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Creating Gender Inclusive Education: An Exploratory Study to Eradicate Homophobia and Stigma Through the Introduction of Non-Binary Genders in Mainstream Curriculum

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Abstract

Gender constructivism has been an issue in South Asia for a long time which could be understood by its rich history of visibility. Though gender expressions have been socially recognized on the subcontinent since the Vedic era, their prevalence in social structures has been limited. The evidence of restricted transgender practices could be witnessed in India during the British administration when they were not allowed to move freely and were punished severely on account of free expression. It delimited the position of transgenders in society and led to the implementation of The Criminal Tribes Act which classifies transgender people as a "criminal tribe". Apart from this, transgender people were mocked and subjected to cruel treatment under the British administration which impacted their position and inclusion in mainstream society.

The present research thereby focuses on gender non-binary inclusion in school textbooks and curricula to create gender-inclusive education. It will help in developing and promoting a safe and secure environment for all genders irrespective of their trans, non-binary, and Queer identities. It includes using these school curricula as a powerful medium to teach children different concepts, traditions, and cultural heritage. The research includes a critical approach and a mixed-method approach combining both qualitative and quantitative data. In order to do this, this study also adopted an interview protocol which was developed by the researcher to investigate the need of creating a gender-inclusive curriculum by introducing non-binary characters in the school curriculum.

Keywords: *gender, inclusivity, curriculum, education*

1.0 Creating a Gender-Inclusive Curriculum

Gender has always been interpreted in line with the culture and hence it is an issue that needs to focus on different contexts. At schools, issues related to gender have been on the rise which is why there is an increased need of raising awareness among the students, teachers, parents, and administrators. It is the responsibility of an educator to provide a safe environment to students of all genders so that they continue the process of learning without any discrimination or feeling of insecurity. This includes introducing the concept of diversified genders in the school curriculum by educators to avoid bullying behaviour at schools, homes, and communities. It, in turn, will help young people to express their compassion and cultivate empathy towards other social beings. Past studies suggest that including gender in the school, curriculum fosters a culture of respect for human beings and also provides an opportunity to express or identify their genders (Clarke, 2016).

To promote a safe and secure school environment, educators should develop a curriculum that

promotes positive representation of all genders. Such curricula must also avoid prejudices against bisexual, queer, gay, lesbian, and transgender history, people, and their events. Past researchers found that transgender/gender-expansive students are identified to be most vulnerable, and they experience extreme violence, harassment and bullying of high levels. Eventually, these students fail to be successful in academics (Russell et al, 2010). To deal with this issue, several handouts have been provided on integrating genders into the school curriculum, which stress the following: a) educating staff on the complex nature of gender; b) making staff understand the complexity of bullying and harassment and eventually preventing them; c) including gender terminology and basics within the school curriculum; d) identifying and discuss the significance of gender-inclusive curriculum and develop gender-inclusive classrooms by providing examples, and e) normalizing the concept of gender diversity.

School curriculum is a powerful medium through which children learn different concepts, traditions, and cultural heritage. Textbooks are regarded to be powerful mediums for shaping the thought process of children with regard to society. Illustrations and stories embedded in textbooks determine models of thoughts and shape their ideas and beliefs. It is widely believed that textbooks teach students to differentiate between right and wrong, beautiful, and hideous. Hence, textbooks play a central role in the development of gender identity. Textbooks play a key role in determining how children understand different concepts of gender – male, female, and non-binary. Non-binary stories and illustrations still appear uncanny and unacceptable worldwide, especially in elementary classrooms. In many developed countries like the U.S., textbooks deviating from heterosexual stories or having gay parent stories, eg. 'Heather has two mommies', have remained banned from public libraries. The problem has worsened due to the involvement of religious groups which sometimes organize after-school programming on binary genders. In such places, mentioning the word queer induces shudders and alarm. The word 'Queer', which is defined to be something unusually different, in gender identity is assumed to be a questionable subject. While, in some parts of the world, schools are comfortable and confident in welcoming queer, trans stories, and illustrations into their classrooms, most countries are still not wanting to talk about it (Gray, 2020).

Keeping the above points in mind, this study proposes that when non-binary students attend schools with an inclusive curriculum they tend to experience less hostility (Brill, 2016). Creating a non-binary gender-inclusive curriculum increases the feeling of connectedness among the students. Such a curriculum promotes diversity by teaching myriads of identity. The experiences of individuals should

be considered while framing the curriculum. The curriculum should provide opportunities for the student community to understand the experiences, expressions, and perspectives of non-binary identities, which may seem to be real, imaginary, familiar, or strange to heterosexual people. The non-binary gender curriculum creates a positive environment for all non-binary students and at the same time provides an awareness of non-binary gender identity to all other students (Ong, 2022). In addition, a non-binary inclusive curriculum will enable students to empathize, collaborate, connect and associate with diverse groups of peers in this multicultural society.

The major benefits of creating a non-binary gender-inclusive curriculum include: 1) spreading awareness about the lives and struggles of transgender persons; 2) encouraging students to question the stereotypes surrounding transgender persons; 3) exposing students to more inclusive and accurate accounts of the history of transgender persons; 4) promoting acceptance; 5) validating the existence and experience of non-binary people; 6) reinforcing the value and worth of non-binary students; 7) providing a safe space for non-binary students to raise their voices.

2.0 Literature Review

According to Miroiu (2011), addressing the issues related to gender difference, gender identity, and gender expressions will help those students who feel isolated because of other people's reactions. Most of the studies claimed that non-binary/transgender students feel unprotected within the school environment, as people treat them differently due to the gender expression they identify themselves with. As a result, transgender persons experience bullying, physical assault, physical harassment, and mental harassment at high alarming rates within the school environment. In such conditions, it is essential to understand that there are innumerable ways through which people understand, identify, and represent their gender.

Smith (2020) stated that the word 'Transgender' is commonly understood as someone who identifies themselves as being different from the sex they were born into. In other words, people whose gender identity, gender experiences, and gender expressions are not cisgender are popularly known as transgender. Commonly, it is understood that gender identifications differ from one person to another based on their cultural expectations. Therefore, people identifying themselves as having different gender expressions may be referred to as gender creative, gender queer, gender expansive, non-binary, and gender non-conforming. When children at a young age identify themselves to be different from the traditional ideas of how boys and girls should look, and behave like, they seem to experience cruelty, harassment, physical assault, and bullying from peers, family, friends, teachers,

and other school staff. Much of this negative behaviour towards 'Non-binary' stems from a lack of education as well as inadequate appreciation and recognition of gender diversity.

Gender is constructed from birth through multiple interactions in social settings like family, friends, school, neighbourhood, etc. Therefore, educators need to provide children with opportunities to learn about individuals that are identified outside of the gender binary so that they begin to construct gender schema about diverse gender identities. Gender schemas are mental frameworks that individuals use to categorize and make sense of the world based on their own preconceived notions of how it should be divided up between sexes. To do this, educators need to provide a curriculum that challenges the status quo. It includes offering children literature, toys, materials, and props that represent the diverse gender identities existing within their social structure (Clarke, 2016).

