

Analysis and Countermeasures of the Educational Situation of Transgender Students in Thonburi, Bangkok, Thailand

Jinxuan Shen^{1,a,*}, Cheng Jiang¹

*¹Pu'er University, No. 6 Xueyuan Road, Simao District, Pu'er City, Yunnan Province, China
a. 1959985689@qq.com*

**corresponding author*

Abstract: With the development of gender diversity culture and cross-domain inclusion in Thailand, transgender students are receiving increasing attention. Transgender students, also known as trans students, refer to those whose physiological gender does not match their self-identified gender. Developing and implementing targeted educational strategies and policies are crucial for improving the quality of education for transgender students and promoting educational equity. The educational situation of transgender students mainly reflects issues in educational resources, opportunities, and fairness. By focusing on educational and teaching practices, it is hoped that transgender students can find a balance between their self-identity and social roles. This paper analyzes the living conditions and educational status of transgender students in the Thonburi area of Bangkok, Thailand, and proposes countermeasures, aiming to provide positive reference suggestions for related research.

Keywords: Bangkok, Thailand, Thonburi area, transgender students, educational situation

1. Introduction

With social progress and economic development, people's views on "physiological attributes" have become increasingly diverse, and there is greater acceptance of the diversity in understanding "human physiological attributes." Thailand, a country rich in cultural traditions and which upholds Buddhism as its state religion, is also experiencing a diversification and multi-layering of its value systems. The emergence of transgender individuals in Thailand, who have transformed their sexual characteristics using modern clinical medical techniques, is a significant development. This includes many students from the Thonburi area of Bangkok. Educating these students scientifically has become a crucial question for educators to consider.

2. The Origin and Living Conditions of Transgender People in Thailand

The so-called "kathoei" refers to men who have injected large amounts of estrogen, leading to the development of female physical characteristics. However, "kathoei" are different from those who have undergone complete gender reassignment surgery. They possess the body and psychology of a woman but have lost male reproductive functions and cannot completely transform their bodies, still retaining a male identity. The earliest "kathoei" appeared in Singapore, and the term for this special group in Thailand originated from the Hong Kong and Taiwan regions[1].

Transgender students may encounter gender discrimination and exclusion in school education, which not only affects their learning motivation but can also harm their gender identity. For example, in a middle school in Thonburi, student B, due to their identity as a transgender person, often faces ridicule and misunderstanding from classmates, resulting in decreased classroom participation and affected academic performance. Although Thailand legally protects the educational rights of transgender students, these rights are often not fully upheld in practice. For instance, at a vocational high school in Thonburi, transgender student C found that when attempting to apply for scholarships or participate in school club activities, these opportunities were often closed off to transgender students, resulting in unequal educational opportunities compared to other students. These issues not only affect their academic performance but can also have negative impacts on their mental health and gender identity.

3. The Educational Status of Transgender Students

3.1. Psychological Education

In the schools of Thonburi, Bangkok, transgender students face numerous challenges in psychological education. Due to differences in gender identity, these students often suffer from discrimination and exclusion on campus, causing them significant psychological stress. For example, in a primary school in Thonburi, a transgender student is frequently mocked and ostracized by classmates due to their unique gender identity, severely damaging their self-esteem. Due to low societal awareness of the transgender community, many teachers and parents find it difficult to accept and understand the needs of these students, exacerbating their psychological difficulties to some extent. In a secondary school in Thonburi, a transgender student seeking help from a teacher was met with indifference and even accused of being a “freak.” In such circumstances, the student’s psychological needs are not met, making them prone to loneliness, anxiety, and depression. School mental health education programs often overlook the specific needs of transgender students, with course content not covering knowledge on gender diversity. Schools generally lack professional psychological counselors, resulting in transgender students’ psychological issues not receiving effective guidance and assistance.

