



TRANSGENDER INCLUSION IN INDIAN EDUCATION: BARRIERS, POLICY COMMITMENTS, AND PRIORITIES FOR SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Legal recognition and education policy provide a basis for transgender inclusion in India, but admission alone does not ensure safety, participation, or educational continuity. This narrative and policy review examines barriers affecting transgender students and considers the educational implications of Indian law, national education policy, and selected research on school experiences. The discussion addresses recognition and records, bullying and school climate, curriculum and teaching, facilities and student support, and transitions between educational stages. Indian evidence is distinguished from international studies, whose findings cannot be assumed to apply directly across Indian settings. The review argues that institutions need coordinated procedures that protect privacy, address harassment, prepare staff, and resolve administrative obstacles before they interrupt education. It proposes responsibilities for school leaders, teachers, support staff, teacher education institutions, and education authorities. Because the review is narrative, it does not estimate the prevalence of discrimination or establish the effectiveness of particular interventions. Research involving transgender students and examination of institutional implementation are needed to determine how legal and policy commitments operate in different educational settings.

Keywords: Transgender Students; Inclusive Education; School Climate; Gender Diversity; Education Policy; India

1. Introduction

Inclusive education requires more than a formal opportunity to enrol. Students must also be able to attend regularly, participate in learning, use school facilities, seek help when needed,

and complete their education with dignity. For transgender students, routine institutional processes, including admission forms, attendance registers, classroom interactions, facilities, complaints, and examinations, can either support or obstruct these aims. A study reported by UNESCO (2018) documented the educational consequences of bullying recalled by sexual and gender minority participants in Tamil Nadu. Its findings establish the relevance of school climate to this discussion, although its recruitment method does not support generalization to all Indian students. India's legal framework recognizes transgender people's rights. In *National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India* (2014), the Supreme Court affirmed protections relating to gender identity, equality, and dignity. The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, addresses discrimination in education, while the accompanying Rules include measures relevant to inclusive schooling and grievances. The *National Education Policy 2020* (NEP 2020) identifies transgender students among groups requiring particular attention and proposes a Gender-Inclusion Fund (Ministry of Education, 2020). These sources establish commitments; they do not, by themselves, demonstrate that every institution implements them effectively. Research from other countries helps identify aspects of school life that deserve examination. In a United States study, Parodi et al. (2022) found an association between school connectedness and some mental health measures among transgender and gender-diverse adolescents. Evans and Rawlings (2021) examined positive schooling experiences, showing the value of studying supportive practices alongside difficulties. These findings cannot be transferred uncritically to India, where legal arrangements, languages, school systems, and social circumstances differ. They do, however, support a broader question: what happens to a student after admission? This paper distinguishes access, participation, and belonging. Access concerns entry into education and the documents needed to continue. Participation concerns attendance, learning, activities, facilities, and support. Belonging concerns whether a student is recognized as a respected member of the school community. The distinction is an analytical framework used in this article, not a claim that these experiences can be measured separately in every setting. The paper asks: What barriers can affect transgender students' access, participation, and belonging in Indian education, and what institutional actions follow from current legal and policy commitments? Its main focus is school education, with attention to transitions into further study.

2. Approach and Scope

This article is a narrative and policy review. It draws on the *NALSA* judgment, the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act and Rules, NEP 2020, government guidance, and selected research on gender-diverse students' educational experiences. Sources were chosen for their relevance to the paper's questions, not through a comprehensive, reproducible database search. The article must therefore not be described as a systematic review or as an evaluation of a national programme. The evidence has different purposes and limits. Indian legal and policy documents identify formal commitments. The Tamil Nadu research reported by UNESCO (2018) offers context-specific empirical evidence. International studies examine relationships among school climate, recognition, facilities, support, and student experiences, but they cannot establish the prevalence of any barrier in India. A qualitative synthesis by Tyni et al. (2024), for example, highlights the importance of relationships, safety, and belonging in transgender and gender-diverse young people's accounts; it does not provide an India-specific estimate.

“Transgender students” is used as an umbrella expression in this article. Individual identities and experiences vary, and legal, administrative, and personal categories do not always align. Age, family circumstances, disability, language, location, school type, and economic position may also affect educational experiences. Institutional responses should be attentive to students’ circumstances rather than assume that one procedure will suit everyone.

3. Population Data and the Limits of Administrative Categories

Demographic figures require precise interpretation. The 2011 Census recorded 487,803 people in the “other” sex category. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (2019) explained that the category did not specifically enumerate all transgender people: it could include others who selected “other,” while some transgender people may have been recorded as male or female. Consequently, 487,803 should not be presented as an exact count of India’s transgender population or as a current estimate. The earlier manuscript stated a 46% literacy rate without a sufficiently clear source and definition. That figure has been removed. More fundamentally, population-level figures cannot explain how a current student experiences admission, safety, instruction, or examinations. Educational research needs measures suited to these questions.

