Original Article

Role of Teachers in Creating Transgender-Inclusive Higher Education Classrooms: NEP-2020- A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

This qualitative analysis discusses the central role of teachers in universities in designing transgender-inclusive educational environments within the ambit of the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP-2020). While the Indian academic community is evolving in sync with global developments, NEP-2020 looks toward equity, diversity, and inclusivity as driving forces to drive reform. The study is centered on the explicit influence of pedagogical practice, attitude, and teaching decisions on the social and educational lives of transgender students. It theoretically covers theoretical knowledge of inclusive education interactively, recognizes institutional and cultural barriers to implementation, and recommends actions for building supportive environments. By way of conceptual models, structural diagrams, and flowcharts, the study provides implementable frameworks to guide policy and practice. These findings are meant to guide teachers, policymakers, and educational leaders in the development of interventions that transition from symbolic inclusion to enable active engagement of transgender students at the university level. Through its focus on empathy, sensitivity training, and curriculum infusion, the paper calls for system change in an effort to create campuses where students of any gender identity can thrive academically and personally. (Government of India, 2020). (UNESCO, 2021). (Connell, 2012; Nanda, 2019). (Joshi & Malhotra, 2022).

Keywords: *Gender identity, Inclusive pedagogy, National Education Policy 2020 (NEP-2020), Supportive learning environments, Teacher practices, Transgender inclusion*

Introduction

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 provides a revolutionary vision for the Indian education sector with a focus on access, equity, and inclusion for all levels of learning. Its core ethos is to bring inclusive practices beyond the traditional areas of caste, class, or gender to include sexual orientation and gender identity (Government of India, 2020; UNESCO, 2021). Under the context of higher learning, the approach reframes teachers' roles from being only knowledge facilitators to change agents in creating spaces for learning where transgender students feel empowered, valued, and supported (Nanda, 2019; Connell, 2012).

Transgender Students in Higher Education

Even with progressive change, Indian transgender students are usually subjected to social stigma, discrimination, and structural exclusion when seeking to access higher education. These issues can lead to exclusionary teaching strategies, narrow curriculum representation, and inadequate institutional support mechanisms. Lack of inclusive role models further contributes to their marginalization. Teachers must be able to play the twin role of delivering academic content while simultaneously role modeling inclusive dispositions and providing mentorship which affirms students' identities.

The Role of Teachers

Inclusive classroom creation relies primarily on the willingness of teachers to engage with diversity and adopt gender-sensitive practices. Teachers can counter systemic hegemonies by using curriculum planning, advocacy, mentoring, and by fostering respectful conversation on gender identity (Connell, 2012; Nanda, 2019; Joshi & Malhotra, 2022). The following analysis investigates these complex tasks and outlines strategic practices based on NEP 2020 to foster inclusivity among transgender students.

Literature Review

Current research on inclusive education points to the importance of learning environments that enable all children to participate equitably and grow academically (Government of India, 2020; UNESCO, 2021). NEP 2020 calls for the elimination of barriers to marginalized groups and proposes teacher training, curriculum reform, and facilitative start-up institutional reforms. Whereas other research emphasizes inclusivity in secondary and primary education, a gap in scholarship centering especially on transgender individuals' inclusion in post-secondary education is highlighted (Connell, 2012; Nanda, 2019; Joshi & Malhotra, 2022). This gap underscores the need for empirical and conceptual work addressing the institutional and covert issues confronting transgender students in colleges and universities.

Educational research consistently underscores how the attitudes and practices of teachers are determinants of inclusive learning environments. Teachers not only teach subjects but are also role models who shape classroom culture and educate for respect for other identities (UNESCO, 2021). One of their most important responsibilities is to function as facilitators of inclusive dialogue by ensuring they provide safe and free spaces where students can have productive conversation with regard to gender and identity. This position deconstructs stereotypes and instills respect towards one another. Teachers must also be curriculum designers by developing beyond the standard syllabi and integrating varied viewpoints, like case studies to reflect real-life experiences of transgender people (Connell, 2012; Nanda, 2019; Joshi & Malhotra, 2022). No less significant is that they are the promoters of change within institutions, as educators are in a place where they can shape higher education practices and policies to provide fair treatment and access to transgender students (Connell, 2012; Nanda, 2019). In addition, educators can go beyond academic instruction by acting as mentors and support systems and providing advice and emotional support to students who are under stigma, discrimination, or conflict within themselves concerning gender identity (Joshi & Malhotra, 2022). Literature is always keen to point out that how effective such roles are depends on the level of preparation of teachers and how much support they receive from institutions, again emphasizing that inclusiveness is best implemented when the teachers are educated and empowered to do so (UNESCO, 2021).

