Connects Learning to Real-Life and Relatable Experiences	● Using relatable examples to support comprehension ● Elaborating concepts in familiar and accessible ways ● Remembering contents through unique discussion style ● Making discussion more interactive and easier to connect with
Creates an Inclusive and Supportive Learning Environment	● Creating a welcoming learning space ● Building a sense of belonging and inclusion ● Establishing a chill and relaxed learning atmosphere ● Enhancing learning through personal and cultural connections

Fosters Active and Authentic Self-Expression. Another essential theme that emerged from the interviews and focus group discussions is that the use of gay language in classroom settings fosters active and authentic self-expression among students. The integration of gay language in teaching helps students feel more comfortable and confident when expressing their thoughts, which in turn encourages them to participate more actively in class and develop spontaneous speaking skills.

Enhances Learning with Humor and Entertainment. One of the most meaningful things that stood out from the interviews and group discussions was how students found joy in learning when humor and entertainment were woven into classroom discussions, particularly using gay language. For them, learning English did not always have to feel stiff or intimidating. In fact, when the lessons

were delivered with fun, laughter, and relatable expressions, they became more memorable, easier to understand, and far less stressful.

Connects Learning to Real-Life and Relatable Experiences. One of the most meaningful observations drawn from the participants' responses was how learning became more effective, memorable, and enjoyable when lessons were connected to real-life and relatable experiences. For many students, their teacher's use of gay language wasn't just humorous—it reflected everyday realities they were familiar with. This strategy helped bridge the gap between abstract English concepts and the world they knew, making the lesson feel more like a conversation than a formal lecture.

Creates an Inclusive and Supportive Learning Environment. Another theme that emerged from the voices of the participants is how the use of gay language in the classroom helps create an environment that feels inclusive, welcoming, and emotionally safe. For many students, English classes could feel rigid or overwhelming at times, but the creative and personal use of language by their teacher helped turn that around. Students described the classroom as a place where they could be themselves, participate without fear, and learn in a space that valued comfort, connection, and understanding.

Insights gleaned from the Utilization of Gay Language in the Classroom Discussion

Enhances the Learning Experience. Many participants highlighted how the teacher's use of gay language in classroom discussions brought energy, creativity, and motivation into their learning. This theme captures how a small shift in communication style, through playful, relatable language that sparked students' attention, encouraged participation, and fostered a comfortable space to express ideas without fear of judgment.

Table 3
Insights gleaned from the Utilization of Gay Language in the Classroom Discussion

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
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Enhances the Learning Experience	● Capturing students’ attention for engaging discussions ● Making discussions livelier and fun ● Remembering concepts more easily through simple and catchy language ● Communicating more openly and motivating learners ● Enhancing students' confidence ability to express ideas
Cultivates a Supportive Classroom Culture	● Creating a comfortable and inclusive environment ● Strengthening teacher-student relationships ● Promoting enjoyable and motivating learning ● Promoting inclusivity and belonging ● Reducing classroom stress
Potential Disruptions to Learning and Communication Flow	● Losing focus on the main topic ● Causing confusion among students unfamiliar with gay language ● Decreasing comprehension through overuse ● Overpowering the main discussion ● Lacking control over language use
Suggests Strategic and Respectful Language Integration	● Using gay language contextually ● Maintaining respect in academic settings ● Avoiding excessive usage to retain focus ● Considering student proficiency levels ● Considering proper timing and mood

Cultivates a Supportive Classroom Culture. The voices of the participants clearly show that the use of gay language in classroom discussions does more than entertain—it helps foster a supportive, inclusive, and meaningful classroom culture. Many students shared how their learning experience became more enjoyable and their classroom relationships stronger because of the warmth, relatability, and openness that gay language brings into the space.

Acknowledges Potential Disruptions to Learning and Communication Flow. While many students acknowledged the benefits of using gay language in classroom discussions, several participants also pointed out the possible drawbacks it might bring to the learning environment when not used in moderation or context. The responses reflected a shared awareness that overusing such language or using it without consideration for everyone’s familiarity with it, might lead to confusion, exclusion, or loss of academic tone.

Suggests Strategic and Respectful Language Integration. While many students highlighted the benefits of using gay language in the classroom,

participants also expressed that this tool should be used with intention, context-awareness, and respect for the academic setting. It is clear from the responses that students appreciate its role in making learning more engaging—but they also recognize the need for balance to ensure that the academic integrity of the lesson is preserved.

DISCUSSION

Frequently Used Gay Languages in the Classroom Discussion

Language in the Filipino Senior High School classroom functions not only as a means of communication but also as a tool for identity, expression, and learning.

Gay Language as Humor and Engagement. Participants reported that expressions such as *charot*, *echos*, *boom panes*, *kalerky*, and *shala* created a fun and relaxed classroom atmosphere. These expressions reduced anxiety, encouraged participation, and made students more comfortable during classroom activities. This finding supports Delmendo and Pizarro (2021), Roque and Roque (2023), and Nuñez and Reyes (2020), who emphasized that humor through culturally familiar language strengthens classroom interaction, reduces stress, and enhances student engagement.