3.2. Educational Equality and Opportunities

In the Thonburi area of Bangkok, Thailand, transgender students face a series of challenges in terms of educational equality and opportunities. Although Thailand is relatively open and inclusive regarding rights, transgender students still often face discrimination and exclusion on campus. Investigations have found that only a few schools in the Thonburi area offer gender education courses, and these courses often lack systematic and comprehensive content. Psychological counseling and support for transgender students are also relatively insufficient, making it difficult for them to obtain equal educational resources that align with their identity. One transgender student mentioned in an interview that although the school does not explicitly exclude transgender students in its curriculum design, teachers often avoid topics on gender diversity in actual teaching, making it difficult for her to find knowledge related to her experiences in the classroom. In campus activities, she often faces strange looks and rejection from classmates due to her gender identity, making her feel lonely and unaccepted. This makes it difficult for transgender students to receive timely and effective help when dealing with identity and campus exclusion issues. Although social media provides a platform for transgender students to express themselves and find identity, over-reliance on social media can also lead to more difficulties in real life. To achieve true educational equality, schools and the government need to provide more support and guarantees for transgender students in areas such as curriculum design, psychological counseling, and educational resources.

3.3. Educational Resources

In the educational environment of the Thonburi area in Bangkok, although the acceptance level for transgender students is gradually increasing, they still face many challenges regarding educational resources. Although some teachers and administrators in Bangkok schools have begun to try to understand and accept transgender students, in practice, the curriculum often still centers on traditional gender concepts and lacks in-depth discussion of gender diversity. Psychological education resources for transgender students are relatively scarce. Most schools do not have professional counselors, making it difficult for transgender students to receive timely and effective support when they encounter psychological difficulties at school. Moreover, although Thai law guarantees educational equality, in practice, transgender students often face discrimination due to their gender identity and cannot enjoy the same educational resources and opportunities as other students. Although online media provides some educational resources, this virtual recognition cannot completely replace the education and resource support available in real life. Therefore, in the Thonburi area of Bangkok, transgender students still face many challenges regarding educational resources. It requires the joint efforts of schools, families, and society to provide them with a more equal and inclusive educational environment.

4. Educational Strategies for Transgender Students

4.1. Respect Gender Diversity and Embrace Self-Identity

The transgender community belongs to a sexual minority group, and they usually seek to suppress their original gender characteristics and express their identified gender. When this desire is not understood or realized, it can lead to distress and discomfort, triggering psychological issues such as depression and anxiety[2]. In the education system of the Thonburi area in Bangkok, respecting gender diversity and embracing self-identity are important strategies for educating transgender students. Schools should acknowledge gender differences and fully consider the special needs of transgender students in curriculum design, teaching methods, and campus culture development. For example, after learning about a transgender student's situation, a middle school in Thonburi allowed the student to use the women's restroom and specially adjusted the physical education curriculum so that the student could exercise in a comfortable environment. Schools should encourage transgender students to be their true selves and to express their true identities in social media and campus life. Social media, as an emerging pathway for self-identity, is significant for transgender students. For instance, a university in Thonburi held lectures and activities on gender diversity, encouraging students to share their stories. The protection of educational policies is key to achieving respect for gender diversity and embracing self-identity. The government and educational departments should implement relevant policies to provide transgender students with equal educational opportunities and resources.

4.2. Becoming the Real Self: Self-Identity in the Age of Social Media

Under the influence of social media, transgender students face challenges regarding gender identity and self-identity. As an open platform, social media provides transgender students with a space to express themselves and explore their self-identity. However, self-identity on social media does not always align with self-identity in real life. For example, Patt, a transgender student at a middle school in Bangkok, actively shares her transgender journey and daily life on social media, gaining much support and encouragement from netizens. However, she faces strange looks and misunderstandings from her classmates, feeling lonely and confused. Transgender students can find people with similar experiences on social media, supporting and encouraging each other to form a positive online

community. For example, Patt joined a group on social media called ‘Transgender Student Alliance,’ where members share their experiences and provide emotional support and advice. Such communities help transgender students build confidence and better face real-life challenges. For instance, Patt sought help from the school’s counselor, who provided her with a range of social media resources to help her manage relationships with classmates and issues of self-identity.

