

An Exploratory study on Academic Experiences and Perception of Transgender students in context of Double Marginalisation

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HOW TO CITE:

Navin Kumar, Ravi Kumar, Dhriti, Neetu Singh (2026). An Exploratory study on Academic Experiences and Perception of Transgender students in context of Double Marginalisation. International Journal of Special Education, 41(16s), 672-680

ABSTRACT:

Discrimination in Indian society is based on gender, identity, socioeconomic conditions, caste and religion. Gender identity-based discrimination is double marginalised in society. Transgenders are one of them. The educational status of transgender individuals is poor because they face family rejections, bullying in schools, discrimination in educational institutions, violence in society and harassment at different stages in their lives. This study aims to assess transgender students' perception and academic experiences in higher education. The main objective of the study is to assess transgender students' perception of higher education towards their inclusivity in society and to explore their expectations from institutional support that enhance their academic development. This study also identifies gaps between current experiences and desire reforms on the basis of government policies, well-being and institutional facilities. A semi-structured interview schedule was administered on 55 transgender students. Data were collected through online and offline interviews with transgender students. Qualitative analysis indicates that participants deal with a variety of intertwined forms of discrimination, institutional negligence and stigma. This paper shows that they face social exclusion, familial rejection and financial difficulties that further limit their access to education and involvement in academic life. The findings of the paper also shows that institutional environment frequently perpetuates heteronormative and binary gender norms in Indian society. To cater the issues like double marginalisation of transgender students, this paper suggests the policy intervention should go beyond symbolic representation. This paper also suggest that marginalised students can be included in main stream through curricula based on gender affirmation, and teacher sensitization and also it focused on support services that acknowledge socio structural vulnerabilities and their gender identities.

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Keywords: double marginalisation, transgender students, higher education, family rejection, inclusion, gender identity.

Introduction

Transgender students in India occupied a deeply marginalised position in society facing discrimination in many layers that are rooted in gender identity, caste, class and other societal discrepancies. Within the education system, mainly in higher education transgender students faced systematic barriers related to admission, infrastructure, curricula, every day social interactions. In India Despite the policy like NEP 2020 transgender students still faces extreme exclusion from the society.

According to NEP 2020 transgender persons are recognised as SEDGs (socio-economically disadvantaged groups), making education mandatorily and equitable and provide support like inclusion. Inclusive education without discrimination is recommended by transgender protection act 2019. Yet transgender students face societal stigma, binary curricula, peer harassment and inadequate infrastructure leading to their dropout.

Although the Supreme Court of India's Nalsa 2014 judgment formally acknowledge the rights of transgender persons, and the National Education Policy 2020 recognised transgender students within the SEDGs category, the educational experiences of many transgender students indicate that these policy commitments have not been fully reflected in institutional practices. Many continue to face barriers that prevent them from experiencing genuinely inclusive and supporting learning environment. (Mittal & Goel 2024).

The concept of double marginalisation highlights the overlapping disadvantages experience by transgender students, who are affected not only by rigid gender norms but also by existing socio-economic inequality (Mittal & Goel 2024). Despite the NEP 2020 focus on promoting educational equity for SEDGs, transgender students continue to encounter multiple forms of exclusion. These include higher dropout rates,

limited representation in school curricula, discriminatory peer interaction and inadequate access to gender inclusive facility (Burman n. d.; Mittal & Goel 2024).

In addition, many transgender students describe educational institution as spaces where they feel excluded, unsafe, or repeatedly misgendered, resulting in a weakened sense of belonging and reduce engagement with their education.

This paper explores perception of transgender students facing double marginalisation in higher education. This study aims to reveal how structural arrangements, everyday practices and institutional culture shaped transgender students' sense of belonging and opportunity. Through the qualitative data collected by the researcher, researcher wants to highlight both the gaps in current policy implementation and the concrete reforms that could enhance transgender students' academic development and inclusion.

