



Students' perceptions of teachers' responses to LGBTQ+ bullying and general bullying: a latent profile analysis

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Abstract

The aims of this study were to identify and compare profiles of students' individual perceptions of teachers' responses to LGBTQ+ and general bullying, and to explore their association with students' bullying roles and students' sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (SOGIE). The original sample consisted of 2482 students aged 12–18 from public secondary and vocational schools in Andalusia (Spain). For the present study, analyses were conducted with a subsample of 1,035 students who reported witnessing bullying and completed items about teachers' responses. Four profiles of perceived teachers' responses to LGBTQ+ bullying were identified: *active and supportive* (58.5%), *moderately contradictory* (11%), *highly contradictory* (4.2%), and *disengaged* responses (26.3%). For general bullying, four profiles were also identified: *active and supportive* (59.6%), *intermittent supportive* (15.5%), *highly contradictory* (5.9%), and *disengaged* responses (19%). Disengaged responses were more prevalent in LGBTQ+ bullying than in general bullying. While response profiles were unrelated to students' SOGIE, they were linked to their bullying roles. In LGBTQ+ bullying, students who perceived contradictory and disengaged responses were more likely to be bullies or bully-victims. For general bullying, students who perceived teachers as intermittently supportive, contradictory, or disengaged also had higher odds of being bully-victims. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

Keywords Students' perceptions · Teachers' responses · LGBTQ+ bullying · General bullying · Sexual orientation, gender identity and expression · Latent profile analysis

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1 Introduction

LGBTQ+ bullying is characterized by recurrent, targeted aggressions toward students who identify, or are identified by others, as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer or any other sexual or gender minority (LGBTQ+). These acts are driven by bias and prejudice against the actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (SOGIE) of the target (Kosciw et al., 2020; Marx et al., 2021; Toomey & Russell, 2016). Its prevalence varies between 22% and 86.3%, surpassing that of general bullying (Earnshaw et al., 2018; Hinduja & Patchin, 2020; Kosciw et al., 2020), being LGBTQ+ students more frequently targeted than their heterosexual peers (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2020; Kosciw et al., 2020). Consequences include mental and physical health issues, school absenteeism, academic underperformance, and a lack of perceived safety (Bishop et al., 2020; Espelage et al., 2019; Pistella et al., 2019, 2020). The sensitive nature of sexuality and gender issues, along with fear of identity disclosure, often prevents victims from seeking help or reporting incidents (Kosciw et al., 2020; Kolbert et al., 2015).

To our knowledge, no studies have directly compared students' perceptions of teachers' responses to general and LGBTQ+ bullying. Understanding this distinction is essential to determine whether teachers' intervention strategies differ depending on the type of bullying. Therefore, the present study aims to explore and compare students' perceptions of teachers' responses to LGBTQ+ and general bullying, providing a more nuanced understanding of how teachers' interventions are perceived across different contexts. Because the study is based on students' reports of actual teachers' behaviors, the findings specifically capture the perspectives of those who have witnessed bullying incidents, offering valuable insight into how teacher actions are interpreted by observers in real school settings.

1.1 Students' perceptions of teachers' responses to LGBTQ+ bullying

Students' perceptions of teachers' active responses to LGBTQ+ bullying are crucial for reducing victimization and its negative effects (Greytak et al., 2013; Ioverno, 2023; Ioverno et al., 2022). Supportive teacher behaviour is associated with students higher reporting rates, fewer school-related troubles, strong school belonging, and better academic outcomes (Diaz et al., 2010; Kosciw et al., 2012; Russell & Joyner, 2001). Specifically, LGBTQ+ students perceive disciplinary sanctions as the most effective intervention against this form of bullying, followed by educating the perpetrator, contacting parents, and providing emotional support to victims (Kosciw et al., 2018, 2020). Despite the importance of intervention, non-intervention remains the most common students' reported response to this kind of bullying (Ioverno et al., 2022; Kosciw et al., 2018, 2020), and teachers tend to intervene more to general bullying (O'Higgins-Norman, 2009) or other bias-based bullying than LGBTQ+ bullying (Harris Interactive & GLSEN, 2005; Kosciw et al., 2008). Furthermore, students often perceive teachers as passive or even complicity, reporting behaviors such as minimizing incidents, laughing, or using homophobic language (Bacchini et al., 2021; Nardelli et al., 2016).

1.2 Students' perceptions of teachers' responses to general bullying

From the students' perspective, teachers' responses to bullying incidents represent important moral messages, signaling whether aggression is tolerated or condemned and shaping their sense of fairness and safety at school (De Luca et al., 2019; Hong & Espelage, 2012; Longobardi et al., 2020; Yoon & Bauman, 2014). Importantly, students' perceptions often differ from teachers' self-reports: while teachers tend to emphasize their active and supportive strategies, students are more sensitive to teachers' inaction (Demaray et al., 2013; van Verseveld et al., 2021).

Across studies adopting the students' perspective, several categories of teacher responses to bullying have been identified. Among perceived active and consistent responses, students often distinguish supportive and relational interventions, such as victim support, mediation between the parties involved, and group discussion (Burger et al., 2022; Campaert et al., 2017; Wachs et al., 2019), and disciplinary actions directed at sanctioning perpetrators (van Gils et al., 2022). In contrast, non-intervention, when teachers fail to respond or minimize the episode, is perceived as particularly problematic, as it signals indifference or tolerance toward bullying (Rigby, 2020; Yoon et al., 2016). Moreover, Bacchini et al. (2021) highlighted that even some active responses may be counterproductive: behaviours such as mocking the victim or laughing at the incident are interpreted by students as forms of complicity that implicitly legitimize aggression. Furthermore, Burger et al. (2015) found that most teachers report to use a combination of one to four strategies, nevertheless, research in this area remains underexplored from the students' perspective.

