

## EXPLORING STUDENTS' OPINIONS ABOUT GENDER INCLUSIVITY IN GRADUATION PROGRAMS

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### Abstract:

*All students should feel equal, safe and empowered in educational institutions. Gender has diversified itself globally. The women's rights movement is gaining ground, but very little has been achieved in terms of human rights for the lesbian, gay bisexual, transsexual, and queer students in various schools and colleges of India. By 2030, India must achieve the Sustainable Development Goal 4.5 (Gender Equality and Inclusion) to eliminate gender disparities in education. Educational institutions must promote and practice gender mainstreaming to achieve gender equality. The NEP 2020 defines socially disadvantaged groups based on gender identities as, "particularly female and transgender individuals," but completely ignores including students from the LGBTQIA+ (T already included) community. Do our college colleges provide Social-Emotional-Ethical (SEE) and inclusive learning by teachers and counselors? Accepting and respecting gender diversity is important in sustaining a supportive and accepting educational and corporate environment. The researcher surveyed undergraduates from a south Mumbai college, on their knowledge and opinions about understanding and accepting the LGBT+ students in inclusive classroom interactions. The non-disclosure questionnaire for 200 students included items on awareness of gender diversity through media and classroom instructional activities, the need for SEE Learning in the new NEP 2020 Curricula, and their willingness to advocate gender inclusivity through SEE Learning. The results show that 87% of students were willing to advocate gender inclusivity through SEE Learning activities. A significant 93% of students opined that gender inclusivity courses should be mandatory minor courses in the NEP college curriculum.*

*The researcher thanks all participants, (especially transgender, non-binary, genderqueer, and gender-nonconforming people) for advocating gender equality and human rights.*

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### Introduction:

All students should feel equal, safe and empowered in educational institutions. Equity is the goal while equality is the measure to reach the goal. It is our responsibility as modern citizens to pass the right values to the young. Gender has diversified itself globally. The need to sensitize people about gender inclusivity and equality for LGBT+ community is important and urgent. When we talk about bringing a positive change in society we need an atmosphere where people support the LGBT+ community. Education should focus both on theoretical and practical aspects of learning while sensitizing students about different genders. The bullying, harassment and exclusion of LGBT+ students and faculty across schools and colleges is a worldwide problem that many students

face. This stigma and prejudice is rooted in the deep cultural beliefs about gender roles, masculinity and femininity. LGBT students face a lot of victimization, name calling, public ridicule, and teasing. They are also prone to physical assault, social isolation, obscene graffiti, stealing and thus they face a lot of mental, emotional, and physical stress, such that it affects their academic work and results in isolation. This happens in classrooms, playgrounds, toilets, changing rooms and when traveling to and from their school and college, as well as online.

#### **Why is SEE Learning important today?**

SEE Learning cultivates compassion for self and others, resiliency skills based on trauma-informed care, systems thinking, and ethical discernment. SEE Learning is important because it empowers students to engage ethically as part of a global community and provides educators with the tools to support student well-being. The ultimate aim of SEE Learning is to cultivate emotional social and apical intelligence in students from individual and collective learning experiences. SEE Learning is powerful because it enables students to learn from nconcrete examples of common issues and challenges so that they can face and overcome common problems which result in social and interpersonal conflict or discrimination. Many students do not know how to confront and solve conflicts in daily life. SEE Learning shows students how to deal with these conflicts, how to recognise and constructively deal with one's emotions, cultivating mindfulness about stress and its impact on one's body and mind. SEE Learning also enables students to accept another person's perspective and opinions. This enables students to empathize and listen, which are all present in the social domain, SEE Learning also enables students to contribute to a better neighborhood and society.

#### **Why does the NEP 2020 figure in Gender Discourses?**

After a gap of 34 years the Government of India implemented the National Education Policy 2020, which proposes a major overhaul for our country's education system. Taking into account the global and national demands of education the NEP 2020 focuses on important 21st century skills among students while mentioning full equity and inclusion as the cornerstones of all educational decisions. The idea of inclusion which empowers people by respecting and appreciating their differences and diversity, in terms of age, gender, caste, religion, disability, sexual orientation, education and nationality, is evidenced in discussions and research. On page 25 of the NEP 2020 in 6. Equitable and Inclusive Education: Learning for All the government document lists 6.2: Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) can be broadly categorized based on gender identities (particularly female and transgender individuals)..... Thus it states providing an equitable quality education to girls and transgender students, but it completely ignores students from the LGBQIA+ (T already included) community community, which is disturbing, as gender identities do not fall under a binary, but are widely located on an entire spectrum of gender and sexuality. Genders are not specific to the transgender or the female gender. Children discover sexuality and gender throughout their adolescence. It is crucial to provide specific importance to LGBQIA+ as most of the students and teachers often assume others to be heterosexual. Moreover, it is known that schools and colleges reproduce society norms and act as potential institutions to challenge these norms. The NEP 2020 claims to transform the educational space of India and hence it must provide specific measures to make all schools and colleges safe and inclusive especially for the minorities who are not represented in the policy. A 2018 UNESCO study found that out of 400 LGBT + youth approximately 60% of students physically