Much of the past research discusses the notion that although there is increasingly more acceptance of non-binary issues in the educational curricula today, transgender ed characters continue to escape representation in picture books (Harbin, 2016; Crawley, 2017; Knopp-Schwyn et.al, 2019). There is a lack of representation of lesbian, gay, and transgender characters in textbooks resulting in a lack of non-binary identity which seems to be challenging in gender diversity. As a result, LGBTQ characters are missing from mainstream textbooks because they are not considered to fit inside the traditional notion of gender as being either male or female.

To understand the present condition of non-binary individuals, several papers identified that, from early years, derogative words are used for gays, lesbians, and transgender and, at the same time, schools teach them to remain invisible. As a result, non-binary individuals often experience harassment and discrimination. They rarely see positive non-binary representation in the media; when seeking treatment for themselves or their partner. They hesitate to reveal themselves in settings that take heterosexuality for granted. For example, at retirement homes, understanding and awareness of their needs are rare (Capehart, 2014). Several papers discussed the violence that has been used against transgender people that too at disproportionately high levels (Drescher & Byne, 2012; De Shutter, Lemmens, Kukova, Sturma, Olsen, Bielefeldt, & Harris, 2009).

In addition to experiencing high rates of sexual, physical, and verbal violence; trans people also face significant prejudice and discrimination in school, employment opportunities, housing, and access to health care. Consequently, many live outside the mainstream society in the form of marginalized groups (Teich, 2011; Bauer, et al., 2012). As members of a marginalized group, trans people experience mental illness, such as depression, and are highly prone to incidents like attempts to

suicide. Researchers have shown that pupils often report experiencing homophobia and transphobia. It was also observed that Transgender students were also affected by transphobic bullying and they reported being bullied because of the expression of their gender. Therefore, having considered this as a research gap, especially in India, there is an urgent need to create a gender-inclusive school curriculum, by introducing non-binary characters in the school curriculum. With this upsurge of non-binary individuals, there has been an expressed need for recognition of Trans individuals in children's literature.

According to Bakker (2018), there is little acknowledgement of trans youth in school curricula and daily education. Thus, schools should seek gender diversity in their text selection and include texts written by transgender authors about transgender and non-binary characters and experiences for creating a gender-inclusive school. In addition, school authorities should create classroom opportunities to discuss and challenge gender assumptions, particularly binary assumptions about gender. Transgender people face disproportionately high rates of sexual, physical, and verbal abuse, as well as significant prejudice and discrimination in the fields of education, employment, housing, and healthcare. Additionally, they are subject to extreme prejudice and discrimination in the media. Verbal and physical abuse is more likely to be inflicted on nonconforming individuals because of the larger societal stigma that is connected to gender-atypical male behaviour. Transgender people have an increased risk of attempting suicide compared to the general population, which is not surprising given that they are already at a greater risk of being bullied and harassed (Asongu et al., 2020).

In societies where alternative expressions of gender are more accepted, such as the Samoan culture which perceives a third gender of "feminine males", these individuals do not experience stigma or distress. This shows that the distress associated with people who don't conform to normative gender expectations is caused by the difficulties encountered by transgressing cultural norms and not by being transgender. There is a diversity of gender identities and expressions that lie outside of the gender binary, and this paper provides some insights into strategies educators can use to create learning environments that affirm transgender and gender-creative identities (Slee, 2018).

3.0 Research Methodology

The study was conducted by using a mixed-method approach combining both qualitative and quantitative data. Mixed-methods research fitted the pragmatic idea because it made practical use of both induction and deduction to achieve understanding and explanation. (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie,

2004, p. 14). There was a use of a sequential mixed method approach in which both the data were collected in sequence and interpreted to understand the situations. Sequential mixed methods designs are those in which a researcher seeks to elaborate on or expand on the findings of one method with another method (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). A questionnaire was used to collect data from people who are related to education: parents, students, teachers, principals, and other stakeholders. An interview protocol was developed by the researcher to collect data from teachers, non-binary students, parents, and other school staff so that we can understand the need to have a gender-inclusive curriculum.

3.1 Research Paradigm

A deductive approach was followed by the researcher to make use of the relevant practical strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methods to address the research inquiries and purpose of this study. This study involved teachers, non-binary students, and other school staff as subjects of research. The (QUAN–qual) design, also known as an explanatory sequential mixed-method design consisted of first collecting quantitative data and then collecting qualitative data to help explain or elaborate on the quantitative results.

3.2 Sampling Procedures

A random sampling technique was used to draw a sample for the present study. Therefore, the respondents were teachers, non-binary students, parents, and other staff, comprising 250 research subjects.

3.3 Research Instrument

To collect data, the following research instruments were developed and administered:

● Questionnaire

● Interview Protocol

The questionnaire is an effective way to collect information from all the members of a sample or population. In this study, the nature of the questionnaire was primarily descriptive because it aimed to estimate, as precisely as possible, the nature of existing conditions and attributes of the population. According to Burns, (2000), the use of questionnaires also guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. The questionnaire method for data collection was used and administered on a five-point Likert-type scale.

3.4 Interview Protocol

The interview protocol was developed by the researcher to investigate the need of creating a gender-inclusive curriculum by introducing non-binary characters in the school curriculum. Twenty respondents were selected for interviews to collect data from an in-depth investigation. The interview protocol was validated with the help of respondents in the field. Under this process, a face-to-face interview is to be conducted to identify the inclusiveness of a gender curriculum and the role of non-binary characters in the school curriculum.

3.5 Data Collection

The researcher collected data through Google clouds and Google Forms from the selected schools. With Google Cloud, people can quickly and simply build and manage resources thanks to the client libraries provided. Interviews were conducted for qualitative data to support and elaborate the findings of questionnaire data.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using interviews and descriptive statistics (i.e., frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation). Thematic analysis was used to identify key information that emerged from interviews.
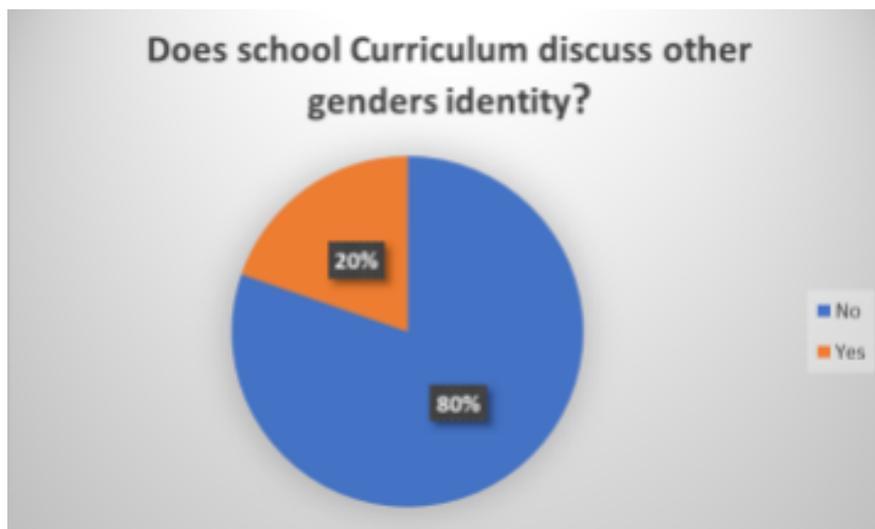
4.0 Analysis