1.3 Students' sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, roles in bullying, and perception of teachers' responses

Students' perceptions of teachers' responses may be influenced by their experiences of social inclusion or marginalization, which are closely linked to both their SOGIE and involvement role in bullying dynamics. With regard to students' SOGIE, no studies, either on general or LGBTQ+ bullying, have examined how diverse sexual orientations and gender identities shape perceptions of teachers' responses. Specifically, studies on general bullying have not considered these characteristics (e.g., Campaert et al., 2017; Rigby, 2020; Troop-Gordon et al., 2021; Waasdorp et al., 2021), while most research on LGBTQ+ bullying, conceptualized as victimization based on actual sexual minority status, has focused almost exclusively on LGBTQ+ students' experiences (e.g., Diaz et al., 2010; Ioverno, 2023; Kosciw et al., 2018, 2020). It is therefore reasonable to assume that LGBTQ+ students may be particularly sensitive to teachers' behaviors across different forms of bullying, as such interactions can either affirm or undermine their sense of belonging at school (Toomey & Russell, 2016).

Regarding bullying roles, previous studies indicated that students involved as bullies, victims, or bully-victims tend to report lower perceptions of teachers' active and positive responses compared to uninvolved peers (Berkowitz, 2014). Burger et al. (2022) found that teachers' strategies were differentially related to students' roles: disciplinary sanctions reduced the likelihood of being a bully or a victim, whereas group discussions promoted defending behaviors. In contrast, mediation or victim

support increased the likelihood of being a bully, and non-intervention raised victimization and reduced defending over time, with no clear association for bully-victims. These results differ from those reported by van Gils et al. (2022), who found that self-reported bullying was positively associated with students' perception of non-intervention and negatively with disciplinary methods, mediation, and victim support, while no link emerged with group discussion.

Taken together, these findings suggest that both students' SOGIE and their roles in bullying dynamics could influence how teachers' responses are perceived. However, the limited and inconsistent evidence currently available highlights the need for further investigation. The current study aims to expand knowledge in this regard.

1.4 Current study

Teachers may employ mixed response strategies to address bullying influenced by the individual and context circumstances, including the type of bullying (Burger et al., 2015; Bussey, 2023). These strategies may be perceived differently depending on students' identities (Kosciw et al., 2018, 2020) and role within bullying dynamics (Campaert et al., 2017; Waasdorp et al., 2021). However, to our knowledge no studies has compared students' perceptions of teachers' responses to LGBTQ+ versus general bullying taking into account how students' SOGIE and bullying roles could shape these perceptions. This study addresses this gap by using Latent Profile Analysis (LPA) to identify patterns of students' perceptions of teacher responses to LGBTQ+ and general bullying. Given that teachers could employ multiple strategies simultaneously, a person-centred approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of this complex, and sometimes contradictory, response patterns (Muñoz-Fernández et al., 2025a, 2025b). Unlike variable-centred approaches, which isolate single behaviors, this method identifies distinct configurations of teacher responses as perceived by students, capturing the heterogeneity of real-world intervention practices. Specifically, the present study explores whether (1) profiles of students perceived teacher responses are similar across LGBTQ+ and general bullying, (2) whether these profiles vary according to students' SOGIE, and (3) whether they differ depending on students' roles in bullying dynamics (bully, victim, bully-victim, or uninvolved).

Based on prior evidence, we expected teachers to be perceived as responding less actively and consistently to LGBTQ+ bullying than to general bullying, given that non-intervention remains the most frequently reported reaction to LGBTQ+ related incidents (e.g., Ioverno et al., 2022; Kosciw et al., 2018, 2020). We also anticipated that LGBTQ+ students would be particularly sensitive to teachers' behaviors across bullying forms, perceiving supportive actions as affirming their belonging and non-intervention as threatening their safety (Toomey & Russell, 2016). Finally, students involved in bullying dynamics were expected to report lower perceptions of teacher active and consistent intervention compared to uninvolved peers (Burger et al., 2022; van Gils et al., 2022). By focusing on students' reported perceptions, this study reduces the social desirability bias common in teacher self-reports (Demaray et al., 2013; van Verseveld et al., 2021) and contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how both, SOGIE and bullying involvement, shape interpretations of teachers'

responses. This knowledge can inform more targeted interventions and school policies aimed at promoting targeted and effective anti-bullying practices.

2 Materials and methods

2.1 Participants

The original sample included 2482 students aged 12 to 18 years ($M=14.49$; $SD=1.62$), from 13 public secondary and vocational schools in Andalusia (Spain), representing all eight provinces of the region. The analytical sample was derived through a two-step filtering process based on the study's inclusion criteria: witnessing LGBTQ+ or general bullying and reporting on teachers' responses. The observation of bullying served as an initial filter for participation. Students who reported not witnessing any form of bullying did not proceed to complete the subsequent questions regarding teachers' responses and were therefore excluded from the analysis. Of the original participants, 808 students (39.6%) witnessed LGBTQ+ and general bullying, 58 students (2.8%) witnessed only LGBTQ+ bullying, 169 students (8.3%) witnessed only general bullying and 1,007 (49.3%) did not witness either. Additionally, 440 students (17.7%) did not complete the items regarding teachers' responses.

Thus, the final study sample included 1,035 students aged 12 to 18 years who had witnessed bullying and reported on teachers' responses, resulting in two overlapping subsamples for analysis (see Table 1 for details): Subsample A ($n=866$) included students who witnessed and reported teachers' responses to LGBTQ+ bullying, and Subsample B ($n=977$) included students who witnessed and reported teachers' responses to general bullying.

Comparing the excluded sample ($n=1,447$) and the final sample ($n=1,035$), differences were observed regarding age, grade, students' SOGIE, and students' role in general and LGBTQ+ bullying. The excluded participants were characterized by a significantly higher mean age [$t(2480)=5.125$; $p<.001$; $d=0.21$], a greater proportion of students in compulsory secondary education grades [$\chi^2(2)=29.56$; $p<.001$; Cramer's $V=0.11$], a greater proportion of cisgender heteronormative students [$\chi^2(1)=4.56$; $p=.033$; Cramer's $V=0.04$], and a higher prevalence of students not directly involved in either general [$\chi^2(3)=65.15$; $p<.001$; Cramer's $V=0.16$] or LGBTQ+ bullying [$\chi^2(3)=23.02$; $p<.001$; Cramer's $V=0.09$]. However, the effect size was small in all cases.

