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Review Article

Beyond the Binary: Challenges and Prospects of Creating Gender Inclusive Schools for Transgender Students

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Abstract: Gender identity is not a static concept; it changes over time. We need to accept and acknowledge that everyone deserves to be their authentic selves. Target 4 a of SDG 4 (Sustainable Development Goals) suggests the establishment of a gender-sensitive environment in educational institutions that will make students feel included, comfortable and safe. Education is recognised as a fundamental human right for all people in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The right to education is necessary for exercising other human rights. Unfortunately, even today, the transgender community continues to be one of India's most at-risk and disadvantaged social groups and is seriously lagging behind in all areas of human development indices, including education. In India, transgender students report high rates of victimisation and marginalisation inside educational institutions for various reasons, particularly due to ignorance of teachers, classmates, school staff and the authority. Such kind of victimisation has detrimental effects on their mental health. Understanding the existence of gender identities beyond the binary and discussing transgender, gender non-conforming, and non-binary identities in the classroom may foster an environment conducive to the development of all kinds of students. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to draw attention to the various difficulties in developing gender-inclusive classrooms and the formation of strategies to build the school as a safe and welcoming place for all students, irrespective of their gender identities. This is a qualitative study in which an inductive approach was adopted to explore the current research problem. Data was extracted from secondary sources such as various research articles, government reports, relevant websites, documentary videos, and news articles. After reviewing the existing literature, the study identified several barriers to establishing gender-inclusive school environments. It contributes to the existing body of knowledge by recommending practical strategies for fostering a gender-inclusive school climate. The findings will assist researchers, teachers, and other school stakeholders in understanding the challenges of creating gender-inclusive schools for transgender students and provide them with actionable insights into effective implementation strategies.

Keywords: Gender-Inclusive School, Transgender, Classroom, Students, India.

1. INTRODUCTION

Gender identity extends beyond the male-female binary and exists along a broad spectrum that encompasses diverse gender expressions. Transgender is an umbrella term and an adjective used to describe individuals whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth(NCERT, 2020). Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2019 defines Transgender as: " A person whose gender does not match with the gender assigned to that person at birth and includes trans-man or trans-woman (whether or not such person has undergone sex reassignment surgery or hormone therapy or laser therapy or such other therapy), person with intersex variations, gender queer and person having such socio-cultural identities as *kinner, hijra, aravani and jogta.*"(*The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2019*, n.d.)

Education is recognised as a fundamental human right for all people in the Universal Declaration

of Human Rights(United Nations, 1948). The right to education is necessary for exercising other human rights. Unfortunately, even today, the transgender community continues to be one of India's most at-risk and disadvantaged social groups and is seriously lagging behind in all areas of human development indices, including education. Many transgender students face significant barriers in schools due to rigid gender norms, discriminatory policies, and a lack of institutional support. Traditional schooling systems often operate within a binary framework that marginalises non-cisgender identities, making it difficult for transgender students to feel safe, included, and affirmed. In India, transgender students report high rates of victimisation and marginalisation inside educational institutions for various reasons, particularly due to ignorance of teachers, classmates, school staff and the authority. Such kind of victimisation has detrimental effects on their mental health and overall well-being.

Target 4 a of SDG 4 (Sustainable Development Goals) suggests the establishment of a gender-sensitive environment in educational institutions that will make students feel included, comfortable and safe. As awareness of gender diversity grows, educators, policymakers, and administrators are increasingly called upon to create more inclusive learning environments that acknowledge and support transgender students. This paper aims to explore the obstacles that transgender students face in educational settings, including bullying, misgendering, limited access to gender-affirming facilities, and restrictive policies. It also examines potential strategies for fostering inclusivity, such as implementing gender-affirming curricula, enacting supportive policies, and promoting staff training on gender diversity. By addressing these issues, this research aims to contribute to the ongoing efforts toward building equitable and inclusive schools for all students, regardless of their gender identity and expressions.

1.1 From Exclusion to Inclusion

The journey of transgender people from social exclusion to dignified inclusion within society is marked by a long history of struggle and resistance. The evolution of this community reveals that, in India, the lives of transgender persons continue to be characterised by a daily battle for acceptance.

