

Educational Initiatives for the Transgender Community in Punjab: Challenges, Progress, and Impact on Social Inclusion

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of this study to explore the initiatives taken by the Government of Punjab for the education of the transgender community and to assess their impact on the lives of transgender individuals. To achieve this, specific research questions were developed to guide the investigation. A comprehensive review of existing literature was conducted to collect information about the government's initiatives and their influence on the transgender community. To gain deeper insights into the issue, a phenomenological research design was adopted, allowing for a detailed understanding of the lived experiences of transgender individuals in the educational sector. Structured, in-depth interviews served as the primary data collection method. The research sample included 10 participants, selected from both transgender communities and educational institutions catering to transgender individuals. These participants provided valuable personal insights regarding the educational initiatives introduced by the government. The findings of the study revealed that although the Punjab Government has made efforts to recognize the educational rights of the transgender community, implementation remains inconsistent. Many participants expressed dissatisfaction with the practical application of these policies, noting that societal attitudes and systemic neglect continue to hinder their educational progress. Challenges such as discrimination, lack of proper infrastructure, and limited acceptance were highlighted, all of which negatively impacted the self-confidence and educational achievements of transgender individuals. The study concluded that despite the efforts of various organizations working for transgender rights, there is a significant need for more consistent, structured, and long-term measures to ensure the effective inclusion of transgender individuals in Punjab's education system.

Keywords: transgender, educational progress, social inclusion, challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Among the most underprivileged populations in Pakistan are the transgender population. Their own family causes them psychological, physical, and sexual abuse over their lifetime. The most often discriminated group, transgender people, have suffered greatly from social stigma and economic marginalization, so affecting their existence historically (Grant et al., 2011). Formal education was denied to them. Every person naturally has a right to education. The government's responsibility to the transgender population is an educational one.

Our country promotes liberties. enrollment of transgender people in several academic establishments. The government will then enact policies allowing transgender people free and obligatory schooling. Act of 2018, Article 25A. 2018 saw the passage by the National Assembly the Protection of Rights bill. Once eighteen years old, a transgender person has the right to self-register with Nadra, get a CNIC, driving license, and passport in line with their self-identified gender.

The government of Pakistan opened a specialist school for transgender children in Lahore in a historic first for the country. A pilot project aiming at teaching the transgender individuals has been started by the Punjabi government. July 7, 2019's Urdu Point Marvia Malik's selection as the first transgender news anchor for Pakistan is one of the major turning points in transgender representation there. Working for Kohinoor TV, she represented a turning point for transgender visibility in Pakistani media. Apart from her work as a television anchor, Marvia created history by leading the first transgender model to stroll the runway during a Pakistani fashion show. Notwithstanding such progress, transgender people in Pakistan—often known as Khwaja Sira—have always been among the most vulnerable members of society. Still major issues are social stigma, discrimination, and marginalization.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Transgender identity is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) in more general and inclusive terms than only as a biological oddity. WHO defines "transgender as the umbrella term for people whose gender identity and expression deviate from the conventions and expectations often connected with the sex assigned to them at birth. It covers persons who identify as transsexual, transgender, or otherwise gender non-conforming."

In Pakistan there are a great number of people, communities, and societies existing. Transgender people have a different role in Pakistani society. In rituals, Eid, celebrations, and marriage, they are really important. Our civilizations in Pakistan refer to transgender people with different names, such as khusra and khawajasara. The society does not consider them human entities. In our society, the khawaja Sara and khusra communities lack respect and dignity. Many people mock them because of their appearance, clothes, and physical movements. Given that many transgender people in Pakistan lack education, the condition is mostly caused by this as well. They face the ignorance and public disdain of the people all around. Transgenderism affects a considerable number of people living in Pakistan (Akhtar, 2016). Most families that recognize their child as transgender at birth show hostility and feel ashamed and embarrassed inside their family and society, which causes them to consider abandoning or damage.

Transgender people in Pakistan mostly work in low-status jobs include dancing, begging, street wandering, and prostitution (European Academic, Research Vol. 15, 2017). Transgender people celebrate birthdays, engage in night festivities, ceremonies, and rituals. To raise money, they perform on stages and in public. Seeking revenue, they walk from door to door and ask in the streets under traffic signals. Some

transgender people work as sex workers, or prostitutes. All of them do this for their living. Transgender people in Pakistan mostly depend on dancing and begging since they have few means of income. Stigma defines the areas the transgender people live in. They lack society respect and cannot live in mainstream society (Mehwish Akhtar art. 2016).

