ShodhSamajik: Journal of Social Studies
October-December 2026 3(3)
https://shodhsamajik.com/

Review Article

FROM RECOGNITION TO PRACTICE: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF BARRIERS AND INCLUSIVE PRACTICES FOR TRANSGENDER STUDENTS ACROSS EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS

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ABSTRACT

While institutions are increasingly acknowledging gender diversity, transgender students still encounter obstacles to meaningful participation in education. However, evidence is patchy across school and higher education contexts, limiting understanding of shared and context-specific challenges and inclusive practices. This systematic review brings together research about the educational experiences of transgender students in different contexts. We conducted systematic searches using PRISMA 2020 principles in Scopus, Web of Science, Semantic Scholar, and Google Scholar, which yielded 903 documents published between January 2010 and May 2025. Twenty-one peer-reviewed studies were included after screening and assessing eligibility. The CASP framework was used to assess methodological quality, and findings were thematically integrated through narrative and cross-context analysis. Shared impediments were discrimination, harassment, invalidation of identity, lack of institutional support, and cisnormative administrative and physical systems. School-based issues were more significantly connected with peer victimisation, teacher reactions, family connections, safety, and restriction of gender expression. Those with higher education reported more frequent challenges relating to administrative processes, housing, documentation, facilities, and institutional support. Promising practices included inclusive policies, administrative recognition, gender-inclusive facilities, educator preparation, student support, and participation. The review concludes that substantive inclusion requires a shift from formal recognition to coordinated and consistently applied institutional practices.

Keywords: Transgender Students, Educational Inclusion, Institutional Exclusion, Higher Education, School Climate, Inclusive Practices, Systematic Review

INTRODUCTION

TRANSGENDER STUDENTS AND EDUCATIONAL INCLUSION

Educational inclusion is not only about access to education but also about safety, recognition, participation, belonging, and equal opportunities. For transgender students, these dimensions are partly dependent on how educational environments recognise and respond to diverse gender identities. The term ‘transgender’ is generally used to describe individuals whose gender identity does not correspond with the sex assigned to them at birth, while terms such as 'gender-diverse', 'gender-expansive', and ‘non-binary’ recognise the diversity of gender identities represented in the educational population Abela et al. (2024). There are differences in terminology and experience, but one common concern is the extent to which educational institutions are still organised around

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Received: 15 September 2026; **Revised:** 09 October 2026; **Accepted:** 27 October 2026; **Published:** 06 November 2026
DOI: 10.29121/ShodhSamajik.v3.i3.2026.167
Page Number: 50-64
Journal Title: ShodhSamajik: Journal of Social Studies
Journal Abbreviation: ShodhSamajik J. Soc. Stud.
Online ISSN: 3049-2319, **Print ISSN:** 3108-2009
Publisher: Granthaalayah Publications and Printers, India
Conflict of Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.
Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.
Authors’ Contributions: Each author made an equal contribution to the conception and design of the study. All authors have reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.
Transparency: The authors affirm that this manuscript presents an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study. All essential aspects have been included, and any deviations from the original study plan have been clearly explained. The writing process strictly adhered to established ethical standards.
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exclusively cisgender ideas. This is particularly crucial to the notion of cisnormativity. Cisnormative educational environments assume that sex and gender identity align. Such preconceptions can become embedded in administrative records, identification systems, classroom interactions, infrastructure, accommodation arrangements, and institutional regulations. Thus, exclusion may be reproduced even through routine institutional arrangements that fail to recognise the identities and needs of transgender students, even if there is no explicit discrimination Goldberg et al. (2018), Stachowiak and Gano (2019). Here, the inclusion of trans people is not only about an individual being accepted but also about how institutions organise and regulate participation.

BARRIERS TO EDUCATION PARTICIPATION AND BELONGING

Research in educational contexts documents a variety of challenges transgender students face, including discrimination, harassment, bullying, social exclusion, and invalidation of identity that threaten safety and belonging. Hostile school climates have been linked to bullying, safety concerns, low school connectedness, and absenteeism Greytak et al. (2009), McGuire et al. (2010), Pampati et al. (2020). Transgender and gender-diverse youth may also experience pervasive social oppression that impacts their psychological and educational well-being Abela et al. (2024). Similar issues are also present in higher education administrative recognition, housing, campus infrastructure, and support services Seelman (2014), Goldberg et al. (2018), Nicolazzo et al. (2018). Institutional systems can therefore either facilitate or repeat exclusion Buthelezi and Brown (2023). Exclusion operates at several interrelated levels, with interpersonal stigma likely compounded by institutional processes and structures that produce distress, disengagement, and educational challenges Pampati et al. (2020), Pascale and DeVita (2024). However, there is also resilience, resistance, and agency demonstrated by transgender students in negotiating exclusionary spaces Hillier et al. (2019), which points to the need for a departure from deficit-based readings.

VARIATION BETWEEN EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS

The institutional and social context of transgender students differs, despite the similarity of exclusion that transgender students may face throughout educational stages. Schools include closer supervision, compulsory participation, more family involvement, and stricter control of appearance, behavior, and peer relationships. Thus, research focuses on school climate, bullying, safety, teacher responses, leadership, and family influences Greytak et al. (2009), McGuire et al. (2010), Meyer et al. (2016), Mangin (2019). Trans students may also negotiate these conditions through resistance and situated agency Hillier et al. (2019). College offers more freedom but requires working through complex administrative and organizational systems in which names and gender markers, student records, housing, facilities, classroom practices, and institutional support are especially important Seelman (2014), Goldberg et al. (2018), Nicolazzo et al. (2018). More evidence on gender-inclusive housing indicates that formal recognition does not necessarily lead to substantive inclusion Nicolazzo et al. (2018). Thus, although discrimination, identity invalidation, inadequate support, and institutional exclusion are common across contexts, how they manifest is context-dependent McGuire et al. (2010), Goldberg et al. (2018), Buthelezi and Brown (2023). Therefore, a systematic comparison is required to differentiate between common and context-specific barriers.