School data present further difficulties. A student may choose not to disclose their identity in an administrative record, and a form may not offer an appropriate option. Better reporting should not come at the expense of privacy. Before collecting sensitive information, institutions should specify its purpose, who can access it, and how students will be protected from identification or misuse. These are proposed safeguards derived from the administrative issues examined here, not claims that a particular reporting system has been evaluated.

4. Legal and Policy Commitments

4.1 Constitutional recognition

The Supreme Court’s *NALSA* judgment addressed the denial of legal recognition to transgender people and connected gender identity with constitutional guarantees of equality and dignity. It recognized self-identified gender and discussed exclusion from education and other public settings (*National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India*, 2014). For schools, recognition has implications for records, communication, and access to educational processes. A school must consider whether its procedures allow a student to participate without avoidable humiliation or exclusion. Recognition also has an interpersonal dimension. In a United States study, Russell et al. (2018) reported associations between the use of a young person’s chosen name across settings and mental health outcomes. The study cannot prescribe Indian administrative procedure, but it illustrates why apparently routine practices of address may matter to students. Schools should handle requests respectfully while following the applicable legal and examination requirements.

4.2 Statutory protection and its current wording

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, includes educational institutions within its framework. Its description of inclusive education concerns transgender students learning with other students without fear of discrimination, neglect, harassment, or intimidation, with teaching and learning adapted to their needs (Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019). The Rules, 2020, include educational measures and address protection against ragging through grievance redressal (Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Rules, 2020). These provisions direct attention to students’ experiences after enrolment

as well as their entry into education. The legal text must be read in its current form. The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Act, 2026, amended the 2019 Act, and India Code displays an updated version (Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Act, 2026). Before submitting this manuscript, the authors should check the amendment's commencement and cite the wording applicable on the submission date. The analysis here does not assume that every definition in the original Act remains unchanged.

4.3 Education policy and implementation

NEP 2020 places transgender students within its discussion of socio-economically disadvantaged groups and proposes a Gender-Inclusion Fund intended to support equitable quality education (Ministry of Education, 2020). The Department of School Education and Literacy's *Samagra Shiksha* implementation guidance also discusses gender and equity in relation to disadvantaged groups (Department of School Education and Literacy, n.d.). These documents provide a basis for planning and support. Whether a particular school has received resources, changed a procedure, or improved a student's experience requires separate evidence. A useful implementation question is therefore: Can a student actually use the opportunity described in policy? Answers require examination of admissions, records, staff preparation, facilities, complaints, and progression. The presence of a policy should be reported as a commitment; its effects should be assessed through institutional and student-level evidence. Figure 1 brings together the legal and policy commitments discussed above and the school practices examined in the following section. It proposes that institutional procedures shape students' experiences of recognition, privacy, safety, and support, which in turn relate to access, participation, belonging, and educational continuity. These pathways are conceptual and have not been empirically tested in this review.

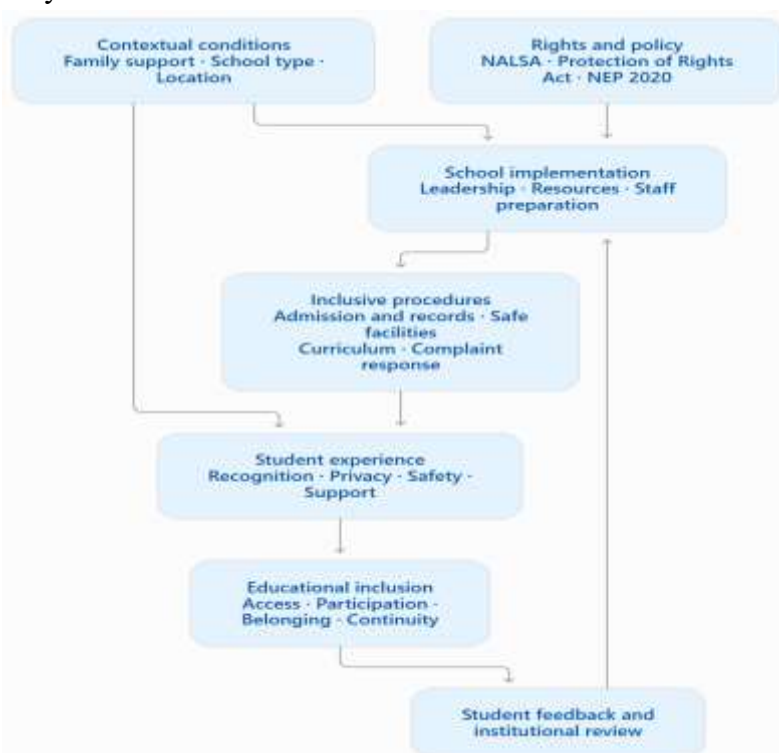


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for Transgender Inclusive Schooling