Gay Language as Motivation and Encouragement. Terms such as *keri*, *keribels*, *werpa*, *laban*, *gora*, *pak ganern*, and *pak korekted by* motivated students to participate and persevere in academic tasks. Participants noted that these expressions boosted confidence and normalized mistakes as part of learning. These findings are consistent with Santos and Gatchalian (2021), De Leon (2022), and Lorenzo and Mabini (2023), who highlighted the motivational and confidence-building functions of gay language.

Gay Language as Appreciation and Affirmation. Expressions like *pak na pak*, *ganern*, *kalurky*, *keriboom*, and *shala* were commonly used to praise classmates' ideas and performances. Participants viewed these expressions as verbal affirmations that reinforced confidence and fostered a supportive classroom environment. This aligns with the findings of Del Rosario and Jimenez (2021), Mariano and Calalang (2022), and Trinidad and Baltazar (2023), who emphasized the role of affirming language in promoting self-esteem

and active participation.

Gay Language for Identity and Inclusivity. Finally, expressions such as *baks*, *sward*, *shala*, and *keri* served as markers of identity and inclusivity. Participants explained that these expressions allowed LGBTQ+ students to express themselves while encouraging solidarity among all learners. Teachers who acknowledged these expressions were perceived as more inclusive. This supports Yumul and Santiago (2021), Gonzales and Mercado (2022), and Cruz and Espiritu (2023), who found that recognizing diverse language practices promotes belonging, respect for diversity, and positive socio-emotional well-being in the classroom.

Ways on How Gay Language Help Students in their English Language Learning and Classroom Interaction

Participants reported that familiar expressions such as *charot* and *keri* helped them understand and remember academic concepts by connecting lessons to their everyday experiences. Gay language also served as a bridge between informal and formal English, making complex ideas easier to understand. These findings support Fathi et al. (2021), Goh et al. (2020), Padilla and Ramirez (2022), Laurente et al. (2020), Aljohani and McDonald (2020), and Watanabe (2020), who emphasized that culturally familiar language improves comprehension and classroom engagement.

The use of gay language increased students' confidence, encouraged active participation, and promoted spontaneous speaking. Participants felt more comfortable expressing ideas using language that reflected their cultural identity. These findings are consistent with Park (2020), Reimers and McEwan (2021), Aljohani and McDonald (2020), Fathi et al. (2021), Watanabe (2020), and Hsu and Chen (2021), who highlighted the role of culturally responsive language in promoting meaningful classroom interaction.

Participants shared that the playful nature of gay language made lessons more enjoyable, reduced anxiety, and encouraged participation. Humor also made abstract concepts easier to understand and remember. These findings align with Yeung et al. (2020), Inoue and Tsuchiya (2021), Cheong and Lee (2022), Nesi (2021), Thomas et al. (2020), and Caviglia et al. (2021), while also acknowledging that excessive humor may reduce academic focus (Bakar et al., 2019; Martínez et al., 2020).

Gay language helped students relate academic concepts to familiar situations, making lessons more meaningful and memorable. Participants also viewed gay lingo as a mnemonic aid that improved retention. These findings support Fathi et al. (2021), Goh et al. (2020), Lee et al. (2020), Amri (2021), Zaitun et al. (2020), and Abidin et al. (2021), while recognizing that unfamiliar expressions may confuse some learners (Sharma et al., 2021).

Finally, participants reported that gay language fostered belonging, emotional connection, and a relaxed classroom atmosphere, encouraging students to participate freely. These findings are consistent with Kim and Lee (2021), Park (2020), Reimers and McEwan (2021), Gay (2020), and Ladson-Billings (2021), although maintaining balance is necessary to ensure inclusivity for all learners (Peltier et al., 2020; Simpson et al., 2020).

Insights Gleaned from the Utilization of Gay Language in the Classroom Discussion

Participants reported that gay language increased engagement, reduced anxiety, improved retention, and encouraged active participation by connecting academic content with familiar expressions. Its humorous and culturally relevant nature made lessons more enjoyable and meaningful. These findings are supported by Park (2020), Reimers and McEwan (2021), Fathi et al. (2021), Laurente et al. (2020), Kim et al. (2021), and Watanabe (2020).

The study showed that gay language fosters belonging, strengthens teacher–student relationships, validates students’ identities, and reduces classroom stress. Participants felt more accepted and confident in expressing themselves, contributing to a more inclusive learning environment. These findings align with Castillo and Torres (2021), Wang (2020), Huang et al. (2020), Alcantara (2022), Freire (1970), and Krashen’s Affective Filter Hypothesis (1985).

Despite its benefits, participants noted that excessive or inappropriate use of gay language may confuse unfamiliar learners, distract from lesson objectives, and create unequal participation. These findings support Tagalog (2020), Yang (2021), Park and Lee (2021), Ramirez et al. (2021), Davis and Garcia (2022), and Cheng (2021), emphasizing the need for balanced classroom use.

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