Theoretical framing

The educational experiences of transgender students in higher education can be better understood by applying the concept of **double marginalisation & intersectionality**. Double marginalisation describes the overlapping forms of disadvantage that arise when individual experience exclusion across more than one social dimension, such as gender identity, socio-economic status, class, caste, region or disability. Rather than functioning independently, these factors interact to create compounded barriers and intensify social exclusion (Mittal & Goel 2024). Within the Indian higher education system, many transgender students belong to socio-economically disadvantaged families, rural communities, or historically marginalised caste groups, placing them within the Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) identified in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Consequently, they encounter multiple layers of disadvantage. In addition to facing prejudice, stigma, and discrimination based

on their gender identity, they also experience the structural inequalities commonly associated with other SEDGs. These intersecting challenges reinforce their marginalisation and create significant obstacles to equitable participation and success in higher education (Mittal & Goel, 2024; NEP, 2020). North America shows that trans youth report higher rates of victimization but also engage in unique resilience that building strategy, suggesting the social support and affirming environments can buffer some of the damage of intersectional marginalization (Aragon et al. 2014; Brian 2019, in 50 ways of telling, 2019)

Researches on NEP 2020 and higher-education policies for transgender

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks an important step towards strengthening equity and inclusion within India's higher education system by explicitly identifying transgender learners as part of the Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) (Ministry of Education, 2020; Mittal & Goel, 2024). Through this recognition, the policy promotes the vision of providing equitable access to education for all learners, irrespective of gender identity or disability. It also recommends establishing a Gender Inclusion Fund (GIF) to support initiatives such as scholarships, infrastructure improvement, and other measures that encourage gender-sensitive educational environments (Ministry of Education, 2020; PIB, 2020). Furthermore, the policy advocates flexible and multidisciplinary curricula, holistic student development, and inclusive teaching practices, creating opportunities for institutions to redesign curricula that better reflect gender diversity and inclusion (Ministry of Education, 2020; Mittal & Goel, 2024).

Although NEP 2020 provides a progressive policy framework, existing research suggests that translating these commitments into institutional practice remains a significant challenge. Studies indicate that many of the policy recommendations are broad in nature and are not accompanied by detailed operational strategies for supporting transgender students in higher

education (Mittal & Goel, 2024; NEP-related commentary, 2023). For instance, while the Gender Inclusion Fund and the recognition of SEDGs offer an encouraging policy foundation, the implementation of measures such as gender-neutral facilities, safe hostel accommodation, inclusive admission procedures, and curriculum reform varies considerably across institutions. As a result, access to inclusive educational environments continues to depend largely on individual institutional initiatives rather than consistent national implementation (Mittal & Goel, 2024; CDPP, 2024).

In addition, several studies have highlighted that many higher education institutions continue to rely on binary gender classifications in admission forms, student records, and other official documentation. Such administrative practices may unintentionally exclude or misidentify transgender applicants, thereby reinforcing barriers to participation despite the inclusive principles outlined in national policy (Mittal & Goel, 2024). These findings demonstrate that meaningful inclusion requires not only supportive policy statements but also systematic institutional reforms that translate policy objectives into everyday educational practices.

Many empirical studies on NEP's affect on transgender students' education indicates that awareness of rights has been increased, also transgender students still experience physical harassment and verbal abuse on campus, despite anti-discrimination guidelines (Gladis, 2023; NEP 2020 focused analysis). These findings suggest that high-level policy statements must be coupled with clear implementation protocols, monitoring mechanisms, and institutional accountability if they are to genuinely reduce double marginalisation in practice.

Researches on academic experiences of transgender students

Transgender and gender diversity students are, across the world, disproportionately failing in education compared to their cisgender classmates. Big surveys, long term studies demonstrate that transgender young people are

more frequently bullied, harassed and excluded from extracurricular school activities and this translates into increased truancy, poor academic results and high levels of school dropout (Kosciw et al, 2020; Aragon et al, 2014). Also, within North America and Europe research demonstrates that in relation to transgender students "many students felt uncomfortable or unsafe in the schools' bathrooms and locker rooms". Unexclusive models, lack of staff training and the absence of gender affirmative policies results in isolation and anxiety (Aragon et al, 2014; Brian, 2019; NEC, UK based analysis).