Fig. 1: Key milestones in transgender persons' rights and inclusion in India. The image was created using Microsoft Office PowerPoint 2021

Although transgender people have existed throughout history in all societies, they have maintained a significant public presence in the South Asian subcontinent. Historical records suggest that diverse gender identities and expressions were socially accepted in this region since the Vedic period (Michelraj, 2015).India's caste-based patriarchal system historically confined transgender persons to stigmatised occupations, contributing to their social marginalisation. Their status further deteriorated under British colonial rule, which imposed punitive regulations and formally criminalised them by categorising them as a "criminal tribe" under *the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871.* During the British Raj, transgender persons were subjected to ridicule, mistreatment, and inhumane treatment (V. Chakrapani, 2010; Elischberger *et al*., 2018; Subramanian & Sugirtha, 2015). The legacies of this discrimination continue to shape their lived realities in contemporary India (NCERT, 2020).

The process of inclusion began to gain formal momentum when the 2011 Census of India recorded the population of transgender persons for the first time, identifying 487,803 individuals as "other" gender, including 54,854 children in the 0-6 age group (NCERT, 2020). This report also, for the first time in India, published data on the location, educational status, and work participation of transgender persons. The 2014 National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) judgment marked a significant milestone in India's legal history by transforming the status of transgender persons. In this decision, the Supreme Court of India affirmed that transgender individuals are entitled to equal rights as citizens and have the freedom to realise their full human potential. The NALSA judgment declared that transgender persons must be treated as a "third gender". This judgment upheld their right to decide their self-identified gender and aimed to protect their constitutional rights (*Social Action Litigation | NATIONAL LEGAL SERVICES AUTHORITY (NALSA) | India*, n.d.). The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act (2019), which came into existence on December 5, 2019, was enacted to prohibit discrimination and recognise the identity of transgender individuals. It specifically placed obligations on educational institutions to provide inclusive education and covered aspects of social security and health(*The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2019*, n.d.). Most recently, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 recognised transgender persons as a Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Group (SEDG). To ensure equitable quality education, the policy recommended the creation of a Gender Inclusion Fund to support both girls and transgender students (Ministry of Education, 2020).

1.2 Gender Inclusive School

 "*When those who have the power to name and to socially construct reality choose not to see you or hear you...when someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked in the mirror and saw nothing.*"- Adrienne Rich.

Gender inclusive schools are unique places where the gender of every student is seen, safe and supported(Gender Spectrum, 2017). They foster authentic self-expression of their gender without fear of discrimination, recognise and normalise gender diversity, and challenge rigid binary understandings of gender. Such schools also encourage critical reflection on gender norms while promoting empathy and respect among students(Gender Spectrum, 2017).

2. METHODOLOGY

It is a qualitative study which is exploratory in nature. An inductive approach was adopted to explore the current research problem. Data was extracted from secondary sources such as various research articles, government reports, relevant websites, documentary videos and news articles.

2.1 Objectives

The current study embodies the following objectives:
1. To identify the challenges of creating gender inclusive schools for transgender students in India.
2. To form practical strategies for creating gender inclusive schools in India.

3. ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FACED BY TRANSGENDER PERSONS AT SCHOOL

Transgender and gender-nonconforming children face significant barriers in school environments that are often structured around rigid binary gender norms tied to birth-assigned sex. These challenges range from psychological distress to physical safety concerns.

3.1 Conflict of Identity

Transgender children often experience a disconnect between their self-perceived gender and societal expectations, which can lead to confusion, distress, and an identity crisis. This mismatch between gender identity and assigned gender often results in psychological distress known as gender dysphoria, arising from gender incongruence. Continuous judgment and rejection from society can further contribute to isolation, anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and suicidal ideation. Many children begin to feel that they are a burden to their families and school communities, and some even end up leaving their natal families (NCERT, 2020).

3.2 Prevalence of Gender Binary Structures

Schools often socialise children into rigid boy or girl categories, overlooking students on the other gender spectrum. Existing binary practices in schools-such as gender-specific uniforms (for example, forcing a trans-man to wear a skirt or salwar kameez can cause them significant discomfort), participation in co-curricular activities and performing arts (where transgender and gender non-conforming students may feel excluded when selecting their preferred characters for drama roles), sex-segregated sports teams, separate seating arrangements in classrooms, and gendered assembly lines can make these students feel isolated and excluded from the school community(NCERT, 2020).