4.3. Becoming the Psychological Self: Psychological Identity in the Home and School Environment

Transgender theory developed on the basis of gender theory, arising from academic reflections on the social suppression of homosexuals and other transgender groups[3]. In the educational system of the Thonburi area in Bangkok, the formation of the psychological self for transgender students is closely related to psychological identity within the home and school environment. In their pursuit of gender identity, these students need not only respect and acceptance from school education but also support and understanding from their families. Research shows that when transgender students experience discrimination or rejection in their families, their mental health is often negatively impacted, affecting their learning and quality of life. For example, a university in the Thonburi area established a Gender Diversity Education Group, which regularly organizes training for teachers and students on gender equality and diversity to improve understanding and awareness of transgender students. The school also allows transgender students to choose restrooms and changing rooms according to their gender identity and use corresponding names and pronouns in school activities, greatly enhancing their self-esteem and sense of belonging. However, the efforts of the school alone are far from sufficient. Family support is equally crucial for the formation of transgender students’ psychological self. In some families, parents may find it difficult to accept their child’s gender identity due to a lack of understanding and awareness of the transgender community. This can make students feel isolated and unaccepted in their family environment, negatively impacting their mental health.

4.4. Educational Policy Protection and Collective Self-Acceptance

With the development and progress of society, the educational rights of transgender students, as a special group, are gradually receiving attention and importance from all sectors of society. To protect the legal rights of transgender students, educational policies need to be continuously improved and optimized. Such aspects include equal protection of educational rights, campus safety protection mechanisms, gender identity respect education, strict protection of privacy rights, psychological health support, and prohibition of discrimination and bullying. Whether policy makers, enforcers, or researchers, most studies and attention on educational policy focus on class interests, the authority of educational policies, and the scientific nature of these policies, often neglecting the fact that individuals exist as gendered beings[4]. To address these issues, we need to adopt a series of measures. Educators and schools should recognize the identity of transgender students and accept their gender differences. They should guide students to correctly view gender identity on social media and help them build a positive self-image. Furthermore, the education department should introduce relevant policies to protect the rights of transgender students, allowing them to receive education in an equal and fair environment. For example, a university in the Thonburi area, upon learning about the needs of a transgender student, actively adjusted the curriculum to include courses on gender identity and provided psychological counseling services. Through the protection of educational policies, they guided the student towards real self-identity and psychological self-identity.

4.5. Sex Education: Becoming a Complete Independent Self

In the Thonburi area of Bangkok, Thailand, transgender students face educational challenges, with sex education being a crucial part of becoming a complete independent self. Currently, sex education largely overlooks issues of gender diversity and sexual orientation, making it difficult for transgender students to find content that resonates with their experiences during the learning process. To change this situation, schools should conduct inclusive sex education to ensure that all students can find resonance in their learning. For example, a university in the Thonburi area introduced a gender identity course to help transgender students understand and accept their gender identity. This course includes explanations of the gender spectrum, gender role cognition, etc., allowing students to understand that gender is not binary but diverse. Reasonable education on sexual knowledge and scientific establishment of sexual concepts are crucial for the growth and guidance of transgender students. From gender conflicts to gender identity, and then to identity acceptance, transgender students need to undergo physical and psychological struggles and transformations. This process requires the education department and schools to jointly establish protective mechanisms, such as the Civil Rights Act in Maine, USA, which prohibits discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, physical or mental disabilities in employment, housing, or public places [5]. However, there are still issues of unequal distribution of sex education resources. In the Thonburi area, some schools lack sufficient sex education resources, resulting in obstacles for transgender students seeking sex education knowledge and identity acceptance. To change this situation, the education department should increase investment in sex education curriculum and materials, ensuring that transgender students gain equality and respect in the sex education process, becoming complete independent individuals.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, regarding the education of transgender students in the Thonburi area of Bangkok, Thailand, educators should tailor their approach to each individual, always paying attention to their inner world, respecting their wishes, and encouraging them to bravely express their thoughts. In daily life, educators should guide students to correctly understand and accept their own gender, helping them realize that gender is a form of self-acceptance and societal acceptance, as well as a state of physiological and psychological mutual acceptance. Overall, education for transgender students is a complex and systematic endeavor. Educators need to adopt different educational strategies based on the specific educational objectives and content.

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