Available evidence from the Indian context regarding the experiences of transgender students in educational settings is sparse but developing. For higher education institutions in India, research indicates that transgender students often experience social stigmatisation, family pressure to hide their gender identity, and resistance from institutions regarding official procedures for changing legal name or gender marker in the records (Mittal & Goel, 2024; NEP related case studies). A report discussing the issues faced by transgender persons in higher education in India indicates that many of these students prefer to attend somewhat liberal urban universities, but still feel they must constantly manoeuvre their visibility and their personal safety which sacrifices full participation in academic and extracurricular activities (CDPP, 2024; University of Delhi related commentary). Often these students express a "double bind": they can choose to hide their gender identity and experience the trauma of that, or they can express their gender identity and face ostracism and harassment, increasing their marginalisation (Mittal & Goel, 2024; NEP related analysis).

Qualitative data from India similarly show that transgender students' health, safety and academic attainment depend directly on the presence/absence of supportive colleagues, educators, classmates, and infrastructure (Mittal & Goel, 2024; case studies on hostel/toilet access) in schools and colleges. Examples of facilities and resources frequently mentioned as key facilitators of continued enrolment and success among trans students includes gender-

neutral toilets, single sex and mixed sex hostels, and inclusive (trans-friendly) counselling. Without these, combined with restrictive attendance and examination regulations, many trans students may choose to withdraw or drop out of education (Mittal & Goel, 2024; NEP linked discussions). A growing body of international research supports this, as schools and universities that adopt clear anti-discrimination policies, staff development and LGBTQ inclusive teaching materials see higher rates of school belonging, lower rates of victimisation and increased motivation for completion among their transgender students (Aragon et al., 2014; Grimm, 2017, cited in supportive climate studies).

The above body of literature, in conclusion, suggests that the academic experience of transgender students is the result of an interplay of inequalities where transgender identity interacts with caste, class, region, disability, and so on, to generate further compounded marginalisation. NEP 2020 acknowledges transgender learners under inclusive rubric but implementation at institutional level is fragmented, symbolic and disparate. There are reports of sustained stigma, harassment and structural impediments impacting well-being, participation and retention in both India and in the global arena. On the other hand, evidence strongly support that infrastructure and processes are important for enabling trans students' sense of belonging and persistence in academic programmes.

Rationale of the study

Previous research on the education of transgender students has convincingly demonstrated high levels of discrimination, stress and poor academic outcomes, but there are still some important gaps – gaps that research into double marginalisation and the academic experiences of transgender students in higher education can meaningfully address. First, while the NEP 2020 and related policy documents now explicitly mention transgender students, there is still a lack of empirical work that systematically explores how these students view government

policies, facilities at the institutional level, and their own well-being in relation to academic achievement. The majority of research in India is descriptive of policies or of wider SEDGs frameworks without detailed analysis of the subjective evaluations of the implementation of policy by transgender students.

Research on the education of transgender students in India heavily relies on description and case studies, failing to integrate a theoretically structured background of double marginalisation. Issues such as lacking proper facilities or social stigma, while mentioned, do not integrate nor identify the issues of caste, class, or disability, which can shape the marginalisation of the transgender population in India. North America and Europe have dedicated researched on the concepts of minority stress and transgender education. However, there are few studies that have researched the concepts of gender minority stress and the transgender population in India, more specifically, in higher education (Brian, 2019; gender minority stress studies in UK schools). This makes the existing research on gender minority stress and education in the UK inapplicable to the Indian context, specifically the socio-political context of India that is defined by family structures and religious beliefs (Mittal & Goel, 2024; NEP related discussions on social context).

Not many studies attempt to directly compare transgender students' collective lived experiences, their aspirations, and anticipated changes to policy, wellbeing, and institutional structures (Mittal & Goel, 2024; NEP focused commentary). It is important to survey inclusivity seen in state policies, wellbeing, and institutional structures and close the gap between lived and aspired experience.

Research Questions

1. How do transgender students perceive their gender identity and what are their experiences of discrimination, harassment and psychosocial support in education settings
2. How do transgender students perceive the inclusiveness of mainstream education, including

the support provided by teachers, peers an educational institution

3. What is transgender students' perception of educational policies, institutional support and career opportunities in promoting equitable access to higher education and employment

Research Objectives

1. To explore the identity-related experiences, self-perceptions, and psychosocial challenges faced by transgender students in educational settings.
2. To examine transgender students' experiences of inclusion, discrimination, and the support received from teachers, peers, and educational institutions.
3. To investigate transgender students' perceptions of educational policies, institutional support mechanisms, and their implications for educational access and career development.