All 13 schools that participated in the original sample were included in the final analytical sample. However, the percentage of students who had witnessed LGBTQ+ or general bullying per school varied widely, ranging from 20.7% to 72.1%. Considering that this witnessing rate might be related to the school's inherent diversity, and since classroom-level data was unavailable due to data protection constraints, we analysed the association between the school's witnessing rate and the school's percentage of LGBTQ+ students, which varied between schools from 14 to 47.6%. This analysis yielded a non-significant positive correlation ($r=.25$, $p=.398$), with a small effect size.

Table 1 Descriptive information of original sample, excluded sample and study sample

	Original Sample (<i>n</i> = 2482)	Excluded Sample: Students who did not witness bullying and did not report teachers' responses (<i>n</i> = 1447)	Study Sample (<i>n</i> = 1035) Final Sample (<i>n</i> = 1035)	Subsample A: Students who witnessed and reported teachers' responses against LGBTQ+bullying (<i>n</i> = 866)	Subsample B: Students who witnessed and reported teachers' responses against general bullying (<i>n</i> = 977)
Age	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>) 14.49 (1.62)	14.63 (1.64)	14.29 (1.55)	14.31 (1.55)	14.30 (1.55)
Course	1st–4th year of Compulsory Secondary Education High School or Vocational training program Basic vocational training	2026 (81.6%) 398 (16%) 58 (2.3%)	1132 (78.2%) 269 (18.3%) 46 (3.2%)	740 (85.5%) 118 (13.6%) 8 (0.9%)	841 (86.1%) 126 (12.9%) 10 (1%)
Assigned at birth sex	Masculine Feminine	1087 (44%) 830 (57.5%)	613 (42.5%) 830 (54%)	412 (47.8%) 450 (52.2%)	448 (46.1%) 524 (53.9%)
Students' SOGIE	Cisgender heteronormative LGBTQ+	1965 (79.7%) 499 (20.3%)	1167 (81.2%) 270 (18.8%)	667 (77.7%) 192 (22.3%)	756 (78%) 213 (22%)
Students' role in general bullying	Uninvolved Victim Bully Bully-victim	1622 (68.9%) 474 (20.1%) 98 (4.2%) 159 (6.8%)	1012 (75.3%) 221 (16.4%) 51 (3.8%) 60 (4.2%)	494 (60.5%) 216 (25.1%) 42 (5%) 92 (10%)	576 (60.4%) 243 (25.5%) 41 (4.3%) 94 (9.9%)

Table 1 (continued)

Students' role in LGBTQ+bullying	Original Sample (n = 2482)	Excluded Sample: Students who did not witness bullying and did not report teachers' responses (n = 1447)	Study Sample (n = 1035)		Subsample A: Students who witnessed and reported teachers' responses against LGBTQ+bullying (n = 866)	Subsample B: Students who witnessed and reported teachers' responses against general bullying (n = 977)
			Final Sample (n = 1035)	Subsample A: Students who witnessed and reported teachers' responses against LGBTQ+bullying (n = 866)		
Uninvolved	2081 (88.8%)	1232 (91.5%)	849 (85.2%)	700 (84.3%)	805 (85.5%)	
Victim	185 (7.9%)	81 (6%)	104 (10.4%)	91 (11%)	95 (10.1%)	
Bully	44 (1.9%)	20 (1.5%)	24 (2.4%)	21 (2.5%)	23 (2.4%)	
Bully-victim	34 (1.5%)	14 (1%)	20 (2%)	18 (2.2%)	19 (2%)	

SOGIE/Students' sexual orientation, gender identity and expression

2.2 Measures

2.2.1 SOGIE

It was assessed using multiple items. First, the sex assigned at birth (“Sex”; response options: female, male), and gender identity (“*You consider yourself to be a...*”; response options: boy, girl, neither, both) were combined to classify students as cisgender girl/boy ($n=990$; 96.1%), transgender girl/boy ($n=14$; 1.4%) and non-binary ($n=26$; 2.5%) (Kosciw et al., 2018). Second, sexual attraction was assessed using an adapted version of Austin et al. (2007), with options including attraction towards boys, girls, both, regardless of gender, none, unsure, or other. It was used to categorize sexual orientation as heterosexual ($n=807$; 79.7%), gay/lesbian ($n=23$; 2.3%), bisexual ($n=89$; 8.8%), pansexual ($n=30$; 3%), questioning ($n=53$; 5.2%), or asexual ($n=11$; 1.1%). Third, gender expression was measured using the Socially Assigned Gender Nonconformity scale (Wylie et al., 2010). This two-item scale assessed participants’ perception of how others view their gender expression (e.g., as very masculine, equally masculine and feminine, or very feminine). Responses were recorded on a 7-point scale, and the measure demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha=0.95$). Responses about gender expression were recoded into three categories: feminine, androgynous, and masculine. Based on gender identity and gender expression, participants were classified as having concordant expression (masculine boys or feminine girls; $n=630$; 61.3%); discordant expression (feminine boys or masculine girls; $n=21$; 2.2%); or androgynous expression ($n=377$; 36.7%). Finally, based on sex assigned at birth, gender identity, sexual orientation, and gender expression, two categories were created: heteronormative cisgender (including cisgender and heterosexual students with concordant or androgynous expression) and LGBTQ+ (included lesbian, gay, trans, bisexual, non-binary, questioning, and heterosexual cisgender students with discordant expression). Grouping participants into sexual majority and sexual minority youth is consistent with the literature on LGBTQ+ bullying, which often dichotomizes participants into the heterosexual majority and the LGBTQ+ minority (DeSmet et al., 2018; Garaigordobil & Larrain, 2020). A key difference here is that our categorization is not limited to a single dimension of sexuality, like sexual orientation, but rather incorporates all four referred dimensions.

