



NEUTRALITY AS THE KEY FINDING: CRITICAL EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE EDUCATORS' ATTITUDES TOWARD TRANSGENDER INCLUSION IN EDUCATION

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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Abstract

This study examined and compared the attitude of prospective teacher and teacher educators towards the inclusion of transgenders in higher education institutions. Descriptive survey method was used. Sample was collected through convenient sampling method. A total of 205 students of University of Allahabad were given self-made attitude scale. Mann Whitney test was used for drawing the inferences. The results showed that the larger chunk of prospective teachers and teacher educators had neutral to positive attitude towards the inclusion of transgender in higher education institutions. The larger number of the sample having neutral attitude bears crucial educational implications and calls for curricular, pedagogical and systemic restructuring of teacher education.

Keywords: *Transgender, Inclusion, Attitude, Teachers, Teacher Educators*

Introduction

According to Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 “Transgender person means a person whose gender does not match with the gender assigned to that person at birth and include trans man or trans woman (whether or not such person has undergone sex reassignment surgery or hormone therapy be laser therapy or such other therapy), person with intersex variations, gender queers and person having such socio cultural identities such as kinner, hijra, Aravani and Jogtas”.

Historical overview on the situation of Transgenders in India

Transgenders have been a part of our Indian society and scriptures from times immemorial. However, in the Indian context, the oldest mention has been found in Rigveda. It dates 3500 years back. Our vedic scriptures Mahabharat and Ramayan have mentions of transgenders in them. Even the form of Lord Shiva *ardhnarishvara* talks about the fusion of the two forms of shiv and shakti, male and female into one. The context of 3rd identity is also seen in vedic astrology where Saturn and mercury planets are called genderless planets. (Michaelraj, 2015).

Moving forward to Jain scriptures. They have the concept of three genders and three sexualities. The jain scriptures talks about ‘psychological sex’, which recognises that biological sex and psychological mindset can be different. They do not take transgenders as something unusual due to result of this idea. However, in Buddhism, the situation is different. They mention about four genders – male, female, *pandaka* and *unhatobyanjanka*. In which *unhatobyanjanka* deals with intersex people. In Buddhism, stigma is attached to their identity unlike the Hinduism and Jainism. They were tolerant but not as accepting as in the case of Hinduism and Jainism.

Moving forward, In Mughal empire or medieval times, transgenders were duly respected. They were accorded high position as that of political administrators and advisors. They were known to be extremely loyal and trustworthy. They were used to guard ‘herams’ and even Mecca and Madina. They really enjoyed high patronage during Mughal empire. (Pattanaik, 2023; Barman,2024)

However, deterioration of the status of transgenders started during British era. The power and protection given to the transgenders were being snatched from them by the Britishers due to concept of “Victorian morality”. Victorian morality was a code of conduct which started in 19th century. It opposed all sorts of deviation from traditional gender roles and sexual norms. There was no acceptance, understanding and flexibility for something out of this system. It was completely against the practices of ancient

India. This mindset still acts as a strong barrier for the progression of the society. This morality or code of conduct has trained us to see things in only binary forms and hence everything else is seen as suspicious. (Betterhelp, 2025)

The results of this practice lead to the development of various unethical laws like Section 377 of IPC and Criminal Tribes Act, 1871. The act was extremely oppressive which denied the basic civil rights to the transgenders. All the help and support towards transgenders were prohibited and snatched. They were put on the margins of the society and that has not changed yet. They are still on the margins of the society.

Census 2011 pointed this that their literacy rate is just 56.10% and which is critically less than the national average of 74.04%. It was in 2014, under NALSA judgement, that transgenders were recognized as third gender. The law gave them identity but their socio-economic condition has not changed much.

According to the studies (NCERT 2015, Balu 2020; NHRC 2021) the average qualification of transgender is usually senior secondary or secondary. They are hardly enrolled in undergraduate degrees. They are rejected from work even after being competent. They are not given houses on rent. Their own family due to societal pressure don't want them. They are not allowed to embrace their identity openly. Even in hospitals and courts they face injustice and discrimination.

