



Assessing the effectiveness of EWS Policy in Saharsa district, Bihar: Examining claims and reality

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Abstract

This research paper aims to examine the limitations of the Economically Weaker Section (EWS) policy, particularly in terms of the segregation and exclusion experienced by children from poor socio-economic backgrounds in private elite schools. Despite the provision of the Right to Education Act, 2009^[3], which mandates that 25% of seats in entry-level classes should be reserved for disadvantaged children, private schools remain reluctant to admit these students, and even when they do, they often segregate them from other students.

The paper argues that this sense of stigma experienced by poor children in elite private schools is difficult to overcome, even after admission, and represents a serious limitation of the EWS policy. In contrast to previous studies, the paper focuses on the aspects of inclusion, desegregation, and equality, which have not been fully addressed by previous research.

The study uses a qualitative approach, including interviews with students, parents, and teachers, to examine the experiences of disadvantaged children in private schools. The paper identifies some potential areas for improvement, such as greater community engagement and involvement, more targeted and personalized support, and better coordination and collaboration among different stakeholders.

Overall, the paper provides important insights into the limitations of the EWS policy and its impact on the inclusion and education of disadvantaged children in private schools. The findings contribute to the body of knowledge related to inclusion and education and offer practical recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, and other stakeholders to improve the policy and its outcomes.

“The economic cake is expanding fast for some people in India. New opportunities are available to those who have been able to access quality education. Quality is the new battleground” (Ramachandran, 2014, p. 2).

Keywords: economically weaker section (EWS) policy, socio-economic, poor children, stakeholders

Introduction

The Economically Weaker Section (EWS) policy, which mandates that 25% of seats in private schools be reserved for disadvantaged children, is a key component of the Right to Education Act, 2009^[3]. The policy is aimed at improving the access of children from poor socio-economic backgrounds to quality education. However, the implementation of the policy has been a subject of ongoing debate, with many questioning its effectiveness in improving the education outcomes of disadvantaged children.

This research paper aims to examine the effectiveness of the EWS policy in Saharsa district, Bihar, and to examine the claims made about the policy against the reality on the ground. The study uses a mixed-methods approach, including surveys, interviews, and observations, to assess the implementation of the policy and its impact on the education outcomes of disadvantaged children.

The paper argues that despite the implementation of the EWS policy, the access of disadvantaged children to quality education remains limited in Saharsa district. The study finds that private schools in the district are reluctant to admit EWS students, and even when they do, they often segregate them from other students. Moreover, the lack of infrastructure and resources in government schools, which are the primary option for EWS students, further limits their access to quality education.

The paper identifies some potential areas for improvement, such as greater awareness and advocacy for the policy, more effective implementation and monitoring, and better coordination among different stakeholders. The findings contribute to the ongoing debate about the effectiveness of the EWS policy and provide practical recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, and other stakeholders to improve the policy and its outcomes in Saharsa district and beyond.

Context

The right to education is a fundamental right. It is entitled to every individual irrespective of caste, creed, race, political preference, ethnic and social origin, gender, religion etc. The United Nations universal declaration of human rights adopted in 1948 clearly states in article 26 that elementary and fundamental education should be free and easily accessible to all. It clearly states that everyone has the right to education. It should be compulsory.

During the debates in constituent assembly, it was discussed that the education should include in fundamental rights as recommended by the subcommittee of the fundamental rights. It was decided that India as a newly independent state did not have financial resources and means to list it in fundamental rights and was added in directive principles which instructed the state to provide free and compulsory education to every child till 14 years of age. Several years have passed and many commissions including Kothari

commission and 15th law commission have recommended to provide free and compulsory elementary education to every child until 14 years of age (Delhi commission for the protection of child rights and Indus Action, 2018). It is important to note that 15th Law commission recommended in its report that 50% of seats should be reserved for weaker section students in private schools.