DEFINITIONS OF OPERATIONAL

In an effort to maintain conceptual consistency, the review uses the descriptor transgender students for the population but also examines related terms such as “trans students,” “gender-diverse students,” “gender-expansive students,” and “gender-creative students” when the population and findings are substantively relevant to the review objectives Abela et al. (2024). This wider terminology allows for variations in educational and geographical settings while keeping an analytical focus on transgender students. Educational environments refer to two general contexts: education in school and education in higher education. School education includes primary, elementary, secondary, and high-school settings. Higher education includes universities, colleges,, and other post-secondary institutions. The contexts differ in institutional structures, student autonomy, relations with families and peers, administrative arrangements, and forms of institutional authority. Experiences in these settings are therefore not assumed to be equivalent, even when similar forms of exclusion take place. Barriers and challenges are interpersonal, institutional, structural, administrative, academic, psychological, and environmental conditions that limit the safety, participation, belonging, well-being, educational engagement, or outcomes of transgender students. Common barriers and challenges are patterns identified in both school and higher education. Context-specific challenges are barriers whose nature, mechanisms, or manifestations are specifically linked to a particular educational setting. This distinction helps the review to recognize repeating patterns of exclusion and differences between educational contexts McGuire et al. (2010), Goldberg et al. (2018). Inclusive practices are institutional, administrative, pedagogical, infrastructural, psychological, and participatory activities that have been found to facilitate the recognition, safety, belonging, participation, well-being, or educational achievement of transgender students Kwok (2016). Conditions can include supportive policies, affirming administrative procedures, teacher preparedness, inclusive environments, gender-inclusive facilities or housing, student support, and opportunities for participation and advocacy Bartholomaeus and Riggs (2017), Goldberg et al. (2018), Gorrotxategi et al. (2020), Greenwood et al., 2024). Hence, inclusion is seen as a multidimensional process of institutional recognition, meaningful participation, supportive environments, and equitable educational opportunities. These operational differences offer the conceptual framework to compare evidence across educational contexts and organize the

synthesis in terms of common barriers, context-specific challenges, and evidence-based inclusive practices. They also include correspondence between the conceptual scope of the review and its three research questions.

INCLUSION PRACTICES AND INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES

Literature discusses institutional practices that have the potential to establish supportive and affirming educational environments. Evidence suggests that whole-school approaches, supportive leadership, teacher preparedness, and cultures that recognize gender diversity are important at the school level Bartholomaeus and Riggs (2017), Meyer et al. (2016), Mangin (2019). Moreover, Martino et al. (2022) identify systemic methods to inclusion that are not predicated on personalized responses and frame inclusion as an institutional obligation rather than one dependent on student resiliency. Inclusive practices in higher education include the acknowledgment of transgender identities, helpful administrative processes, gender-inclusive housing, campus support, and responsive policies Seelman (2014), Goldberg et al. (2018), Nicolazzo et al. (2018). Transgender students' educational experiences have been reviewed in several studies. Educational interventions can raise understanding about transgender problems Gorrotxategi et al. (2020), and student-led initiatives can boost activism. Hafford-Letchfield et al. (2017) on post-compulsory education; Combrinck and Van Wyk (2024) on higher education, Domínguez-Martínez and Robles (2019) on transphobic bullying and inclusive education settings. But evidence remains diffuse across levels of schooling and areas of investigation. A major gap is the absence of a synthesis of school and higher education within a similar analytical framework, particularly in terms of shared and context-specific obstacles. Previous studies have identified school-based concerns such as bullying, safety, and teacher responses and greater education-related concerns such as administration, housing, facilities, and institutional policies McGuire et al. (2010), Pampati et al. (2020), Seelman (2014), Nicolazzo et al. (2018). Another gap is the piecemeal evidence of inclusive behaviors across locations and forms of intervention Bartholomaeus and Riggs (2017), Goldberg et al. (2018), Gorrotxategi et al. (2020), Greenwood et al. (2024).

equality and institutional transformation Greenwood et al. (2024). Taken together, the findings demonstrate that inclusion involves changes in legislation, educational practice, organizational culture, and student involvement. However, evidence-based practices differ from general recommendations in that their effectiveness depends on the context of implementation, target populations, and demonstrated outcomes. This distinction is important as the literature consists of empirical evaluations and conceptual or practice-oriented discussions.

SCOPE OF THE SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

The aim of this systematic review is to address these gaps by examining common barriers, context-specific manifestations of exclusion, and evidence-based inclusive practices in both school and higher education. (1) What are the common difficulties and problems in different educational environments? (2) How do these challenges differ in schools versus higher education? (3) What evidence-based methods promote the inclusion, well-being, and educational performance of transgender students? The integration of the multiple aspects helps to identify patterns of exclusion while synthesizing institutional and pedagogical strategies that may foster more inclusive settings.

METHOD

REVIEW DESIGN AND METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The study employed a systematic review design to synthesize evidence of the educational experiences of transgender students in school and higher education settings. The review was conducted according to the PRISMA 2020 reporting framework Page et al. (2021). The large heterogeneity of research design, context, population, and outcomes led to a qualitative and narrative synthesis approach. Common barriers, context-specific differences, and practices that promote transgender inclusion and educational well-being were identified in the review. The review process involved the development of research questions, eligibility criteria, systematic searching, screening, full-text assessment, quality appraisal, data extraction, thematic analysis, comparison across contexts, and narrative synthesis. This allowed for the systematic identification of recurring patterns while maintaining differences between school and higher education settings. The final thematic categories were developed through systematic comparison and synthesis of the evidence from the included studies.

CRITERIA FOR ELIGIBILITY

The criteria for eligibility were set to ensure that the research was relevant to the population, to the educational context, and to the phenomena that the research questions were addressing. Studies were included if they focused on transgender or gender-diverse students in school or higher education settings and addressed experiences, barriers, challenges, institutional responses, educational participation, well-being, or practices relevant to transgender inclusion. Qualitative and quantitative empirical studies were both considered because the multidimensional nature of the educational experience of transgender students could not be adequately captured by a single methodological tradition. The empirical synthesis comprised English-language publications from January 2010 to May 2025, and only published journal articles were considered. Studies were excluded if they were conducted outside of formal school or higher education settings, did not focus substantially on transgender or gender-diverse students, did not report findings

relevant to the review questions, or were non-peer-reviewed sources, including editorials, conference abstracts, opinion pieces, policy briefs or book chapters. Publications for which the full text could not be retrieved were also excluded.