bleed in middle schools and 43% of students are sexually harassed in Indian primary schools based on their sexual orientation and gender identity. The consequences of bullying were quite harsh: 73% had reduced social interactions with other students, 70% suffered from anxiety and depression, 70% said they lost concentration and studies, 63% reported low academic performance and 53% script classes 33.2% said bullying played a key role in discontinuing School. Much research is required to study the extent of bullying of college students and faculty. This physical bullying has drastic consequences for students resulting in depression, anxiety, low academic performance, low concentration in studies, reduced social interaction and some of them ultimately drop out of school or college. Additionally the NEP 2020 policy document focuses on developing a gender inclusive fund for implementing schemes to improve the access and participation of girls and transgenders students this fund will be determined by both the central and state government. Although the NEP 2020 has become more gender inclusive with the inclusion of transgender and the use of terms like gender, it forgets to include the other gender minorities community and puts them in a vulnerable situation. It is imperative to understand that education is needed to generate employment as well as to construct a world that is free of discrimination.

#### **Operational Definitions:**

**Gender Binary:** the classification of gender into two distinct, opposite forms of masculine and feminine, whether by social system, cultural belief, or both. Most cultures use a gender binary, having two genders (boys/men and girls/women).

**LGBTQIA+:** Abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual and more (terms used to describe a person's sexual orientation or gender identity).

**NEP 2020:** National Education Policy implemented in 2020, by the Government of India.

Sexual Orientation is a part of individual identity that includes “a person's sexual and emotional attraction to another person and the behavior and/or social affiliation that may result from this attraction”

**Transgender (Trans):** An umbrella term that describes many gender identities for people who do not identify with their sex assigned at birth.

**Undergraduate Students:** A college or university student who's not a graduate student.

#### **Research Problem:**

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBT+) youth experience higher rates of mental health challenges compared to their cisgender, straight peers as a result of chronic stressors such as discrimination and victimization.

The researcher will attempt to study the extent to which senior college students use gendered pronouns, gender-neutral pronouns and gender-inclusive pronouns.

**Significance of the Study:** India and the world must attain the goals of the UN SDGs by 2030. With reference to SDG 4.5 (By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations), the youth need to be sensitized about the non-binary identity of other students, so that there is more acceptance, mutual respect and harmony in the class interactions. The study will help to understand

if undergraduates who are going to enter the world of work, will behave in a non-judgemental manner toward their LGBT+ colleagues and administrators.

**Limitations of the Study:** The present study is conducted only with undergraduates from South Mumbai colleges.

**Research Aim and Objectives:**

Accepting and respecting gender diversity is important in sustaining a supportive and accepting educational and corporate environment.

1. Do our colleges provide a safe inclusive learning environment for students with gender diversity?
2. Do our colleges provide Social-Emotional-Ethical (SEE) Learning instructional material for gender inclusion?
3. Do our colleges provide inclusive learning by teachers and counselors?

**Sample:** The researcher surveyed 200 undergraduates from a South Mumbai college, on their opinions about understanding and accepting the LGBT+ students in inclusive classroom interactions.

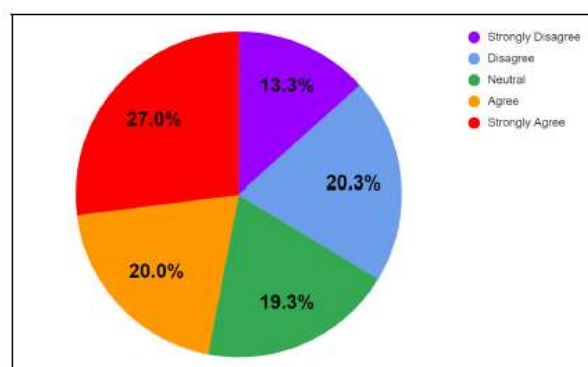
**Tools:** A self-made questionnaire was constructed by the researcher for the study which consisted of the rating of items on a 5-point Likert Scale of agreement. The non-disclosure questionnaire was sent online using the snowballing technique of data collection, with a consent clause. The non-disclosure questionnaire for 200 students included items on awareness of gender diversity through media and classroom instructional activities, the need for developing social, empathetic and ethical behaviour for gender inclusion, learning in the new NEP 2020 Curricula, and their willingness to advocate gender inclusivity through social, empathetic and ethical learning.