2.2.2 Bullying

LGBTQ+bullying and general bullying were assessed using an adapted version of The European Bullying Intervention Project Questionnaire (EBIP-Q; Ortega-Ruiz et al., 2016), the Sexual Diversity Bullying Questionnaire (SDBQ; Muñoz-Fernández et al., 2023). It consists of 24 items: 14 for general bullying (7 for perpetration and 7 for victimization) and 10 for LGBTQ+bullying (5 for perpetration and 5 for victimization), evaluating the frequency of bullying over the past 2 months. Examples of items include: “*Someone has spread rumours about me*” (general bullying); and “*Mocking someone’s appearance, clothing, or gestures due to not considering them ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ enough*” (LGBTQ+bullying). Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1=never; 5=more than once a week). Internal consis-

tency was adequate ($\alpha_{\text{general bullying victimization}}=0.83$; $\alpha_{\text{LGBTQ+ bullying victimization}}=0.77$; $\alpha_{\text{general bullying perpetration}}=0.82$; $\alpha_{\text{LGBTQ+ bullying perpetration}}=0.80$). The 14 general bullying items were used to establish roles of involvement in general bullying, while the 10 LGBTQ+bullying items were used to establish roles of involvement in LGBTQ+bullying. The cut-off scores proposed by the authors of the original instrument (Ortega-Ruiz et al., 2016) were applied to define these roles for both forms of bullying, LGBTQ+and general. Students were considered victims of bullying if they responded with one or two times a month (i.e., a score of 3 or higher) on any victimization item; bullying perpetrators if they responded with one or two times per month (i.e., a score of 3 or higher) on any perpetration item; bully-victim if they met the criteria for both, perpetrator and victim, in the past 2 months.

2.2.3 Students' perceptions of teachers' responses against LGBTQ+ and general bullying

A Spanish-adapted version of the *Teachers' Reactions to Bullying Incidents Questionnaire* (Bacchini et al., 2021) was used. Following questions about students' involvement in bullying, participants were asked to report teachers' responses to LGBTQ+and general bullying. To assess teachers' responses against LGBTQ+bullying, the question was: "If, in the last 2 months, you have witnessed any bullying situation due to the sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression of any student, what did the teachers do?". To assess teachers' responses to general bullying, the question was: "Now, thinking about bullying in general, in the last 2 months, what did the teachers do?". For each form, five teachers' responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = never; 5 = always). The five items were: comforting the victim, blaming the perpetrator, discussing incidents in the classroom, ignoring, and laughing. Students could also select "I have not witnessed any such situation" —those who did were excluded from analyses, determining the final subsamples. Following the original conceptualization of the measure (Bacchini et al., 2021), the items were grouped into two categories: supporting behaviours (i.e., comforting the victim, blaming the perpetrator, and discussing the incident in the classroom) and non-supporting behaviours (i.e., ignoring the situation and laughing). Supporting behaviours are considered appropriate and potentially effective interventions, whereas non-supporting behaviours are viewed as inappropriate or even iatrogenic, as they may reinforce bullying or signal tolerance. Two confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) were conducted to examine the internal structure of the scale in two parallel versions addressing general bullying and LGBTQ+bullying. The same two-factor structure emerged in both cases. Model fit for the general bullying response was acceptable: $\chi^2(5)=29.34$, $p<.001$; RMSEA=0.070, 90% CI [0.047, 0.095]; CFI=0.968; TLI=0.937; SRMR=0.029. Information criteria were also satisfactory (AIC=15,553.70; BIC=15,627.22; SSA-BIC=15,579.58). For the LGBTQ+bullying response, model fit was slightly lower but still within acceptable thresholds: $\chi^2(5)=36.95$, $p<.001$; RMSEA=0.084, 90% CI [0.060, 0.110]; CFI=0.959; TLI=0.917; SRMR=0.031. Information criteria were also adequate (AIC=14,362.30; BIC=14,434.60; SSA-BIC=14,386.96). Internal consistency was acceptable for the supporting behaviours subscale ($\alpha=0.76$ for general bullying and $\alpha=0.80$ for LGBTQ+bullying). The non-supporting behaviours

subscale showed somewhat lower internal consistency ($\alpha=0.65$ and $\alpha=0.61$, respectively), likely due to the limited number of items (only two) and the distinct nature of the behaviours included. These findings provide evidence for the structural validity and cross-situational consistency of the instrument in assessing teachers' responses to bullying.

2.3 Procedure

The sample was obtained using a representative cluster sampling method, aiming for a sample representative of youth in Andalusia, Spain. The cluster strategy was based on two criteria: province (ensuring the inclusion of schools from all eight Andalusia provinces) and school education level (secondary and vocational education). In total, we contacted with 19 schools and 13 accepted to participate in this study. No specific inclusion or exclusion criteria were applied to schools or classrooms beyond their location, educational level and willingness to participate, thus ensuring a diverse and representative sample from Andalusia (Spain). During the 2021–2022 academic year data collection was conducted. Students and their families or legal guardians who agreed to participate provided informed consent. Participation was voluntary, anonymous, and without financial compensation. All participants received direct instructions on how to complete the questionnaire. This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Universidad de Jaén (code: OCT.20/6.PRY).

2.4 Data analysis

Latent Profile Analysis (LPA) was conducted separately to identify profiles of teachers' responses to LGBTQ+ and general bullying, based on five strategies observed by students—comforting the victim, blaming the perpetrator, classroom discussion, ignoring, and laughing—each of which was entered into the model as a continuous indicator variable (i.e., the frequency reported for that specific strategy). LPA was performed separately. Model selection relied on Akaike information criterion (AIC), Bayesian information criterion (BIC), bootstrapped likelihood ratio test (BLRT) and entropy, with lower AIC and BIC values and higher entropy (close to 1) are considered more suitable (Nylund et al., 2007). Furthermore, when the p-value is significant, the current solution is considered improved compared to the previous solution. LPA were conducted with Mplus 8.3.

The Chi-squared test was used to analyse the association between teachers' responses profiles and students' SOGIE using SPSS 29. Multinomial logistic regression analyses explored the association between profiles membership and bullying roles in LGBTQ+ and general bullying (victim, bully, bully-victim, and non-participant). Multinomial logistic regression analyses were conducted with Jamovi.