Table 1

Table 1 Eligibility Criteria Applied in the Review

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Population	Transgender, trans, gender-diverse, or gender-creative students	Studies focusing exclusively on cisgender populations
Educational context	School and higher education settings	Non-educational settings
Phenomenon	Challenges, discrimination, exclusion, well-being, educational experiences, institutional support, or inclusion	Studies unrelated to educational experiences
Inclusive practices	Institutional, administrative, pedagogical, infrastructural, psychosocial	Interventions unrelated to transgender student inclusion
Publication period	January 2010–May 2025	Outside the specified period
Language	English	Non-English
Publication type	Peer-reviewed journal articles	Editorials, conference abstracts, policy briefs, opinion pieces, book chapters
Full-text status	Full text available	Full text unavailable
Research design	No design restriction	Studies failing substantive eligibility requirements

DATA SOURCES AND SEARCH STRATEGY

A systematic literature search was performed in Scopus, Web of Science, Semantic Scholar, and Google Scholar from March to May 2025. Scopus and Web of Science provided a major multidisciplinary coverage, while Semantic Scholar and Google Scholar expanded the search for potentially relevant literature. The search used terms relating to population, educational-context, challenge, and inclusion. Population terms used were "transgender students," "trans students," "gender diverse students," and "non-binary students." Educational context-related terms included school, high school, secondary school, higher education, university, and college. Challenge and inclusion terms were discrimination, harassment, bullying, challenges, inclusion, institutional support, mental health, school climate, campus climate, and inclusive practices. The main search structure was:

("transgender students" OR "trans students" OR "gender-diverse students" OR "non-binary students") AND (school OR "secondary school" OR "high school" OR "higher education" OR university OR college) AND (challenges OR discrimination OR harassment OR bullying OR inclusion OR "mental health" OR "school climate" OR "campus climate" OR "institutional support" OR "inclusive practices")

The search was limited to English-language publications from January 2010 to May 2025. Where needed, database-specific search strings were adapted to account for differences in indexing and search syntax. The full database-specific strings should be available as an appendix to help with replication. Hand-searching of reference lists of relevant publications and related-article searching were also undertaken in an effort to identify potentially eligible studies that were not identified through the initial database searches.

Table 2

Table 2 Overview of Database Searches

Database	Records identified
Scopus	215
Web of Science	192
Semantic Scholar	243
Google Scholar	253
Total	**903**

IDENTIFICATION AND SELECTION OF STUDIES

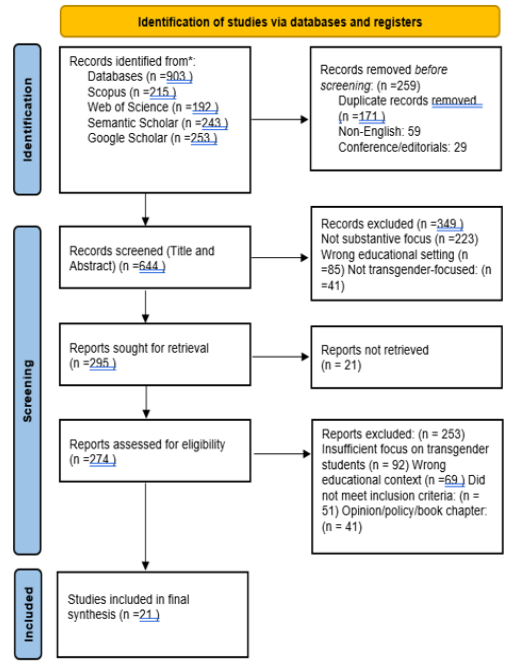
The identification and selection process followed the sequential stages suggested by PRISMA 2020 Page et al. (2021). The first search yielded 903 records: 215 from Scopus, 192 from Web of Science, 243 from Semantic Scholar, and 253 from Google Scholar. Before screening, 259 records were removed: 171 duplicates, 59 not in English, and 29 conference abstracts or editorials. 644 records were to be screened by title and abstract. 349 records were excluded at the title and abstract level: 223 were not relevant to the substantive focus, 85 were not set in school or higher education settings, and 41 were not focused on transgender populations. Thus, 295 reports were requested for full text retrieval. 21 reports could not be retrieved and were excluded from the analysis. A full-text assessment was carried out on the remaining 274 reports. Of these, 92 did not sufficiently focus on transgender students' experiences, 69 did not address the specified educational contexts, 51 did not meet the predefined inclusion criteria, and 41 were opinion pieces, policy briefs, or book chapters. The numbers sequence should be accurately reflected in the PRISMA diagram to provide an auditable trail from identification to inclusion.

Table 3

Table 3 Study Selection Across Review Stages

Selection stage	Records/reports
Records identified	903
Duplicate records removed	171
Non-English records removed	59
Conference abstracts/editorials removed	29
Records screened	644
Records excluded at the title/abstract stage	349
Reports sought for retrieval	295
Reports not retrieved	21
Full-text reports assessed	274
Full-text reports excluded	253
Studies included in final synthesis	**21**

Image 1



*Consider, if feasible to do so, reporting the number of records identified from each database or register searched (rather than the total number across all databases/registers).

Page MJ, McKenzie JE, Bossuyt PM, Boutron I, Hoffmann TC, Mulrow CD, et al. The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. BMJ 2021;372:n71. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71

FEATURES OF INCLUDED STUDIES AND DATA EXTRACTION

A structured data extraction framework was developed to extract information relevant to all three research questions. Data on authorship and publication year, geographical location, educational setting, participant population, research design, methodological approach, study purpose, major findings, reported challenges, institutional or contextual factors, effects on educational experiences, and reported inclusive practices or recommendations were extracted for each study. Where applicable, data on school climate, institutional policy, administrative procedures, infrastructure, mental health, peer relationships, educator practices, and student participation were also noted. Findings were organized according to whether they occurred in school, higher education, or both, allowing a comparison in terms of RQ1 and RQ2.

ASSESSMENT OF METHODOLOGICAL QUALITY

The methodological quality of the studies included in this review was assessed using the Critical Appraisal Skills Program (CASP) framework, which offers structured criteria to evaluate methodological rigor and credibility across different research designs Critical Appraisal Skills Programme. (n.d.). The appraisal considered research aims, study design, sampling and recruitment, data collection, analysis, ethical considerations, clarity of findings, and the extent to which conclusions were supported by the evidence. The CASP checklist appropriate to each methodological design was applied rather than treating all studies the same. Interpretation was guided by quality appraisal, rather than the simple application of an undifferentiated quality label. Findings that were replicated in multiple contexts and backed by methodologically stronger studies were considered more robust than findings derived from isolated or methodologically limited evidence. In judging the strength and consistency of themes, account was taken of where there was a large variation in methodology.

ANALYSIS OF DATA AND SYNTHESIS OF THEMES

Because of the heterogeneity of the evidence, a qualitative thematic and narrative synthesis was performed rather than a statistical meta-analysis. The analysis sought to detect trends but also to preserve differences in educational context, geography, population, and research design. This was achieved through close reading of the findings and conclusions of the studies, extraction of evidence pertaining to the three research questions, assignment of descriptive codes, and grouping of related codes into broader categories. These categories were then compared across school and higher education contexts to differentiate between shared experiences and context-specific manifestations. The final categories were not pre-defined findings imposed on the literature but were developed by systematic comparison of findings from included studies and organized in relation to the review questions. The synthesis was made up of three analytical domains: the common challenges across educational environments, the challenges specific to the context, and the inclusive practices.