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

Figure 1: Response towards Purpose of Textbook in Shaping Child Behaviour
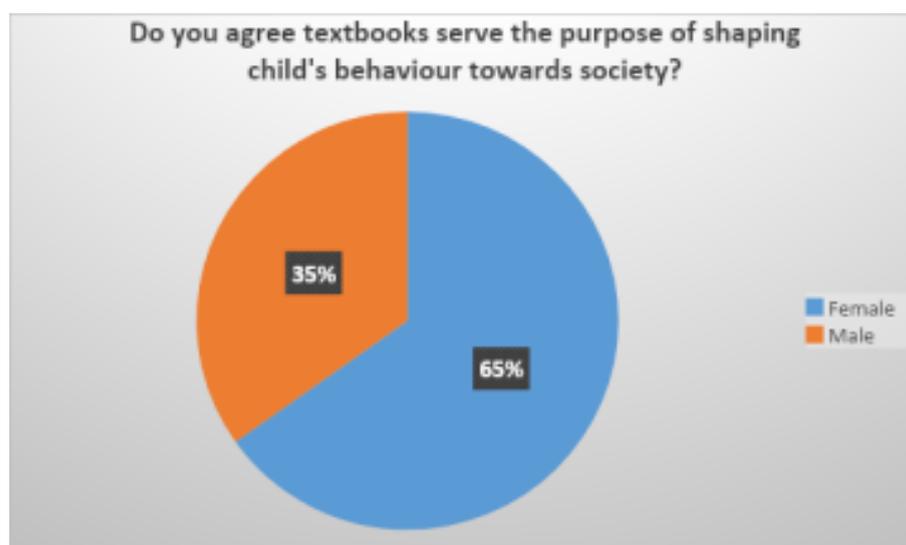

65% of the respondents are female and 35% are male; Majority of the respondents are females.

Figure 2: Response regarding School Curriculum, if it Discusses the Gender Identity

According to 80% of respondents, the school curriculum does not address different gender identities. First, it is vital to analyze some of the ideas that will guide this literature research before going on to investigate other components of the educational environment for transgender and gender non-conforming youth. Examples of such concepts include the gender binary, the words heteronormativity and cisnormativity, and the notion that sex and gender are two distinct aspects of a person's identity. In light of these ideas, it's possible that the research problem that was investigated in this work might be understood better. In today's modern culture, the idea of "gender" is widely acknowledged to be one of the most hotly debated topics of discussion. Because the concept of gender has always been defined in connection to culture, it is necessary to pay attention to this issue in all of its many contexts.

Figure 3: Response towards Inclusion of Transgender
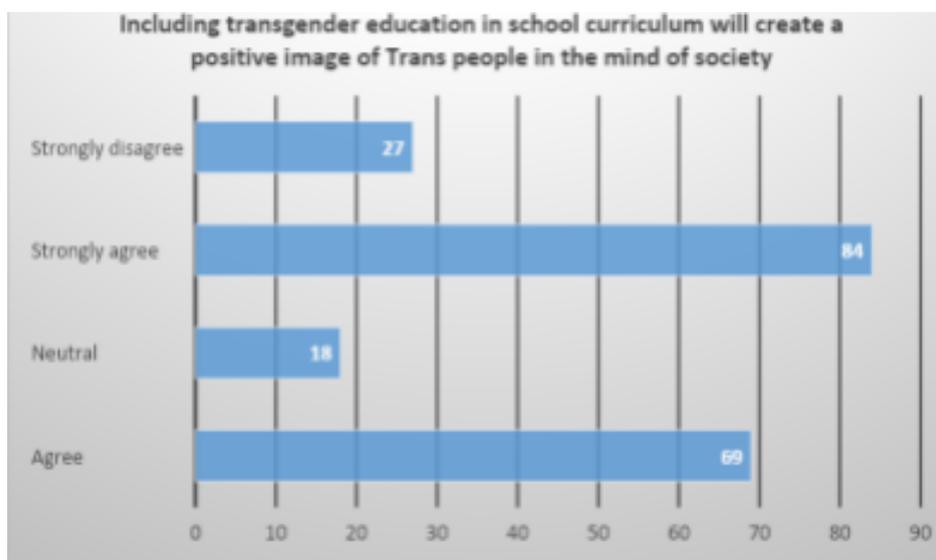
Based on the above graph, it can be said that the study mainly focuses on including transgender education in the school curriculum that will create a positive image of trans people in the mind of society. The study found that 84% of people 'highly agree' with this statement and 69% of respondents agreed with the statement. On the other hand, only 27% of respondents disagreed with this statement.

Figure 4: Response towards Introduction of Non-Binary Characters
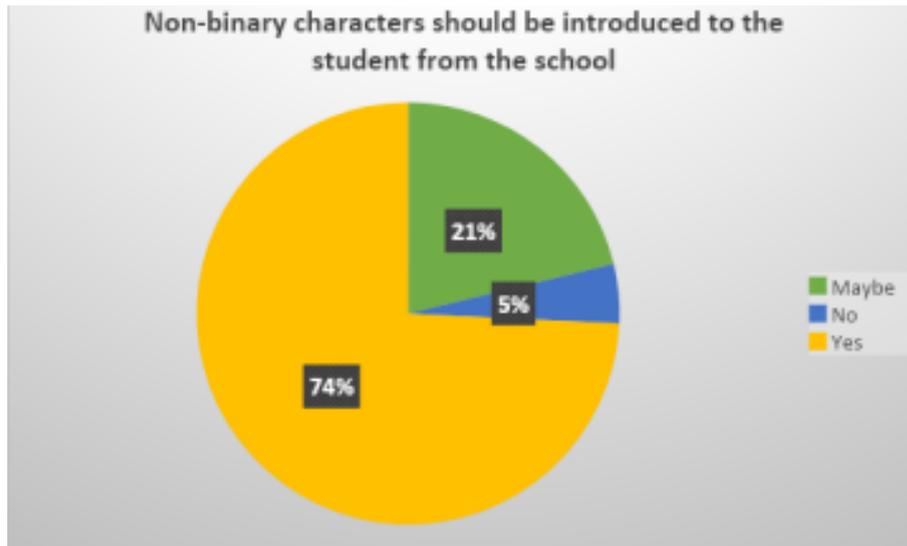
74% of respondents favoured the statement that non-binary characters should be introduced to students from schools. As a result, the role that textbooks play in the development of a person's sexual orientation and gender identity cannot be overstated. Textbooks have a significant impact on the ways in which young people conceptualize male, female, and non-binary gender identities.