Table 2 Fit indices for students' perceptions of teachers' responses against LGBTQ+ bullying and general bullying latent profiles

# of profiles	Teachers' responses against LGBTQ+bullying				Teachers' responses against general bullying			
	<i>AIC</i>	<i>BIC</i>	<i>Entropy</i>	<i>BLRT</i>	<i>AIC</i>	<i>BIC</i>	<i>Entropy</i>	<i>BLRT</i>
1	14751.78	14799.42			16213.85	16262.70		
2	13735.70	13811.93	0.91	1028.07***	15122.99	15201.14	0.99	1102.86***
3	13068.23	13173.04	0.94	679.47***	14358.86	13173.04	0.95	883.591***
4	12724.71	12858.10	0.96	355.52***	13630.17	13766.94	0.96	633.22***

****p*<.001

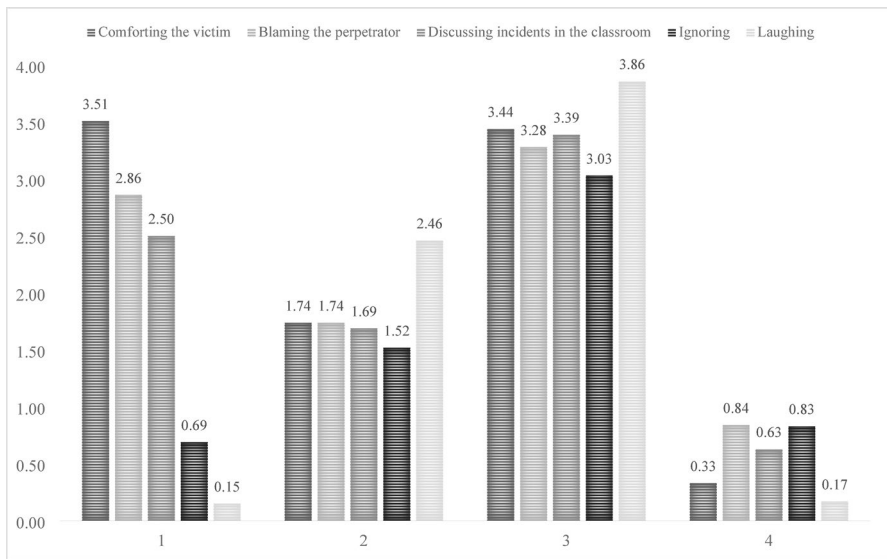


Fig. 1 Four-profile solution for students' perceptions of teachers' responses against LGBTQ+ bullying. Values represented the raw-scores for comforting the victim; blaming the perpetrator, discussing incidents in the classroom, ignoring and laughing. Profile 1 = active and supportive responses; Profile 2 = moderately contradictory responses; Profile 3= highly contradictory responses; Profile 4 = disengaged responses

3 Results

3.1 Profiles of students' perceptions of teachers' responses to LGBTQ+ bullying

Table 2 presents fit indices for the latent profile solutions regarding teachers' responses to LGBTQ+ bullying. Among the tested models, the four-profile solution offered the lowest *AIC* and *BIC* values and the highest entropy. *BLRT* was always significant, suggesting that adding a new profile improved the model. Thus, the four-profiles solution was selected as optimal.

Figure 1 illustrates the mean response patterns across the four identified profiles regarding LGBTQ+ bullying.

Profile 1: *active and supportive responses* (58.5%; $n=507$). This largest profile was characterized by students consistently reporting that their teachers employed supportive intervention strategies. Teachers in this group actively comforted the victim, blamed the perpetrator, and discussed the bullying in class frequently, while students reported they rarely or never ignored or laughed at the incidents.

Profile 2: *moderately contradictory responses* (11%; $n=95$). This profile included students who perceived that teacher frequently reinforced the LGBTQ+bullying behaviour though laughter while providing minimal assistance. Specifically, supportive responses, such as comforting the victim, blaming the perpetrator and classroom discussion, all received low ratings.

Profile 3: *highly contradictory responses* (4.2%; $n=36$). This smallest profile was the most ambivalent and highly contradictory, reflecting a distinct pattern of maximal simultaneous involvement. This group reported the highest frequencies for supportive strategies (providing comfort, blame and discussion) yet also displayed the highest reported frequencies for inappropriate responses (ignoring and laughing).

Profile 4: *disengaged responses* (26.3%; $n=228$). This group comprised students who indicated that a general lack of intervention. Although reports of explicit non-supportive behaviours (ignoring or laughing) were low or absent, the teachers in this profile also did not intervene actively (providing little comfort, blame or discussion) when faced with LGBTQ+bullying.

3.2 Profiles of students' perceptions of teachers' responses to general bullying

Table 2 also display the fit model for the latent profile models based on teachers' responses to general bullying. Among the solutions tested, the four-profile model offered the lowest *AIC* and *BIC* values. Although the entropy of the four-profile model was slightly lower than that of the two-profile model, it remained high overall. Additionally, the *BLRT* was significant, suggesting that the four-profile solution improved on previous solutions. Finally, the four-profiles solution was considered the best.

Figure 2 illustrates the mean response patterns across the four distinct profiles of teachers' responses regarding general bullying.

Profile 1: *active and supportive responses* (59.6%; $n=582$). This largest profile was characterized by students reporting that their teachers consistently employed supportive interventions. Teachers in this group comforted the victim and frequently blamed the perpetrator and discussed the bullying in class, while rarely ignoring and never laughing at the incidents.

Profile 2: *intermittent supportive responses* (15.5%; $n=151$). This profile included students who reported using supportive strategies only sometimes (i.e., sometimes comforting the victim, blaming the perpetrator, and discussing incidents in the classroom). Crucially, non-supportive behaviours (ignoring or laughing) were also rarely reported.

Profile 3: *highly contradictory responses* (5.9%; $n=58$). Characterized by significant ambivalence, this smallest profile was defined by students reporting teachers frequently engaged in non-supportive behaviours (laughing and ignoring the bullying), alongside the frequent use of supportive strategies.