Barriers to Transgender Inclusion

The creation of transgender-inclusive learning environments continues to encounter various challenges. One of the most significant obstacles stems from personal biases and preconceived notions held by some educators, which can hinder their ability to promote genuine inclusivity. Equally problematic is the lack of structured training programs addressing gender diversity, leaving many teachers unprepared to effectively meet the needs of transgender students. Outdated and inflexible curricula, which frequently fail to reflect contemporary social realities, further contribute to exclusion by disregarding the perspectives and experiences of marginalized gender identities. At the institutional level, barriers such as poor policy implementation, weak support systems, and limited resources often undermine efforts towards inclusivity.

Additionally, broader social factors, particularly cultural conservatism and deep-rooted societal prejudices, play a key role in shaping educators' attitudes, influencing classroom practices, and sustaining systemic inequalities. Even educators who are committed to inclusivity may find their efforts restricted by these structural and cultural limitations, underscoring the need for both institutional reforms and societal change to achieve meaningful inclusion (Connell, 2012; Nanda, 2019; Joshi & Malhotra, 2022).

Methodology

Qualitative Research Approach

Because the research topic is sensitive and complex, this study uses a qualitative approach to look into how higher education teachers help create learning environments that are inclusive of transgender students. Qualitative research is good for exploring detailed, specific issues that can't be easily measured with numbers. This method focuses on stories, themes, and ideas that can show how teachers experience and deal with inclusivity in their work. Even though this study doesn't collect new data from people directly, it uses a lot of existing research, policy documents, and the ideas from the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP-2020) to understand inclusivity in higher education better (Government of India, 2020; Connell, 2012; Nanda, 2019; Joshi & Malhotra, 2022).

Data Sources and Conceptual Framework

Since the study doesn't gather primary data, it is based on a hypothetical framework that outlines the main ideas and factors related to teachers' roles in inclusive education.

Three methods were considered for collecting data in this framework:

a. **Semi-Structured Interviews (Hypothetical):** These would be used to talk to teachers about their views, difficulties, and methods in making their teaching inclusive (UNESCO, 2021; Joshi & Malhotra, 2022).

b. **Document Analysis:** Policies, curriculum guidelines, and NEP 2020 documents were reviewed to find good examples and point out where schools could improve their support for transgender inclusion.

c. **Focus Group Discussions (Conceptual):** Educators would meet in groups to share their experiences, talk about their challenges, and discuss ways to build more supportive learning environments (Connell, 2012; Nanda, 2019; Joshi & Malhotra, 2022).

This approach helps understand how teachers' beliefs, school support, and policy ideas work together to support inclusive education.

Hypothetical Sampling and Selection Criteria

In applied research, purposeful sampling is the best way to find teachers who are involved in promoting inclusive practices in higher education. The selection would consider factors like whether the school is public or private, its location, the subject the teacher teaches, and their previous experience with diversity or sensitivity training. This helps ensure participants have relevant experience and can share meaningful insights. The study assumes that these teachers are familiar with the National Education Policy

2020 (NEP-2020) and have been involved in either using or pushing for more inclusive teaching methods in their own work (Government of India, 2020; UNESCO, 2021).

Analytical Techniques

If qualitative data were collected, it would be analyzed through thematic analysis, a method that involves systematically coding and interpreting the transcribed accounts from interviews and discussions. This approach would allow for the identification of recurring patterns and emerging themes. Based on existing literature, the anticipated central themes include teacher preparedness, curriculum adaptation, mentorship, and advocacy. In addition, the study would employ qualitative content analysis on institutional documents and policy guidelines, thereby integrating theoretical insights with practical strategies for implementation.