Figure 5: Response on Adequacy of Teacher Training on Gender Inclusivity
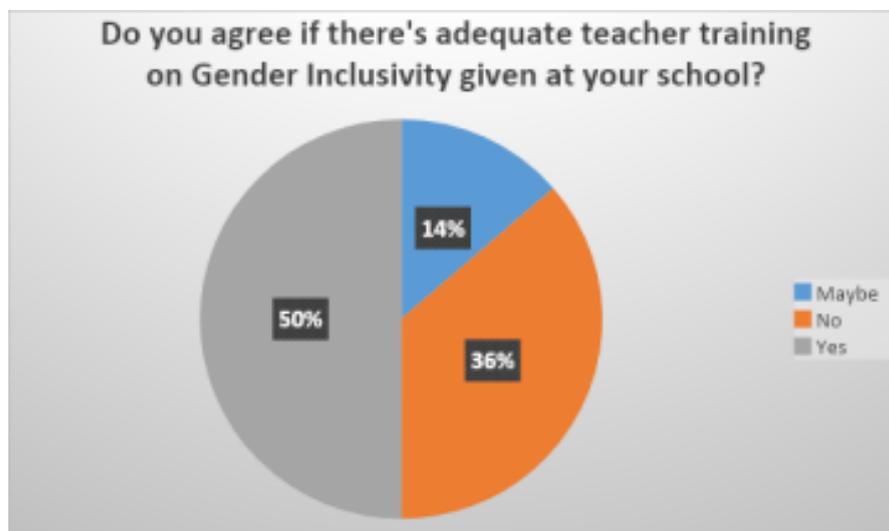
50% of respondents agreed that there is adequate teacher training on gender inclusivity even at their school. There is an increasing need to educate school communities about gender-related issues among students, staff, parents, and administration.

Figure 6: Response to Introduction of Non-Binary Identities in School
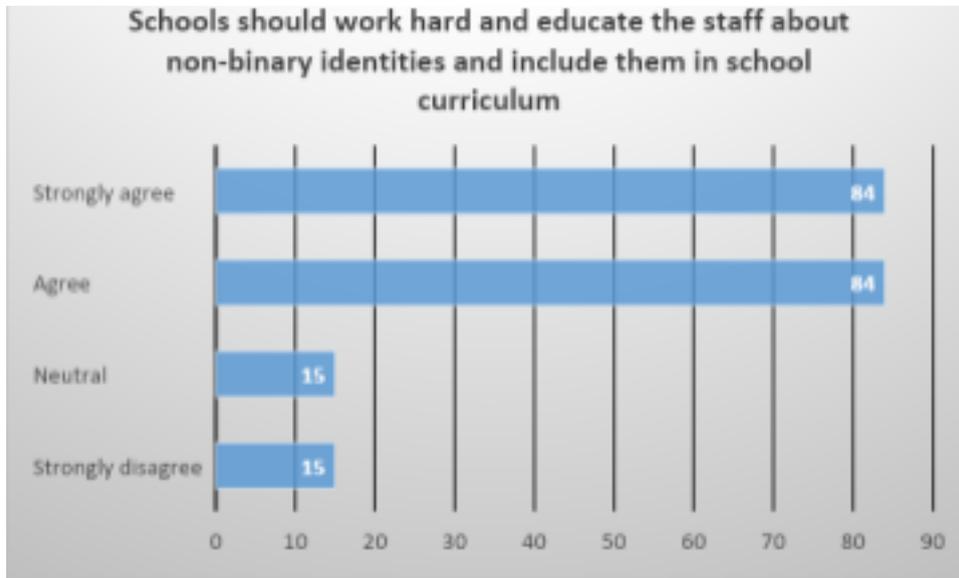
Based on the above graph it was found that 84% of people highly agree with the statement that schools should work hard and educate the staff about non-binary identities and include them in the school curriculum. On the other hand, 15% of respondents were neutral and strongly disagree with this statement.

Figure 7: Response on Effect of Non-Binary Education on Eradicating Fear among Students
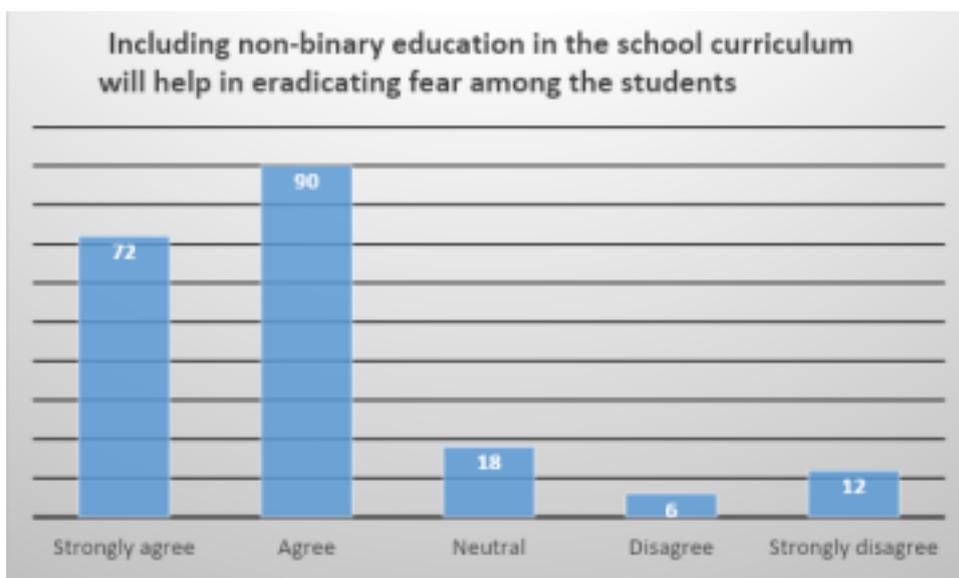
Based on the above graph it can be seen that the study mainly included non-binary education in the school curriculum with the help in eradicating fear among the student and it was found that 90% respondent agreed with this statement and on the other hand only 6% respondents disagreed with this statement.