5. Barriers and Educational Responses

5.1 Admission, records, and privacy

Students move through a sequence of administrative processes: admission, attendance registration, identity verification, examinations, certification, and transfer. A problem with a record at one stage may affect the next. This is a practical implication of the recognition and educational protections discussed above, not a claim that all Indian institutions handle records identically (*National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India*, 2014; Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019).

A student facing inconsistent documents may have to explain personal information repeatedly to different officials. Such a situation could be especially consequential near an examination or transition to another institution. Schools should designate a confidential route for resolving discrepancies, clarify who may view the information, and provide timely decisions under applicable rules. Staff should discuss sensitive information only where necessary for a legitimate educational purpose.

The school's process should be reviewed from the student's perspective. Can the request be made privately? Is the responsible official identifiable? Is there a route to resolve a delay? Is the student told what documentation is required? These questions make an abstract commitment to dignity relevant to routine administration.

5.2 Bullying and school climate

School climate affects what happens between admission and completion. In the Tamil Nadu study reported by UNESCO (2018), participants recalled bullying linked to sexual orientation or gender identity and described consequences for their interactions and studies. Because participants were recruited through community networks and the survey had specific eligibility criteria, its percentages should not be interpreted as estimates for all students in Tamil Nadu or India.

International evidence strengthens the case for examining school relationships, while requiring the same contextual caution. Gower et al. (2018) found associations between protective relationships, perceived school safety, and well-being measures among gender-diverse adolescents in the United States. Parodi et al. (2022) examined school connectedness among transgender and gender-diverse youth. A systematic review by Marraccini et al. (2022) considered how school relationships and climate relate to outcomes among LGBTQ+ students more broadly. None of these studies measures the national situation in India. Together, they identify school safety and relationships as matters worth investigating and addressing locally. Schools need a reporting route that students can understand and use. It should explain whom a student may approach, how information will be handled, what response can be expected, and how retaliation will be addressed. UNESCO's (2016) international education-sector guidance treats responses to violence as an institutional responsibility involving prevention, reporting, and support. UNESCO and UN Women (2016) likewise provide operational guidance on school-related gender-based violence. These resources inform institutional planning; they do not replace India's applicable laws and school procedures.

5.3 Curriculum and teaching

Curriculum extends beyond a designated lesson about gender. Textbook examples, classroom language, activities, and teachers' responses to questions can communicate assumptions about

who belongs. A review of international studies by Fernandes et al. (2023) identified inclusive policies, social support, and school connectedness among factors associated with positive experiences for LGBTQ+ students. These findings support reviewing the learning environment as a whole, while their broader LGBTQ+ scope should not be mistaken for evidence concerning transgender students alone.

Teachers can examine materials for stereotypes and inaccuracies, use respectful language, and guide classroom discussions without requiring an individual student to disclose or explain their identity. Evans and Rawlings (2021) studied positive experiences reported by gender-diverse and transgender students, demonstrating why research and professional preparation should examine helpful school practices as well as harm. Their study was conducted outside India, so local consultation remains essential.

Teacher preparation should address practical decisions: responding to a harmful remark, protecting privacy, managing group activities, and referring a student's concern to the appropriate person. Evidence from a United States study by Day et al. (2019) examined relationships between school-level policies and students' experiences. It suggests the value of considering policies together with practice, but cannot establish which policy package will work in an Indian school.

5.4 Facilities, safety, and individual circumstances

Access to facilities is part of the school day, not a peripheral issue. A qualitative study in Western Australia found that staff and policymakers identified school toilets as potential sites of bullying while also describing practical considerations involved in changing facilities (Francis et al., 2022). In a United States survey, Murchison et al. (2019) found associations between restrictions on restroom or locker-room use and reported sexual assault among some groups of transgender and nonbinary adolescents. Neither study determines what arrangement an Indian institution must adopt. Both show why safety, privacy, and student experience should be examined when facilities are reviewed.

Schools should provide a way for students to raise concerns privately and consider arrangements under current legal and institutional requirements. A response should be assessed by whether the student can use necessary facilities safely and with dignity. Assuming that one solution suits every student would overlook differences in circumstances and preferences.