CROSS-CONTEXT COMPARATIVE STUDY

In answering research question 2, a cross-context comparative analysis was included in the synthesis to investigate differences between school and higher education. Each finding was explored in relation to its educational setting and experiences of exclusion or inclusion. Four dimensions guided the comparison: the source of the challenge, the institutional mechanism by which it operated, consequences for students, and the type of reported response or inclusive practice. Hence, the different barriers were understood as possible context-specific expressions of more general processes of institutional exclusion, rather than just separate lists. This comparative analysis allowed the review to answer research question 2 at an analytical rather than descriptive level, reflecting on how processes of exclusion of this kind manifest differently depending on the institutional context.

QUALITY OF EVIDENCE, METHODOLOGICAL RIGOR, AND HANDLING OF BIAS

We judged the strength of synthesized evidence based on methodological quality, consistency of findings, number of contributing studies, diversity of context, and convergence across educational contexts. Stronger evidence was seen as stemming from multiple credible studies across contexts, while evidence from fewer studies or studies in a particular context was viewed with caution. Inclusive practices, many of which were considered from a small-scale or practice-based research perspective, received special attention. Structured data extraction, quality appraisal, thematic comparison, and contextual analysis to address methodological heterogeneity across research designs, participants, settings, and conceptual approaches. Potential biases included restriction to the English language, coverage of databases, publication bias, and geographic concentration. Four databases were used, and supplementary reference-list searching and related-article searching were used to reduce retrieval and selection bias; geographical concentration was taken into account when considering transferability across cultural, legal, and institutional contexts. Search

sources, eligibility criteria, decisions for screening and full-text exclusion, extraction domains, quality-appraisal procedures, and analytical processes were documented to maintain transparency. The review process reporting is guided by PRISMA 2020 Page et al. (2021). The synthesis had a clear trail of evidence from the identification and selection of studies to the appraisal, extraction, coding, thematic development, and comparative interpretation, thus ensuring that the conclusions were based on the collective evidence rather than the findings of individual studies. The strength, consistency, and limitations of the evidence were used to interpret the three analytical domains (common challenges, context-specific challenges, and inclusive practices). Methodological limitations were explicitly incorporated to prevent overstatement of the generalisability or causal strength of the overall synthesized findings.

RESULTS

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STUDIES INCLUDED

Twenty-one studies met the eligibility criteria and were included in the final synthesis. The evidence base was diverse in terms of technique and context, including school and higher education settings and qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods, review-based, and practice-based approaches. Studies explored transgender and gender-diverse students' experiences of educational settings, institutional policies, identity recognition, safety, belongingness, administrative systems, support structures, and inclusive practices. The majority of the data was from Western and English-speaking cultures, with minimal representation from other parts of the world, limiting the generalizability of the conclusions. Studies in schools have focused mostly on bullying, school atmosphere, reactions of educators and peers, gender expression, and educational involvement. Higher-education studies focused on campus climate, administrative policies, housing, facilities, support services, identity documentation, and participation. Other studies focused on institutional responses, administrators, and educators. Results were synthesized thematically rather than statistically due to the heterogeneity. Overall, the evidence indicated common barriers, context-specific exclusion, and institutional practices related to greater inclusion. The evidence was more compelling for documenting students' experiences and perceptions than for establishing the causal effectiveness or long-term sustainability of specific interventions.

Table 4

Table 4 Studies on Transgender/Gender-Diverse Inclusion in Educational Settings

Author(s)	Country	Focus	Key Findings
Combrinck and Van Wyk (2024)	South Africa	Transgender students in higher education	Identity-related, social, and institutional barriers persist.
Domínguez-Martínez and Robles (2019)	International	Transphobic bullying and educational inclusion	Transphobic bullying remains a major inclusion barrier.
Goldberg et al. (2018)	USA	Transgender students in higher education	Recognition, chosen names, and supportive policies improve campus experiences.
Hafford-Letchfield et al. (2017)	International	Transgender students in post-compulsory education	Transgender students remain under-researched and face complex challenges.
Stachowiak and Gano (2019)	USA	Transgender oppression in higher education	Institutional and interpersonal practices reproduce marginalisation.
Abela et al. (2024)	Australia	Oppression among transgender/gender-expansive young people	Oppression across contexts affects well-being and participation.
Bartholomaeus and Riggs (2017)	Australia	Whole-of-school approaches	Whole-school approaches are more effective than isolated interventions.
Buthelezi and Brown (2023)	South Africa	Inclusion/exclusion in higher education	Formal recognition does not ensure substantive inclusion.
Goldberg et al. (2018)	USA	Trans students' perspectives on inclusive policies/practices	Students prioritised identity recognition, facilities, housing, and support.
Gorrotxategi et al. (2020)	Spain	Gender/transgender knowledge among university students	Interactive intervention improved transgender-related knowledge and attitudes.
Greenwood et al. (2024)	USA	Student-led transgender justice advocacy	Student-led advocacy can support institutional change.
Greytak et al. (2009)	USA	Transgender youth in schools	Harassment, discrimination, and safety concerns affect educational experiences.

Hillier et al. (2019)	USA	Risk, resilience, resistance and agency among trans high-school students	Trans students demonstrate resilience and agency amid exclusion.
Mangin (2019), Mangin (2020)	USA	Supportive elementary-school principals	Supportive leadership helps, but broader binary norms persist.
Martino et al. (2022)	Canada	System-level approaches to trans inclusion in schools	Inclusion requires systemic rather than individualised responses.
McGuire et al. (2010)	USA	School climate and transgender youth	Supportive personnel can mitigate harmful school climates.
Meyer et al. (2016)	USA	Teachers' perspectives on transgender/gender-creative students	Teacher preparedness and responsiveness support inclusion.
Nicolazzo et al. (2018)	USA	Gender-inclusive housing in higher education	Effective inclusion requires intentional institutional implementation.
Pampati et al. (2020)	USA	School climate, safety, bullying and absenteeism	Unsafe climates and bullying contribute to absenteeism.
Pascale and DeVita (2024)	USA	Mental health of transgender college students	Supportive environments are important for transgender students' well-being.
Seelman (2014)	USA	Recommendations for inclusive college campuses	Recognition, policies, facilities, and support are key inclusion domains.

