

Teachers' Readiness for Normalizing Students with LGBT Identities

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ABSTRACT

Article aimed to study the teachers' readiness for normalizing students with LGBT identities in the educational setup. 76 teachers from Government and private sectors across India participated the survey. Google form was used for data collection. Of the total sample, 11.8% teachers were unaware of the term "Homosexuality". 14.5% considered homosexuality as abnormal. 13.2% believed LGBT as a "western concept". 25% reported it "against Indian culture". Study emphasizes on the importance of awareness and sensitization trainings for teachers in prevention and management of negative psychosocial and academic consequences faced by this student community as an imperative part of inclusive education.

Keywords: *Teachers readiness, LGBT Normalizing, inclusive education*

Introduction: Current situation of LGBT in India: Issues and Challenges

We as a Teachers have a responsibility to bring the world our students will have to confront -are already confronting-into our classrooms. Anything less than that is professionally and morally irresponsible.

-Hoffman, "Teaching Torch Song: Gay Literature in the classroom"

India decriminalized homosexuality in the year 2018, after eight yearlong battle of gay right activists and declared some parts of section 377 as unconstitutional and reason for causing agony, discrimination and violation of article 21, 14, 15 of the people with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender identities. All this has not even hampered the overall mental health of the people with LGBT identities but have also led to being in unsatisfying and unharmonious relationship for the partners conceptualized and committed to live together under stereotypical hetero-normalized social institutions. Studies have shown that LGBT students report more depression, drug abuse and suicide attempts than students with heterosexual identities. The GLSEN report also points out that Seventy-four percent of LGBT youth were verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation, and 55 percent were verbally harassed because of their gender expression (Kerr³, 2016). In India along with many other countries, since long the people involved in gay sexual behavior were considered to be

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spreading HIV, though that is not reality. The vulnerability was because of lack of correct knowledge, discrimination, being harassed by local police both sexually and verbally (Logie⁴, Lacombe-Duncan, Kenny, Levermore, Jones, Marshall, & Newman, (2017), Chakrapani⁵, 2010) along with the absence of any act which protected their right to have consensual adult sexual act. Many gay rape victims in India, did not report the crime happened against them in view of absence of the decriminalizing act. Appreciatively, through the print and overgrowing digital media, the landmark judgment reached to the commonest of the person in India and across the globe, so as to the learned masses of India within few minutes, post the judgment was passed. For some, it was matter of a great pride and for the others, it was hotcake topic, to come up with and forward amusing memes.

Inclusive education in sexual diversity: Teachers and current policies

Teachers can have desirable impact on building the psychological wellbeing of the students, identifying with co-existing sexualities, and furthering the social change than any other socializing agent. Percolation of this attitudinal and functional change at social level and then at institutional level is inevitable. As a result, a teacher has to remain abreast with all emerging inclusions/trends in the society.

Subsequent to the amendment of the Act in 2018, almost after two years, it is the right time to know that how much awareness and acceptability, the teacher community has about LGBT. As, it is very vital for the teachers, who deal directly with the children, after the parents. Further to this teachers' must be sensitized about the needs and challenges of these children, who will later be the responsible citizens of the country. Ignorance of the teachers or having outdated point of view towards this aspect can lead to biasness, and ignorance. Unattended cases may further bring unrest and unsatisfied development of the children with co-existing sexual orientation. The effort in the direction towards integration of the sexual diversity in teaching curriculum in India requires serious focus. Including these identities in citing examples, illustrations and issues of them along with the mainstream gender identities by the teacher can initiate a healthy conversation among classmates and bring the students with margin sexual identities to make an inclusive setup. Fortunately, in the recent curriculum revisions at both state and Central Board of School Education attention is paid to include minority, women and people living with disability in the textbooks as a positive step towards inclusive education. After a recent syllabus change, a Maharashtra class⁶ 11 Sociology textbook included information on same-sex couples, live-in relationships and single parents (India Today, 2019). Similarly, Pearson (international educational company) has also announced that school textbooks will be updated to ensure that they are LGBT

³ Kerr M. (2016). Depression in the LGBT Population.