Table 1: Response of Respondents on Questionnaire Questions

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Agree	Neutral	Agree	Disagree
Including transgender education in school curriculum will create a positive image of trans people in the mind of society	27	84	18	69	-
Schools should work hard and educate the staff about non-binary identities and include them in the school curriculum.	15	84	15	84	-
The schools help children to know more about the two main genders of society through the school curriculum. Likewise, third-gender (others) education should be included in the school curriculum.	24	66	18	78	12
Including non-binary education in the school, the curriculum will help in eradicating fear among the students.	12	90	18	72	6

The purpose of this research was to explore the problems that are experienced by educators who seek to construct gender-inclusive classrooms in which all students, regardless of their gender identification, feel secure expressing themselves in an honest manner. Teachers addressed the tactics and resources they utilized, including the use of gender-neutral vocabulary and toys, as well as the seizing of "teachable moments," and reported favourable responses from a broad range of youngsters. Educators showed a range of preparedness to handle themes linked to gender diversity in their curriculum, despite research showing that doing so is essential for questioning traditional gender norms and eliminating prejudice.

4.2 Interview

4.2.1 Thematic Analysis on Introducing Non-Binary Genders in Mainstream Curriculum

4.2.1.1 Become Familiar with the Data

First, reading, understanding, and interpreting the transcripts is the process of qualitative analysis. It is necessary to gain a comprehensive understanding of the entire data set (i.e., all data that will be used and all data relevant to all interviews) before proceeding further. This table provides a general overview of the major responses to the questions that were asked:

Table 2: For the thematic analysis, four open-ended questions from the questionnaire have been chosen. The responses from the respondents were duly noted and they are as follows:

The respondents were asked about the inclusion of transgender identity in the school curriculum and whether there should be open discussions about the same in classrooms. The responses suggested that the majority of the interviewees agreed with the notion and the responses that stood out were; from a scientific perspective (biological aspects), the need to appoint qualified teachers, and all in all that it should be done correctly and consciously mould the younger generation and at the same time, be an ally for the young LGBTQ community.
The researcher asked the respondents their opinion regarding the failure of the school management as well as a society failing to accept non-binary gender as common people who have the same feelings or thoughts as normal human beings the majority agreed with the question while a few responded that aren't aware of the issues.
Next, the researcher pointed out that the government is helping and supporting non-binary gender people to lead a better life in society and in terms of this, what can the schools do to promote the same? The responses included the introduction of the topic into curriculum, activities, seminars, training and sensitivity sessions in schools, teaching the importance of inclusivity etc. One respondent suggested that schools should refrain from using gender differences to limit discrimination from a very young age.
When asked whether the non-binary gender characters should be given special attention in the school textbooks, the responses were that instead of giving special attention, as it may lead to discrimination, all genders should be treated equally. A few stray responses pointed out that there should be special attention given as it is 'a genetic challenge.'

4.2.2 Generate Initial Codes

Coding was performed on each segment of data that corresponded to or captured something of interest to the research questions. Not all text was coded. In this study, open coding was utilized, meaning that codes were not pre-set and developed as the coding process was conducted.

Table 3: Since there were a large number of responses, codes were generated by considering the most relevant answers and discarding the repetitive answers without compromising the objective of the study.

Questions/ Responses	Interviewee Response/Codes	Theme
Q9	**Do you think the school curriculum should openly discuss transgender identity? State your justifications.**	
A1	Yes, all the topics should be discussed with a scientific **approach**.	Scientific Approach
A2	Yes. **Whatever is taught from childhood a child accepts that** and when he grows up he won't find anything unusual about transgender.	Taught from Childhood
A3	Yes, the **school curriculum should openly discuss transgender identity** as encouraging the preteen to hide their sexual orientation sends a message that you think there's something wrong with them. Discussing their identity gives them a sense of belongingness.	School Curriculum Inclusion
A4	Yes they should discuss it as they are also part **of society**. Absolutely and it should be portrayed in such a way that it is **something natural** that it is not man-made and it is completely normal.	**Part of the Society**
A5	Yes it should. Categorizing and stereotyping are a result of **societal steadfastness** in the belief that only male and female genders are normal, which is far from the truth. As we open up to	**Societal Steadfastness**

	the obvious reality, it is important to **sensitize children** about the normalities of **gender identities**.	
A6	Yes. Discussing the taboos, prejudices, etc would not only **raise awareness** but could be a big step that discriminates "them" from the "others".	**Raise Awareness**
A7	It can be a good idea to make students understand the real world in which they are living. And **humanity should be taken as an utmost priority rather than gender** discrimination.	**Humanity over Gender Discrimination**

Q10	**In your opinion, school management as well as a society fail to accept non-binary gender as common people who have the same feelings or thoughts as normal human beings?**	
A1	Yeah **school and society fail** to do so in fact, school is the place where we can start change.	**Failure from School and Society**
A2	Yes. For ages, they have **been projected incorrectly by society** as a whole. due to which their own parents also do not accept them because of this they get into menial acts for their survival.	**Projected Incorrectly**
A3	Yes. However, the acceptance and recognition of non-binary people is a recent phenomenon **which will take time to sink in** schools because of the **bureaucratic process of curriculum design**.	**Bureaucratic Curriculum Recent Phenomenon will take Time**
A4	Yes, it can be that not everyone in the management has the same outlook, but the majority are **biased**.	**Biased Outlook**
A5	Yes. They look forward to them as **outcasts** and keep them away from society and a **child learns what it**	**Out-Casted Negatively Influences Children**

	sees.	
A6	To a certain extent, yes! Fortunately, in some sections of society (**especially in larger cities**), this is somewhat gradually changing but it is still a long way.	**Somewhat Changing**
A7	Yes, **school management is mostly not interested** in creating an inclusive space for other genders because of **parents creating issues** and maybe not wanting to get their child's admission done in that school.	**Lack of Effort from School Management; Lack of Parental Awareness**

Q12	**The government is helping and supporting non-binary gender people to lead a better life in society. If yes, list what schools can do.**	
A1	Introduction to the **curriculum**.	**Curriculum**
A2	By accepting their admission, the school environment should be **congenial towards such students**. Schools can conduct seminars on sex education, gender neutralization and specific types of sexual identities and how to be sensitive towards people who are not straight or male or female.	**Congenial Attitude**
A3	**Employ people of all genders** as administrative and academic staff.	**Employ People of all Genders**
A4	Some **special schools** for them.	**Special School**
A5	**Introduce the topic** from lower classes even if it's not there in **textbooks**.	**Introduce through Textbooks**
A6	They need to **remove the categorization of male, female, transgender**. As this is the first step towards discrimination. (However**, I strongly do not include gay/lesbians in this category as they are manmade.**)	**Remove the Categorization of Male, Female and Transgender**

	Every child should be treated equally, irrespective of their gender. Most of the schools are harsh towards males and soft towards females. And God only knows what will happen if the teachers come to know about any child being transgender. Psychological abuse is far more damaging in a child than physical abuse. So teachers and school management need to be given proper in-house training to be more sensitive about such things.	
A7	Be it any taboo, any prejudice, any stereotype, any opinion. **Schools just need to give students open space**.	**Provide a Safe/Open Space for Students**

