

Breaking Barriers: Higher Education Institutions and Transgender

Empowerment under NEP-2020

C., Prakasha

Research Scholar, Dept. of P.G Studies and Research in Education, Kuvempu University,
Shivamogga, Karnataka, India

Abstract

This article explores the hurdles faced by transgender individuals in India, especially in accessing higher education, and investigates how Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can empower transgender communities within the framework of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Historically marginalized and subjected to discrimination, transgender individuals confront limited educational opportunities and formidable societal barriers. The NEP 2020 acknowledges these challenges and underscores the importance of inclusive policies to establish a supportive educational milieu. The article discusses various strategies, including interdisciplinary approaches, initiatives for equitable access, special education provisions, promotion of local languages and cultures, diversity initiatives, mentoring and support programs, advancements in research and innovation, teacher training, integration of technology, community engagement, curriculum diversification, tailored support services, non-discrimination measures, affirmative actions, advocacy through research, enhancement of campus climate, collaborative endeavors, waivers for examination fees, rethinking vocational education, establishment of dedicated study centers, and organization of conferences and workshops. Through the implementation of these strategies, HEIs can significantly contribute to creating an inclusive and empowering educational environment for transgender students in India.

Keywords: Transgender, Inclusive, New Education Policy-2020, HEIs, Discrimination

Introduction

As transgender individuals' identities and rights are now more widely acknowledged, there are still issues, particularly in the field of education. Students who identify as transgender have

particular challenges that prevent them from pursuing higher education. This essay investigates the educational condition of transgender people, emphasizing the challenges they encounter and the vital role that postsecondary institutions play in promoting acceptance and assistance. In order to make higher education more inclusive and equitable for all students, it is intended to promote a fuller knowledge of the challenges experienced by transgender students and to push for the required reforms. A person is labelled transgender if their gender identification is different from their birth sex, which may or may not match their physical or genetic sex. India's transgender population is around 4, 87,803 with a literacy rate of 57.06%. Indian Supreme Court accepted transgender people as a third gender in 2014, confirming their inclusion in the population count (**Pallav Das, 2019**). The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 aims to empower transgender education and dismantle age-old barriers. The revised policy, approved in July 2020, recognizes discrimination and a special difficulty faced by transgender students and promotes transformation and holistic growth in education Higher education establishments emphasize the promotion of transgender empowerment through education. Transgender students, individuals whose gender identity differs from the sex assigned to them at birth, often encounter multifaceted obstacles that can hinder their educational experience. As per the landmark NALSA judgment, every person has the right to self-identify as a transgender person irrespective of medical treatment (**Prakasha. C, 2023**).

In India, there is no widely accepted education system that caters specifically to transgender people. Transgender individuals often face the loss of family support and a safe educational environment, leading many to discontinue their education and jeopardize their future employment prospects. A thorough analysis of multiple publications and discussions with stakeholders and the community reveals that many transgender individuals, predominantly illiterate or undereducated, are reluctant to pursue higher education. Most possess only senior secondary or secondary-level qualifications. This results in a low enrolment rate and a persistently high dropout rate at the primary and secondary levels. +

Status of Transgender Education in India

Transgender education in India faces challenges due to the lack of understanding of transgender identity and the lack of social and cultural engagement. The Indian Constitution classifies transgender individuals as a third gender, but their constitutional rights to equality and protection

are violated (**Ashok Raj**). The 2011 census counted transgender persons, but they still strive for advancement in education. The transgender community has a low literacy rate of 46%, largely due to persecution and prosecution. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights emphasizes the right to education for all (**Vats, N.K 2017**).

Educational Status

In India, there is no formal school system that transgender persons find appealing. Transgender people lose their families and their educational environments; they stop going to school and jeopardize their chances of finding work in the future. According to a detailed examination of several publications and conversations with community members and stakeholders, transgender people who are mostly illiterate or undereducated may become reluctant to pursue higher education. It is typical to need qualifications at the senior secondary or secondary (major) levels. Both the enrolment rate and the primary and secondary dropout rates are conspicuously low (**Raj Kumar, 2016**).

Problems of Transgender students

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 of India aims to transform the Indian education system by making it more inclusive and holistic. However, there are several challenges and concerns specific to the transgender community that need to be addressed to ensure that the NEP 2020 effectively includes them. Some of these problems include:

- 1. Social Stigma and Discrimination:** Transgender individuals often face significant social stigma and discrimination in educational settings, which can lead to exclusion, bullying, and harassment. This hostile environment can discourage them from attending school or participating fully in educational activities.
- 2. Lack of Inclusive Infrastructure:** Many educational institutions lack gender-neutral facilities such as restrooms and changing rooms, which can make transgender students feel unsafe or uncomfortable.
- 3. Inadequate Teacher Training:** Teachers and staff may not be adequately trained to handle issues related to gender identity and inclusion. This can result in misgendering, lack of support, and an inability to address bullying or harassment effectively.