<https://www.healthline.com/health/depression/gay#suicide-prevention>

⁴ Logie, C. H., Lacombe-Duncan, A., Kenny, K. S., Levermore, K., Jones, N., Marshall, A., & Newman, P. A. (2017). Associations between Police Harassment and HIV Vulnerabilities among Men Who Have Sex with Men and Transgender Women in Jamaica. *Health and human rights*, 19(2), 147–154.

⁵ Chakrapani, V. (2010). Hijras/Transgender Women in India: HIV, Human Rights and Social Exclusion, UNDP, India

⁶ Maharashtra class 11 Sociology textbook teaches about same-sex couples, live-in relationships, single parents, news article, India Today, August 4, 2019 <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/news/story/maharashtra-class-11-sociology-textbook-teaches-about-same-sex-couples-live-in-relationships-single-parents-1577032-2019-08-04>

inclusive (The Telegraph⁷, 2018). Also, the charity Stonewall has produced “A new handbook” for secondary schools that advises teachers on how they can make the curriculum more welcoming for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender pupils (The Telegraph, 2018). In the National Education Policy 2020 in India emphasizes to ensure that all the transgender children of the school age receive quality school education and sensitization of teachers on the issues related to transgender children and special learning needs (Ministry of Human and Resource Development, 2019). However, there is no mention of including sexual diversity in the education policy including Gay, Lesbian and Bi-sexual orientations.

Provision of creating platform for the teacher for exchanging their views will enable many teachers to express their emotions. This platform may facilitate professional ambience and conducive environment for the educationists. Ignoring the existing non heterosexual identities and just emphasizing on two genders, definitely, may hamper the expression of the former, Moreover, unwelcomed gestures leads to unsaid inhibition. Above said is what ought to be and how a teacher should be empowered, however, teachers have their own challenges in acquainting themselves with this future change. Sometimes, it is difficult to locate the sources for getting authentic knowledge. Therefore, it is important to know the limitations and hesitations of the teachers in practicing new trends in their classrooms.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: FROM LENSES OF NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

World Health Organization

According to WHO “Gender refers to the roles, behaviors, activities, attributes and opportunities that any society considers appropriate for girls and boys, and women and men. Gender interacts with, but is different from, the binary categories of biological sex (WHO). World health Organization also states that as gender is a social construct and societal rules and norms pose various expectations on basis of the binary gender classification on both male and female. They have also come out with concept of “Toxic Masculinity” and “Women oppression” all this influences a person’s risk-taking and health-seeking behaviors, exposure to health risks and vulnerability to diseases. Also, the Organization states that it cannot be completely understood that what can be the etiological factors of this gender and sexual diversity, whether they are biological, inherited or later environment leads to this variation. However, nowhere the gender and sexual variation on basis of evidential research is being put under any kind of illness. In the latest version of ICD-11 the sexual and variations are even declassified from gender identity disorders and are to be studied under issues of sexual health (Bulletin of the World Health Organization, 2014). This is going to be a very beneficial step for betterment of the people under these identities. Also, the term “Transgender” does not only define the Transsexuals, it is an umbrella term-including everyone who does not want to define oneself within the binary gender (male-female) classification. Long held belief about the physical, sexual and psychological health of the population with sexual variation are also broken by various evidence based research which states that this population is at risk of sexual, physical and psychological ailments not because of their orientation but because they lack access to the basic survives, negative societal evaluation, stigma and discrimination. The organization has come up with various empowerment strategies to integrate them into main education and health system.

⁷The Telegraph, 2018, School textbooks will be updated to include same sex couples in their questions, Pearson says. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2018/02/01/school-textbooks-will-updated-include-sex-couples-textbooks/>

American Psychological Association (APA)⁸

American Psychiatric Association (APA) removed the diagnosis of “homosexuality” from the second edition of its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) in 1973 (Bayer⁹ R.1981 and Drescher¹⁰, Merlino, editors, 2007). APA has come up with practice guidelines for working with LGBT clients in 2011 (APA, 2012). The guidelines are intended to help practitioners in the areas such as religion and spirituality, the differentiation of gender identity and sexual orientation, socioeconomic and workplace issues, and the use and dissemination of research on LGB issues.