Limitations of the Methodology

This study is primarily conceptual in nature, and while it presents a well-structured qualitative framework, it does not include the collection of empirical data.As a result, the findings and interpretations are derived from theoretical analysis and secondary sources rather than direct statistical evidence. The methodology outlined here should therefore be viewed as a proposed model, intended to guide future investigations that incorporate primary data. Moreover, the multidimensional nature of transgender identity and educational inclusivity suggests that the conceptual framework used in this study may not fully capture the breadth of variables required for a comprehensive analysis. Consequently, there remains a strong need for rigorous empirical research that can build upon this foundation and provide deeper insights into the lived experiences of transgender learners in higher education (UNESCO, 2021; Connell, 2012; Nanda, 2019).

Ensuring Rigor and Credibility

To ensure both rigor and credibility, the study adheres to standard qualitative research practices. Triangulation is recommended, with multiple data sources such as interviews, focus groups, and document analysis being employed. Member checking and peer debriefing would serve as additional mechanisms to verify the interpretations and findings. The conceptual nature of the present research is acknowledged, and the ensuing discussion is framed as a theoretical exploration that holds promising implications for actual learning environment practice.

Findings and Discussion
Conceptual Analysis of Teacher Roles in Transgender Inclusion

Teacher practices play a multifaceted and transformative role in shaping LGBT-friendly and transgender-inclusive learning environments. Drawing upon the conceptual framework, this section highlights three major dimensions of teacher engagement: curricular innovation, interpersonal communication, and advocacy (Connell, 2012; Nanda, 2019).

Curricular Innovation and Pedagogical Adaptation

One of the most critical responsibilities of educators lies in revising curricula to ensure that gender diversity and transgender perspectives are adequately represented. Traditional course materials are often criticized for their limited scope, failing to reflect the lived realities of diverse identities. Innovative teachers address this gap by integrating case studies, narratives, and interdisciplinary approaches that challenge heteronormative assumptions (Connell, 2012; Nanda, 2019; Joshi & Malhotra, 2022). Key strategies include embedding gender studies content such as transgender histories, rights, and cultural contributions into mainstream curricula to promote critical thinking. Educators also employ adaptive learning materials, including multimedia tools, to accommodate different learning needs and ensure inclusivity. Furthermore, collaborative learning environments, such as group discussions, role-play, and problem-based tasks, allow students to engage meaningfully with issues of gender diversity.

Interpersonal Communication and Classroom Climate

The affective dimension of teaching is equally essential for nurturing an inclusive environment. Teachers must respond not only to the intellectual but also to the emotional needs of transgender learners (Connell, 2012; Nanda, 2019). Effective strategies include active listening and empathetic engagement, which foster trust and allow educators to recognize individual challenges. The deliberate use of inclusive language that avoids binary assumptions affirms student identities and fosters respect. Moreover, in cases of discrimination or microaggressions, teachers are expected to take on the role of mediators, addressing conflicts with sensitivity and safeguarding the emotional well-being of affected learners (Connell, 2012; Nanda, 2019; Joshi & Malhotra, 2022).

Advocacy and Institutional Change

Teachers extend their influence beyond classroom dynamics by acting as advocates for institutional transformation, in line with the inclusivity agenda of the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP-2020) (Government of India, 2020; UNESCO, 2021; Joshi & Malhotra, 2022). Their advocacy can take the form of policy influence and professional development, such as pushing for gender-sensitivity workshops, diversity training, and sustainable support systems for transgender learners (Connell, 2012; Nanda, 2019). Teachers may also foster institutional partnerships by collaborating with student councils, diversity offices, and external experts to strengthen support structures. Additionally, mentorship programs led by senior faculty can provide both academic and personal guidance to transgender students, helping them navigate challenges and succeed in higher education.

Table 1: Dimensions of Teacher Roles in Transgender-Inclusive Higher Education

Dimension	Main Features	Expected Outcomes
Curricular Innovation	Inclusion of gender diversity topics; adaptive teaching	Broader curriculum perspectives; enriched academic environment
Pedagogical Adaptation	Use of multimedia; inclusive teaching strategies	Enhanced engagement; diverse learning styles accommodated
Interpersonal Communication	Empathetic engagement; conflict resolution	Improved classroom climate; reduced instances of marginalization
Institutional Advocacy	Policy influence; mentorship programs	Increased institutional support; sustainable inclusivity culture

Table 1 illustrates the conceptual dimensions of teacher roles and their expected outcomes in higher education institutions.