3.3 Infrastructural Challenges

Gender binaries are also embedded in the facilities provided in schools, such as single-sex schools, gender-segregated toilets, hostel accommodations, and common rooms. The absence of gender-neutral facilities becomes a major source of distress for transgender students. They often avoid using school washrooms to escape mocking, harassment, molestation, or physical assault. Hostels and common rooms frequently become spaces where transgender and gender non-conforming children face a heightened risk of sexual abuse (NCERT, 2020).

3.4 Bullying and Violence

Transgender students are highly vulnerable to verbal abuse (such as name-calling), physical assault, and sexual violence from both peers and adults in schools. In their search for information and support, they are often exposed to uncensored and unfiltered content online. Vulnerable transgender youth are particularly prone to cyberbullying, online blackmail, and exposure to sexual predators. Transphobic hostility is often rooted in irrational myths and misconceptions about transgender persons.

3.5 Rejection and Lack of Support

Many transgender children lose their social capital as they are rejected by parents, peers, and teachers. Instead of providing support, some teachers ridicule students for their mannerisms or even perpetrate emotional violence, such as intentionally failing a student who refuses sexual favours(NCERT, 2020).

3.6 Academic Consequences:

The combined effects of mental trauma, bullying, violence, and the lack of representation of gender nonconformity in textbooks often cause many transgender students to lose interest in their studies and eventually drop out. Data from the 2011 Census indicates a literacy rate of only 56.1% among transgender persons, which is significantly lower than the national average. Moreover, textbooks rarely depict gender diversity and gender spectrum, making it difficult for transgender children to relate to their curriculum(NCERT, 2020).

4. CHALLENGES FOR CREATING GENDER INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS FOR TRANSGENDER STUDENTS IN INDIA

The challenges for creating gender inclusive schools for transgender students in India are discussed below.

4.1 Lack of Access to Appropriate Restroom Facilities

Most schools in India do not provide separate or gender-responsive toilets for transgender students. As a result, they are often subjected to assault and bullying when they use restrooms that do not align with their gender identity. A 2018 study conducted by Dr V. Chakrapani, Mr Sunil Menon, and Ms Jaya identified school toilets as major bullying hotspots, which is a serious matter of concern (Dr V. Chakrapani *et al.*, 2018).

4.2 Bullying and Violence

The 2018 research brief "Experiences of bullying in schools: A survey among sexual/gender minority youth in Tamil Nadu," commissioned by UNESCO New Delhi and conducted by the community-based organisation *Sahodaran*, examines bullying based on sexual orientation and gender identity in Indian schools using a mixed-methods approach. Findings show that bullying was widespread, with nearly all participants facing harassment due to their gender expression or perceived sexual orientation. The nature of abuse varied by age: sexual harassment was more common in primary school, while physical harassment increased in middle, high, and higher secondary levels. Most bullying was carried out by peers and seniors, though some participants also reported bullying by teachers. Harassment most frequently occurred in classrooms, toilets, and terraces. Bullying had severe academic and mental health impacts: many students experienced reduced academic performance, loss of concentration, and school dropout, while a large majority reported anxiety, depression, and emotional isolation (Dr V. Chakrapani *et al*., 2018). Such incidents of bullying and violence against transgender and gender non-conforming students are prevalent in many Indian schools, posing a major challenge to the creation of a gender-inclusive school climate.

4.3 Heteronormative Curriculum

The reluctance to include non-cisgender identities in the curriculum reflects an attempt to heteronormalize educational content and practices (Sullivan & Urraro, 2019), where only the gender binary is acknowledged. Due to the lack of representation of transgender students, many feel neglected and gradually lose interest in academics. Furthermore, most schools in India do not incorporate gender diversity education into their curriculum, leaving students largely misinformed about transgender individuals.

4.4 Lack of Awareness among Teachers and School Staffs

Teachers often believe that it is inappropriate for children to engage in discussions about gender-expansive identities, assuming that they are too young for such conversations. Many educators also feel uncomfortable and unqualified to address these topics. In India, the social stigma surrounding gender norms and stereotypes remains strong, and many teachers do not readily accept the idea of gender diversity. There is also a lack of awareness about different gender expressions among other school staff, which contributes to an environment where students are frequently ridiculed and harassed.