National Education Policy, 2020

MHRD in India is in process of implementation of DNEP which is well researched and has opinions from people from sexual diversity. Though it doesn't mention LGBT community but talks of ensuring transgender discrimination free quality education in India. Also, it intends to train teachers to be sensitive and well equipped with the knowledge and skill required to welcome the transgender children in the classes (MHRD, 2019). However, in India the transgender term is commonly used for “Transsexual/intersex” persons and LGBT is not included in that. But recent Transgender Bill passed in Rajya Sabha has addressed this issue and gives freedom to people for choosing their gender identity. However, the policy needs to be more succinct and clearly mentioning LGBT student's treatment in class. The “Saksham” guide in India (UGC) clearly states issues faced by Homosexual students and penalties for the accuser.

The treatment which pathologies homosexuality were prevalent across the world which usually included; i.e., intrauterine hormonal exposure, excessive mothering, inadequate or hostile fathering, sexual abuse, etc. (Drescher¹¹, 2015). Efforts of national and international organizations, activists and research in field is imperative in bringing this theoretical and practical shift. Though a lot has to be done in applied manner which may take significant time across the world but the consistent efforts from all sides are needed, as there are still many countries who have not yet begun the process. They require major shifts in attitudes, many orthodox and religion based countries are still in the denial phase to take up these issues and accept their on sexual variant co-existing identities considering the negative religious connotations towards gender and sexual variance.

METHODOLOGY

Present article aimed to study the teachers' readiness for normalizing students with LGBT identities in the educational setup, especially, during regular classroom teaching and learning process. We, in India, have not yet normalized ourselves towards teen heterosexual sex and necessity to impart formal sex education in the educational institutes, have got another challenge to mainstream the identities, which many of us are still not comfortable with.

⁸ American Psychological Association. Guidelines for psychological practice with lesbian, gay, and bisexual clients. *Am Psychol.* 2012;67(1):10–42. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0024659> PMID: 21875169

⁹ Bayer R. (1981). Homosexuality and American Psychiatry: The Politics of Diagnosis. Basic Books; New York, NY, USA: [Google Scholar] *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* (2014);92:672-679. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2471/BLT.14.13554>

¹⁰ Drescher J., Merlino J.P., editors. (2007). *American Psychiatry and Homosexuality: An Oral History.* Routledge; New York, NY, USA: [Google Scholar] *Gender.* (WHO) <https://www.who.int/health-topics/gender>

¹¹ Drescher J. (2015). Out of DSM: Depathologizing Homosexuality. *Behavioral sciences* (Basel, Switzerland), 5(4), 565–575. doi:10.3390/bs5040565