SIMILARITIES IN CHALLENGES ACROSS EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS

DISCRIMINATION, HARASSMENT, BULLYING, AND STIGMA

Discrimination, harassment, bullying, and social exclusion were recurrent issues in school and higher education settings. School-based studies have documented verbal harassment, derogatory comments, bullying, physical victimization, gender policing, and social exclusion, often in the midst of poor institutional responses Greytak et al. (2009), McGuire et al. (2010), Hillier et al. (2019), Pampati et al. (2020). Research in higher education also reported hostility, discrimination, harassment, and concerns about physical or sexual safety Goldberg et al. (2018), Hafford-Letchfield et al. (2017). Exclusion happened both through interpersonal hostility and through institutional environments that did not fit the students' experiences. However, students negotiated agency through seeking out supportive relationships, selectively disclosing their identities, correcting others, advocating for change, or avoiding unsafe spaces Hillier et al. (2019).

INVALIDATING IDENTITY, DEADNAMING, AND MISGENDERING

The form that exclusion took was misgendering, deadnaming, and the failure to acknowledge affirmed identities. Students experienced misnomers or misgendering and a lack of recognition from peers, teachers, faculty, and institutional actors, often having to disclose or explain their identities multiple times Martino et al. (2022), Abela et al. (2024). Identity was also challenged through administrative systems. Legal or birth names or binary gender categories may be held in records, class rosters, identification papers, email systems, and other platforms, leading to repeated identity negotiation and possible involuntary disclosure Seelman (2014), Goldberg et al. (2018), Hafford-Letchfield et al. (2017), Stachowiak and Gano (2019). Identity invalidation occurred on both interpersonal and systemic levels.

INSTITUTIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE BARRIERS

Poor institutional support included lack of inclusive policies, inconsistent responses to discrimination, poor support structures, and gaps between formal commitments and implementation McGuire et al. (2010), Seelman (2014), Goldberg et al. (2018), Buthelezi and Brown (2023). Crucially, policies do not always translate into accessibility or execution. In some instances, students were unaware of regulations in place, and gender-inclusive housing did not always translate to accessible support Goldberg et al. (2018), Nicolazzo et al. (2018). Additional implementation obstacles were evidenced in administrative delays in gender-inclusive modifications Stachowiak and Gano (2019). Barriers included modifications to name and gender identifiers, records, identification systems, housing, health services, and counseling, revealing how routine organizational procedures might replicate exclusion without deliberate discriminatory intent.

EXCLUSIONARY CONTEXTS AND CISNORMATIVE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS

Institutional exclusion was also encoded in arrangements based on binary gender preconceptions. Educational environments have seen the emergence of gender-segregated facilities, binary forms and records, restricting paperwork, gendered housing, and

regulations surrounding attire or participation Seelman (2014), Goldberg et al. (2018), Bartholomaeus and Riggs (2017), Abela et al. (2024). Such constructions impacted toilets, changing rooms, sports, housing, administrative files and institutional papers. These arrangements may not impact all transgender students in the same way, but failing to adequately accommodate gender diversity can lead to incfiles,reased administrative negotiation, avoidance of facilities, less participation, and a feeling of not belonging.

PSYCHOLOGICAL, SOCIAL, AND EDUCATIONAL EFFECTS

Exclusionary settings were linked to psychological, social, and educational outcomes. Studies in higher education revealed greater levels of psychological distress, loneliness, depressive symptoms, self-injury, and suicidal conduct, although the patterns were inconsistent among measurements and comparator groups Pascale and DeVita (2024). Lower levels of belonging and institutional integration were also associated with hostile campus climates Goldberg et al. (2018), Hafford-Letchfield et al. (2017). Likewise, evidence from schools linked hostile environments to lower safety and connectedness, absenteeism, avoidance, and education disruption McGuire et al. (2010), Pampati et al. (2020), Hillier et al. (2019). Overall, exclusion impacted participation by reducing safety and belonging, creating psychological distress, eliciting avoidance, and resulting in disengagement. Nonetheless, these findings are assumed to be associations rather than causal effects that are universally established, with the evidence being predominantly observational, qualitative, and cross-sectional.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SCHOOL AND HIGHER EDUCATION ENVIRONMENTS

SCHOOL-SPECIFIC MANIFESTATIONS

Peer relationships, family dependence, adult authority, and compulsory participation and regulation of gender expression were strong determinants of school-based exclusion. Peer bullying and victimization were prominent, along with family rejection and limited parental support Greytak et al. (2009), McGuire et al. (2010), Abela et al. (2024). Schools also regulated clothing, names, bathrooms, sports, and classroom environments, with restrictive dress codes, gender-segregated activities, and limited access to affirming spaces becoming recurrent concerns Bartholomaeus and Riggs (2017), Mangin (2020), Abela et al. (2024). Often inclusion depended on the school's teachers, administrators, and leaders. Participation was enabled by supportive adults, while limited knowledge or inconsistent responses could recreate exclusion Meyer et al. (2016), Martino et al. (2022), Mangin (2020). Exclusion at the school level was thus the outcome of the interaction of peer culture, family relationships, adult reactions, and institutional control.

MANIFESTATIONS IN THE SETTING OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Institutional administration and organizational infrastructure had a greater bearing on higher-education exclusion. Students face issues with names, gender markers, records, identification systems, housing, bathrooms, health and counseling services, campus security, institutional policies, and specialized support Seelman (2014), Goldberg et al. (2018), Nicolazzo et al. (2018), Buthelezi and Brown (2023). In particular, gender-inclusive housing was a distinct concern, as policies could still be difficult to find, understand, or access if they were poorly communicated or developed without meaningful transgender student involvement Nicolazzo et al. (2018). Administrative systems, also, might involve the repeated negotiation of names and gender identities across institutional units. Higher education also enabled agency and collective action through peer-support organizations, advocacy groups, student initiatives, and attempts to establish trans-affirming settings Goldberg et al. (2018), Greenwood et al. (2024). Nevertheless, these opportunities did not overcome the underlying structural exclusion.

CROSS-CONTEXTUAL COMPARISON

The synthesis shows a strong continuity between school and higher education, as well as differences in the mechanisms of exclusion. Discriminatory practices, invalidation of identity, lack of adequate institutional support, exclusionary facilities and administrative systems, and safety and belonging concerns were cited across both settings. Yet their institutional expression was different. Peer victimization, family relationships, teacher responses, compulsory participation, and regulation of gender expression were more closely associated with exclusion in schools. In higher education, it referred more often to administrative procedures, housing, campus facilities, documentation, health and support services, communication of policy, and institutional accountability. The differences do not mean that either setting is more inclusive, either. Rather, the same gendered assumptions were reproduced through different institutional mechanisms. The wide variation in populations, methodologies, settings, and outcome measures means direct quantitative comparison of inclusiveness is not warranted. The evidence rather points to a situation where exclusionary mechanisms overlap across levels of education, but their concrete manifestations are context-dependent.