They are prone to violence, cyber bullying, transphobic attitude, mental-physical abuse and sexual harassments. They are mostly engaged in meagre jobs earning less than ₹10,000 and mostly as sex workers.

Literature Review

Studies shows that in educational setting, the environment is not at all welcoming for them, from the basic infrastructure to the needed support and help from teachers, administrators and peers. Administrators do not want them to be admitted in the schools due to mind-sets of the parents and self. Teachers have reportedly physically manhandled them. They usually opt for distance learning in Higher education for hiding their identity. Most of them have described their experiences as catastrophic so much that they have left their studies midway. (Agha 2019; Roop 2014; Gegenfurtner, 2021; Beemyn 2005; Elischberger, Glazier, Hill & Verduzco-Baker, 2017; Deshpande 2022; Das, Pyne & Prasad, 2025).

Most of them became socially secluded and isolated, suffer from trust issues, have poor social skills. They get the average qualification of less than the 10th standard and in many areas this is just primary. Most of them don't finish their schooling and hence the dreams of getting into UG PG degree is not their aspiration. (NHRC 2021; McKinney 2006; Miralles-Cardona, 2025). Most of the transgenders are facing problems in employment opportunities. They are dearth of opportunities for them due to poor qualification because of their identity. Even if they get a job, they are continuously harassed by their colleagues and a result they leave the job (Ansari 2021; Kumar & Roy 2023). This turns out to be a vicious cycle for them This is not just the case with private employers but also with the reputed public employers. Example of that is when SBI didn't mention the transgenders in their application forms and didn't response to the concern raised (Atri kar vs The Union of India & Ors ,2017). Transgender are mostly engaged in private sectors, and often in the low paid work of them as in badhai, singing, dancing, begging and as sex workers. (Kerala Development Society 2017).

Education is used as a tool to fight all the injustices and discrimination. However, in case of transgender it doesn't help. As pointed out earlier they suffered brutally in terms of enrollment, engagement, retention and academic performance due to preposterous attitude of administrators, teachers and peers. The example of Epistemic Injustice towards them are seen as in the studies of (Rajesh et al., 2016; Chandra, 2017; Kumari, 2020; Kumar & Roy 2023). They pointed out that:

- Institutional Infrastructure doesn't support them; there is lack of resources for them. Toilets and restroom facilities, Proper accommodation in the hostels, Transgender cells for mental counselling, health and healing are absent. Their grievances are not addressed.
- No gender sensitization programmes for students includes the issues of transgender. This is a severe problem as students fail to understand the basic concepts of sex and gender and the plurality of identities.
- Curriculum does not reflect their socio cultural, economic and political marginalization. No textbook has adequate content of transgender. This problem has been pointed out by SCERT Delhi recently in their report Gender Audit Report of Textbook in September 2023.
- No training and modules related to transgenders are actively used and evaluated for their effectiveness. This is reflected when teachers do not feel comfortable in discussing these issues (Mishra 2016).
- School and college administrators do not want them to get admitted in the institutions and want the government to establish separate schools for them.

Therefore, it can be concluded that social and educational injustice towards Transgenders lead them into a trap of exclusion which even government policies fail to fill. It would need serious implementation and changes to bring change. Until and unless they are included in the educational setting, inclusive education would be incomplete in its true meaning.

And hence this study aims to study the attitude of prospective teachers and teacher educators towards the inclusion of transgender in higher education institutions. The student chosen are the future teachers and administrators who would be crucial for bringing the change in the future education system to promote true fraternity.

Research Objectives

1. To study the attitude of the prospective teachers (B.Ed. Trainees) and teacher educators (M.Ed. Trainees) towards the inclusion of transgender in higher education institutions.
2. To compare the attitude of the prospective teachers (B.Ed. Trainees) and teacher educators (M.Ed. Trainees) towards the inclusion of transgender in higher education institutions.

Research Hypothesis

- 1) H01 – There will be no significant difference between the attitude of the prospective teachers (B.Ed. Trainees) and teacher educators (M.Ed. Trainees) towards the inclusion of transgender in higher education institutions.