4.5 Lack of Support

Transgender students often feel isolated and alone due to a lack of support from both peers and their families. Many leave their natal families, and when they do not find a supportive environment at school, it becomes even more difficult for them to continue their education. As a result, many drop out at an early age. In many Indian schools, this absence of nurturance also comes from teachers. Such persistent isolation can significantly contribute to mental health problems among transgender students.

4.6 Verbal and Physical Abuse

According to a study by the National Human Rights Commission, 18% of transgender students in India experience physical abuse, 62% face verbal abuse

in schools, and 15% are harassed by both students and teachers(Chauhan, 2018). Such widespread victimisation has contributed to a high dropout rate among transgender students in Indian schools.

4.7 Lack of Actions against Bullying

The lack of school policies that explicitly prohibit harassment based on gender, including gender identity and gender expression, poses a significant challenge for transgender students in continuing their education. Only a small proportion of victims report incidents, and school authorities often respond ineffectively by dismissing complaints or blaming the victim(Dr. V. Chakrapani *et al*., 2018). Consequently, schools become fearful and unsafe spaces for these students.

4.8 Enforced Dress Code

Gender specific uniforms can be very uncomfortable for transgender and gender non-conforming students. Stonewall's 2017 school report found that 20% of transgender young people were not allowed to wear clothing that aligned with their gender identity at school (Tuli, 2021). Similarly, most Indian schools enforce dress codes strictly based on the gender binary. A lack of awareness and understanding of transgender students' gender identities often leads to the imposition of dress codes that do not reflect who they are. Such enforcement may impact students' mental health, self-esteem, and overall personality development.

5. STRATEGIES FOR CREATING GENDER INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS FOR TRANSGENDER STUDENTS

5.1 Use of Gender Neutral Language

Using appropriate and gender-neutral pronouns in the classroom can help create a more supportive and encouraging environment for transgender students. Adopting gender neutral language when addressing the entire class, such as "all students, children, learners, or scholars" instead of gendered terms like "boys and girls" or "ladies and gentlemen", helps to boost students' sense of comfort and confidence(Broomfield, 2017). Teachers can also address students based on their roles or activities, for example, "All readers" or "All writers, please pay attention"(Gender Spectrum, 2017). Furthermore, students should be allowed to choose their preferred pronouns, as this fosters respect for their identities and contributes to a more gender-inclusive classroom environment.

5.2 Discontinuance of Binary Practices in School

Existing binary practices, such as separate assembly lines for boys and girls, segregated participation in school functions, classroom seating arrangements, gender-specific uniforms, and gender-based grouping for assignments, excursions, and other activities, should be discontinued. Instead, inclusive mixed groups should be encouraged, and gender-neutral uniforms may be introduced(NCERT, 2020). Some

Rudolf Steiner schools in India follow gender-neutral school uniforms (Tuli, 2021). Anjali Patel-Mehta, a Mumbai-based fashion designer and mother, supports gender-neutral school uniforms, suggesting the *kurta* as a truly universal and authentically Indian option. However, she acknowledges potential challenges in implementation, including possible resistance from students, particularly girls facing body image concerns. She believes children should ultimately have the freedom to choose what they wear, emphasising that gender neutrality should be a social choice rather than something imposed(Tuli, 2021). However, girls wearing pants and shirts is not necessarily a gender-neutral choice. In fact, a "trousers-only" policy cannot truly be considered gender neutral(Tuli, 2021).
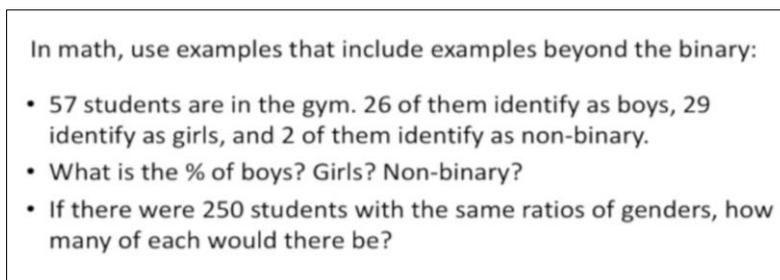
5.3 Sensitisation of All School Staff

Both teaching and non-teaching staff should be sensitised to diverse gender expressions and the gender spectrum. They should be trained to promote transgender-sensitive behaviour, prevent the isolation and harassment of gender-nonconforming students, and address transphobic attitudes and hostility within the school community(NCERT, 2020).