Methodology

In this study researcher adopts a Qualitative research design to explore the perception and experiences of transgender students facing double marginalisation. Population of the research are transgender students who self-identified as transgender. Researcher administered semi-structured interview schedule on 55 transgender students. Data through collected online and offline in-depth interviews. Researcher used purposive combined with snow ball sampling as sampling technique.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

All audio recordings will be translated and transcribed word for word. Participants will be assigned pseudonyms for confidentiality. All of the following will be done using A thematic analysis. Transgender research participants identified varying experiences of pride and social conflict in relation to their identity. (a) identity and stigma (b) social exclusion (c) recognition and support (d) respect and academic accessibility.

Contested social identity and stigma

The participants argue society negatively and harmfully construct their identity. One

participant note, “This is not the kind of identity we want from people and we have been defamed”, indicating the label of “transgender” carries more stigma than being a neutral category. The participants vehemently refuse to equate their identity with their behavior, pointing out, “Just because this is our identity, it does not mean we are like that. That is wrong.” The participants’ arguments with the intersectional and minority-stress frameworks highlight that the stereotypical ‘deviance’ of gender minority individuals is a stereotype, and is inconsistent with their behaviors.

However, for some participants their identity has become a source of pride and “not shame”. Yet, this pride is internal because it exists in a social and religious context where it seems that “there is no acceptance”. This represents rejection from the outside and self-acceptance from the inside, and is an example of double-marginalisation, the simultaneous marginalisation of gender identity combined with social and economic marginalisation.

Experiences of exclusion in education and employment

The narratives vividly portray double marginalisation in everyday life. The interviewees state that “everywhere we have to face inferior treatment” and that “some people do not even talk to us”. In the context of the workplace, they are told, “We do not keep people like you,”, which corroborates the results of studies on employment discrimination against transgender people. In the context of education, they are subjected to being treated as “weak”, with some teachers even making them “sit separately or behave differently with us in the whole class”. These attitudes are completely at odds with the principles of inclusive education enshrined in NEP 2020, but sadly seem to be the status quo in many classrooms.

Participants also reported that they do not get any kind of help in their studies: “We do not get any kind of help in our studies. We want to live our lives on our strength”. The absence of institutional support was associated with feelings of injustice and deprivation of human rights: “We

do not get any kind of respect. I think we should be treated equally in everything”. Participants highlighted that they face double oppression and social exclusion and ask rhetorical questions: “Is it fair to deny us to work and study?” and “Should we not receive respect, employment, education, and the right to live in society?”. The last questions emphasized the fact that participants felt that their social rights were violated.

The transformative role of support and recognition

Despite the prevalence of experiences of exclusion, the narratives also reveal an underlying theme of acceptance and solidarity. Participants pointed out that it is essential for “the family to stand by us” because “if the family does not accept us, then society does not accept us either,” but rejection by families leads to “very difficult life.” In other words, there is an understanding that social support from one’s close ones is often the major source of strength in combating societal judgment and discrimination, thus promoting social inclusion. Classmates and peers also appear to play an important role in the lives of transgender people because those who “stood by us,” including “those who understood our problem” were “our strength.” Indeed, minority stress theory highlights the importance of social support in reducing the impact of discrimination on the psychological well-being of socially disadvantaged groups.

Finally, participants reveal their hope that one day their situation would change and people would treat them with compassion because “we are also human beings” and “we also want to lead a good life.” This hope helps them cope with discrimination and motivates their efforts to change society’s attitude toward transgender people. Indeed, they point out that asking the question “are we not human beings? can we not be students?” implies that they feel their humanity and desire to study are questioned. In other words, participants believe that their transgender identity should not deprive them of basic human rights, including the right to education and the right to be treated with dignity and respect.

Academic opportunities, dignity and institutional facilities

The voices strongly resonated that, the trans participants do not seek special rights but rather equal rights and opportunities just like every other citizen of the country. The participants claimed, “We also want to work honestly. We should receive respect like any other citizen of the country.” The participants further argued that, provision of support structures from the government and the society in terms of employment opportunities and education and sufficient facilities for living, “Our condition can improve” and therefore be contributing members of the society. The participants also complained that, scholarships were not enough to offer much-needed academic support.

