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JOURNAL OF EDUCATION

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Transforming Education: A Journey Towards Transgender Inclusion

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Abstract

There has been a rising acceptance in recent years of the significance of cultivating inclusion in education, with a special emphasis on transgender inclusion. Transgender people have a gender identity that differs from their biological sex. Gender identity is a person's internal perception of gender, which may or may not correspond to their biological sex based on physical traits. Transgender people were listed as a third group in the 2011 census, but the Indian Supreme Court approved them as a third gender in 2014. The transgender population in India is estimated to be 4, 87,803, with a literacy rate of 57.06%. The article emphasizes the need for transforming education to create a more inclusive environment for transgender individuals. It highlights the importance of dismantling discriminatory practices, fostering awareness, and creating a curriculum that reflects gender diversity. It also highlights the role of teacher education in creating an inclusive learning environment and the importance of professional development programs for educators. The article also advocates for the creation of safe spaces within educational institutions and supports the psychological and emotional well-being of transgender students through support networks, counselling services, and anti-bullying initiatives. The article argues that transforming education towards transgender inclusion is a moral imperative and a strategic investment in the future, empowering transgender students to thrive academically, emotionally, and socially.

Keywords: transgender, inclusive, gender identity, curriculum. marginalization

Introduction

The term "inclusive education" is a concept and method of teaching that aims to meet the various learning needs of every student, regardless of their aptitudes, experiences, or personal traits. Creating an environment where every learner feels appreciated, respected, and supported despite their unique differences is the fundamental tenet of inclusive education. The term "transgender" refers to people whose gender identity differs from the gender given to them at birth. Gender identity refers to a person's profoundly felt an internal sense of their own gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex they were assigned at birth based on physical traits. Transgender individuals, often identifying with a different gender, were included in the 2011 census as a third group. There was no choice for a third gender in the census, which only contained male and female gender categories. The Indian Supreme Court, on the other hand, recognized transgender people as a third gender in 2014 (Prakasha.C, 2023) affirming their inclusion in the population count The transgender population in India is estimated to be 4,87,803, with a literacy rate of 57.06%.

Inclusive education is crucial in addressing the unique needs, experiences, and identities of transgender students. Key considerations include respecting gender identity, policy development, curriculum inclusion, teacher training, safe spaces, awareness and sensitivity, access to health resources, and flexible policies. Respect for gender identity involves using preferred names and pronouns, creating a supportive atmosphere, and addressing the rights and protections of transgender students. Policies should address anti-discrimination, restroom usage guidelines, and measures to prevent bullying or harassment based on gender identity. The

curriculum should reflect a diversity of gender identities and experiences, including transgender perspectives in subjects like history, literature, and social studies. Teachers should receive training on transgender-inclusive practices, creating a supportive learning environment. Safe spaces and support networks are essential for transgender students, and awareness and sensitivity about their experiences are promoted through educational programs and open discussions. Inclusive policies should be flexible and accommodating to the needs and preferences of transgender students. By integrating these considerations, inclusive transgender education creates a learning environment that validates, supports, and empowers transgender students, contributing to their academic success and overall well-being.

Educational Status of Transgender

The Indian Constitution recognizes the Third Gender, but they lack equal legal protection, limited access to public spaces, healthcare, and education, and often do not attend educational status classes. formal education, which causes them to be cut off from their family and social networks. Transgender persons are hesitant to pursue education since they are frequently uneducated or stupid, according to reports and conversations with the community. Although qualifications at the secondary or upper secondary levels are common, enrolment is low and dropout rates are high. Because of their lack of education and social acceptance, they do not acquire a proper education. "Everyone has the right to an education," (N.K Vats, 2017). Educated Transgender are making significant contributions to social development, and in the future, more Transgender will be observed traveling into areas formerly controlled by Normal Men and Women**. (Ashokraj S, 2019).**

Constitutional and the Legal Provisions for Transgender

There are Constitutional and legal directives for ensuring inclusive spaces for all gender 'identity' including transgender. The various provisions are discussed briefly for building a perspective for all the stakeholders.

Right to Equality: The right to equality is guaranteed under the Indian Constitution. Articles 14-16 provide equality before the law, a prohibition on inequity based on gender, ethnicity, place of birth, religion, or caste and equal opportunities in public employment. The specific prohibitions on gender discrimination in Articles 15(1), 15(2), and 16(2).

Right to Freedom: Everyone has the right to be free, regardless of gender, race, religion, caste, or place of birth. It consists of an article 19—Protection of specific rights, such as freedom of expression an article 20—Protection against criminal convictions—and Article 21—Protection of life and personal liberty, which states that no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of life.