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES AND INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES OPEN

Explicit institutional recognition of gender identity and expression emerged as a recurring feature of inclusive practice. It was found that non-discrimination protections, clear institutional responsibilities, accessible responses to discrimination, and recognition of gender diversity were important elements of supportive environments Seelman (2014), Bartholomaeus and Riggs (2017), Goldberg et al. (2018).

However, the existence of policy did not necessarily lead to implementation or access. The awareness of trans-inclusive policies was related to students' perceptions of campus climate and belonging, yet policies were difficult to find, understand, or utilize Goldberg et al. (2018), Martino et al. (2022), Nicolazzo et al. (2018). The evidence, therefore, supports the importance of explicit policies but offers stronger evidence for policy recognition and accessibility than for the causal effectiveness of specific policy models.

RECOGNITION IN ADMINISTRATION AND GENDER-INCLUSIVE PROCEDURES

There were pragmatic measures to reduce identity barriers, one of which was administrative recognition. Institutional inclusion included important components like affirmed names and pronouns, flexible procedures for gender markers, appropriate student records, and consistent recognition across rosters, identification systems, and digital platforms Seelman (2014), Goldberg et al. (2018), Hafford-Letchfield et al. (2017).

Most often, these practices were described as institutional supports or recommended reforms rather than through rigorous comparative intervention designs. But inconsistent recognition between institutional systems may mean students have to repeat disclosure or explanation of their identities. Thus, administrative recognition is an alternative institutional dimension of inclusion.

GENDER INCLUSIVE HOUSING AND RESTROOMS

Consistently, gender-inclusive restrooms, changing facilities, housing, and other affirming physical spaces were identified as supportive practices. For example, higher-education students valued facilities that were accessible, but housing research found that access did not guarantee meaningful access Goldberg et al. (2018), Nicolazzo et al. (2018).

Implementation was not just the physical provision but also accessibility, safety, communication, visibility, and whether students were able to use the facilities without further scrutiny. Housing policies could also be ineffective where eligibility rules were unclear, information was hard to access, or transgender students were excluded from developing policies. Thus, inclusive infrastructure includes physical provision, as well as administrative accessibility, communication, safety, and institutional responsiveness.

TRAINING AND SENSITIZATION OF TEACHERS/FACULTIES.

The key enabling factor that was identified was educator and staff readiness. Studies pointed out the necessity of teachers, faculty, administrators, and other personnel being aware of gender diversity, using appropriate names and pronouns, responding to transphobic behavior, and incorporating inclusive practices into everyday interactions Meyer et al. (2016), Martino et al. (2022), Goldberg et al. (2018). Gorrotxategi et al. (2020) found that a sample that underwent an interactive educational program showed a significant improvement in self-reported knowledge of transgender issues, although changes in transphobia and gender-bashing were not statistically significant. While structured training may improve knowledge, it need not necessarily change attitude. In general, there is support in the literature for sustained professional learning, though evidence on the comparative effectiveness of specific training models is limited.

CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGICAL INCLUSIVITY

Another important institutional response was the inclusion of the curriculum and pedagogy. Suggestions included transgender-inclusive content, representation of gender diversity, inclusive classroom practices, and broader LGBT-inclusive curricula as potential mechanisms for increasing visibility and reducing marginalization Greytak et al. (2009), Bartholomaeus and Riggs (2017), Domínguez-Martínez and Robles (2019), Greenwood et al. (2024). However, much of the evidence was based on reported, recommended, or practice-based rather than rigorously evaluated interventions. Curricular inclusion thus appears promising, but causal effects on academic achievement, retention, and long-term outcomes are uncertain. Inclusion is not only about isolated information about transgender identities but also about representation in teaching materials, language in the classroom, syllabi, library resources, and everyday pedagogy. But empirical evaluation of these aspects is limited.

STUDENTS' SUPPORT, BELONGING AND PARTICIPATION

Supportive relations and institutional services were an important aspect of inclusion. Students recognized the value of supportive teachers, faculty, peers, student organizations, counseling, and LGBTQ+-specific support structures as resources McGuire et al. (2010), Goldberg et al. (2018), Hafford-Letchfield et al. (2017). Higher education evidence particularly highlights peer networks and recognized student organizations in fostering belonging and collective support. Knowledge of inclusive institutional practices has also been associated with more positive perceptions of campus climate and belonging Goldberg et al. (2018). However, the evidence is associative and does not demonstrate that specific services improve well-being or retention independently. Mental-health and counseling services were also identified as important supports, but evidence for effectiveness was less available than evidence for unmet needs. Overall, the literature supports accessible and affirming support as an institutional component of inclusion, but the comparative effectiveness of specific service models is not well enough established.

STUDENT PROTEST AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

Student engagement was found to be a unique dimension of higher-education inclusion. Transgender students campaigned, offered peer support, engaged with student organisations, and sought to change institutional policy and practice. For example, Greenwood et al. (2024) described a student-led transgender justice programme that combined peer support with education and institutional lobbying. Moreover, there is evidence that including transgender students in the development and evaluation of policies that impact them is critical. Nicolazzo et al. (2018) noted shortcomings in the participation of students in the design of gender-inclusive housing, while Martino et al. (2022) underlined institutional learning beyond individual accommodation. Because the evidence base consists mostly of institutional initiatives rather than comparative evaluations, student-led advocacy should be regarded as a documented and promising approach rather than an intervention with established generalisable effects. However, participation shifts the gaze from seeing transgender students as mere service recipients toward seeing them as agents in institutional decision-making.

DISCUSSION

This systematic review synthesised evidence from 21 studies and addressed three questions: what common barriers are encountered by transgender students in school and higher education, how do these barriers differ across contexts, and what inclusive practices are reported in the literature? The results show that educational exclusion is not only about interpersonal prejudice or a certain level of education. Instead, it is produced through the interplay of interpersonal encounters, institutional practices, administrative arrangements, physical environments, and available support. Such processes are recurrent in settings, but their expression varies depending on the educational context. Evidence also suggests that inclusive policies matter if they are translated into routine institutional practices, although evidence on the effectiveness of specific interventions is limited.