5.5 Counselling and support

A student who asks for help should be able to reach support without unnecessary disclosure. Counselling may assist a student experiencing distress, but it cannot substitute for addressing harassment, exclusion, or an unresolved administrative obstacle. The World Health Organization (2019) explained that ICD-11 moved gender incongruence out of the chapter on mental and behavioural disorders. Schools should consequently avoid treating transgender identity itself as evidence of a mental health problem.

Support can also come from relationships with teachers and other trusted adults. Gower et al. (2018) found that connectedness and perceived safety were associated with some protective outcomes in their United States sample. Tyni et al. (2024) synthesized young people's accounts of supportive and unsafe relationships. These sources support attention to the quality of interactions, while the design of services in India must be informed by local students and institutional responsibilities.

5.6 Continuity and transitions

A student's educational pathway includes changes of class, school, examination board, and educational stage. An admission procedure may work while a later certificate or transfer process does not. Institutions should therefore assess inclusion over time rather than regard initial enrolment as the endpoint.

Clear guidance before examinations and transfers, prompt resolution of document questions, and routes back into education after interruption are reasonable priorities. This paper proposes them as institutional responses; it does not claim to have evaluated their effectiveness. The Tamil Nadu evidence concerning recalled absence and discontinuation reinforces the need to examine continuity, while its methodological limits remain important (UNESCO, 2018).

6. Discussion and Institutional Priorities

The evidence and policy sources considered here operate at different levels. The *NALSA* judgment and legislation establish a rights framework (*National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India*, 2014; Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019). NEP 2020 sets an educational policy direction (Ministry of Education, 2020). Indian and international studies identify experiences and relationships that institutions should examine (Evans & Rawlings, 2021; Parodi et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2018). Keeping these roles distinct prevents a common error: using the existence of a law to claim that inclusion has been achieved.

A practical school review can follow the ordinary steps in a student's education. Can the student enrol and maintain accurate records? Attend and participate without harassment? Use facilities and support services? Report a concern confidentially? Sit examinations and move to the next stage without avoidable difficulty? These questions translate broad commitments into matters that school leaders can inspect.

Responsibility should be shared but clearly assigned. Teachers influence classroom practice; office staff handle records; counsellors provide support; leaders establish procedures and accountability. Education authorities can issue guidance and review implementation. Without coordination, one staff member may support a student while another institutional process creates a new barrier.

The evidence base also calls for restraint. International research can suggest questions and possible responses, but local implementation should be examined with students in Indian settings. Future work should distinguish the availability of a policy from students' ability to use it and should protect participants' privacy, particularly where small numbers could make individuals identifiable.

7. Recommendations

Table 1: Recommended Institutional Actions to Support Transgender Students in Schools

Responsible group	Recommended action	Main issue addressed
School leaders	Review admission, records, facilities, complaints, and transitions; assign a person responsible for resolving each type of request.	Fragmented procedures
Teachers	Examine materials and language, support classroom participation, and respond to harassment.	Classroom exclusion and unsafe interactions
Administrative staff	Resolve records and examination issues accurately and confidentially.	Interrupted educational progression
Counsellors and support staff	Offer voluntary, confidential support and identify recurring institutional causes of harm.	Inaccessible support
Teacher education institutions	Use cases and supervised practice to prepare teachers for privacy, communication, and responses to discrimination.	Gaps in professional preparation
Education authorities	Provide current legal guidance and examine whether institutional procedures can actually be used by students.	Gaps between commitment and implementation

These are recommendations derived from the review, not tested findings of this paper. They should be adapted to current law and evaluated with transgender students' perspectives.

8. Limitations and Future Research

This is a narrative review without a comprehensive search protocol or formal quality appraisal. The selected studies differ in setting, population, and design. In particular, international findings cannot establish the prevalence of barriers in India, and studies of LGBTQ+ students as a broad group cannot always isolate transgender students' experiences. The Tamil Nadu study offers valuable Indian evidence but does not provide a nationally representative estimate (UNESCO, 2018).

Further research should examine admissions, records, facilities, school climate, teaching, complaints, and transitions in different Indian school settings. It should ask whether a procedure exists and whether students can use it safely. Research involving minors or sensitive disclosures requires careful attention to consent, confidentiality, and the possibility of identification in small samples.

9. Conclusion

Indian law and education policy provide a foundation for transgender inclusion, but their educational value depends on everyday institutional practice (*National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India*, 2014; Ministry of Education, 2020; Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019). Schools should examine the full pathway from admission to completion, including safety, learning, records, facilities, support, and transitions. The proposals in this paper offer a framework for that examination. Evidence gathered ethically with students and schools is needed to determine which practices work in different Indian settings.

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