Inequality for Transgender

Transgender individuals consistently experience unequal protection throughout their lives. Societies perpetuate inequity due to a lack of understanding of transgender individuals. They consistently encounter challenges from their families, educational institutions, employment, housing, and the legal system. From an early age, transgender individuals encounter unfavorable and adverse behaviors within their homes and communities. Individuals lacking shelter often resort to drug trafficking, theft, and prostitution. They experienced physical, social abuses, and harassment due to inequity. Transgender individuals face threats of hatred and are implicated in criminal activities..

Historically, there was no notion of transgender education in Pakistan. Globally. In the past, individuals were unable to access official or informal education under any circumstances. They were denied access to education and the acquisition of knowledge. Education was seen as the privilege of the male and female genders. The third genders were not granted rights. Some seek to acquire an education.

To reach meaningful integration into society, transgender people need the active support of their families, communities, and government. Among these, government support is especially important and helps the transgender population to advance their educational possibilities. For transgender people, access to school marks a basic first toward empowerment and long-term success.

The Pakistani government has started initiatives recently meant to assist the care and education of the transgender population. Historically, because to extensive social isolation, transgender people were sometimes confined to roles linked with dance, street acts, or begging. Recent government initiatives, on the other hand, show a dedication to acknowledge their basic human rights and enhance their access to necessary chances.

These rights cover access to education, money generating, social respect, the right to marriage, freedom of residence and religion, political involvement, healthcare, and personal protection. As a constitutional state, Pakistan cannot deny the transgender population the same rights and conveniences accessible to other people. They also are creations of God and merit equal rights to live with dignity.

Islamic teachings stress also the fair treatment of transsexual people. Ghamdi (2016) claims that parents neglecting or mistreating their transgender children are breaking Islamic law. Moreover, Islam labels the maltreatment of transsexual people as sin. Transgender people can still experience discrimination and are not completely acknowledged as equal members of society despite these religious and legal protections (Kran, 2016).

Government Action

Actions undertaken by the government:

The government has implemented measures to safeguard the livelihood of transgender individuals.

The government built a protection center that offers medical facilities, healthcare, and education to transgender individuals.

The government establishes vocational training centers for educational and occupational training.

iii. Established separate prisons for transgender individuals convicted of crimes.

The government assists transgender individuals in initiating small, personal businesses by offering

accessible loans and other support.

The government has granted them numerous rights, including the rights to inheritance, education, voting, work, healthcare, and access to public spaces and property. All rights are similarly granted to the transgender people concerning sexual genders in Pakistan (Sasha Ingber, 2018).

Problem Statement

Despite constitutional guarantees and growing awareness of transgender rights in Pakistan, the transgender community continues to face significant barriers to accessing quality education, particularly in Punjab. Although the Punjab Government and various institutions have initiated programs to promote transgender education, there is limited research assessing the effectiveness of these efforts or their real impact on the lives of transgender individuals. Many transgender persons still encounter social stigma, discrimination within educational institutions, and a lack of tailored support systems that address their specific needs. Moreover, while policies and services may exist on paper, gaps often remain in their practical implementation, leaving transgender individuals undeserved and marginalized in the educational sector. There is also a need to explore the roles of non-governmental institutions and community organizations in supporting transgender education. To address these gaps, this study investigates the initiatives undertaken by the Punjab Government and other institutions, assesses their actual impact on transgender individuals' educational experiences, and identifies the challenges they continue to face. By adopting a qualitative, descriptive approach using semi-structured interviews, the research seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of transgender individuals within the educational system and to highlight areas where further efforts are necessary for meaningful inclusion and educational equity.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the projects the Punjab Government is working on for transgender community education.
2. To evaluate how these programs affect the life of transgender people.
3. To investigate the activities and initiatives made by different institutions toward transgender community education.

Research Questions

1. What educational services are currently being provided by the government for the transgender community?
2. What future initiatives or services do you know of that are planned to support their educational rights?
3. In what ways can the educational system influence or impact the lives of transgender individuals?
4. What challenges or obstacles does the transgender community face within educational institutions?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research tool

Semi structured interview was used to collect the data.

Research Design

The methodology of this study is descriptive in nature, with the survey (interviews) conducted thoughtfully, keeping in view both local contexts and issues specific to the transgender community. To gain a better awareness of how people comprehend and organize their experiences, the researcher personally conducted the data collection. The study follows an inductive approach, aiming to produce rich, detailed, and descriptive findings.

Sample Size

For this research 10 participant selected for interviews with the help of accessibility approach

Analyze Data

The data in this study were analyzed using both inductive and deductive thematic analysis approaches within the framework of narrative analysis. The researcher employed an inductive method to allow themes to emerge naturally from the participants' responses. Additionally, a deductive, theory-driven thematic analysis was used, following established guidelines to ensure that the analysis remained structured and aligned with the research objectives.