**Analysis Technique:**

The data was collected and analyzed keeping the objectives in view and the design of the study. Descriptive statistics such as graphical representation was used.

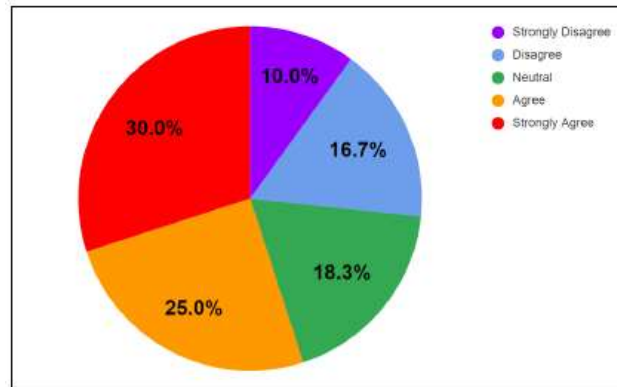
Main Findings from the Analysis of Data :

**1. Analysis of data based on opinions of students, about the safe college environment for students with gender diversity.**



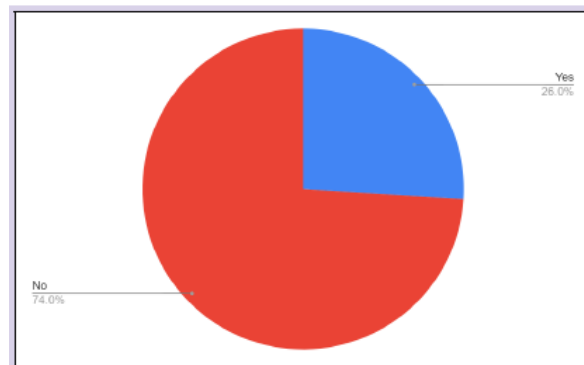
**Interpretation of Data:** The research findings indicate that 47% of students opined that their college provides a safe inclusive learning environment for students with gender diversity.

**2. Analysis of data based on opinions of students, that colleges should provides self-instructional and group learning sessions for gender inclusion.**



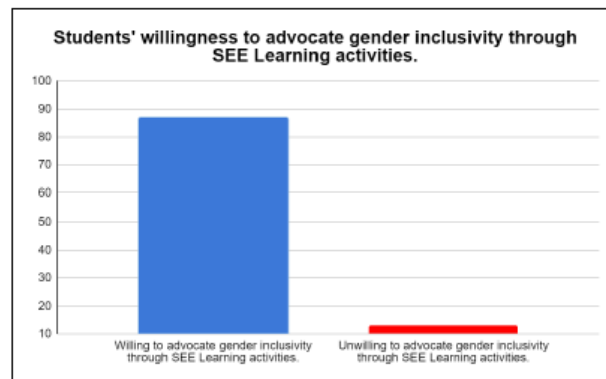
**Interpretation of Data:** The research findings indicate that 55% of students opined that colleges should provide self-instructional and group learning sessions for gender inclusion.

**3. Analysis of data based on the college providing informal gender inclusive learning by teachers and counselors.**



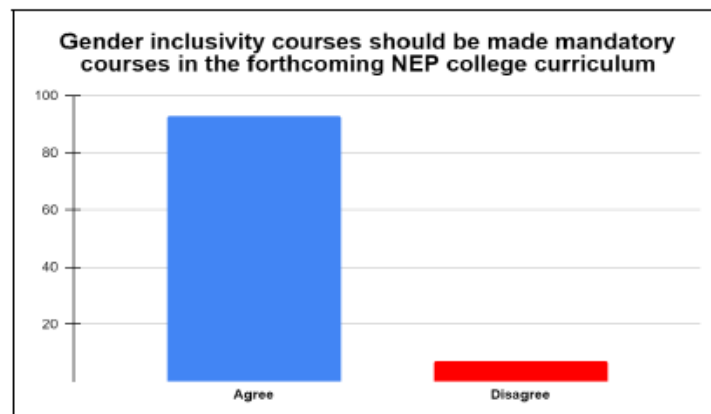
**Interpretation of Data:** The results show that 26% of students stated that their college provides informal gender inclusive learning by teachers and counselors.