Operational Definitions of the terms

Attitude: The American Psychological Association (APA) defines attitude as “a relatively enduring and general evaluation of an object, person, group, issue or concept on a dimension ranging from negative to positive. Attitude provides summary evaluation of target objects and are often assumed to be derived from specific belief, emotions and past behavior associated with those objects”.

Attitude here means the value judgement of prospective teacher and teacher educators towards the inclusion of Transgenders in higher education institutions.

Prospective Teachers and Teacher Educators: In the study, it is defined as those students who are enrolled in B. Ed. and M.Ed. courses respectively.

Higher Education Institutions: Higher Education Institutions means those institutions offering advance and specialized knowledge post senior secondary education in India, leading to degrees, diplomas or certificates.

Transgenders: The Transgender person (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 describes Transgenders as a person whose gender does not match with the gender assigned at birth and includes trans men or trans women, people with intersex variation, gender queer and person having socio cultural identities such as kinner, hijras, Aravani, jogtas etc.

Methodology

Descriptive survey method was used for the study. Population of the study comprised of all the prospective teachers and teacher educators pursuing B. Ed and M. Ed in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh. Sample size was of 205 students. (155 B. Ed and 55 M. Ed students). A self-made attitude scale was administered which had 30 questions. The scale was 5 pointer scale having strongly negative, negative, neutral, positive and strongly positive. The calculation of positive item scoring had the scoring of 5,4,3,2,1 and the negative statements had the inverse scoring. Maximum marks of the questionnaire were 150 and minimum were 30. Mann Whitney U test was performed for data analysis and drawing the inferences.

Findings of the research

Objective 01 – To study the attitude of the prospective teachers (B.Ed. Trainees) and teacher educators (M.Ed. Trainees) towards the inclusion of transgender in higher education institutions.

The raw scores were analysed using frequency distribution.

Table 1: Showing frequency distribution of level of attitude of the prospective teachers (B.Ed. Trainees) and teacher educators (M.Ed. Trainees) towards the inclusion of transgender in higher education institutions

Range of raw scores	Frequency	Percentage	Level of Attitude
75-90	3	1.48	Strongly negative
91-106	18	8.78	Negative
107-122	88	42.92	Neutral
123- 138	81	39.51	Positive
139- 154	15	7.31	Strongly positive

The findings indicate that 39.51% of prospective teachers and teacher educators are positive towards the inclusion of transgender people in higher education institutions. Only 7.31% of the students are strongly positive towards the inclusion. It was also observed that 1.48% and 8.78% of the prospective teachers and teacher educators have strongly negative to negative attitudes towards the inclusion of transgenders in higher education institutions. Furthermore, 42.92% of the prospective teachers and teacher educators were found to be neutral towards the inclusion of transgender people in higher education institutions.

Objective 02- To compare the attitude of the prospective teachers (B.Ed. Trainees) and teacher educators (M.Ed. Trainees) towards the inclusion of transgender in higher education institutions.

H01- There would be no significant difference between the attitude of the prospective teachers (B.Ed. Trainees) and teacher educators (M.Ed. Trainees) towards the inclusion of transgender in higher education institutions.

Table 2: Showing significant difference between the attitude of the prospective teachers (B.Ed. Trainees) and teacher educators (M.Ed. Trainees) towards the inclusion of transgender in higher education institutions

Course	N	Mean Rank	Sum rank	U	Z	p
B.Ed.	150	97.91	14686.50	488.50	2.030	0.42
M.Ed.	55	116.28	6428.50			

As the p value is $0.42 < 0.05$, and $U=488.500$, at the 0.05 level of significance. Thus, our null hypothesis is rejected and researcher can say that there is a significant difference between the attitude of prospective teachers (B.Ed. Trainees) and prospective teacher educators (M.Ed. trainees) for the inclusion of transgender people in Higher education institution.