4. Curriculum Gaps: The curriculum may not include adequate representation of transgender individuals or address issues related to gender identity and diversity. This lack of representation can perpetuate stereotypes and ignorance among students.

5. Access to Higher Education: Transgender individuals may face barriers to accessing higher education due to discriminatory admission processes or lack of support systems. Scholarships and financial aid programs may not be inclusive of transgender students' needs.

6. Mental Health Support: Transgender students often face mental health challenges due to the discrimination and social stigma they encounter. There is a need for better mental health support services that are sensitive to the needs of transgender individuals.

7. Legal and Administrative Barriers: Legal and administrative processes related to name changes, gender marker changes, and documentation can be cumbersome and discriminatory, making it difficult for transgender individuals to have their identities recognized and respected in educational settings.

8. Lack of Awareness and Sensitization: There is often a lack of awareness and sensitization about transgender issues among students, teachers, and the broader school community. This can lead to misunderstandings and a lack of support for transgender individuals.

9. Policy Implementation: While NEP 2020 emphasizes inclusivity, the actual implementation of these policies at the ground level can be challenging. There needs to be a robust mechanism to ensure that the policy's inclusive principles are effectively translated into practice.

Challenges of the transgender students

❖ **Policy Implementation:** While NEP 2020 emphasizes inclusivity, the actual implementation of these policies at the ground level can be challenging. There needs to be a robust mechanism to ensure that the policy's inclusive principles are effectively translated into practice.

❖ **Institutional Discrimination and Stigma:** It is common for transgender students to encounter institutional discrimination and stigma, which fosters a climate that is unfriendly and unwelcoming.

❖ **Limited Access to school:** Many transgender individuals may have limited access to school as a result of social prejudice, a lack of awareness, or a fear of harassment. This can have a negative impact on enrolment and increase dropout rates.

- ❖ **Lack of Sensitivity and Awareness:** Teachers and staff members may not be sensitive enough to transgender problems, which can lead to misgendering, insensitivity, and a lack of support for transgender young people.
- ❖ **Bullying and harassment:** Students who identify as transgender are more likely to experience bullying, harassment, and violence, both within and outside of the school, which negatively impacts their mental and emotional well-being.
- ❖ **Lack of Empathy and Need for Guidance:** Pervasive societal norms and prejudice often lead to transgender people being denounced by teachers. This insensitivity towards the transgender community has a negative impact on them. Many educators lack knowledge and sensitivity regarding transgender issues, making them hesitant to provide proper education and support.
- ❖ **Inclusion in Schools, Colleges, and Universities:** Including transgender students in high schools and colleges can be challenging. Providing transgender students with the same educational opportunities as their cisgender peers is difficult due to issues of inclusion with both male and female students.

Role of Higher Education Institutions (HEI's)

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes inclusivity and equity in education, which includes empowering transgender individuals through higher education. Higher education institutions (HEIs) play a crucial role in this empowerment by creating a supportive

- **Gender-Inclusive Admission Processes:** Ensure that admission processes are inclusive and do not discriminate against transgender applicants. This includes recognizing their self-identified gender and providing appropriate facilities during entrance exams and interviews.
- **Gender-Neutral Facilities:** Establish gender-neutral restrooms, changing rooms, and accommodation to make transgender students feel safe and comfortable.
- **Health and Counseling Services:** Provide accessible mental health and counseling services that are sensitive to the specific needs of transgender students.
- **Inclusive Curriculum:** Integrate transgender issues and perspectives into the curriculum across various disciplines to raise awareness and foster understanding among all students.

➤ **Research and Scholarship:** Encourage and support research on transgender issues, gender diversity, and related fields. Provide scholarships and financial aid specifically for transgender students to promote their academic and professional development.

➤ **Sensitization Programs:** Conduct regular training and sensitization programs for faculty and staff on gender diversity, inclusivity, and the challenges faced by transgender students.

➤ **Inclusive Teaching Practices:** Encourage faculty to adopt inclusive teaching practices that respect and acknowledge the identities and experiences of transgender students.

➤ **Identification of transgender students in schools**

Algorithms for identification of transgender students in schools include the following characteristics:

- The indications could be sociological, psychological, physical or behavioral;
- Observe why the student is reserved/highly reactive;
- In the clothing practices of the student; While choosing a role in school play and the engagement in various school activities;
- Issues while going to the designated toilets like repeated mocking, bullying and teasing by fellow students;
- Being uncomfortable with certain peer groups;
- Uncomfortable while addressed in gender binaries. It should be noted that this list of indicators is not exhaustive. These indications might be due to various other issues faced by the student within and outside the school environment. It is suggested that the teachers and other stakeholders interact with the student with extreme sensitivity while trying to understand the reason behind such behaviors. (Prakasha.C,2022)

➤ **Support Groups and Alliances:** Establish support groups, alliances, and resource centers for transgender students to provide peer support, advocacy, and a sense of community.