**4. Analysis of data based on the students willing to advocate gender inclusivity through SEE Learning activities.**



**Interpretation of Data:** The research findings indicate that a significant 87% of students were willing to advocate gender inclusivity through SEE Learning activities.

#### 5. Analysis of data based on whether gender inclusivity courses should be made mandatory courses in the forthcoming NEP college curriculum.



**Interpretation of Data:** The research findings indicate that a significant 93% students agreed that gender inclusivity courses should be made mandatory courses in the forthcoming NEP college curriculum.

#### Conclusions of the Study:

The teaching fraternity must bring about “equality for all” to reduce all inequalities, specially those that are prevalent in gender diversity. We must also check if we treat everybody equally outside the classroom as well. Changing a society may take years to bring gender inclusion easily. The researcher conducted a small study to understand the willingness of students to formally learn about gender inclusion and gender representation in educational institutions.

#### Results of the Study:

1. The results show that 47% of students opined that their college provides a safe inclusive learning environment for students with gender diversity
2. The results show that 55% of students opined that colleges should provide self-instructional and group learning sessions to develop social, emotional and ethical behaviour for gender inclusion.

3. The results show that 26% of students opined that their college provides informal inclusive learning by teachers and counselors.
4. A significant 87% of students were willing to advocate gender inclusivity through SEE Learning activities.
5. A significant 93% of students opined that gender inclusivity courses should be made mandatory courses in the forthcoming NEP college curriculum.

Teachers and counselors in educational institutions play a major role in improving society. The major stakeholder of any educational institution are students and thus the impact and influence of good educational programs must be carefully planned in order to make the world a better place of acceptance and the quality. It is crucial that our educational systems and curricular provide inclusive education learning material towards an inclusive world.

The current learning systems promote exclusion and biased learning programs which propagate stereotypes and make the growing population vulnerable to gender inequality and discrimination. It is here that Social Emotional and Ethical Learning can improve the understanding, acceptance and celebration of gender diverse minorities, so as to practice inclusion in a population that is increasingly gender diverse. Social Emotional and Ethical Learning will improve the mental and social health of our society, and facilitate justice and freedom to learn in safe environments. This study showed that students are ready to use Social Emotional and Ethical Learning from their teachers, through the coursework and self instructional material so as to remove the gender bias and exploitation that is evident in society. We need suitable literature in social media and public media by women writers and the LGBTQ+ community. It is important to involve women and LGBTQ+ writers to design suitable gender inclusive learning material for all stages of education. Gender representation is important in all educational institutions, governance and workplaces. This small research has proved that Indian schools and colleges are going through a huge change in gender diversity recognition and thereby they require good instructional material for implementation in the new National Education Policy 2020 which is being implemented across the country.

#### **10 steps for cultivating non-binary Inclusive Classroom Communities:**

Teach students to use accept gender diversity and establish best practices like:

1. As teachers, we can offer our names & pronouns when introducing ourself to the class.
2. Substitute gendered language for more inclusive language, such as “everybody,” “folks,” or “this person”.
3. When in doubt about what pronouns someone uses, use the student’s name and/or gender neutral pronoun “they/them”.
4. Apologize when you make a mistake and misgender someone. If someone is misgendered, politely provide a correction whether the person who was misgendered is present or not (e.g., speak to the person who did the misgendering after class to offer a correction; emphatically saying “they” pronouns when one student uses “he”/”she” pronouns to refer to another student who already shared they use they/them pronouns).
5. Integrate LGBTQ+ content, perspectives, writers, researchers, etc. into the curriculum, so students see themselves reflected in your content, when selecting readings and other materials, videos and resources, that features voices from LGBTQ+ communities.

Be intentional about including perspectives from LGBTQ+ scholars and thinkers throughout the syllabus and consider using case studies or examples from the field that include LGBTQ+ people and communities.

6. Respect student's confidentiality should they come out to you as LGBTQ+ and have disclosed that they do not want to be out in certain settings (e.g., the classroom).
7. To avoid mispronouncing a student's name or using the wrong name for a student who has not updated their preferred name, have students share their name with the entire class, rather than you reading off the attendance register.

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