Discussion on the Impact of Teacher Practices

The role of teachers in promoting inclusive education is complex and involves both strategies at the classroom level and broader changes within the school system. Our discussion is based on research from UNESCO (2021) and Joshi & Malhotra (2022). Curricular Reforms: Educators can change traditional subjects by including topics about transgender people and gender diversity. This helps to challenge outdated teaching materials that exclude certain groups. When transgender students see themselves represented in what they learn, they feel more confident and interested in school. This idea is supported by Connell (2012) and Nanda (2019), as well as Joshi & Malhotra (2022).

Classroom Atmosphere: How teachers and students interact is very important for creating a good learning environment. Teachers who show real understanding and use language that includes everyone help make school a safer place for all. It's also important to handle conflicts and small unfair comments carefully to prevent transgender students from feeling left out. These ideas come from Connell (2012), Nanda (2019), and Joshi & Malhotra (2022).

Advocacy for Institutional Change: Teachers can also push for bigger changes in the school system. By talking about fairness and inclusivity, they can influence school rules and create lasting changes that support transgender students. This means teachers need to go beyond just teaching and become active participants in changing the school culture. This point is based on UNESCO (2021).
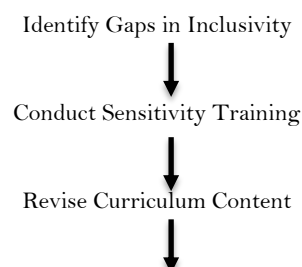
Table 2: Challenges and Proposed Solutions for Transgender Inclusion

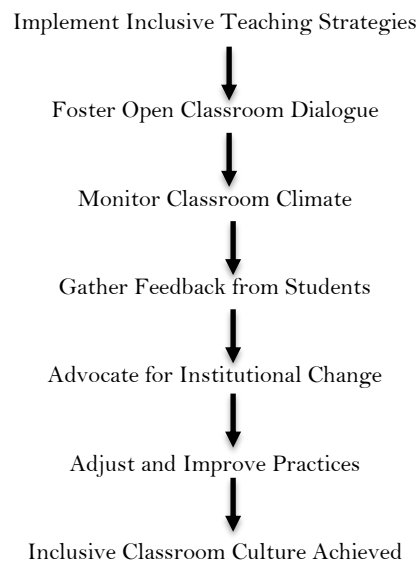| Challenge	Description	Proposed Solution
Limited Training on Gender Diversity	Many teachers lack formal instruction on gender sensitivity	Implement regular diversity and inclusivity workshops
Inadequate Curriculum Representation	Curricular materials rarely represent transgender narratives	Revise curricula to integrate transgender history and rights
Institutional Resistance	Traditional institutional cultures may resist change	Establish policy advocacy committees and mentorship networks
Social and Cultural Prejudices	Pre-existing biases affect teacher attitudes	Promote awareness programs and sensitivity training modules
Resource Constraints	Lack of technological and pedagogical resources	Invest in digital platforms and adaptive learning technologies

Table 2 provides a conceptual summary of the challenges faced in creating transgender-inclusive learning environments and offers solutions aligned with the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP-2020) framework. (Government of India, 2020). (Connell, 2012; Nanda, 2019).

Conceptual Process Flow: Inclusive Classroom Development

A conceptual diagram that shows how teacher interventions help create transgender-inclusive learning environments has been created. The stages of inclusion are mapped out in this graphic framework, which also shows how teaching behaviors like advocacy, mentorship, and curriculum adaptation create helpful learning environments (Connell, 2012; Nanda, 2019).

Identify Gaps in Inclusivity

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Conduct Sensitivity Training

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Revise Curriculum Content

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Implement Inclusive Teaching Strategies

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Foster Open Classroom Dialogue

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Monitor Classroom Climate

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Gather Feedback from Students

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Advocate for Institutional Change

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Adjust and Improve Practices

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Inclusive Classroom Culture Achieved

Figure: 1 An inclusive classroom development process involves a step-by-step approach that educators can follow to create and maintain an inclusive learning environment. The diagram highlights the iterative process of feedback and adjustment, which is essential for ongoing improvement. (Joshi & Malhotra, 2022)

Interpreting the Conceptual Findings

Conceptual Insights on Teacher Practices for Transgender Inclusion: This study's conceptual analysis shows how teacher practices can bring about real change when done with commitment and cultural awareness. Teachers need to move beyond just teaching a subject and become active supporters of diversity and inclusion. Several important ideas come up from this discussion.