Table 1

Participant Information

Sr no	Name	Age	Qualification	Profession
Participant 1	pinki	28	Matric	Cenima house
Participant 2	mehak	23	Middle	job
Participant 3	chamki	41	Matric	job
Participant 4	sheem	34	FA	beautician
Participant 5	raani	31	BSC	business
Participant 6	khan	36	Matric	job
Participant 7	wajeeh	42	Bachelors	Garment
Participant 8	Asia malik	23	Middle	Dancer
Participant 9	sonia	34	Middle	beautian
Participant 10	Gul e aara	37	Middle	Dancer

Coding for Responding

Participant 1 P1; Participant 2 P2; Participant 3 P3; Participant 4 P4; Participant 5 P5; Participant 6 P6; Participant 7 P7; Participant 8 P8; Participant 9 P9; Participant 10 P10.

Research Question No 1: What educational services are currently being provided by the government for the transgender community?

Derived Theme

Educational Services

P1 stated, *“The government should provide us with access to schools because many transgender individuals remain illiterate. If we are given equal educational opportunities, it will not only benefit us but also enhance the reputation of our country.”* P4 shared, *“The government allowed us to enroll in public schools, but neither the students nor the teachers accepted us. Most teachers refused to teach us simply because we are transgender. As a result, we face constant challenges and opposition. Sometimes, they go as far as trying to destroy our confidence and motivation. This is why many transgender students eventually drop out of educational institutions.”* P8 remarked, *“I am not aware of any official services provided by the authorities for the education of transgender individuals. I believe the government should establish separate colleges or institutions specifically for our community—places where we can pursue our dreams without fear of discrimination or harassment.”* P7 commented, *“The authorities make promises, but they rarely follow through. They never take practical action. It’s mostly private NGOs that help us survive in this hostile environment and advocate for our rights.”*

Research Question No 2: what future initiatives or services do you know of that are planned to support their educational rights?

Derived Theme

Jobs Availability

P5 shared, *“If someone genuinely cares about our survival, they should provide us with all necessary facilities. With proper support, we would have no difficulty accessing educational institutions or finding employment. But we shouldn’t be compared to others—we have our own unique struggles.”* P2 expressed, *“I believe that educational institutions for transgender students should be managed by transgender activists, not by outsiders. We deserve better employment opportunities and a respectful learning environment. I know this is a difficult goal, but it’s not impossible. Although laws have been made for us, if those laws were properly followed, much better outcomes could be achieved.”* P9 stated, *“I want to see the government take real steps to safeguard our rights. We need separate educational institutions within our communities and employment quotas specifically for transgender individuals to ensure fair opportunities.”* P6 added, *“The government should establish complete educational institutions for us, where we can gain the skills needed for employment and professional growth. If we receive compulsory education, we will grow in confidence, compete equally with others, and begin to dream of a brighter future and meaningful careers.”*

Research Question No 3: In what ways can the educational system influence or impact the lives of transgender individuals?

Derived Themes

Educational System 2. Positive Change

Educational System

P7 stated, "I do not regard myself as an erudite individual; however, I recognize that knowledge fosters human advancement." Should I have the opportunity to acquire an education, I would be gratified and a respectable individual." P3 has responded. "Did I received an education, I would possess my own residence or employment. I may engage in collaboration with integrity. I might act based on principles of honor. My concepts were valid. I was prepared to attain success alone. I do not solicit food in the presence of others. My family does not furnish me with substantial financial support." P5 stated, "Education instructs us on interpersonal interactions, effective communication of our messages with respect, and advocacy for our liberties." as per P4 I am fully engaged in sexual encounters or gatherings featuring dance. I acknowledge that it is already too late; education will exert no impact on my life. We must consume sustenance for this schooling to be efficacious. P6 responded, "Subsequently, we will be able to engage with individuals more efficiently." We shall not succumb to despondency due to adverse sentiments. We shall possess greater self-confidence. One may readily exist in a merciless society post-education. Educated transgender individuals are likely to advocate for their rights." P1 stated, "Due to a deficiency in education or opportunities, we now perceive them as beggars and performers." I possess expertise and comprehend how to earn respectably. I possess the self-assurance and confidence to venture outside my comfort zone, adapt to diverse individuals, and address societal challenges deemed unsolvable". P7 stated, "We now possess a venue to enhance our skills." A comprehensive education enables us to discern between good and wrong. We cultivate self-confidence and effortlessly surmount challenges through knowledge."

Positive Change

P7 stated, "Education positively influences our lives." We can generate revenue through education. We are capable of sustaining our family. We can acquire halal by honorable means. I will not plead for sustenance. We will be protected against illicit relationships or gatherings. P3 stated, "We shall refrain from engaging in unethical activities and will lead respectable lives if we are educated." No one will solicit for sustenance. We may also strive to disseminate knowledge to those around us, or we may urge our colleagues to seek education". P6 stated, "Were I more educated, I would advocate for my rights and motivate transgender students to seek education and professional opportunities." I hold myself in high regard, prompting me to confront challenges that may be positively received by the community."