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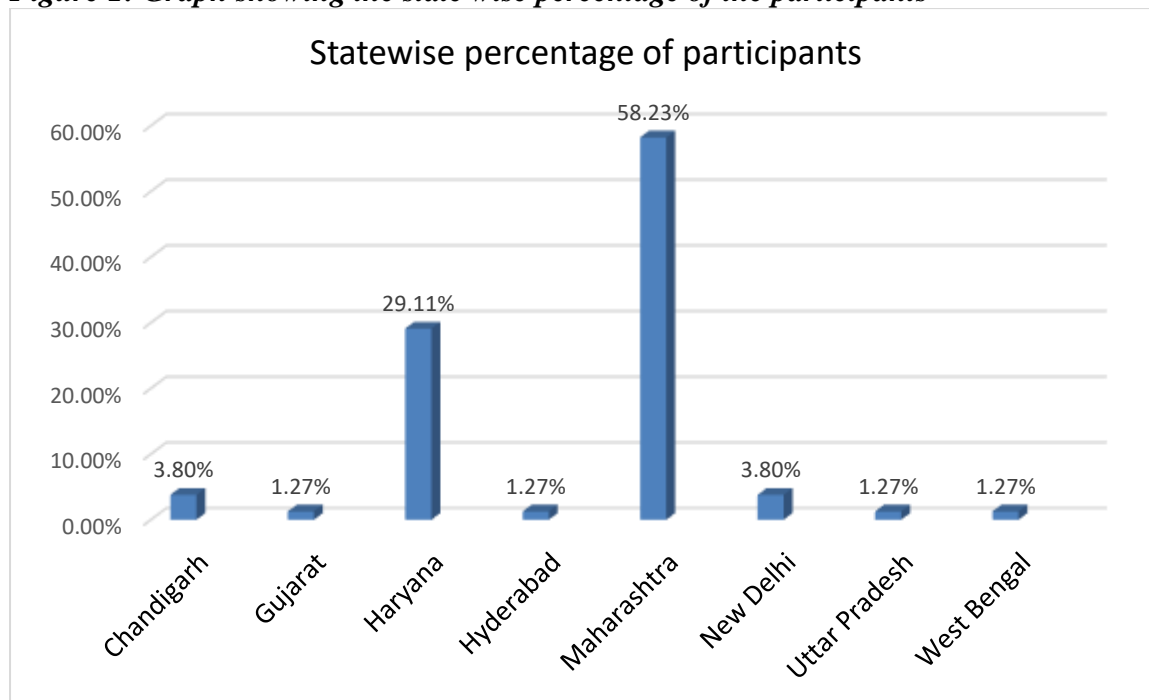
The article surveyed teachers employed in Government and private sectors across the country to find out their readiness towards normalizing and mainstreaming the co-existing sexual identities by knowing their level of awareness, acceptance, improvising examples in their regular teaching content, curricular and co-curricular activities, unassuming of the sexuality of students and open to take up the discussion on the related topics. The survey questionnaire was mailed to the institutions for circulating among teachers, personally mailed to the teachers and posted on social networking sites such as Facebook and WhatsApp to reach wider teacher population. Survey had 14 questions measuring the knowledge, attitude, and readiness of the teachers towards including LGBT related discussions, examples, and issues in their classroom teaching. The survey had both open ended and close ended question so that both quantitative and qualitative responses could be captured.

RESULTS

Background information of respondents

Of the 500 teachers only 76 responded to the survey, of which 28.9% were in 25-30 age group, 25% (30-35yrs), 31.6% (35-45yrs), 11.8% (45-55yrs), 2.6% were above 55yrs. Of the total response 75% were female and 25% were male teachers with 31.6% PhD, 42% Post graduation, 18% graduates and 7.9% MPhil had as highest qualification. Maximum Teachers responded were faculty of Psychology (44.3%) followed by faculty of Education (20.26%), Social work, Sociology and Anthropology (10.13%), Science and Engineering (11.4), Management and Commerce (8.8%), Architecture (2.53%), Languages (2.53%). Of the total 76 teachers 60.5% were from private, 21.1% public, 5.3% deemed to be university, 13.2 from other like NGO and other aided institutes.