Q16	**Do you think non-binary gender characters should be given special attention in school textbooks?**	
A1	It **will create discrimination**.	**Creates Discrimination**
A2	No.	**No**
A3	Given special attention to anything makes it more prominent to be noticed**. Let it flow**. Until then children wouldn't know about the third gender and they never give importance to them. There are already many burning issues waiting for attention.	**Natural Flow**
A4	Textbooks create a **new vision in children's minds** and will change their thinking patterns. As a result, **parents will also be able to change their way of thinking**.	**Introduction in Textbooks**
A5	It **may be difficult for everyone to accept**.	**Difficult to Accept**

| A6 | Because **some non-binary don't want extra attention, they** want the same as everyone in school. | **Could cause Trauma** |
| A7 | They should be **normalized** rather than shown as extra attention. | **Normalized Over Giving Extra Attention** |

4.2.3 Generate Key Themes

The following table demonstrates the themes identified from the respondent's opinions and relevant research questions, along with their corresponding sub-heads.

Table 4: Respondent's Response Arranged as per Themes

As shown in the following table, themes have been identified based on the responses to the questionnaire, along with sub-headings that correspond to those themes.

Reasons behind Gender Discrimination	Taught from Childhood
	Societal Steadfastness
	Projected Incorrectly
	Failure from School and Society
Role of Schools	School Curriculum Inclusion
	Scientific Approach
	Bureaucratic Curriculum
	Lack of Effort from School Management
	Creates Discrimination
	Could cause Trauma
Role of Parents	Negatively influences Children
	Lack of Parental Awareness

	Congenial Attitude
Role of Society	Recent Phenomenon
	Somewhat Changing
	Biased Outlook
Strategies to Improve Transgender Inclusivity in Schools	Employ People of all Genders
	Introduce through Textbooks
	Remove the Categorization of Male, Female, Transgender
	Provide a Safe/Open Space for Students
	Introduction in Textbooks
	Seminars, Workshops, Sensitivity Training
	Normalized Over giving Extra Attention

1. Reasons behind Gender Discrimination: Bullying of transgender individuals is a widely prevalent phenomenon across the country. As a result of a lack of gender identity awareness, students and teachers have been instigators of bullying and harassment. As our mindsets and institutions have been trained to categorize people only into heterosexual binary categories, transgender students face real challenges in our schools. The binary expression of school uniforms, seating arrangements, school assemblies, and washrooms does not acknowledge the existence of transgender individuals in our society. Thus, most transgender people cannot pursue various career opportunities. Due to this, their mental health is negatively affected to a great extent, resulting in a high dropout rate among them. Furthermore, even when they can work in mainstream professions, they are subjected to verbal and sexual harassment, bullying, and discrimination from their colleagues. However, recognition has always come at a cost, with an added struggle, even though Transpeople exist across all classes, races and castes. In terms of access to social equality, rights, education, employment, and so on, the trans community has suffered due to society's dichotomous attitude towards them; how they are simultaneously marginalized and revered simultaneously. From the interviewees' responses, it can be understood that social steadfastness, stereotypical representation in mainstream media and lack of

awareness has largely contributed towards the blatant discrimination of the transgender community in India, especially in schools.

2. Role of Schools: Several incidents illustrate the lack of sensitivity and awareness in Indian educational institutions. The challenges transgender students face in schools are real and need to be addressed by our educational system. Like our societal mindsets, our institutions are trained to only distinguish between heterosexuals and homosexuals. It is clear from the socio-economic situation of transgender people in our country that they are not eligible for education. Despite their predominant concerns regarding survival, education remains regarded as a luxury by them. Transgender children face social stigma outside of school and are not considered dignified members of society. Therefore, schools and educational institutions must become 'trans friendly' to address the stigmas associated with their identity. Transgender students require continuous representation and support in the educational system to overcome these stigmas. Only through gender-inclusive education and curriculum can mainstream social perceptions be transformed. Unfortunately, the government and successive governments' policymakers consistently ignore transgender students and persons in general. The problem cannot be solved simply by giving them a separate gender category to check on forms.

3. Role of Parents: According to the National Human Rights Commission, the rights of transgender people are significantly weakened, and they feel isolated within their homes, communities, and institutions due to rampant discrimination against them. As a result, this is highly reflected in the responses, as while most parents asserted the need to educate parents and not only students about gender inclusivity, there were also assertions that some parents may not wish to enrol their children in schools that promote gender inclusivity (Lau, 2018). By definition, the role of the parents here will inherently negatively affect the children, who will grow up to be discriminatory, just as their parents did. Therefore, it is critical that parents take a step towards educating themselves and steer away from the congenial attitude.

4. Role of Society: Though transgender people have played an integral role in Indian history- they have appeared in Indian mythology, myths, Ramayana, Mahabharata, etc.- heteronormative Indian society has not been accepting nor welcoming towards them. Until the very recent past, there was no mention of equal rights for transgender individuals in modern Indian history. Even after achieving independence, transgender individuals did not experience significant improvements in their working

conditions. The cinema is, without a doubt, a reflection of society, and transgender individuals are predominantly limited to the role of dancers or sex workers in Indian cinema. It has been a few years since the honourable Indian courts issued judgments which have increased transgender acceptance in society. However, acceptance in society as equal members still seems like a pipe dream simply due to the lack of awareness and prejudiced mentality of Indian society.

5. Strategies to Improve Transgender Inclusivity in Schools: In order to address stigmas related to transgender identity, transgender students must be continuously represented and supported in the educational system. Gender-inclusive education and curriculum can only significantly change mainstream social perceptions. According to the interview responses, schools can promote trans inclusivity by employing people of all genders, introducing it through textbooks which could not only aid the students but also the parents, removing the categorisation of males, females, and transgenders, providing a safe, open space for students, incorporating trans-inclusivity into textbooks, providing seminars, workshops, and training on sensitivity issues. In addition, inclusion should be normalized rather than given extra attention, which may trigger trauma. At the same time, one of the responses suggested the need to have a 'special school' for the trans community, which in itself is a form of discrimination.

5.0 Findings and Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This section mainly defined the key findings and based on that discussion is to be provided in the below part.

5.2 Analysis and Discussion

5.2.1 Questionnaire Analysis

To focus on collected data, the study included descriptive analysis and found that 65% were female and highly participated in the study. The study also examined the school curriculum and discussed other gender identities and found that 80% of respondents were in the favor of this statement. The study also examined the role of transgender education in the school curriculum and found that 84% of respondents strongly agreed, 69% respondents agreed, 27% respondents strongly disagreed and 18% respondents were neutral with the statement of including transgender education in school, a curriculum that will create a positive image of trans people in the mind of society.