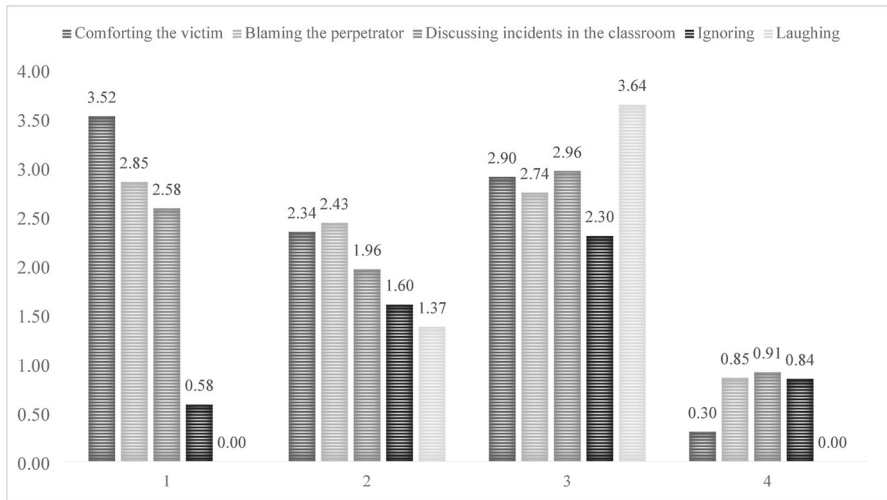


Fig. 2 Four-profile solution for teachers' responses against general bullying. Values represented the raw-scores for comforting the victim, blaming the perpetrator, discussing incidents in the classroom, ignoring and laughing. Profile 1 = *Active and supportive responses*; Profile 2 = *Intermittent supportive responses*; Profile 3 = *Highly contradictory responses*; Profile 4 = *Disengaged responses*

Profile 4: *disengaged responses* (19%; $n=186$). This group represented students who perceived a near total lack of teacher intervention. Students reported that teachers never or rarely comforted the victim, blamed the perpetrator, or discussed the incident, while similarly reporting very low frequencies for ignoring and never laughing during general bullying episodes.

3.3 Did teachers respond similarly to LGBTQ+ and general bullying?

Profile 1 (*active and supportive responses*) and 4 (*disengaged responses*) showed similar configuration across both bullying types. However, *disengaged responses* were notably more frequent in LGBTQ+bullying (26.3% vs. 19%), clearly indicating a higher rate of non-intervention when teacher faced LGBTQ+bullying. Profile 2 differed substantially: in response to LGBTQ+bullying, this profile was characterized by inappropriate behaviours (e.g., teacher laughing), suggesting a pattern of active negative reinforcement. Conversely, in response to general bullying, Profile 2 was characterized by intermittent supportive responses without mockery. Profile 3 (*highly contradictory responses*) had a similar mixed structure in both cases, but all responses strategies were more intense in LGBTQ+bullying. This heightened intensity in both supportive and non-supportive behaviours suggest greater ambivalence when teacher faced LGBTQ+bullying.

3.4 Association of students' SOGIE with students' perceptions of teachers' responses to LGBTQ+ and general bullying

SOGIE was not significant associated with teachers' responses profiles to either LGBTQ+bullying [$\chi^2(3)=5.56; p=.786; CC=0.08$] or general bullying [$\chi^2(3)=2.51; p=.474; CC=0.05$] (see Table 3).

3.5 Association of students' perceptions of teachers' responses to LGBTQ+ bullying with students' roles in LGBTQ+ bullying

Multinomial logistic regression (Table 4) revealed that LGBTQ+ students were more likely to be victims of LGBTQ+bullying, while cisgender-heteronormative students were more likely to be bullies. Students exposed to moderately contradictory responses had higher odds of being bullies or bully-victims. Disengaged response was associated with greater likelihood of being bully-victims.

3.6 Association of students' perceptions of teachers' responses to general bullying with students' roles in general bullying

Multinomial logistic regression (Table 5) indicated that LGBTQ+ students were more likely to be victims of general bullying. Intermittent supportive responses were linked to higher odds of being a bully-victim. Highly contradictory responses were marginally associated with being a bully and significantly with being a bully-victim. Disengaged responses also increased the likelihood of being a bully-victim.

4 Discussion

This study aimed to identify and compare students' perceptions of teachers' responses to LGBTQ+ and general bullying. Latent Profile Analysis revealed four distinct profiles for each type of bullying, highlighting that teachers sometimes use a mix of strategies, both supportive and ineffective (e.g., ignoring or laughing). While prior studies have explored how teachers combine responses to general or ethnic bullying (Burger et al., 2015; Özdemir et al., 2021), they have not addressed LGBTQ+ bullying or considered teachers' negative responses. To our knowledge, this study is the first to use a person-centred approach to examine both supportive and disengaged or non-supportive teachers' responses to LGBTQ+ and general bullying as perceived by students.

Looking more closely at the profiles, nearly 60% of students perceived active and consistent responses to both LGBTQ+ and general bullying. These profiles were similarly structured, combining individual-focused strategies (comforting the victim, blaming the perpetrator) and group-centred actions (discussing incidents in class), applied frequently and without disengaged and invalidating responses (ignoring or laughing). This similarity is notable given that teachers often find LGBTQ+ bullying more difficult to address (Moyano & Sánchez-Fuentes, 2020). One possible explana-

Table 3 Association of students' sexual and gender diversity with students' perceptions of teachers' response profiles

Profiles of teachers' responses against LGBTQ+ bullying	CHN		LGBTQ+		Profiles of teachers' responses against general bullying		CHN		LGBTQ+	
	n (%)	z	n (%)	z	n (%)	z	n (%)	z	n (%)	z
Active and supportive responses	386 (57.9%)	-0.8	117 (60.9%)	0.8	Active and supportive responses		456 (60.4%)	0.9	121 (56.8%)	-0.9
Moderately contradictory responses	79 (11.8%)	1.6	15 (7.8%)	-1.6	Intermittent supportive responses		110 (14.6%)	-1.5	40 (18.8%)	1.5
Highly contradictory responses	31 (4.6%)	1.6	4 (2.1%)	-1.6	Highly contradictory responses		46 (6.1%)	0.5	11 (5.2%)	-0.5
Disengaged responses	171 (25.6%)	-1.0	56 (29.2%)	1.0	Disengaged responses		144 (19.0%)	-0.1	41 (19.2%)	0.1
Total	667		192		Total		756		213	

CHN: Cisgender heteronormative students, LGBTQ+ Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and any other sexual and gender identities

tion is that teachers skilled in handling LGBTQ+bullying, a structurally complex form (Earnshaw et al., 2018), may also be capable of addressing general bullying.