TRANSGENDER EXCLUSION AS A MULTI-LEVEL EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

A key finding is the recurrence of discrimination, harassment, identity invalidation, lack of institutional support, and exclusionary arrangements across educational environments. Research in schools documents cases of bullying, verbal harassment, social exclusion, and negative responses to gender expression, and research in higher education discusses harassment, discrimination, and institutional marginalization Greytak et al. (2009), McGuire et al. (2010), Goldberg et al. (2018), Hafford-Letchfield et al. (2017). This recurrence suggests that transgender exclusion is reproduced by multiple layers of educational organisation rather than by individual prejudice alone. Hostile interactions may be more consequential where institutional procedures provide little protection or redress, while misgendering can be institutionally reproduced through records, rosters, identification systems, and digital platforms that do not recognise affirmed names and gender identities Seelman (2014), Goldberg et al. (2018), Hafford-Letchfield et al. (2017). This interpretation aligns with evidence that formal policies do not necessarily transform everyday practice. Despite educators' positive intentions, misgendering and invalidation of identity may still be reproduced Martino et al. (2022), and gender-inclusive housing may be difficult to find, understand, or access Nicolazzo et al. (2018). Thus, institutional inclusion should be evaluated not only in terms of policies and facilities but also in terms of their implementation in the everyday life of the school.

FROM FORMAL RECOGNITION TO EVERYDAY INSTITUTIONAL RECOGNITION

One important finding is the difference between formal and substantive recognition. Transgender inclusion is increasingly institutionally recognised, but policy recognition does not always translate into consistent implementation. Key inclusion criteria include prohibitions against discrimination, flexible name and gender-marker processes, support services, and institutional responsibility Seelman (2014). Similarly, understanding of trans-inclusive policies was associated with more favorable feelings of campus atmosphere and belonging Goldberg et al. (2018). Hence, policies need not just to ban discrimination but to convey that transgender students are recognised as genuine members of the school community. But availability does not guarantee accessibility

or implementation. Gender-inclusive housing may be formally available but may be difficult to find and understand Nicolazzo et al. (2018). Administrative changes may be slow and stuck in institutional inertia Stachowiak and Gano (2019). The evidence therefore suggests a continuum of policy. recognition → access → administration → practice, and weaknesses at any stage diminish the practical value of inclusion.

THE RECOGNITION OF IDENTITY AS AN INSTITUTIONAL CONDITION FOR PARTICIPATION

The repeated occurrence of misgendering, deadnaming, and administrative non-recognition points to the fact that recognition of identity is an interpersonal and organisational question. Students may be invalidated by their peers and educators but also by records, forms, identification systems, email accounts, class rosters, and other administrative technologies Seelman (2014), Goldberg et al. (2018), Hafford-Letchfield et al. (2017). Repeated encounters across institutional systems can institutionalise identity negotiation as a structural aspect of educational participation, rather than an isolated interpersonal problem. Coordinated procedures for preferred names and gender markers are, therefore, an important part of institutional reform Seelman (2014). At the same time, students respond to potentially hostile environments through selective disclosure, correction, avoidance, seeking allies, and advocacy Hillier et al. (2019). Students therefore actively negotiate their identities, though institutional systems that consistently recognise affirmed identities may lessen the burden of this negotiation.

SCHOOL AND HIGHER EDUCATION: CONTINUITY WITH CONTEXTUAL VARIATION

The findings show continuity and contextual differentiation in transgender exclusion across school and higher education. In schools, exclusion was more obvious through peer bullying, safety concerns, teacher reactions, attendance, family ties, and control of gender expression Greytak et al. (2009), McGuire et al. (2010), Pampati et al. (2020), Mangin (2020). In higher education, exclusion was more directly related to administrative processes, housing, institutional policies, infrastructure, support services, and involvement in campus life Seelman (2014), Goldberg et al. (2018), Nicolazzo et al. (2018), Buthelezi and Brown (2023). This is not to suggest that these distinctions are interpersonal versus systemic. Instead, the experiences of institutional acknowledgement differ according to educational environments. Attendance is more mandatory and tightly controlled in schools, and more power is wielded by families and institutions over attendance, dress, facilities, classroom participation, and behaviour Greytak et al. (2009), McGuire et al. (2010) , Abela et al. (2024). Greater higher education is associated with greater individual autonomy but also with increased exposure to more complex institutional systems of housing, identification, records, health services, and policy procedures Seelman (2014), Goldberg et al. (2018), Nicolazzo et al. (2018). The problem of institutional recognition is the same in its essence in various contexts, but it finds a different form of expression depending on the organisational structure and the degree of institutional autonomy.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND ADMINISTRATION AS MODES OF INCLUSION OR EXCLUSION

Physical infrastructure and administrative systems are not just logistical concerns; they are what determines if transgender students can participate in educational life without repeated barriers related to their identity Seelman (2014), Nicolazzo et al. (2018), Goldberg et al. (2018). Binary forms, legal name-only records, and gender-segregated facilities can lead to exclusion without explicit discriminatory intent. The bigger question is whether the routine systems of institutions can accommodate gender diversity. But infrastructure alone does not guaranty inclusion. Gender-inclusive housing might still be difficult to access or understand Nicolazzo et al. (2018), and students' awareness and perceptions of available support also influence the effectiveness of gender-inclusive housing Goldberg et al. (2018). Inclusion is therefore more than material provision. It requires accessibility, communication, safety, administrative recognition, and institutional commitment. Thus, institutional inclusion is relational: policies, facilities, and administrative options are meaningful when students can identify, access, use, and trust them.

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS: AVOIDING A DEFICIT PERSPECTIVE

The data details the psychological, social, and educational impacts of exclusionary situations. Research on higher education has reported disparities in mental health, loneliness, and psychological distress, and school-based research has linked hostile environments to lower safety, connectedness, attendance, and educational engagement Pampati et al. (2020), Pascale and DeVita (2024), Goldberg (2018). These outcomes should not be attributed to transgender identity. Rather, they are consistently associated with discrimination, marginalization, lack of support, and institutional exclusion. This shifts the lens of interpretation from an individual deficit model to the educational environments in which students are engaged. At the same time, transgender students exercise agency through selective disclosure, seeking allies, advocacy, and resistance and through supportive educators, peers, organisations, and institutional resources that can foster protection and belonging Hillier et al. (2019), McGuire et al. (2010), Meyer et al. (2016), Goldberg et al. (2018). Psychological outcomes should therefore be seen as mostly a product of educational circumstances rather than as innate vulnerabilities.