Research Question No 4: What challenges or obstacles does the transgender community face within educational institutions?

Derived Themes

Difficulties 2. Positive Environment 3. Respect 4. Misbehave

Difficulties

P5 indicated that "I had a favorable experience at Gender Guardian School. I am present to enhance my sewing skills. I had no association with any other educational establishments. Nonetheless, I contend that had I been affiliated with different institutions, I would not have encountered such difficulties. I will

recover". P3 stated, "I feel at ease in our educational institutions." Regardless of our gender identity, our institutions provide us with a secure environment. We shall express gratitude as members in my community will have the opportunity to advance their studies through these institutions. P4 stated, "I was subjected to harassment due to my appearance." I feel remorseful, endure anxiety, and contemplate what others possess that I lack. Why are they treating me in this manner? P7 stated, "There are no specific accommodations for transgender students." Public derision on our visage. We were referred to in distinct manners. They designated us as Khusra. However, I accept the truth and appreciate this term. Khusra also engages in prayer. We owe our gratitude to Allah. He will not disappoint us."

Positive Environment

P7 said "I cannot speak for other institutions, but I encountered no issues with Gender Guardian School,". Here I finished my beautician degree and developed sewing talents. For me, this environment is calming. P3 replied "thanks you for teachers and students for their extra work". "Individuals consistently mock me whenever I am in public; this is upsetting; but, the institution did not tell us that we had an outward look or that we were in a stigmatized surroundings."

Respect

P6 states, "We are content within our institutions." This is the reason for mutual respect among individuals here. All those who are not transgender accept us as we are. And exhibit the same consideration for others." P2 stated, "During my stitching instruction at the Guru Sight facility, I encountered no difficulties." There exists no bias predicated on gender. We conduct themselves and each other with dignity and respect."

Misbehave

P6 stated, "I experience comfort in our educational institutions as there is no abuse or comparison to others." All individuals receive equitable treatment. We were adequately supported, and we are acquiring knowledge quite efficiently here. Due to our shared mindset." P5 stated, "There are no obstacles for transgender individuals." Transgender students receive comparable treatment inside their different institutions. Transgender students acquire information and advance in their lives through our educational institutions. Relative to public institutions, I perceive myself as significantly more empowered and motivated."

CONCLUSION

The findings reveal that despite ensuring compulsory education for transgender individuals, its practical implementation remains limited. The transgender community faces significant barriers, including a lack of dedicated schools, hostile educational environments, and deep-rooted psychological distress due to social stigma. While government policies mention rights and access, actual services, support structures, and dedicated institutions are largely absent. Employment opportunities are scarce, and discrimination persists in both education and workplaces. Respondents emphasized the urgent need for separate, safe educational institutions, awareness programs, and employment quotas to ensure equality, dignity, and meaningful inclusion for transgender individuals in Pakistan. The study highlights that education positively transforms the transgender community by boosting self-confidence, enabling respectable livelihoods, and fostering societal inclusion. Separate transgender institutions provide supportive, respectful, and impartial environments, free from discrimination. These spaces empower transgender individuals to pursue education, develop skills, and work toward a dignified and independent future.

RECOMMENDATION

The results indicate a scarcity of educational institutions where transgender individuals can attend without the threat of harassment or violence due to their gender identity. However, as these institutions do not provide credentials, they will be unable to facilitate the advancement of transgender individuals in their respective professions. The government's initiatives to address the financial, social, and educational needs of transgender individuals have been viewed with skepticism due to inadequate implementation.

- I. It is recommended that members of the transgender community be made aware of the importance of education and its potential to enhance their quality of life. To ensure the effectiveness of institutions established for transgender education, a robust feedback mechanism should be developed to assess their outcomes. Additionally, the allocation of employment quotas for transgender individuals is essential to promote sustainable inclusion and the long-term viability of these institutions.
- II. Reforms should also be introduced in mainstream educational institutions. These include comprehensive teacher training programs and the sensitization of students to the experiences and challenges faced by transgender peers, thereby fostering a supportive and inclusive learning environment.
- III. Transgender individuals should be encouraged to use their voices to advocate for their rights and personal development, rather than being discouraged by criticism. As human beings, they are entitled to dignity, respect, and equal opportunities. It is crucial to provide access to social programs and community activities tailored to their needs.
- IV. Financial resources must be allocated specifically for the empowerment of transgender individuals, including the establishment of dedicated schools and universities. Furthermore, funding should be directed to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that actively support and uplift the transgender community. Lastly, efforts must be made to close the implementation gap between transgender-inclusive policies and their practical application, ensuring that legal protections and initiatives translate into real, tangible benefits.

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