Right to Education Act, 2009: The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE), adopted by the Indian Parliament on August 4, 2009, defines the requirements for free and compulsory education in India for children aged 6 to 14, as stipulated under an article 21(A) of the Indian Constitution. The Act states that every child between the ages of six and fourteen has a fundamental right to an education, and it also establishes minimum criteria for primary schools. (Prakasha C, 2023).

National Legal Services Authority Judgment, 2014

The National Legal Services Authority Judgement 2014 is a crucial ruling that protects

the rights of transsexual individuals in the Philippines. The ruling acknowledges the right to self-declare one's gender identity, regardless of physical appearance, and the right to be classified as a "third gender" for transgender individuals. Failure to recognize this self-declared gender identity can lead to harassment, violence, and sexual assault in public and private settings.

National Education Policy (NEP) (2020) Transgender students have the right to all of the measures listed in the National Education Policy 2020 for Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SDGs) that have historically been underrepresented in education. This is because transgender people are explicitly recognized as one of these groups. The statement "All participants in the school education system, including teachers, principals, administrators, counsellors, and students, will be sensitized to the requirements of all students, the notions of inclusion and equity, and respect, dignity, and privacy of all persons" clearly emphasizes the importance of raising awareness among the various stakeholders in the Indian educational system.

The policy statement tackles the drop in school enrolment, particularly among transgender children, by advocating alternative education centres, and a 'Gender-Inclusion Fund' (GIF) to ensure equal quality education. The initiative intends to assist these youngsters in regaining access to mainstream schooling while also addressing local context-specific challenges. It also suggests that governments provide funds to assist female and transgender children in gaining access to education, such as sanitation, toilets, bicycles, and conditional cash transfers. This is crucial since education is widely recognized as the most effective tool of fostering social justice and equality.

Inclusive Environment for Transgender in School

Transgender individuals face barriers in education due to gender binaries in school structures, leading to bullying, harassment, and unreported incidents. This can result in discontinuation of formal education or decline in academic performance.

The Supreme Court of India acknowledges the marginalization, physical and mental abuse of the transgender community, commonly known as hijras, in India due to superstition (Neetu, 2019). Transgender students face a range of problems and challenges that can significantly impact their educational experiences and overall well-being. Some of the key problems include:

Harassment and Bullying: Transgender students are more likely to be bullied or harassed by their peers. This can involve verbal abuse, physical assault, and social marginalization, all of which contribute to a hostile and dangerous school environment.

Discrimination and Stigma: Gender identity discrimination is a widespread problem. Transgender students may suffer prejudice, bigotry, and stereotyping from their classmates as well as adults, which can contribute to feelings of isolation and marginalization.

Lack of Understanding and Awareness: Many educational institutions and individuals lack understanding and awareness about transgender issues. This lack of knowledge can result in unintentional insensitivity, misgendering, and exclusion of transgender students.

Privacy and Safety Concerns: Privacy and safety concerns occur in gender-segregated facilities such as toilets and locker rooms. Transgender students may experience difficulties accessing facilities that correspond to their gender identity, causing discomfort and possibly

prejudice.

Mental Health Struggles: Transgender students frequently face greater rates of mental health issues, such as anxiety, depression, and suicidal thinking. Stressors such as societal expectations, prejudice, and lack of acceptability all contribute to these difficulties.

Limited Support Services: Many schools may lack adequate support services, including counselling and mental health resources tailored to the specific needs of transgender students.

Educational Barriers: Transgender students may encounter barriers to education, including higher dropout rates, lower academic achievement, and limited access to educational resources. These barriers can result from the intersection of discrimination, bullying, and mental health challenges.

Lack of Inclusive Curriculum: The curriculum in schools often lacks representation and inclusion regarding transgender issues. This absence perpetuates ignorance and contributes to the erasure of transgender experiences and history.

Family and Community Rejection: Some transgender students endure rejection and lack of support from their families and communities, leading to homelessness, financial insecurity, and emotional distress.

Challenges

Transgender individuals face socioeconomic barriers, deeming education a premium. They face social humiliation outside school, making it crucial to create "trans-friendly" educational institutions. Transgender students can face various challenges in an inclusive school environment, despite efforts to create an atmosphere that embraces diversity. Some of the

challenges include:

1. Lack of Understanding and Awareness: In some cases, there may be a lack of understanding and awareness among students, teachers, and school staff about transgender issues. This lack of awareness can lead to misconceptions, stereotypes, and discriminatory behaviour.