Discussion

The findings of the present study reveal important patterns in the attitudes of prospective teachers and teacher educators toward the inclusion of transgender individuals. A combined 39.51% positive and 7.31% strongly positive attitude indicates that nearly half of the respondents (46.82%) demonstrate a favourable stance toward transgender inclusion. This is significant because teachers with positive attitudes are more likely to create safe, accepting, and equitable learning environments. Such attitudes are crucial given that transgender students frequently experience bullying, violence, and sexual harassment in educational institutions (D’Augelli & Grossman, 2006; McGuire, Anderson & Russell, 2010; Bartholomaeus & Riggs, 2019; Martino et al., 2022). Researches also state that school personnel especially teachers also contribute to the above-mentioned hostile conditions (McGuire, Anderson & Russell, 2010). Positive teacher attitudes can counteract these experiences. It may foster supportive climates and protect transgender students from harm and subsequently improve their academic, social, and emotional well-being (Bridges & McGuire, 2017; Anderson, 2003; Greyak, Thompson & Rivera, 2019; Jonas, Pérez & Smith, 2020).

However, in contrast, 1.48% strongly negative and 8.78% negative, totaling 10.26% respondents hold unfavorable attitude. It reflects a small but concerning proportion, that can significantly hinder inclusive practices. Negative attitudes among teachers often manifest in failure to intervene, victim-blaming, or reinforcing hostile environments (Higa et al., 2014; McGuire, Anderson & Russell, 2010; Bartholomaeus & Riggs, 2019; Martino et al., 2022). Even the small percentage of such teachers may elevate the fear and alienation of Transgender students and they may avoid seeking help due to inadequate institutional support (Martino et al., 2022). Therefore, even a small percentage of negatively oriented educators carries substantial implications for school climate, equity, and student safety.

The most noteworthy finding is that 42.92% of respondents hold a neutral attitude toward transgender inclusion. This neutral stance requires careful attention, because neutrality in situations of injustice align one with the oppressor (Seress, 2013). Neutral attitudes often the result of insufficient knowledge, limited exposure, or lack of socio-cultural understanding. Such neutrality may lead to passivity, and bystander behaviour (Darley & Latané, 1968). In the context of transgender inclusion, neutrality may reinforce existing gender binaries, subtle discrimination, and persistent stigmas (Connell, 2005; Herek, 2009; Budge, Adelson & Howard, 2013). Therefore, the fact that the largest group in the sample is neutral, signals a crucial educational challenge. These individuals are not yet equipped to advocate actively for transgender rights, support students, or create inclusive learning environments and thus may work like the agents of maintaining the status quo (Tarrow, 1994; Pettigrew, 1998).

Furthermore, the study found that M.Ed. trainees hold significantly more favourable attitudes than B.Ed. trainees, supporting the view that higher levels of education are associated with more positive perceptions of transgender inclusion (Markland et al., 2023). This indicates that exposure to advanced academic content, deeper pedagogical understanding, and more mature socio-cultural perspectives contribute to greater inclusivity.

These patterns underline the need for strengthened teacher preparation. Schools can become safer for transgender students only when teachers are trained, informed, and sensitive (Johnson, 2024; Gower et al., 2018; DePalma & Fox, 2018). Pre-service teachers require more preparation, perspective-taking opportunities, and pedagogical tools to understand transgender experiences (Blair & Deckman, 2019; Johnson, 2024). Many studies have shown that teachers who generally hold mildly positive attitudes, do not translate these attitudes into inclusive practices. They require intentional training and curriculum restructuring (Johnson, 2024; Martino et al., 2022; Bartholomaeus & Riggs, 2019). Therefore, M.Ed. trainees who were found having positive attitude in comparison to the B.Ed. trainees also require intensive training to translate the positive attitude to positive behaviour.

Thus, the distribution of attitudes reflected in the percentages—particularly the high neutrality—calls for targeted educational interventions to move future educators from passive acceptance toward active inclusion.

