

SDDirect Pride Blog Series

At SDDirect, Pride month has been an opportunity to reflect, learn and celebrate queer joy and progress made for LGBTQI+ rights globally, while deepening our understanding of the challenges that remain. Through this blog series, we continue our exploration of how LGBTQI+ communities are impacted by some of the global development challenges of today, and reflect on the barriers and opportunities for LGBTQI+ inclusion within our areas of work.

Why is LGBTQI+ inclusive education so important and what can be done?

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When I think back to my time at school here in the UK, I struggle to remember a point in which the curriculum or general personal, social, health and economics (PSHE) sessions, ever included discussion about gender identity and sexual orientation. During sex education in both Year 6 and Year 9, there was no reference to LGBTQI+ people for example. This was most likely because of Section 28, the damaging legislation that prohibited discussion of LGBTQ+ in schools between 1988 and 2003 in the UK. This legislation 'othered' those who identified as LGBTQI+, creating "breeding grounds for ignorance, misinformation and bullying" within schools that denied crucial safe spaces to learn and develop ([Stonewall, 2021](#)). Sadly, [legislation that causes exclusion within education and society for LGBTQI+ people](#) has not just been seen in the UK - 69 jurisdictions criminalise private, consensual, same-sex sexual activity mainly between men; 42 countries criminalise lesbianism; 11 countries impose the death penalty for same-sex sexual activity; and 15 countries criminalise the gender identity and/or expression of transgender people (Human Dignity Trust, n.d.).

What is LGBTQI+ inclusive education and why is it important?

At the core of a LGBTQI+ inclusive education, young people should feel safe and happy with their identities and know they are represented and welcomed in the education setting. When young people experience representation of all diversity through an inclusive education, they are more likely to develop a stronger sense of self, empathy, and confidence, thereby strengthening their social and emotional development. An inclusive education is one that is respectful and sensitive to all identities, where children and queer adolescents are not at risk of misinformation or dismissal of feelings, for example using correct pronouns and not outing or deadnaming students[1]. [Lindsay Amer](#) argues that a LGBTQI+ inclusive education does not need to be age appropriate as children have a solid understanding of their gender identity by the age of four, therefore, children (and people) of all ages should be exposed to LGBTQI+ learning.

A LGBTQI+ inclusive education is one that can be rooted and integrated into many different subjects, resources, assemblies, internal and external communities, and includes inclusive language ([Stonewall, n.d.](#)). Classes on health, including sexual and reproductive health, should move away from binary measures of puberty and development and be inclusive of all forms of gender and sexual identities. Teachings should also focus on exploring sexuality in safe ways. Many queer people tend to go through their adolescence by living out the identities they are told to embody (usually cisgendered and heteronormative). They do not reach certain developmental milestones as a result, such as having their first kiss and having a relationship with someone they have deep feelings for. But when they start to identify and explore life as queer, they will begin to meet these developmental milestones and experience a 'second queer adolescence'. If young people do not experience LGBTQI+ inclusive education, they risk experiencing their second queer adolescence and meeting these milestones in unsafe ways and with predatory individuals.

[1] Deadnaming is the act of referring to a transgender or non-binary person by a name they used prior to transitioning, such as their birth name.



A LGBTQI+ inclusive education can help to reduce the risk of mental health issues among children and young people. The risk of anxiety, depression and suicide is extremely high for individuals who identify as LGBTQI+. The Chartered College of Teaching notes that LGBTQI+ youths are three times more likely to self-harm and twice as likely to contemplate suicide than heteronormative, cisgendered individuals. A study conducted by [Okanlawon \(2020\)](#) in Nigeria found that LGBTQI+ students at school and universities in Nigeria experience rejection, bullying, and victimisation from parents and siblings at home and from students, teachers and school administrators within schools – who sometimes expel LGBTQI+ students from schools and university. These students were found to have significantly higher suicidal ideation than heterosexual students. As schools and universities have a duty of care towards safeguarding the environment to reduce bullying and ensure all children and young people have an equal and safe experience at school, a LGBTQI+ inclusive education is the most effective avenue to achieve this.