Interdependence of Dimensions: The different roles and areas mentioned in Table 1 are connected. For example, changing the curriculum works best when combined with good communication skills and support from the school. A teacher who knows how to adapt their teaching might still not succeed if the school doesn't support progressive ideas. So, teacher development should cover all these areas together, not one at a time (Connell, 2012; Nanda, 2019).

Continuous Nature of Inclusivity: The process shown in the diagram is ongoing, not something that happens once. Inclusion is something that keeps changing and needs constant thinking, feedback, and improvements. Teachers should regularly check their methods, include the voices of transgender students, and adjust their strategies. This ability to change and improve is key to long-lasting inclusive learning (Connell, 2012; Nanda, 2019).

Need for Institutional Support: Although individual teachers are important, their impact is stronger when they have support from the school. Changes in school policies, programs that promote diversity, and structured support systems are crucial for making inclusion consistent and lasting. School support helps even teachers who aren't very experienced in this area to become strong advocates (Joshi & Malhotra, 2022).

Collaborative Engagement and Peer Learning: Working together is important for creating inclusive practices. Activities like group discussions, training sessions, and sharing experiences with other teachers help them learn from each other and address unfair attitudes. This teamwork not only improves individual skills but also ensures that inclusivity is maintained across all subjects and parts of the school (UNESCO, 2021; Joshi & Malhotra, 2022).

Broader Implications for Higher Education

The ideas developed in this study have big effects on the future of higher education. As universities and colleges around the world start to adopt more inclusive policies, the role of teachers is key in making these changes happen. By creating transgender-inclusive practices, teachers help students who are often left out to succeed academically. This also helps build a school culture that values fairness, dignity, and respect for everyone. In India, the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP-2020) supports these changes by making inclusivity a main goal of educational reform (Government of India, 2020; UNESCO, 2021; Connell, 2012; Nanda, 2019; Joshi & Malhotra, 2022). This study also shows how important it is for teachers to work with people from other fields like gender studies, psychology, and sociology. By bringing in knowledge from these areas, educators can create better, more complete plans for making schools more inclusive. In this way, teachers move beyond just teaching subjects and become people who help change society, shaping not only the way classes are run but also the overall culture of the college or university (Joshi & Malhotra, 2022).

Implications

This study looked at the basic ideas about how teachers can create transgender-inclusive learning environments in higher education. It used the vision of inclusivity from the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP-2020) to guide the analysis. The key implications from this study are as follows (Government of India, 2020; Connell, 2012; Nanda, 2019)

Multidimensional Teacher Roles: Teachers help create inclusive environments in many ways. This includes changing the curriculum, how they interact with students, and how they push for change within the school. Each of these areas is important in creating learning spaces that

Royal International Global Journal of Advance and Applied Research
Peer Reviewed International, Open Access Journal.

ISSN: 2998-4459 | Website: https://rlgjaar.com Volume-2, Issue-9 | September - 2025

truly support transgender students (Connell, 2012; Nanda, 2019).

Emphasis on Continuous Improvement: Inclusive education is not a fixed thing it keeps changing. Teachers need to regularly think about their teaching methods, take student feedback into account, and adjust their approaches to better meet the needs of students. The tools and methods in the conceptual framework are important for keeping inclusivity going (UNESCO, 2021).

Systemic and Collaborative Change: Making inclusive learning environments isn't just up to individual teachers. Schools also need to put in place policies, offer training, and build teamwork among staff. Activities like diversity training, changing what is taught, and setting up mentorship programs help everyone work together to create a fairer system.

Conceptual Framework for Practical Application: The models, tables, and diagrams presented in this study provide a **blueprint for action**. They can guide educators, administrators, and policymakers in translating NEP-2020's inclusive agenda into actionable strategies. These tools underscore both the existing challenges and the potential interventions that can bring about sustainable transformation in higher education (Government of India, 2020; Joshi & Malhotra, 2022).