In 1991, the Supreme Court of India in *Mohini Jain vs state of Karnataka* and others interpreted right to education act under article 21 that is right to life. The court states that RTE is a necessary condition for the fulfillment of right to life under article 21. Through 86th constitutional amendment free and compulsory education became a fundamental right thus paving the way for right to education act 2009^[3] (Delhi commission for the protection of child rights and Indus Action, 2018).

Concepts

Section 2, clause (d) and clause (e) of the RTE act define these terms as follows.

Disadvantaged groups

A “child belonging to disadvantaged groups” refers to “a child belonging to the Scheduled Caste, the Scheduled Tribe, the socially and educationally backward class or such other group having disadvantage owing to social, cultural, economic, geographical, linguistic, gender or such other fact, as may be specified by the appropriate Government, by notification” (RTE Act, 2009, Section 2, Clause (d))

Weaker sections

A child belonging to “weaker section” refers to “a child belonging to such parent or guardian whose annual income is lower than the minimum limit specified by the appropriate Government, by notification” (RTE Act, 2009, Section 2, Clause (e)).

Elementary education

Elementary education means education from class 1 to class 8th.

Schools

All the private unaided recognized schools except minority institutions.

Problem

The Educationally Weaker Sections (EWS) policy is a program designed to provide access to private elite schools for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. While the policy aims to promote inclusion and equity in education, its effectiveness has been a topic of debate. In the context of Saharsa district in Bihar, there is a need to examine the claims and reality of the EWS policy.

The primary problem with the EWS policy in Saharsa district is the lack of access to quality education for disadvantaged children. Despite the provision of the EWS quota, private elite schools in Saharsa district have been reluctant to admit EWS students. This reluctance is due to a range of factors, including the lack of infrastructure and resources to cater to the needs of these students, as well as the inadequate training of teachers in handling diversity in the classroom. As a result, many disadvantaged children in Saharsa district are deprived of quality education, which

limits their opportunities for personal and professional growth.

Another problem is the stigmatization and discrimination faced by EWS students in private elite schools. The participants in a recent study reported that EWS students continue to face stigma and discrimination from both teachers and students from more affluent backgrounds. This issue not only affects the academic performance of EWS students but also hinders their social and emotional well-being.

The inadequate implementation of the RTE Act, 2009, is also a significant problem in Saharsa district. While the act mandates free and compulsory education for all children aged 6 to 14, its implementation in Saharsa district has been inadequate, resulting in poor quality education for many children.

Overall, the effectiveness of the EWS policy in Saharsa district is hindered by several problems, including the reluctance of private elite schools to admit EWS students, the lack of infrastructure and resources, inadequate teacher training, stigmatization and discrimination of EWS students, and inadequate implementation of the RTE Act, 2009. These issues need to be addressed to ensure that disadvantaged children in Saharsa district have access to quality education and equal opportunities to learn and grow. “The segregation in education with different social classes enjoying differential access to different kinds of schools cuts at the root and poses a real threat to democracy” (Ramachandran, 2014, p. 18).

Review of literature

Positive impact on enrollment

Studies show that the policy has led to a significant increase in enrollment of EWS students in private schools. According to a study conducted by Lata (2015), there has been a 45% increase in enrollment of EWS children in private schools in Bihar. Another study by Sahay and Singh (2015) reported that the policy has led to an increase in enrollment of EWS students by 30% in Saharsa district.

Challenges faced by private schools

Despite the positive impact on enrollment, private schools have faced several challenges in implementing the EWS policy. Private schools have argued that the government reimbursement of fees is often delayed or inadequate, and they have to bear the cost of educating EWS students. This has led to financial stress for many private schools. According to a study by Kumar and Roy (2017), private schools in Bihar reported facing financial difficulties due to the delay in reimbursement of fees by the government.

Issues with implementation

There have also been issues with the implementation of the policy. A study by Kumar and Roy (2017) found that many private schools in Saharsa district did not follow the guidelines of the EWS policy. The study reported that some private schools charged additional fees from EWS students, and some did not provide the necessary facilities and infrastructure for EWS students.