➤ **Mentorship Programs:** Develop mentorship programs that connect transgender students with role models and mentors who can provide guidance and support in their academic and career pursuits.

➤ **Simplified Documentation Processes:** Facilitate easier processes for name and gender marker changes on academic records, ID cards, and other official documents.

- **Awareness of Legal Rights:** Educate transgender students about their legal rights and provide assistance in navigating legal and administrative challenges.
- **Community Engagement:** Engage with transgender communities and organizations to understand their needs and develop programs that address those needs.
- **Collaborations and Partnerships:** Partner with NGOs, governmental bodies, and other organizations that work for transgender rights to enhance the support provided to transgender students.
- **Data Collection and Analysis:** Collect data on the enrollment, retention, and success of transgender
- **Interdisciplinary and Flexibility:** NEP 2020 encourages higher education institutions to take a multidisciplinary approach and to improve the flexibility of their course structures. This makes it easier to satisfy the interests and demands of a diverse group of pupils. Institutions should design their programs to accommodate a wide variety of students, including underrepresented students and students with impairments.
- **Equitable Access:** Inclusive education aims irrespective of their gender, level of physical ability, or financial status. Higher education institutions have to make an effort to eliminate barriers to enrollment such price, location, and discriminatory practices.
- **Special Education Programs:** NEP 2020 mandates that higher education institutions establish special education programs in order to assist students with disabilities. This may mean providing assistive technologies, accessible infrastructure, and support services to ensure that no one is left behind.
- **Local Language and Culture:** The policy encourages the use of regional languages and cultures in higher education. By establishing a rapport with the backgrounds of students and enhancing accessibility, this can support education's inclusivity.
- **Affirmative Action and Scholarships:** Colleges can overcome past barriers and encourage transgender students' access to higher education by implementing affirmative action programs. For transgender students, they can also offer financial aid and scholarships tailored to their needs to support their academic endeavors.

- **Research and Advocacy:** Academic institutions may be crucial catalysts for the growth of transgender-related research and the advocacy of inclusive policies. Universities that carry out and support study in this area contribute to our understanding of transgender experiences.
- **Campus Climate:** Creating a welcoming campus atmosphere is essential. Universities can organize workshops, events, and support groups that promote inclusivity, diversity, and acceptance. These initiatives support the development of an inclusive learning environment for all students, including transgender kids.
- **Collaboration:** Universities can partner with LGBTQ+ groups, governmental entities, and other institutions to collectively strive towards developing a more inclusive educational system and society. Collaboration can help solve systemic problems and promote policy reforms.
- **Exemption from examination fees:** Organizations that administer tests, such as the UGC, UPSC, SSC, KPSC, NTA, KEA, and others, should pay for transgender people's exams in order to encourage them to take more of them and build their confidence in their professional abilities.
- **Reimagining Vocational Education:** This strategy intends to acquire skills developed among at least 50% of learners through the school and higher education system by 2025 in order to fully exploit India's demographic dividend. Vocational education will be progressively implemented in all educational institutions over the course of the next 10 years.
- **Establishing Study Centers:** Higher education institutions and universities can enhance the achievements of transgender students by setting up dedicated study centers that focus on examining their cultural achievements and way of life.
- **Hosting Conferences and Workshops:** Transgender students can thrive when universities organize national and international conferences, seminars, and workshops on transgender issues.

Conclusion

The article emphasized challenges transgender people in India have, especially while trying to further their education. It draws attention to their historical marginalization and social exclusion as well as the difficulties they encounter, such as restricted access to healthcare and education. It underlined how structural adjustments are required to address these issues. Diverse approaches, equitable access, special education programs, promoting local language and culture, diversity and inclusion initiatives, mentorship and support services, research and innovation, teacher

preparation, technology use, community engagement, curriculum development, support services, non-discrimination policies, affirmative action, research and advocacy, campus climate improvement, collaboration, examination fee exemption, reimagining vocational education, separate study centers, hosting conferences and workshops are some of the strategies for fostering inclusivity and support for transgender students. In order to address these issues which, include mental health difficulties, bullying, harassment, and discrimination—the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is essential. It also addresses the lack of access to education and gender-sensitive facilities. In order to empower transgender kids, the essay advocates for a holistic strategy that addresses systemic issues, fosters positive changes at several levels of the educational system, and creates a more welcoming and encouraging learning environment for them.

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