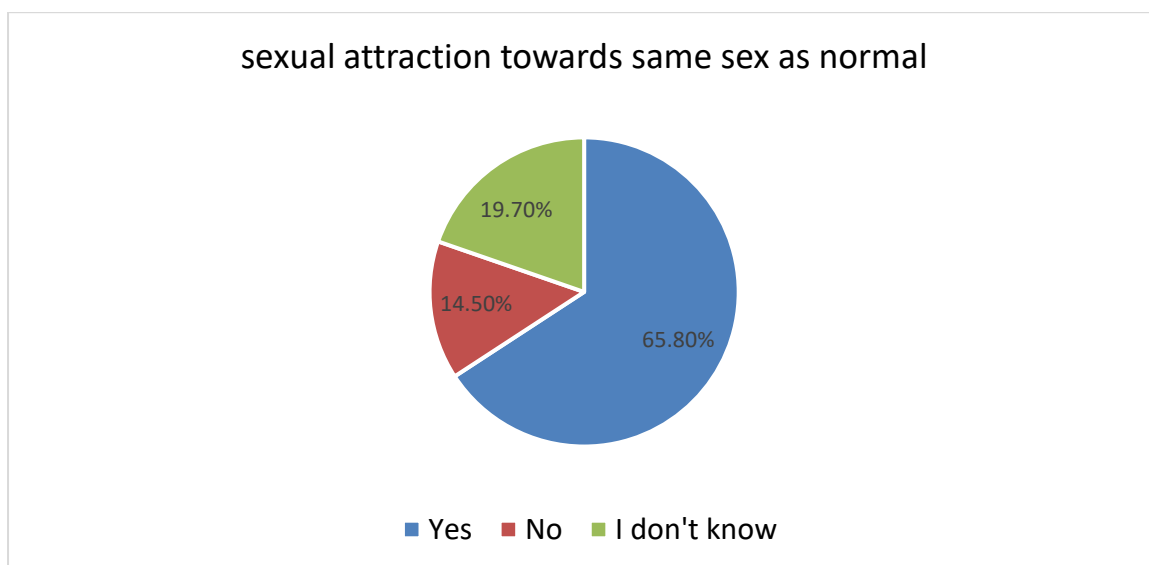
Figure 1: Graph showing the state wise percentage of the participants



Knowledge and Awareness

The survey showed that 88.2% of the teachers were aware of the term LGBT 11.8% were not clear on the term. 65.8% respondents reported that sexual attraction towards same sex is normal 14.5% reported that it is not normal and 19.7% responded that they do not know.

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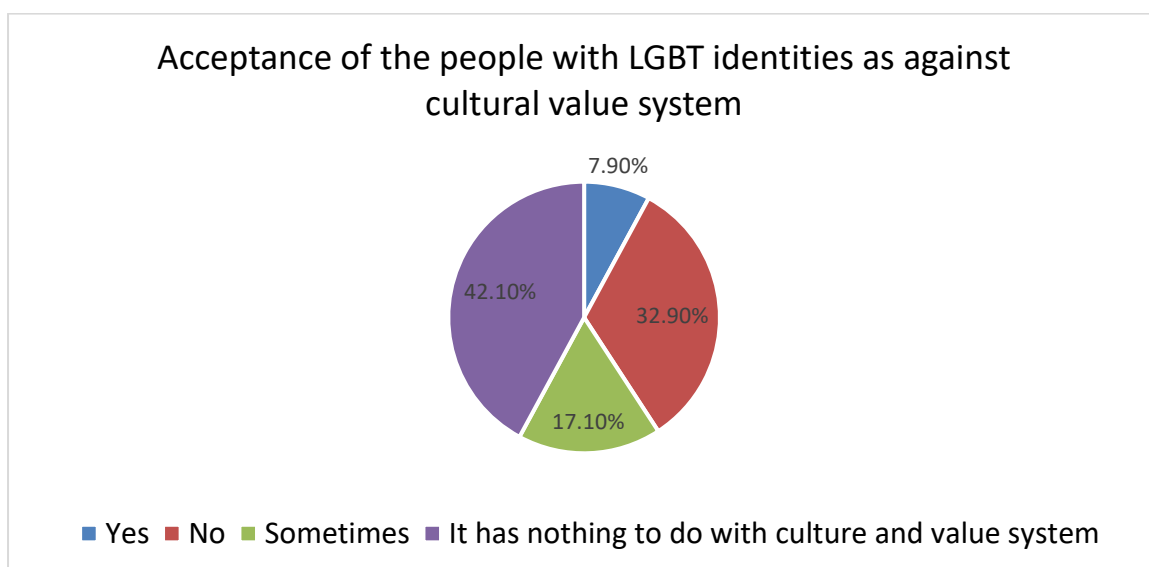


13.2% respondents reported that LGBT is a western concept, 7.9% had no idea of it and 78.9% did not consider it as a western concept. Homosexuality was declassified from the list of mental illness thirty years ago and in 1987 and also it was removed from the list of the “ego dystonic” disorder.