2. Concerns about privacy and safety: Transgender students may confront privacy and safety issues, particularly in gender-segregated areas such as bathrooms and locker rooms. Schools must adopt inclusive policies that address transgender students' safety and comfort.

3. Discrimination from Staff: Discrimination may occur not only from peers but also from school staff, including teachers and administrators. Educators must be trained to create a supportive and accepting atmosphere for all pupils, regardless of gender identification.

   Mental Health Concerns

1. Legal and Policy Challenges: Legal and policy challenges, such as restrictions on transgender students' participation in sports or access to gender-affirming healthcare, can impact their overall well-being. Transgender students should be treated equally as regular students and should be valued humanely. Everyone should understand how to contribute to their education. (JB Messman, 2018).

2. Parental and Community Opposition: Transgender students may face opposition or lack of support from their parents, local communities, or religious groups, which can further isolate them.

4. Acknowledging their sexual identity

5. Internal struggles and confusion

6. Behavioural, emotional, and physical trauma brought on by changes or confusion that results

in an exclusion

7. Various forms of violence, such as sexual abuse and molestation

8. An appropriate use of restrooms and uniforms, particularly when kids are unsure of who they are.

9. Selecting a character or role in a school play, game, or other activities.

Creating a fully inclusive school climate entails tackling these difficulties through education, awareness, policy changes, and fostering a culture of respect and inclusion. On-going training for staff and students, the implementation of inclusive policies, and the promotion of an environment of empathy and understanding can all contribute to a more welcoming environment for transgender students.

Suggestions

Suggestions for School Administrators for a Gender-Inclusive School Environment

1. Gender diversity education programs conducted through parent-teacher conferences and community leaders' meetings

2. No discrimination based on gender should be allowed when selecting academic, nonacademic, and housekeeping staff

3. Transgender teachers and other school staff could be hired without discrimination based on gender

4. Transgender students should be given special consideration on application forms and on all course certificates

5. Scholarships for transgender students should be made available

6. Transgender students' healthcare needs should receive special attention, especially for Specially-abled/ Divyang transgender students.

7. To educate the staff about gender-affirming policies and procedures, regular workshops may be held.

8. Transgender students should have access to trained counselors for support. These kids frequently experience bullying, exclusion, and harassment, primarily as a result of various prejudices related to their gender identification.

9. The location of these boxes ought to be chosen in a way that ensures the complainant's identity stays anonymous.

10. Counsellors might be hired to deal with problems that call for specialized therapy as a means of redress or prevention.

11. To raise awareness among students, speakers, role models, law enforcement, attorneys, and socially engaged citizens might be invited.

12. Movie sessions in schools can be conducted for students and community members, with suggestions vetted and screened. Transgender individuals can be invited as Special Guests/Members of Committees for workshops on gender inclusion and sensitivity, discussing topics like legal rights and skill development. Schools can play a pivotal role in setting up these meetings.

Conclusion

The paper emphasizes the importance of promoting inclusivity in education, particularly in the context of transgender inclusion. It advocates for a radical approach that eliminates

discriminatory behaviours and fosters an environment that is more accepting of transgender people. The term "transgender" is defined in terms of gender identity, emphasizing an internal sense of gender that may differ from the sex assigned at birth. The article discusses the historical context of the inclusion of transgender individuals as a third gender in India's census and the legal recognition granted by the Indian Supreme Court in 2014. The central argument revolves around the moral imperative and strategic investment in the future by transforming education to empower transgender students academically, emotionally, and socially. The concept of inclusive education is introduced, emphasizing the importance of creating an environment where every learner feels appreciated, respected, and supported, irrespective of their unique differences. Key considerations for achieving inclusive transgender education include policy development, curriculum inclusion, teacher training, safe spaces, awareness, and sensitivity. The article also discusses the challenges faced by transgender individuals in India, such as limited access to education, healthcare, and public areas. To create an inclusive environment for transgender individuals in schools, the article suggests various measures, including the introduction of gender-neutral uniforms, provision of scholarships, healthcare support, and awareness workshops.

The article urges school administrators to implement outreach programs, non-discriminatory hiring practices, scholarship provisions, regular workshops, trained counsellors, and the formation of committees to address gender-based violations.

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CONFLUX
JOURNAL OF EDUCATION

ISSN 2320-9305 (Print)
ISSN 2347-5706 (Online)

Volume 12, Issue 2, June 2024
https://cjoe.naspublishers.com/

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