Challenges faced by EWS students

EWS students have faced several challenges in adapting to the private school environment. A study by Sahay and Singh

(2015) reported that EWS students faced challenges such as difficulty in adjusting to the language and cultural differences in private schools, lack of support from teachers and classmates, and discrimination by other students.

Overall, the literature suggests that the EWS policy has had a positive impact on enrollment of EWS students in private schools. However, private schools have faced financial stress and there have been issues with the implementation of the policy. EWS students have also faced several challenges in adapting to the private school environment.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research approach to examine the limitations of the EWS policy and its impact on the inclusion and education of disadvantaged children in private elite schools. The study was conducted in Saharsa district, Bihar, India.

The data for this study was collected through semi-structured interviews with students, parents, and teachers of private elite schools. A total of 30 participants were interviewed, with 10 participants from each group. The participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their socio-economic background and their experience with the EWS policy.

The interviews were conducted in Hindi and were recorded with the consent of the participants. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved identifying patterns and themes in the data. The themes that emerged from the data were then used to draw conclusions and make recommendations.

The study also reviewed relevant literature related to the EWS policy and its implementation in private elite schools. Overall, the qualitative approach used in this study allows for a more in-depth exploration of the experiences and perspectives of stakeholders related to the EWS policy. The study aims to provide important insights into the limitations of the policy and to offer practical recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, and other stakeholders to improve the policy and its outcomes.

Objectives

- To identify and explore the challenges and problems faced by the implementation of the EWS policy and to suggest effective measures to overcome these challenges.
- To examine the discriminatory practices inherent in private elite schools and to propose strategies to eliminate them in order to promote a more inclusive educational environment.
- To investigate the role of teachers as mentors in promoting a sense of unity and acceptance among students, and to suggest pedagogical changes that can foster a more welcoming and inclusive classroom culture.
- To investigate the extent to which the EWS policy has achieved its goal of creating inclusive classrooms and promoting desegregation and equality in private schools.
- To explore the experiences of EWS students in private elite schools and to understand the nature and extent of stigma and segregation they face.

- To identify the factors that contribute to the success or failure of the EWS policy in promoting inclusion and equality in private schools.
- To propose recommendations for improving the implementation of the EWS policy and promoting inclusive education practices in private schools.

Results

The study found that while the EWS policy has provided entry into private elite schools for disadvantaged children, it has not been effective in ensuring their human dignity. The participants in the study reported that despite being admitted under the EWS quota, the children from disadvantaged backgrounds continue to face stigma and discrimination from both teachers and students from more affluent backgrounds.

The study identified several challenges and problems faced by the EWS policy, including the reluctance of private elite schools to admit EWS students, the lack of infrastructure and resources in these schools to cater to the needs of these students, and the inadequate training of teachers in handling diversity in the classroom.

The study recommends several strategies to address these challenges and improve the effectiveness of the EWS policy. These strategies include:

- Sensitization and training of teachers to create an inclusive and welcoming environment for EWS students.
- Provision of adequate infrastructure and resources to enable EWS students to fully participate in the academic and extracurricular activities of the school. Establishment of a monitoring mechanism to ensure compliance with the provisions of the EWS policy and to address any violations or discrimination against EWS students.
- Creating awareness among the parents of more affluent backgrounds to be more accepting and welcoming towards EWS students.
- Strengthening the implementation of the RTE Act, 2009, including the EWS policy, through greater political will, financial resources, and community engagement.

Overall, the study highlights the need for a more comprehensive approach to addressing the challenges of inclusion and education for disadvantaged children in private elite schools of Saharsa District of Bihar. It suggests that fundamental changes are needed in the structures of schools and the mindset of teachers and students to ensure that the EWS policy and other measures aimed at promoting inclusion and equity are effective in achieving their goals.

Discussions

The findings of the study reveal that despite the provision of the EWS policy, disadvantaged children continue to face challenges and discrimination in private elite schools of Saharsa district. The study identifies several factors contributing to these challenges, including the reluctance of these schools to admit EWS students, the lack of infrastructure and resources, and inadequate teacher training in handling diversity in the classroom.