93% of the respondents reported that teachers must be aware of the issues faced by Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual and Transgender identities, 5.3% were of the opinion that it is up to the teacher and only 1.3% responded that teachers must not be aware of their issues.

Attitudes and acceptance

25% reported that accepting LGBT identities is against our culture, whereas 32.9% reported that it is not against our culture. 42.1% responded that it has nothing to do with our culture and value. Research shows that sexual behaviors that are not recognized as valid form of sexuality contribute towards the vulnerability to various negative circumstances, diseases and violence (Bryant and Schilt, 2008; Lombardi, 2009; Grant and others, 2011). In our society sexuality expression is governed majorly by spiritual, ethical and moral concerns (SIECUS, 2012).



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On response to “As a teacher you will be equally able to accept a female student whose girl friend is female as you will be towards a male student with female girlfriend (with whom she is sexually attracted)” 69.7% responded yes, 26.3% reported that they have nothing to do with this and 3.9% responded that they would not be able to accept.

Readiness

59.2% responded that during regular teaching teachers must give examples related to other gender and sexual identities 35.5% were of the opinion that it is up to the teacher, only 5.3% responded that teachers must not include any such examples during regular teaching. 80.3% were of the opinion that teachers must take up discussion on related topics 17.1% responded that it is up to the teacher and 2.6% were not in favor of discussion on the related topics. Teachers' talking about on topics of homosexuality and bi-sexuality is a good idea according to 68.4% respondents, 27.6% responded that they cant's say whether it is good or not, 2.6% were of the opinion that it would be embarrassing for teachers to take up such discussions, only 1.3% responded that it is not a good idea. On response to if parents identify at early age that their child is getting attracted towards same sex then same sex attraction can be prevented 57.9% responded no, 25% responded that yes it can be changed if identified at early age and 17.1% responded that they do not know. 53.9% respondents reported that they are comfortable talk to their students on LGBT related issues, whereas 2.6% responded no, 3.9% said they do not want to talk on this topic with their students, 39.5% respondents reported that they would be able to talk if they are given more knowledge and training on this topic. On response to why they think it is important for teachers to talk on this topic, respondents' opinions could be categorized as following:

Reasons for Teachers awareness of LGBT community issues	
1	Developing Acceptance and sensitivity
2	Breaking Inhibitions and homophobia
3	Clearing Myths and Awareness
4	Handling Cultural diversity
5	Difficult for parents to talk
6	New phenomenon
8	Normalization and Mainstreaming
9	Part of sex education
10	remove stigma and discrimination
11	Teachers have more impact than parents
12	understand students better and guide them
13	Early identification can help in treating sexual variation

Views of the respondents

“Teachers must be aware of the LGBT community because teachers interact and deal with a large cross-section of the society in the form of students and the LGBT community is an integral part of the same society.”

“Because in present scenario LGBT are coming up in our society”

“LGBT is not new to India. If we take the ancient history into consideration the kings and Queens have been known to have them around. Again, a teacher is a driving and strong influential force in a student's life who can help form acceptance and positively developing thoughts in a student's life.”

(Above views are expressed by the teachers on reason for need to be aware of the LGBT issues)

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97.4% of the respondents reported that teachers awareness on LGBT issues will be helpful for the students with these identities to accept their identities and 89.5% respondents reported that given an opportunity they would like to attend workshop/training on the this topic, 7.9% would not like to attend any such training or workshop, whereas 2.6% responded that teachers do not require any training on this topic. Research has also shown that teachers reported a higher frequency of engaging in behaviors to support LGBT students when they worked in a school with an active GSA or enumerated anti-bullying policy and received training specifically related to LGBT youth (Swanson & Gettinger, 2016).