Implications for Educators and Policymakers

The insights derived from this study highlight several practical implications for educators, institutional leaders, and policymakers engaged in higher education. These recommendations emphasize the importance of sustained efforts to foster inclusive practices aligned with the vision of equity and diversity.

For Educators:

Educators are encouraged to actively engage in continuous professional development programs that emphasize diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Curricula should be revised to incorporate gender studies and transgender narratives, thereby expanding disciplinary discussions (Connell, 2012; Nanda, 2019). Classroom environments must be designed to foster open dialogue and emotional safety, ensuring that students feel respected and supported. Teachers should also work with colleagues and institutional units to advocate for systemic reforms that benefit all marginalized communities.

For Institutional Administrators and Policymakers:

Administrators and policymakers have a crucial role in creating comprehensive institutional policies that require diversity training for faculty and staff (Joshi & Malhotra, 2022). Institutions should invest in resources and adaptive teaching technologies that cater to the diverse learning needs of students. Structured mentorship and support programs must be established to provide transgender students with academic guidance and personal support (Connell, 2012; Nanda, 2019). Institutions should also cultivate a culture of continuous assessment and feedback, using both internal evaluations and external benchmarking against recognized best practices to drive ongoing improvement.

Suggestions

While this study provides a conceptual framework for examining the role of educators in creating transgender-inclusive learning environments, further research is necessary to strengthen and expand these insights. Future studies should incorporate empirical data to validate and refine the proposed models. Mixed-method approaches, combining quantitative assessments with qualitative narratives, would offer a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of inclusive practices. Comparative studies could evaluate the impact of different teacher training initiatives, while longitudinal research may reveal the long-term effects of inclusive pedagogy on student achievement and well-being. Additionally, exploring regional differences in the implementation of National Education Policy 2020 (NEP-2020) guidelines would highlight contextual challenges and best practices across various educational settings (Government of India, 2020; Connell, 2012; Nanda, 2019; Joshi & Malhotra, 2022).

Conclusion

The movement toward transgender-inclusive higher education should be recognized not only as a policy directive but also as a profound moral responsibility. Teachers, positioned as frontline agents of transformation, have the potential to reshape educational experiences by cultivating environments that embrace diversity, encourage open dialogue, and support both academic and personal development. The qualitative analysis in this study highlights that teacher practices form the foundation of such change, reinforcing the idea that inclusivity begins in the classroom. By aligning with the principles of the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP-2020) and engaging in continuous professional growth, educators can play a pivotal role in dismantling systemic barriers that restrict the participation of transgender learners in higher education (Government of India, 2020; Connell, 2012; Nanda, 2019; Joshi & Malhotra, 2022).

Final Thoughts

The findings presented, supported by conceptual frameworks, tables, and process-based models, function as both a roadmap and a call to action. They affirm that inclusivity is not a static achievement but a collective and evolving process, demanding the sustained commitment of educators, institutions, and policymakers. Ultimately, the role of teachers extends beyond academic instruction to active participation in societal transformation, where diversity is not simply acknowledged within policies but celebrated as a core value of contemporary education (UNESCO, 2021). The pursuit of transgender inclusivity in higher education, as envisioned by the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP-2020), is both an urgent challenge and a necessary reform. This study has offered a comprehensive conceptual analysis that underscores the transformative potential of teacher practices in reshaping academic spaces. Through pedagogical innovation, empathetic classroom management, and active engagement in institutional policy-making, educators can bridge the gap between policy aspirations and on-ground realities (Government of India, 2020; UNESCO, 2021; Connell, 2012; Nanda, 2019; Joshi

& Malhotra, 2022). The framework, tables, and process models presented here not only synthesize current best practices but also provide direction for future inquiry. Although this work does not include empirical data, the conceptual foundations laid here create a strong basis for subsequent research and for the practical implementation of inclusive strategies. By aligning the vision of NEP-2020 with practical interventions, this study highlights the pivotal role of educators in advancing equity and justice within higher education (Government of India, 2020; Connell, 2012; Nanda, 2019; Joshi & Malhotra, 2022).

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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