Among the remaining 40% of teachers, 11% primarily responded to LGBTQ+bullying by laughing, though some positive responses were also present. This profile, *moderately contradictory*, describing minimal support and occasional delegitimizing behaviours, differs from its general bullying counterpart (*intermittent supportive*), in which 15% of students perceived low levels of active and supportive responses from their teachers, but laughing behaviours were reported only rarely. This difference may stem from the broader social normalization of homophobic prejudice (Bradlow et al., 2017; Poteat et al., 2019). Notably, teachers' responses against LGBTQ+bullying are more positive when they receive specific training (Poteat et al., 2019).

The *highly contradictory*, characterized by frequent use of both supportive and delegitimizing and non-supportive behaviours, was identified in both LGBTQ+and general bullying, though it was the least common (4% and 6%, respectively). While not previously described in the literature, this complex pattern highlights the value of a person-centred approach. It may also help explain inconsistent findings on the effectiveness of specific teacher strategies, such as group discussion, mediation or disciplinary methods (van Verseveld et al., 2019; Wachs et al., 2019), as these may often co-occur with disengaged or invalidating responses like ignoring or laughing.

Finally, 26% of students perceived that teachers exhibited a general lack of intervention across both supportive and non-supportive or delegitimizing responses to LGBTQ+bullying, corresponding to the *disengaged* profile, a higher percentage compared to general bullying (19%). In these cases, teachers neither ignored nor laughed but did not actively intervene either. This lack of perceived responses to LGBTQ+bullying may be due to teachers feeling unprepared, confused and powerless (Liodaki et al., 2023; Nappa et al., 2018). Individual, such as prejudice and contextual barriers like insufficient school authorities support or teacher training may also contribute to this response (Elipe et al., 2023; Ioverno, 2023; O'Higgins-Norman, 2009).

The second aim of this study was to examine the relationship between students' perceptions of teachers' response profiles across bullying forms and students' SOGIE; however, in contrast with our hypothesis, no significant associations were found. This finding may suggest that teachers' behaviors are interpreted as generally consistent regardless of students' sexual and gender minority status. Although no previous studies have compared teachers' responses according to students' SOGIE, qualitative evidence indicates that even heterosexual students recognize teachers' difficulties in responding effectively to LGBTQ+bullying (Allen, 2020). It is also plausible that other factors than SOGIE, such as school climate, peer relationships, or prior experiences with teachers, play a stronger role in shaping students' perceptions of teacher responses (Ioverno et al., 2022; Moyano & Sánchez-Fuentes, 2020). However, while perceptions of teachers' behaviors may not differ by SOGIE, their consequences might: for sexual and gender minority students, even similar teacher responses could have a distinct emotional impact, influencing their perceived safety, sense of belonging, and inclusion at school (Kosciw et al., 2020; Toomey & Russell, 2016).

The third aim was to analyse the association between students' perceptions of teachers' response profiles and students' roles in bullying. Teachers' response profiles

Table 4 Results of multinomial logistic regression analysis predicting students' roles in LGBTQ+ bullying

	Victim (<i>n</i> = 91; 11%) ^a			Bully (<i>n</i> = 21; 2.5%) ^a			Bully-victim (<i>n</i> = 18; 2.1%) ^a					
	Est	SE	<i>p</i>	OR	Est	SE	<i>p</i>	OR	Est	SE	<i>p</i>	OR
SOGIE (LGBTQ+)	1.75	0.24	<0.001	5.78	-18.04	0.00	<0.001	146,000.000	0.37	0.59	0.526	1.45
Moderately contradictory ^b	0.47	0.38	0.207	1.61	1.78	0.55	<0.001	5.89	1.86	0.72	0.010	6.45
Highly contradictory ^b	0.11	0.65	0.862	1.12	0.58	1.09	0.591	1.79	1.30	1.14	0.253	3.66
Disengaged ^b	0.24	0.27	0.375	1.27	0.73	0.57	0.196	2.08	1.56	0.62	0.012	4.78

SOGIE students' Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression (reference = CHN students)

^aReference (uninvolved; *n* = 700; 84.3%); ^bReference (active and supportive responses); *AIC* = 868; *BIC* = 938; χ^2 (12) = 86, *p* < 0.001

were associated with students' involvement as bullies and bully-victims. Specifically, the bully role in LGBTQ+bullying was associated with *moderately contradictory responses*, while the bully-victim role was related to both *moderately contradictory responses* and *disengaged responses* profiles, characterized respectively by a low level and a lack of both supportive and non-supportive behaviours. Consistent with past findings (Campaert et al., 2017; Nappa et al., 2021), our results confirm that teachers' lack of active and supportive responses increase the risk of bullying involvement. Specifically, compared to Campaert et al. (2017)'s non-intervention, our person-centered profiles more accurately capture teachers' tendency either to refrain from intervening or to respond with minimizing or delegitimizing behaviors (e.g., laughing), thereby broadening the understanding of the link between bullying involvement and teachers' potentially harmful passive and active reactions. In fact, inappropriate responses, such as laughing or intermittent support, may reinforce students' prejudices and thus elevate the likelihood of becoming a bully or bully-victim. Previous research shows that when students hold strong homophobic attitudes and teachers fail to intervene, levels of LGBTQ+aggression rise (Bacchini et al., 2021). Longitudinal studies are needed to clarify the direction of these associations.