DISCUSSION

Findings of the study are indicative of imparting more awareness, sensitization, attitude change among the teachers to be ready for normalizing students with the LGBT Identities, as there is high number of teachers who responded that mainstreaming has nothing to do with them, considering which they did not take part in the study. Many participants who refused to take part in the study justified nonparticipation in the study as; not linking this area of research, not being comfortable with the rese¹²arch topic, lack of time, teacher has no role to play on the given topic. OECD (2017) in it working paper reports that in most OECD¹³ countries, homophobia is widespread. In the same report it is mentioned that LGBTI are bullied at school and suffer academically. Therefore, the teachers responding no role in the awareness of LGBT issues are actually ignorant of their role as a teacher to prevent bullying and create enabling environment. The survey covered 54 countries including India. The OECD survey also point out under LGBTI educational outcomes that stigmatization of sexual and gender minorities at school is a hindrance in academic performance and also experience of same-sex attraction poses challenge in adolescence even early adulthood and is related to lower educational achievement. Considering all these factors, drop-out rate and degree completion in the transgender students is reduced to 50% of the heteronormative students.

There were quite a number of teachers who considered homosexuality as abnormal, western concept and against Indian culture. This shows that many lack correct knowledge responses like; “if identified earlier then homosexuality can be prevented emerged” are indicative of the know existing misconceptions among the teachers.

The article presents strong evidence- based findings to come up with a trained task force to actually make our education system inclusive of all the gender and sexual identities. 89% of the respondents in current study have expressed the need to be part of any workshop or training to comfortably take up the LGBT integration in classroom. Indian constitution has come up with this positive change, However, being part of the welfare state, we educationist must come forward to imply what is being legally conceptualized. For that a strong rationale, accepting and non-judgmental teaching force is required, which cannot be created without attitudinal changes and facilitating readiness in the teachers.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The study findings can be summarized as important step towards assessing readiness of the teachers in India, towards including gender and sexual variation in the classrooms. The paper presented positive trend as acceptance and keenness to attend trainings in the field to support the psychological and academic well-being of the students with co-existing sexualities. A similar large-scale survey could be facilitative in any formulating future

¹² OECD. (2017). LGBTI in OECD Countries: A Review, Working Paper No. 198;

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guidelines for the psychological and academic well-being of the students, with the co-existing sexual and gender identity. There are various guides and handbooks available for teachers to normalize and cater the needs of these students but in India as far as teacher training curricula and pre-service teacher training is concerned, no such specific guide is present. Therefore, present paper can pave further way for the researchers, educationists, and psychologists to develop such guidelines for teachers specific to Indian teachers. We are multicultural society and guide developed in western context cannot be aptly applied to our cultural setting, because in India binary gender roles are very specifically defined, hence, segregation of them in more variant societal context requires in-depth cultural understanding. Books such as "Getting ready for Benjamin: Preparing teachers for sexual diversity in the classroom" is present in various edition could be a good reference for creating such resources for teachers in India. Finally, the paper also throws light on reluctance of teachers to take part in the furtherance of the sexual integration, because of various issues, mainly: attitudinal, lack of importance given to this issue, lack of skills and knowledge of the field and busy schedules. The current research would like to recommend that pre-service and in service teachers must be mandatorily exposed to awareness and sensitization trainings to understand the importance of their role in preventing unfortunate experiences these students undergo, result of which could be drop out, under performance at academic level and at physical and mental health level it could be violence, depression and various other negative consequences. Therefore, taking no role in support of gender and sexual diverse students is equal to not fulfilling the ethical and moral duties of being a teacher in complete sense.

Limitations and suggestions for further studies

Study was conceptualized in a manner that it would include large sample of the teacher population in India across the states. However, only a small sample participated in the study which, limited the generalizability of the research findings. Secondly, very small population participated from rural India hence the survey does not have adequate representation of the teachers from rural India which has skewed the attitudes and readiness in positive side. Whereas, 68.8% of population in India is in villages, therefore it is imperative to conduct this survey at large scale with more randomized sampling.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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