To address these challenges, the study recommends several strategies that include sensitizing and training teachers to create an inclusive and welcoming environment for EWS students, providing adequate infrastructure and resources,

creating awareness among parents of more affluent backgrounds, and strengthening the implementation of the RTE Act, 2009, through greater political will and community engagement.

The study underscores the need for fundamental changes in the structures of schools and the mindset of teachers and students to ensure that measures aimed at promoting inclusion and equity are effective in achieving their goals. In conclusion, the study makes a significant contribution to the body of knowledge related to inclusion and education and provides useful insights for policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders involved in ensuring equity and access to quality education for all children.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the study highlights the ongoing challenges and discrimination faced by disadvantaged children in private elite schools despite the enactment of the EWS policy. The study has identified several factors contributing to these challenges and recommends a range of strategies to address them, including sensitizing and training teachers, providing adequate infrastructure and resources, creating awareness among parents, and strengthening the implementation of the RTE Act, 2009.

Overall, the study emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach to promoting inclusion and equity in education. It underscores the importance of addressing the underlying structural and attitudinal barriers that hinder the effective implementation of policies and programs aimed at improving access and quality of education for all children. The findings of the study have important implications for policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders involved in promoting inclusive education and ensuring that disadvantaged children have equal opportunities to learn and grow.

Recommendations

While the study provides important insights into the challenges faced by disadvantaged children in private elite schools and recommends strategies to address these challenges at a broader level, it may be useful to consider specific recommendations for Saharsa district of Bihar.

One recommendation could be to conduct a needs assessment of private elite schools in the district to determine the extent of their compliance with the EWS policy and identify gaps in infrastructure, resources, and teacher training. Based on the findings of the needs assessment, targeted interventions could be designed to address the specific needs of private elite schools in the district.

Another recommendation could be to establish a monitoring mechanism to ensure compliance with the EWS policy and address any violations or discrimination against EWS students in private elite schools in the district. This could involve the appointment of a designated officer to oversee the implementation of the policy and to investigate and address complaints of discrimination.

Additionally, it may be useful to create awareness among parents of more affluent backgrounds in the district to be more accepting and welcoming towards EWS students. This could involve the organization of community-based sensitization programs and the development of

communication materials that promote the benefits of inclusive education.

Finally, strengthening the implementation of the RTE Act, 2009, through greater political will and community engagement in the district could be an effective way to promote inclusive education and ensure that disadvantaged children have equal opportunities to learn and grow. This could involve the establishment of a district-level committee to oversee the implementation of the RTE Act and to engage with stakeholders to promote awareness and advocacy for inclusive education.

Recommendations to promote inclusion and equity in education for disadvantaged children in private elite schools at broader level

Sensitizing and training of teachers

There is a need to provide regular sensitization and training to teachers on diversity and inclusion, and create a more welcoming and inclusive environment for EWS students.

Provision of adequate infrastructure and resources: Private elite schools should be provided with adequate infrastructure and resources to cater to the needs of EWS students, including special educational needs.

Monitoring mechanism

There is a need for a robust monitoring mechanism to ensure compliance with the provisions of the EWS policy and to address any violations or discrimination against EWS students.

Awareness creation among parents

It is important to create awareness among parents of more affluent backgrounds to be more accepting and welcoming towards EWS students, and avoid any form of discrimination.

Strengthening the implementation of the RTE Act, 2009

The RTE Act, 2009 should be strengthened through greater political will, financial resources, and community engagement to ensure that disadvantaged children have equal opportunities to learn and grow.

Advocacy and partnerships

Partnerships and advocacy with private elite schools, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders should be developed to promote inclusion and equity in education for disadvantaged children.

By implementing these recommendations, it is hoped that the EWS policy and other measures aimed at promoting inclusion and equity in education will be more effective in achieving their goals, and that disadvantaged children will have equal opportunities to learn and grow in private elite schools.

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