What challenges could Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) face when supporting the advance of LGBTQI+ inclusion in the education sector?

It is essential that any ODA accounts for country and cultural contexts and laws to ensure 'Do No Harm' principles are met. It should also ensure LGBTQI+ individuals are consulted in the design and implementation of all types of interventions. However, there are many challenges to advancing LGBTQI+ inclusion in the education sector, especially in countries where their behaviours are criminalised. [USAID](#) provides an overview of what these challenges are:

- Violence, discrimination, bullying[1], and stigma against LGBTQI+ students is carried out by multiple actors including peers, educators, administrators, staff, sports team coaches and parents. This is heightened in criminalised states
- Curriculum where LGBTQI+ issues are invisible or demonised, result in little or no representation, negative stereotypical portrayals and ignorance towards sexual health of LGBTQI+ people
- There are educators who don't understand, are unprepared or biased against LGBTQI+ individuals: training may not cover how to promote inclusivity and reduce biases
- Educators may experience stigma, discrimination, or violence based on their own SOGIESC[2]. They may feel pressure and anxiety from society due to laws or stereotypes and therefore remain closeted and may even be forced to resign if their identities are made known
- There are unsafe learning environments where educators fail to act in response to any violence or bullying towards LGBTQI+ people
- There is a lack of access to facilities to accommodate transgender students
- There is a lack of support for LGBTQI+ students in school policies, laws, and even the prescriptive dress codes
- LGBTQI+ learners have been widely reported to be unfairly suspended or expelled from schools.

[1] A UNESCO report found more than half LGBTQI+ students reported bullying based on their sexual orientation and gender identity/expression - Chile (68%), Guatemala (53%), Mexico (61%), and Peru (66%)

[2] Sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC)



How can we work with these challenges?

'We can ask ourselves: "are we only teaching about dead, straight, white men?" Where are the lesbian poets, the gay scientists and the trans film directors in the curriculum? Growing up gay in school, I had no way of learning what it means to be who I am, whereas in our heteronormative society, young straight people are represented all over our TVs, in our films and in what they are taught. We can't be what we can't see.'
(Chartered College of Teaching, 2022)

Stonewall (n.d.) and USAID have provided many ways to work with these challenges:

- Check school policies include tackling homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying, and are not prescriptive of gender-binaries
- Promote concepts of diversity, inclusion and respect in curricula, events and discussion
- Encourage inclusive language in lessons, resources, assemblies, internal and external communications
- Address school related gender-based violence (harassment, bullying and victimisation included)
- Provide inclusion-focused professional development programmes for educators, that encourages them to challenge gender stereotypes where possible and respects the privacy of students by not revealing their SOGIESC. USAID's Basic Education Programme carried out training for School Management and Leadership on LGBTQI+ rights and inclusion and duty of care for over 140 principals in Kosovo
- Ensure student supports signpost LGBTQI+ groups and services, especially related to self-identification, general and sexual health, relationships and family formation
- Make schools safe for all by reducing access to spaces where students are often bullied
- Engage with local LGBTQI+ civil society organisations who have country- and culturally-specific knowledge and tools
- Work to sensitise youth and educators on rights of LGBTQI+ people.

Other resources to explore and read:

- Integrating LGBTQI+ Considerations into Education Programming
- GLSEN (2019) Developing LGBTQ-Inclusive Classroom Resources
- Queer Kid Stuff on Youtube - An edutainment company that brings LGBTQ+ and social justice media to kids and families, and for people of all ages.
- Poran (2022) Teaching puberty for LGBTQIA+ Diversity, Inclusion, and Beyond: A new model for expansive pubertal understanding.
- Chartered College of Teachings (2022) LGBTQ+ Inclusivity in Schools.
- UNHR (2019) The inclusion of LGBT people in education settings; of paramount importance to "leaving no one behind"

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