5.4 Gender Inclusive Curriculum

A gender-inclusive curriculum considers the academic, social, physical, and psychological needs of transgender children alongside those of girls and boys. It emphasises the importance of critical dialogue as a pedagogical approach, enabling both students and teachers to meaningfully engage with issues such as gender norms, gender identities, and deeply rooted social practices (NCERT, 2020). Curricula and teaching-learning materials should be reviewed to eliminate any bias against transgender persons. Content addressing gender diversity should be thoughtfully incorporated to reduce prejudice, foster understanding of diverse gender identities, and promote positive representation by highlighting the achievements and contributions of transgender individuals in society(NCERT, 2020). The creation of both textual and non-textual materials to promote transgender equality should be encouraged, highlighting transgender individuals as role models and ensuring that curriculum delivery is inclusive of transgender perspectives(NCERT, 2020).

Curricular reform aimed at strengthening gender inclusivity should adopt a spiral approach. At the foundational levels, students can be introduced to basic concepts of gender diversity and common gender stereotypes. As they progress to higher grades, these concepts can be revisited with increasing depth and complexity, ensuring that discussions remain age-appropriate at each stage. Schools must address not only the visible curriculum but also the hidden curriculum; otherwise, boys, girls, and transgender students may continue to internalise rigid gender roles and expectations. Attention to the hidden curriculum is essential to counter its negative influences, encourage

critical self-reflection on attitudes and behaviours, and design activities that reduce gender bias(NCERT, 2020).

In math, use examples that include examples beyond the binary:

- 57 students are in the gym. 26 of them identify as boys, 29 identify as girls, and 2 of them identify as non-binary.
- What is the % of boys? Girls? Non-binary?
- If there were 250 students with the same ratios of genders, how many of each would there be?

Fig. 2: Example of a math problem which includes gender nonbinary terms. Source: Gender Spectrum (Director). (2017, September 26). *What is a Gender Inclusive School?* **[Video recording]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CcMh7-ijLYE**

5.5 Fostering Self-Esteem and Self-confidence among Transgender Students

This can be accomplished by engaging achievers from the transgender community across various fields, along with motivational speakers, psychologists, and counsellors. Parent-teacher associations, NGOs, and employers can also work together to boost the confidence of transgender students. The media can further contribute by promoting the positive portrayal of transgender individuals (NCERT, 2020).

5.6 Inviting Transgender Guest Speaker

Inviting transgender guest speakers provides a great opportunity to conduct myth-busting sessions in which students can interact with them directly and clarify any doubts or misconceptions. Following an open discussion, teachers may invite students to share feedback or reflect on how their perceptions of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals have changed. In this way, mutual understanding and respect for diverse forms of gender expression can be fostered among students (Chasnoff & Cohen, 1996). Personal stories shared by the speakers can inspire students and help them develop a deeper and more thoughtful understanding of gender diversity.

5.7 Conducting Innovative Action Projects and Research

Teachers should be encouraged to design innovative projects and undertake action research focused on the education and empowerment of transgender children. Such initiatives can help identify the challenges faced by transgender students in schools and support the development of effective strategies to promote their inclusion and integration into mainstream education(NCERT, 2020).

5.8 Creating Support Groups in Schools

Transgender students often experience discrimination, bullying, and violence in schools. To help address these challenges, schools can establish supportive groups consisting of classmates, teachers, counsellors, or transgender individuals who are sensitive to their issues and needs. One successful approach is the Circle of Support (COS) model, first introduced in Canada and later implemented in other countries. In this model, a group of people meets regularly to assist an individual(the 'focus person') in working toward personal goals that they may find difficult to accomplish on their own(NCERT, 2020).