Additionally, 74% of respondents favoured the statement that non-binary characters should be introduced to students from schools. The study also examined the point of view of respondents in which 84% strongly agreed on the results of the school working hard and educating the staff about non-binary identities and including them in the school curriculum. Apart from this, 78% of respondents were in favour of the statement that the school needs to help the children to know more about the genders of society through the school curriculum. As a result, a majority of the respondents were in favour of including third-gender education in the school curriculum. Additionally, 50% of respondents agreed that there is adequate teacher training on gender inclusivity even at their school, and 80% of respondents strongly agreed that schools should work hard and educate the staff about non-binary identities and include them in the school curriculum. On the other hand, the study also found that 90% of the respondents were in the favour of the statement that including non-binary education in the school curriculum will help in eradicating fear among the students.

5.2.2 Interview Analysis

The findings of this research suggest that teachers may be more constrained by their own worries than by the parents themselves. This is because teachers were able to alleviate family objections, despite the fear of parental retaliation being the most frequently reported obstacle to teaching about gender diversity overtly. It is essential to do research to determine whether or not these concerns are founded in reality. It is impossible to place a sufficient amount of emphasis on the significance of having open conversations about gender in the classroom, and training programmes for teachers should reflect this reality (Grant et al., 2020).The number of transgender persons seen and heard in the media is at an all-time high, and transgender celebrities are establishing more of a public profile than ever before. Despite this, anti-trans prejudice is still prevalent, and transgender people face a disproportionate degree of physical assault. Because transgender people defy cultural standards associated with both sexuality and gender, which have recently been brought to the centre of the conversation as a result of recent adolescent suicides, they are subject to a higher level of persecution than LGBTQIA+ groups.

In the interview, students were asked whether or not they believed that transgender identity discussions should be promoted in schools as well as if they believed that transgender persons should be part of the curriculum. Some of those who participated had concerns about the usefulness of providing transgender identity. The author of the research then posed the question. The responses showed that most people agreed with the notion and that it should be done to correctly and purposefully shape the next generation while still being an ally for the young LGBTQIA+ community.

It was suggested that schools could teach students the importance of inclusion, have seminars on the topic, include it in extracurricular activities, host training and sensitivity workshops for students, and a great number of other suggestions. One of the respondents said that youngsters should not be taught to be prejudiced against because of their gender that they are. The large majority of respondents agreed with the question concerning the impossibility of school administration and society to recognise non-binary gender as ordinary persons with the same feelings and thoughts as normal humans, while a minority number of respondents claimed to be ignorant of the issues (Lao et al., 2022). The study also reflected on the adoption of non-binary gender characters in textbooks and the need to treat all genders equally rather than singling out only one.

It is possible that parents and administrators at primary schools may question whether or not it's appropriate for instructors to talk about gender diversity with their pupils. There are a variety of approaches that are age appropriate that may be used to have these conversations with children of all ages about gender, especially non-cisgender identities and the fact that all children live in communities and homes that are varied with regard to gender expression (Cutler et al., 2022). In fact, the children's own questions and observations on colours, toys, people in their lives, and the students' own experiences with their bodies and genders may serve as a starting off point for such discussions. Through the exploration of such issues using a range of texts and pedagogical approaches, children's knowledge of the gendered possibilities that are available to them may be enlarged.

6.0 Recommendation

It is not just transgender students who are limited by transphobic bullying. All students are limited in the expressions of their gender by the ways that society explicitly and implicitly policies gender (Sherer, Baum, Ehrensaft, & Rosenthal, 2015). The purpose of this research is to normalize the life of transgender people through literature and school curriculum. Schools should seek gender diversity in their text selection, including texts written by transgender and non-binary authors about transgender and non-binary characters and experiences to create a gender-inclusive school. In addition, school authorities should create classroom opportunities to discuss and challenge gender assumptions, particularly binary assumptions about gender. It is the responsibility of the educator to provide a safe environment to students, of all genders, so that children continue the process of learning.

To avoid bullying behaviours at schools, homes, and communities, educators should include the

concept of gender in the teaching-learning process, which will help young people to express their compassion and cultivate empathy for social beings. It is also essential for schools to foster a culture of respect within human beings by focusing on gender in the school curriculum because it provides an opportunity to express or identify their genders. Keeping the above points in mind, this study proposes that when non-binary students attend schools, with an inclusive curriculum, they experience less hostility. Creating a non-binary gender-inclusive curriculum will increase the feeling of connectedness among the students in line with the school community. The non-binary gender-inclusive curriculum promotes diversity by teaching myriads of identity, which will reflect the experiences of individuals. Therefore, the curriculum serves as a mirror and hence, becomes a self-affirmation.

Trans individuals, like other members of their stigmatised community, are prone to mental health concerns including depression and acts like suicide attempts. Previous research has shown that a significant number of children have reported being subjected to homophobia and transphobia in their respective educational environments. It has also been established that students who identify as transgender are targets of bullying that is motivated by transphobia. The efforts made by transgender students to openly present themselves as the gender they identify with are often at the centre of these situations (Macbeth, 2022). It is recognised that there is a dearth of research on the significance of including non-binary gender perspectives in educational programming. This exemplifies the vital need of including non-binary characters in instructional materials in order to cultivate a more gender-inclusive educational environment.

In view of the recent increase in the number of persons who do not identify with a particular gender binary, it is essential for educational institutions to include transgender and non-binary characters and experiences in written works that have been penned by transgender authors as part of their initiatives to provide gender-inclusive learning environments. Furthermore, school officials should create space for students to evaluate and challenge gender stereotypes, particularly those that reinforce a binary view of gender roles. We live in a society that is saturated with messages relating to gender (Grant et al., 2020). We are constantly being bombarded with messages that define what it means to be a "normal" or "regular" woman or man.

Every aspect of society is plagued by sexism to some degree. According to research published in the Annual Review of Psychology, children "begin actively engaging in learning information about what things signify and how they should behave" around the age of 18 months. Components of this change include gender normative behaviour and the intuitive identification of gender with broad stereotypes.

That is, men are cutting their hair short or children are playing with dolls. Because children are most likely to solidify their ideas and views at this stage of their development, the preschool years are an essential period for the formation of a child's worldview (Slee, 2018). Teachers have a significant influence on the perpetuation of gender disparity in the classroom because of the early foundations they build for the behaviour and perception of their pupils. The classroom is where it all starts, and the educator is where it all begins when it comes to any effort to create educational equality. Educators that are effective treat their students with respect and create an environment in which all children feel it is safe to express themselves and participate in the learning process.