INCLUSIVE PRACTICES: EVIDENCE OF PROMISE, NOT DEFINITIVE EFFECTIVENESS

The review identified major domains of inclusive practice, which included explicit institutional policies, administrative recognition, gender-inclusive facilities and housing, educator preparation, inclusive curricula, and student support and participation . However, evidence of their effectiveness is less developed than evidence documenting barriers. Most of the literature only notes that these practices are necessary, supportive, or correlated with more positive experiences, rather than showing that they cause intervention effects. Awareness of trans-inclusive policies is correlated with perceptions of belonging and campus climate Goldberg et al. (2018), but it is not established that awareness of policy alone leads to greater belonging. Likewise, inclusive facilities, flexible administrative procedures, curricula, trained educators, and support services are identified as important institutional practices Bartholomaeus and Riggs (2017), Seelman (2014), Goldberg (2018), but few studies directly evaluate if they lead to sustained improvements in educational outcomes. The evidence for intervention supports this distinction further. Gorrotxategi et al. (2020) found that self-assessed knowledge improved after an educational intervention, but there were no statistically significant changes in all the attitudinal outcomes. Increased knowledge, therefore, does not equate to a broader attitudinal transformation. The literature generally offers more evidence on the nature of inclusive institutions and on the values of students than on the causal effects of interventions on sustained inclusion.

FROM INDIVIDUAL ACCOMMODATION TO INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

The findings also point to the limitations of relying solely on individual accommodation. Measures such as affirmed names, access to facilities, and gender-inclusive housing may address immediate needs, but ongoing barriers within administrative and organisational systems suggest that individualised solutions can result in superficial changes to the structures themselves. Teachers can encourage individual pupils but also replicate broader gender stereotypes, as Martino et al. (2022) remark. Supportive school leaders can work in institutions that uphold binary assumptions Mangin (2020). Thus, individual responsiveness and systemic change connect but remain separate elements of inclusion. The other dimension is student-led participation. Greenwood et al. (2024) described a programme that included educational and institutional advocacy with peer support. Practices developed in the absence of meaningful student input can be remedied by engaging transgender students in policy development Nicolazzo et al. (2018). Inclusion can therefore best be understood as layered: individual accommodation is necessary but not sufficient when institutional procedures continue to produce exclusion.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNDERSTANDING OF INSTITUTIONAL INCLUSION

These findings support the conceptualisation of transgender inclusion as an institutional alignment rather than a one-time intervention. A non-discrimination policy means little in practice if there are no accessible grievance mechanisms; gender-inclusive facilities mean less if students cannot safely find or use them; and inclusive curricula may have limited impact if administrative systems continue to invalidate students' identities. Similarly, staff training needs organizational mechanisms to support its application. Therefore, inclusion depends on the alignment of formal policy and daily practice, including explicit recognition, accessible processes, competent staff, inclusive environments, visible support, and meaningful student involvement Seelman (2014), Goldberg et al. (2018), Nicolazzo et al. (2018), Greenwood et al. (2024). But the review does not show that any holistic institutional model has been empirically validated. Given the heterogeneity of qualitative studies, surveys, reviews, practice-oriented accounts, and limited intervention research, the synthesis finds an evidence-informed pattern of institutional conditions associated with inclusion, rather than a universal model.

SCOPE OF THE EVIDENCE AND CONTRIBUTION OF THE REVIEW

Findings should be interpreted in light of the geographic and methodological heterogeneity of the evidence base. Much of the literature is situated in North American and Western contexts, with less research coming out of places like South Africa and India, limiting the direct cross-national generalizability Buthelezi and Brown (2023), Kumar (2016). Diversity of methodology also constrains comparability. Quantitative studies uncover relationships, whereas qualitative studies provide contextual perspectives. Practice-orientated research sometimes suggests promising answers without showing causal efficacy. Thus, researchers have greater confidence in patterns that multiple studies and methodological approaches replicate. This constraint is particularly relevant to inclusive interventions, for which the empirical evidence base is less developed than that documenting discrimination and institutional barriers. There is a need for longitudinal and comparative research to study consistency and change in implementation and in belonging, participation, academic persistence, safety, and well-being. The review adds to these limitations by integrating school and higher-education evidence in a common analytical framework while maintaining contextual differences. It makes a distinction between barriers and interventions that have been consistently documented and those that are not sufficiently established and suggests that transgender inclusion should be evaluated at various institutional levels: policy recognition, administrative implementation, staff practices, physical environments, safety and belonging, and student participation. Inclusion

cannot, therefore, be measured in terms of the existence of a policy or a facility but in terms of how institutional commitments are translated into accessible and meaningful everyday practices on a consistent basis.

CONCLUSION

This systematic review focused on the challenges faced by transgender and gender-diverse students in school and higher education settings, the context-dependent nature of these challenges, and institutional practices associated with more inclusive educational environments. Transgender exclusion in the 21 included studies was a multi-dimensional process comprising interpersonal discrimination, identity invalidation, administrative barriers, institutional structures, physical environments, and inadequate support. These findings suggest that exclusion is not only the result of isolated interpersonal incidents but is reproduced through routine educational systems and practices.

The review found both significant continuity in the underlying mechanisms of exclusion across educational levels and significant contextual differences. Exclusion in schools was more linked to peer victimisation, teacher responses, family relationships, school safety, and the regulation of gender expression. In higher education, stakeholders paid more attention to administrative systems, institutional policies, housing, campus facilities, documentation, support services, and campus climate. Depending on the educational context, different organisational mechanisms may reproduce similar forms of marginalisation.

A key finding is that formal recognition is not enough for meaningful inclusion. Supportive environments may include inclusive policies, administrative recognition, gender-inclusive facilities, educator preparation, inclusive pedagogy, student support, and student engagement. But their presence does not guarantee accessibility, consistent implementation, or meaningful student experiences. So evidence suggests a persisting gap between policy recognition and everyday institutional practice. Meaningful inclusion requires the coordinated implementation of institutional policies, administrative systems, infrastructure, educational practices, staff preparedness, and support mechanisms.

The evidence base is still also stronger in describing barriers and good practices than in demonstrating the causal effectiveness of specific interventions. Much of the literature is qualitative, cross-sectional, descriptive, or based on participant perceptions, and there is a lack of rigorous longitudinal and comparative evaluations. Therefore, inclusive practices should be understood as evidence-informed institutional conditions and not as universally validated interventions. Future research should consider the adoption of transgender-inclusive policies, as well as the implementation and experience of, monitoring of, and translation of policy into measurable changes in participation, belonging, safety, and institutional climate.

Transgender inclusion is best understood as a multilevel institutional process that is ongoing, not an isolated policy, accommodation, or intervention. Meaningful inclusion means that educational institutions accept the diversity of gender identities, remove structural and administrative barriers, consistently use inclusive policies, and encourage equal possibilities for participation and belonging. The key problem noted by this review is the gap between official recognition and ordinary institutional practice, requiring coordinated, accessible, and ongoing institutional implementation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

No specific acknowledgements. No individual or organization other than the authors contributed to this work.

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