Similar results emerged for general bullying. Both the *intermittent supportive* and *disengaged* response profiles were associated with being a bully-victim. Previous research has shown that students who perceive low teacher active intervention are more likely to be involved in both perpetration and victimization (Campaert et al., 2017). However, the association between the *intermittent supportive* response profile and the bully-victim role represents a novel contribution, not documented in prior research (Burger et al., 2022; Özdemir et al., 2021). Our findings suggest that occasional responses are not enough, students need teachers to intervene consistently whenever bullying occurs (Muñoz-Fernández et al., 2025a, 2025b). Additionally, the bully-victim role was linked to *highly contradictory responses* profile, in which teachers were perceived to laugh while also applying multiple supportive strategies. This combination may undermine the effectiveness of those strategies, as laughing can legitimize the bullying. These results underscore that both the consistency and the quality of teacher responses matter: inconsistent or mixed messages may increase students' risk of involvement in bullying.

The victim role in both, LGBTQ+ and general bullying, was associated only with students' SOGIE, LGBTQ+ students were more likely to be victims, consistent with prior research on their higher rates of victimization and poly-victimization (Elipe et al., 2022; Toomey & Russell, 2016). Students' perceptions of teachers' responses were unrelated to victimization in our study, although longitudinal evidence suggest they may influence victimization over time (Burger et al., 2022). This point to the potential long-term importance of consistent and effective teacher intervention.

4.1 Practical implications

This study advances knowledge on students' perceptions of teachers' responses to bullying, highlighting the crucial role of active, consistent, and supportive interventions, particularly in cases of LGBTQ+bullying, where disengaged or contradictory reactions were more frequent and especially harmful (Liodaki et al., 2023; Nappa

Table 5 Results of multinomial logistic regression analysis predicting students' roles in general bullying

	Victim (<i>n</i> = 243; 25.4%) ^a			Bully (<i>n</i> = 41; 4.2%) ^b			Bully-victim (<i>n</i> = 94; 9.8%) ^a					
	Est	SE	<i>p</i>	OR	Est	SE	<i>p</i>	OR	Est	SE	<i>p</i>	OR
SOGIE (LGBTQ+)	0.85	0.18	<0.001	2.34	0.00	0.43	0.992	1.00	0.37	0.27	0.169	1.45
Intermittent supportive ^b	0.13	0.22	0.572	1.13	-0.31	0.55	0.571	0.73	0.77	0.30	0.010	2.16
Highly contradictory ^b	-0.17	0.38	0.654	0.84	0.94	0.53	0.076	2.55	1.22	0.39	0.002	3.37
Disengaged ^b	0.04	0.21	0.839	1.04	0.11	0.42	0.795	1.12	0.65	0.28	0.022	1.92

SOGIE Students' Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression (reference = CHN students)

^aReference (Uninvolved; *n* = 577; 60.4%); ^bReference (active and supportive responses); *AIC* = 1917; *BIC* = 1990; χ^2 (12) = 42.4, *p* < 0.001

et al., 2018). The findings indicate that not only the absence of intervention, but also intermittent or contradictory responses, for instance, when teachers alternate supportive actions with dismissive or invalidating behaviours, may reinforce students' involvement in bullying, either as bullies or bully-victims (Burger et al., 2022; Muñoz-Fernández et al., 2025a, 2025b). Such dynamics may lead students to perceive aggressive conduct as tolerated and to lose confidence in teachers' capacity or willingness to intervene effectively.

Teacher education and professional development should therefore prioritize the cultivation of continuity, empathy, and awareness of bullying dynamics (Wachs et al., 2019), especially those rooted in bias or prejudice against sexual and gender minority people (e.g., Ioverno, 2023). Schools, in turn, should embed these principles within whole-school inclusion frameworks, ensuring coherence between individual teacher actions and institutional policies (Ioverno et al., 2024). Regular monitoring and reflective supervision of teachers' responses can help identify patterns of disengagement or contradiction, promoting greater accountability, consistency, and trust in anti-bullying practices.

4.2 Limitations

While this study advances understanding of teachers' responses to general and LGBTQ+bullying from the students' perspective using a person-centred approach, several limitations should be noted. First, a limitation of the study is that only students who reported having witnessed bullying (general or LGBTQ+) were asked about actual teachers' responses. This means that students who were involved in bullying situations, as victims, bullies, or bully-victims, but did not report witnessing incidents involving others were excluded from the analysis. As a result, our findings reflect the perceptions of students who observed bullying and may not fully capture the perspectives of those involved in bullying dynamics in other roles or contexts. Future studies should include larger samples and adopt a multi-informant design to validate these findings. Furthermore, since the findings rely solely on students' characteristics and experiences, with no teacher-level or school context variables included, it remains unclear how teacher or school environment characteristics may shape students' perceptions of response patterns. Future research should investigate which teacher attributes or contextual factors contribute to the development of different perceived response profiles. Second, the profiles were based on the raw frequency reported to specific items, in line with previous latent profile research (see Heiden-Rotes et al., 2020), rather than on factor mean scores derived from a multidimensional scale. Future research could benefit from assessing teacher responses through measures that include multiple items to more robustly evaluate each specific type of reaction. Lastly, the cross-sectional design limits causal inference; therefore, future studies should examine patterns investigated from a longitudinal perspective.

4.3 Conclusion

This study used a person-centred approach to compare students' perceptions of teachers' responses to general and LGBTQ+bullying, addressing a gap in research on how

these responses vary by bullying type and student roles. The results indicate that students perceive teachers' interventions as complex and sometimes contradictory, often combining both effective and ineffective strategies. Importantly, teachers were more likely to respond inconsistently or with less support in LGBTQ+ bullying situations, and these response patterns were associated with students' involvement as bullies or bully-victims. These findings highlight the critical importance of consistent, active, and supportive teacher interventions to reduce bullying and promote safer school environments. Overall, the findings provide insight into how students experience teacher behavior in bullying situations and underscore the need to explore teacher strategies in a more nuanced way. Recognizing these students' perception response profiles can inform targeted teacher training, professional development, and inclusive anti-bullying interventions, ultimately helping educators respond more effectively to both general and LGBTQ+ bullying.

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Data availability The data that support the findings of this study will be available in the repository of the University of Jaen: <https://ruja.ujaen.es/jspui/handle/10953/1188>.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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