7.0 Conclusion

As per the above-detailed information, it can be concluded that the major aim of the research is to eradicate transphobia through the introduction of the non-binary gender in the mainstream curriculum. Apart from this, various past researchers discussed that teachers reported a wide range of acceptance and willingness to address the topic related to gender diversity in their curriculum in India. Previous literature indicated that explicit discussion about gender is integral to challenging traditional gender expectations and preventing biases. The study found that discrimination, homophobia, and transphobia affect the life and choice of non-binary persons in all the social life areas in India as well as across the world. The study also examined the fear of discrimination, homophobia, and transphobia that contribute to the invisibility of non-binary persons. It also includes instances of violence that have been used against transgender people (Drescher & Byne, 2012) (De Shutter, Lemmens, Kukova, Sturma, Olsen, Bielefeldt, & Harris, 2009). Additionally, the study also indicated high levels of sexual and verbal violence faced by trans people. It includes experiences of discrimination in school, employment opportunities, housing, healthcare, and many lives outside the mainstream society (Teich, 2011) (Bauer, et al., 2012). Research indicated that teachers rarely intervene in instances of Transphobic and homophobic bullying in the (Erickson-Schroth, 2014) school and trans-students often perceive teachers to be unsupportive of them. Unsurprisingly, many trans-adults reported that attending school was the most traumatic aspect of growing up. From the above, it is clear that the education system has failed to create safe spaces, free from gender-based bullying that is inclusive of students of all genders.

One of the two additional stressors identified by the model for which persons with minority identities are at elevated risk is the direct experience of prejudice and discrimination as a direct result of their minority identification. Foreseeing future tensions might result in immediate anxieties, which can

lead to disguising one's sexual orientation and internalized homophobia. The authors of this study argue that relationships and sex education curriculum that acknowledges and positively affirms a broad variety of identities would be beneficial for young people with non-normative gender identities and sexual orientations (Mouchritsa et al., 2022). We also argue that delaying the introduction of inclusive relationship education is a tactic that might exacerbate minority stress among young people who see themselves as part of these groups. As a result, we argue that a curriculum that places a focus on affirming relationships and sex education may help LGBTQIA+ youth deal with the pressures of being a minority. The establishment of unfavourable attitudes is aided by the dissemination of stereotypical depictions of LGBTQIA+ people in the media and in school textbooks, as well as by the dissemination of information that is both out of date and inaccurate regarding what defines sexual orientation and gender identity. The non-binary gender curriculum creates an inclusive learning environment that benefits all students, not just those who self-identify as non-binary. This is beneficial for all students. Students who are instructed to utilize a non-binary inclusive curriculum will, as a consequence, be better prepared to comprehend, collaborate with, and develop connections with their peers who come from a broad spectrum of identities in the contemporary multicultural society. By including conversations about gender in their lesson plans, teachers may do their lot to combat the problem of bullying in the school setting, as well as at home and in the wider community. The ability of young people to better express their empathy and compassion, as well as to have a greater knowledge of the experiences of others whose lives are different from their own, will improve.

There have only been a handful of official condemnations made for this sort of talk. The marginalization of LGBTQIA+ persons and the unwillingness to analyze their human rights status in a meaningful manner is a recurrent theme throughout this research (Alieto, 2022). There are a lot of individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) who don't come out to their friends, family, or workplace because they are afraid of being ridiculed or treated differently. They are afraid that if others discover their sexual orientation or gender identity, they will be subjected to discrimination, hatred, rejection, or even physical danger. This is because they believe that the broader community will not accept them.

When children reach their adolescent years, they start to develop an awareness of the differences between themselves and other people their age. At this point in time, the impact of a teacher is absolutely essential for moulding the pupils' perceptions of acceptable gender roles in society. In addition to this, the interactions permanently influence how individuals see themselves as well as the

opportunities that are available to them. The practice of teaching children to line up according to gender, the use of terms such as "both genders" or "opposite sex," the maintenance of gender-specific dress codes, locker rooms, PE classes, and graduation robes, and the failure to include transgender and gender-variant people in English language arts curricula are all practises that send unmistakable messages about which genders are more deserving of recognition (Asongu et al., 2020).

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Appendix

Questionnaire for introducing Non-binary genders in mainstream curriculum

Note: Your honest and unbiased answers will directly impact the research study

1. Name _____

2. Sex
🎬 Male
🎬 Female
🎬 Others

3. Non-binary is, generally understood as, having a gender identity that does not fit into the male/female binary. Do you agree with the above statement?
🎬 Yes
🎬 No

4. Queer is a word that describes sexual and gender identities other than straight and cisgender.
🎬 Strongly agree
🎬 Somewhat agree
🎬 Neither agree nor disagree
🎬 Somewhat disagree
🎬 Strongly disagree

5. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people may all identify with the word queer.
🎬 Strongly agree
🎬 Somewhat agree
🎬 Neither agree nor disagree
🎬 Somewhat disagree
🎬 Strongly disagree

6. Do you agree textbooks serve the purpose of shaping a child's behaviour towards society?
🎬 Yes

🎬 No

7. Do you believe that certain gender stereotypes and prejudices exist in society because the existing school curriculum is designed in such a way?

🎬 Yes

🎬 No

8. From the beginning of school education, a child is shown a male and a female character only, with certain gender stereotypes, do you agree?

🎬 Strongly agree

🎬 Somewhat agree

🎬 Neither agree nor disagree

🎬 Somewhat disagree

🎬 Strongly disagree

9. Do you think school curriculum should openly discuss transgender identity? State your justifications.

_____

_____

_____

10. In your opinion, school management as well as society fail to accept non-binary gender as common people who have the same feelings or thoughts as normal human beings?

_____

_____

_____

11. The government is helping and supporting non-binary gender people to lead a better life in society. Do you think schools can help the government in this mission?

🎬 Yes

🎬 No

12. If yes, list what schools can do

_____

_____

_____

13. The schools help children to know more about the two main genders of the society through school curriculum. Likewise, third gender (others) education should be included in school curriculum.

🎬 Yes

🎬 No

14. Do you think creating a school curriculum that is inclusive of non-binary gender will help the future generation to accept them more easily?

🎬 Yes

🎬 No

15. Do you think non-binary gender characters should be given special attention in the school textbooks?

🎬 Yes

🎬 No

16. State the reason for above answer

_____

_____

_____

17. Do you think non-binary gender people face higher rates of discrimination and violence in society?

🎬 Yes

🎬 No

18. In your career, have you had non-binary gender children in your classroom?

🎬 Yes

🎬 no

<u>Rate your satisfaction level about the following:</u>

19. Including transgender education in school curriculum will create a positive image of Trans people in the mind of society.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

20. As a teacher, you will push for a gender-expansive curriculum in early childhood education.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

21. Including non-binary education in the school curriculum will help in eradicating fear among the students.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

22. The Non-binary characters should be introduced to the student from the school.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

23. Schools should work hard and educate the staff about non-binary identities and include them in school curriculum.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

24. Do you agree if 'third gender' characters are introduced to children at their level, it can make the society a better place to live in?

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

25. Do you agree if there's adequate teacher training on Gender Inclusivity given at your school?

- Yes
- No

Thank you for your sincere participation!