Educational Implications

The above findings indicated the gap persistent in the curricular, systemic and pedagogical aspects of teacher education. To address the gap identified following recommendations are given:

Recommendations derived from the findings

- Since the highest percentage of respondents (42.92%) hold a neutral attitude, mandatory sensitization modules must be introduced across both B.Ed. and M.Ed. programmes to shift students from neutrality to active inclusion. These modules should focus on awareness-building, empathy development, and reflective practices.
- Workshops and training programmes should be organized regularly to address misconceptions, stereotypes, and the knowledge gaps that contribute to passive neutrality or negative attitudes.
- Teacher educators should receive specialized training to model inclusive behaviour, as their attitudes significantly shape the perceptions and practices of prospective teachers.
- Field-based practicum should include structured interactions with transgender communities to develop first-hand understanding and reduce indifference.
- Institutional policies must be revised to ensure non-discrimination, gender-neutral facilities, and inclusive administrative procedures so that institutional practices reinforce classroom-level inclusion.
- Collaboration with NGOs, LGBTQ+ support groups, and experts should be strengthened to provide real-life perspectives and sustained awareness programmes within teacher education institutions.
- Continuous assessment mechanisms should be developed to evaluate prospective teachers' and teacher educators' attitudes toward transgender inclusion as part of their professional competencies.
- Research-based assignments and action research projects should be encouraged at both B.Ed. and M.Ed. levels to deepen engagement with issues related to transgender learners.
- Teacher education institutions should establish grievance redressal cells and supportive mechanisms that specifically address the needs of transgender students, ensuring a safer institutional environment.
- Peer sensitization programmes should be introduced so that future teachers learn to cultivate supportive peer cultures in their own classrooms.
- The curricula of B.Ed. should be made responsive to the issue wherever possible. For example: In the paper on Childhood and Growing Up—Growth and development, understanding childhood in socio-cultural perspectives, and issues and concerns about identity crisis, bullying, abuse and harassment should be inclusive of transgenders.
- In the Contemporary India and Education paper, the social discrimination and stratification faced by transgenders should be included. Policy frameworks and initiatives taken by the states should also be taught.
- In the paper related to community engagement or community living experiences, real-life experiences of transgenders should be included through webinars, seminars, and conferences, along with inputs from social activists or those who have enough information for sharing reflections.
- In the papers Gender, School and Society and Reading and Reflecting on Text, topics related to the social seclusion of transgenders, and their academic, professional and social situation, should be incorporated.
- The paper Creating an Inclusive School should have topics related to administrative, infrastructural and health-wise support. How a safer and inclusive environment can be built for transgenders should be taught to educators and teacher educators.
- In M.Ed. the necessary changes can be implemented across relevant subject. In the course Psychology of Learning and Development, Problems and suggestions for the better engagement of transgenders may be added. It will help in understanding their issues and problems.
- In the History and Political Perspective of Education the deterioration of the transgenders over the years and their marginalization in education may be added.
- In Communication and Expository Writing and Sociology of Education, the autobiographies, biographies, and Case Studies may add to brim the discussion.
- In Institutional Planning and Management of Secondary and Senior Secondary Education courses, Infrastructural and administrative facilities for transgenders should be examined.
- In the course Teacher Education – Issues and Challenges, underrepresentation of transgenders can be added as a prominent and persistent issue.

Conclusion

The study makes one thing clear. Attitudes toward transgender inclusion in higher education are shifting, but the shift is slow, uneven, and still fragile. Almost half of the future teachers and teacher educators carry a positive outlook, which is hopeful. Yet the largest share stands in the middle—neither here nor there—quiet, uncertain, and not fully ready to take a stand. And neutrality, in a place filled with injustice, quietly keeps the old system alive.

The significant difference between B.Ed. and M.Ed. trainees also tells a story. Education matters. Exposure matters. When people learn more, they feel more. They think wider. But this cannot be left to chance or maturity or personal effort. Institutions responsible for teachers training must step in, and restructure their policies, curriculum, pedagogy and institutional planning instead of treating transgender inclusion as an optional footnote. Their efforts of systemic restructuring of the above decide whether a transgender student will feel safe sitting in a classroom or walk away from education altogether and remain on the margins of the society.

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