5.9 Anti-Discrimination Cell

All schools in India must set up anti-discrimination cells to address and monitor discrimination against transgender students. Teachers must actively prevent and intervene in cases of gender-based bullying and harassment, with clear guidelines and rules for reporting such cases. Schools should promote gender diversity and inclusion through visible messages like posters, banners, and mission statements. Additionally, a dedicated committee including representatives from the transgender community should be formed to address issues of abuse, violence, and sexual harassment. Also, helpline numbers should be made available for transgender students to ensure prompt action on gender-based grievances(NCERT, 2020).

5.10 Breaking the Stereotypes

In the documentary titled *It's Elementary*, directed by Debra Chasnoff and Helen Cohen, the teacher first asks students about their views, opinions, and stereotypes regarding the transgender and gender non-conforming community. The teacher then asks how they learned these stereotypes or misconceptions, and it is revealed that most of their ideas come from television, news, and other media (Chasnoff & Cohen, 1996). Such open discussions are needed in schools so that stereotypes rooted in rigid gender binary norms can be challenged, and students can be sensitised to gender diversity and the gender spectrum from a young age in an age-appropriate manner. Teachers are primary agents of change in shaping students' perceptions, as well as influencing society at large. Therefore, it is essential to first sensitise teachers, as they are the ones who will guide students on these matters. Reflective storytelling can also be effective for younger children. In this approach, situations that challenge stereotypical beliefs

about gender binaries are presented to students. Teachers can then ask reflective and critical questions to help children think deeply, develop empathy for transgender and gender non-conforming individuals, and better understand issues related to gender diversity(Chasnoff & Cohen, 1996). Teachers can also give students reflective writing exercises, such as 'Changing Gender Roles'. For example, they can ask female students to imagine they are boys and describe the advantages and disadvantages they might experience in their daily lives, and vice versa. Teachers can also ask all students to reflect on what it might be like to live a day as a transgender student or person and write about how they would feel in that situation. In addition, role-playing activities can help students develop empathy toward different genders and challenge stereotypical gender roles.

5.11 Gender Responsive Infrastructure

A study involving 922 transgender students revealed that 31% limited their food or fluid intake to avoid using school restrooms (Francis *et al*., 2022), which can adversely affect their physical health, highlighting the need for gender responsive infrastructure. Gender-neutral toilets, also known as all-gender, gender-inclusive, or unisex toilets, are designed to be accessible to students regardless of their gender identity. The study identified two main types: self-contained single-user toilets and multi-stall shared toilets(Francis *et al*., 2022). However, the introduction of gender-neutral toilets has generated several concerns. For instance, self-contained units may be limited by financial and spatial constraints, while multi-stall arrangements may not align with the religious or traditional cultural beliefs of some students. Additionally, some critics raise issues related to women's privacy and safety, suggesting that toilet facilities should either remain sex-segregated or be designed as fully private individual cubicles to ensure safety, dignity, and comfort for all users(Francis *et al*., 2022).

6. CONCLUSION

"We need to give each other the space to grow, to be ourselves, to exercise our diversity. We need to give each other space so that we may both give and receive such beautiful things as ideas, openness, dignity, joy, healing, and inclusion."
-Max de Pree

Every individual is unique and has the right to live with dignity. Yet, the transgender community continues to face ostracism, largely due to persistent myths and misconceptions about traditional gender norms. Schools play a vital role in the socialisation process and can significantly influence attitudes towards gender diversity from an early age. The persistent absence of transgender representation in school curricula despite legal progress indicates that this silence reinforces stigma and rigid gender stereotypes from an early age. Since prejudice is learned, schools should

introduce the idea that gender is not strictly binary through simple, age-appropriate methods such as storytelling, using gender inclusive language, theatre, and exposure to real-life transgender role models (Madhavi, 2026).

Creating a gender-inclusive school climate can help reduce discrimination against transgender individuals, both within educational spaces and in society at large. Teachers, in particular, have the power to shape lives in meaningful and lasting ways. Caring and nurturing educators who recognise each student's potential can inspire them to explore a world of possibilities that guides them throughout life. To achieve this, schools must promote gender-inclusive curricula, use gender-neutral language, and cultivate values such as tolerance and empathy among students. Students should also be given the freedom to express their gender identity without fear or restriction. Such measures are essential to building a safe, respectful, and welcoming environment for all learners.