The participants also implored that, there is a need to change societal attitudes towards them noting that, “People should stop treating us as different. We should be accepted as normal human beings.” They also strongly felt that, “If society changes its thinking, there can be great improvement in our lives.” In this way, the participants seem to propose or argue that, both the structural policies and facilities as well as the culture need to be changed. It is the combination of both that would provide the best opportunity for education for them.

Discussion

The present research aimed to discover transgender students’ beliefs about higher education, including the inclusiveness in terms of government’s policies, well-being in terms of personal characteristics, and access to appropriate facilities, as well as to discover the discrepancy between perception and expectations. The results of the study confirmed the notion of double marginalisation, which was mentioned in the previous works (Mittal & Goel, 2024). In accordance with the research question, the participants described their experiences, which indicated that their marginalisation was intersected with their poverty and social exclusion, resulting in double marginalisation.

Regarding the government’s policies, most participants stated that they were not supported

in the system, despite the inclusion of transgender people in SEDGs under the NEP 2020. The analysis revealed that, although participants expressed recognition of the government’s efforts, in most cases, they did not feel supported in practice. This result aligns with the previous research, which revealed that policies that mention transgender people are not implemented properly due to the absence of specific monitoring and evaluation (Mittal & Goel, 2024). Therefore, the inclusion of transgender students in the NEP 2020 does not mean that they are not marginalised on a day-to-day basis.

Regarding your analysis of the results, I agree with your point about participants reporting negative feelings about themselves and their studies due to being exposed to discrimination and prejudice. I appreciate that you used the minority-stress theory to explain the mechanism between discrimination and negative educational outcomes. Indeed, participants stressed being socially isolated, facing misunderstanding and contempt from the majority community, and being humiliated. At the same time, several respondents did not feel deprived of self-respect, and those who did reported that their pride was not a result of being treated poorly but rather their identity pride. I think it is essential that you emphasized the role of family and friends’ support in helping participants cope with discrimination and achieve academic success. Your analysis echoes international research on transgender and genderqueer students who feel socially included and academically engaged when supported by affirming environments (Aragon et al., 2014; Kosciw et al., 2020).

As a follow-up question, I would like to ask you if you think the analysis reveals insights into the facilities or resources that institutions could provide to better cater to the needs of trans students. Indeed, participants spoke of their experiences in co-ed spaces and classrooms where they did not feel encouraged to participate fully in activities with their peers. They stressed the importance of being treated equally despite being different and voiced concerns about the lack of support services at institutions (Aragon et

al., 2014; Kosciw et al., 2020). I think it is essential that you specified the importance of policy implementation in terms of making schools more attractive to gender diverse students and ensuring that they are treated fairly and offered the same opportunities as their peers.

Conclusion

The stories told above show that, for transgender participants, identity is closely connected with negative perceptions and experiences of being judged, excluded, and oppressed. However, this aspect of identity is also connected with pride and resilience. Participants narrate that double marginalisation occurs in specific ways, such as in the classroom, on the job, and in terms of general social behaviors and interactions. Additionally, the stories highlight the expectations of society and specific institutions, such as schools or workplaces, in terms of transgender rights to education, employment, and overall socialization.

Educational Implications

The above research results have several educational implications. First, it is necessary to create a more inclusive environment that would make transgender students feel safe and supported, provide gender-neutral washrooms, ensure fair seating arrangements, and offer

teacher training that would address gender discrimination and minority stress. Second, it is essential to actualize the pledges made by the NEP 2020 and the Gender Inclusion Fund. It is essential to ensure that scholarships, counselling, and other forms of support are provided to transgender students in a manner that would be beneficial to them. At the same time, the academic course contents need to be adjusted to include transgender topics as a way of legitimizing their status and improving representation. Finally, the study reminds us that family support and peer interaction play a critical role in ensuring that transgender students remain confident and motivated throughout their studies. Educational institutions can serve as a third party that fosters connections between family members and students and help them understand their position and impact on the transgender experience. To this end, educational institutions must facilitate counselling services, conduct sensitization campaigns, and offer safe spaces where transgender students can share their stories and struggles. In essence, the themes of identity, exclusion, and hope illustrate the need for the above-described educational interventions that would help realize the vision of equity and inclusion enshrined in the NEP 2020.

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