The present study aimed to identify the challenges involved in creating gender-inclusive schools in India and to propose practical strategies for overcoming these barriers. After reviewing the existing literature, the study identified several obstacles in establishing gender-inclusive school environments, including limited access to appropriate restroom facilities; bullying and violence faced by transgender students; a heteronormative curriculum; lack of awareness among teachers and school staff; inadequate support systems; verbal and physical abuse; insufficient action against bullying; and enforced dress codes. This study contributes to the existing body of literature by recommending practical strategies for fostering a gender-inclusive school climate. These include the use of gender-neutral language; the discontinuation of binary practices in schools; sensitization of all school staff; implementation of a gender-inclusive curriculum; fostering self-esteem and self-confidence among transgender students; inviting transgender guest speakers; conducting innovative action projects and research; creating school-based support groups; establishing anti-discrimination cells; challenging stereotypes through open and reflective discussions; and developing gender-responsive infrastructure.

A matter of hope is that things are gradually changing. Schools in India and across the world are gradually undertaking initiatives to create more gender-inclusive classrooms. In September 2018, Kolkata introduced its first transgender awareness program in schools at Netaji Nagar. Conducted as a month-long pilot project, the initiative aimed to sensitise students to the challenges faced by the LGBTQI community and address transphobia within educational spaces (Chakraborty & Sarkar, 2018). The program was led by Sobhan Mukherjee, who focused on educating students about the Supreme Court's landmark ruling on

transgender rights and reinforcing the importance of non-discrimination. Emphasising schools as primary sites of socialisation, he highlighted their responsibility in cultivating inclusive and supportive environments. During the sessions, speakers shared personal accounts of both discrimination and support, offering students a deeper understanding of transgender persons' lived experiences. The headmaster, Avijit Banerjee, stressed the importance of recognising individuals for their humanity rather than defining them solely by gender identity(Chakraborty & Sarkar, 2018). The initiative also pointed to the urgent need for more such sensitisation programs to ensure safer, more inclusive educational experiences for transgender students.

In 2018, the NGO Society for People's Awareness, Care and Empowerment (SPACE), in collaboration with the Delhi government and the Netherlands Embassy, launched "Project Purple Board" to certify schools as trans-friendly. So far, 27 schools in Delhi (25 government and 2 private) have been declared trans-inclusive(Narayanan, 2019). Inclusivity standards include providing gender-neutral washrooms and establishing anti-trans bullying committees. Activist Rudrani Chettri has specifically called for the inclusion of transgender-related topics in biology textbooks. Additionally, the Delhi government's State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) has implemented teacher-training programs that include direct interaction with members of the transgender community. Transgender activist Rose Venkatesan hopes that the Delhi model of gender-inclusive schools will expand nationwide, fostering safer and more inclusive learning environments across India(Narayanan, 2019).

Tamil Nadu has emerged as a pioneer in promoting transgender inclusion in the education system that serves as a blueprint for other states. Government model schools in the state have implemented awareness programmes, theatre initiatives, and community-led sessions to share the lived experiences of transgender individuals. These efforts demonstrate that children can understand and embrace diversity when introduced at an early stage(Madhavi, 2026). Some schools have introduced gender-neutral uniform policies to promote inclusivity. For example, St Brigid's National School in Greystones, County Wicklow, Ireland, allows boys to wear skirts and girls to wear trousers (O'Brien, 2019). Uppingham School in Rutland, East Midlands, England, has also adopted a gender-neutral uniform policy (EdexLive Desk, 2018). Similarly, Mumbai-based Rudolf Steiner schools such as *Tridha* follow gender-neutral uniforms(Tuli, 2021).

Terms such as gender non-binary, gender nonconformity, and transgender may appear complex or difficult to understand. However, a complete conceptual grasp of these identities is not needed for showing respect to those who identify in these ways. Young children, in particular, cannot be expected to fully comprehend such terminology. What they can understand is that gender is a diverse concept and extends beyond the categories of male and female, or boys and girls. Education should therefore encourage children to look beyond external appearance and recognise the inherent uniqueness of every individual. They should be taught to value and celebrate this diversity. Ultimately, this is what transgender and gender-diverse individuals have demanded for generations: basic respect, dignity, and acceptance.

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