

Beyond Inclusivity: Developing a New Paradigm is the EWS Quota of Right to Education Working Towards Social Inclusion or Widening the Gap?

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Abstract: *As a grade 11 student studying in Modern School, Barakhamba Road, New Delhi, I have been fortunate enough to witness the effects of government policies aimed at integrating children from economically weaker sections (EWS) into mainstream education. While the inclusion of EWS children in schools like ours has been a significant stride towards social equity, there are still several challenges to overcome. Our batch (2011) was the first batch where the EWS quota was implemented by the government. All throughout junior school, I kept hearing from my family that it was the noblest idea to integrate children who come from slightly disadvantaged backgrounds into the mainstream, and how it was only through education and equal opportunities that the children of this country would grow to become fine human beings who could lead the world of the future. I was always taught to treat them with kindness and compassion, but also, at the same time, in an effort to be inclusive, was taught to be careful about not hurting them by making them feel different or pointing out the differences between our upbringings. The presence of EWS children in our school is a testament to the success of policies such as the Right to Education (RTE) Act, which mandates private schools to reserve a percentage of their seats for underprivileged children. This initiative has provided EWS children with access to quality education, creating opportunities for their future. However, the social aspect of integration is an area that still requires attention. One of the most glaring challenges is the lack of interaction between children belonging to higher socio-economic strata and those belonging to the EWS. I have myself been a witness to unequal treatment, even though it was largely inadvertent. This is because schools ask children to engage in activities that may not necessarily be within the means of an EWS household. Activities such as domestic field trips and international exchange programmes challenge even affluent households at times. It is not uncommon to see students from different socio-economic backgrounds form separate social circles. This social divide can have a profound impact on the EWS children, making them feel isolated and unwelcome. Such feelings can further affect their academic performance and emotional well-being. As a student, I believe it is crucial to explore ways to foster better relationships between students from diverse backgrounds.*

Keywords: EWS Quota, Right to Education, Social Inclusion

1. Unravelling the Problem at Hand

Education is the key to human development and educational planning needs to be done meticulously and executed with great sensitivity. Education improves the quality of life and develops manpower for different sections of the economy. It empowers the poor masses to become self-reliant and enables them to participate in the process of national development. Since independence, significant government policies/interventions have shaped the education landscape in India¹.

Social inclusion is the process of ensuring the presence and participation of all sections of society in the activities considered normal for the society as a whole by removing all kinds of social, economic, psychological and physical barriers. Social inclusion of the economically weaker and socially disadvantaged sections is imperative to achieve sustainable development of a country. To ensure the social inclusion of socially and economically backward divisions of society, education is considered to be one of the most influential mediums. Governments should aim to achieve education for all so that the marginalised sections can come forward and participate actively in society.

The successful implementation of the RTE Act of 2009 has led to an improved net enrollment rate in primary education

and infrastructure of schools. However, thousands of EWS children are facing an uncertain future as they reach Class IX.

1.1 Foundations and Implications of the Right to Education (RTE) Act

The Right to Education Act, 2009 proposed to provide free and compulsory elementary education for children between 6 and 14 years of age. It was enacted by the Parliament on 4th Aug 2009 and came into effect on 1st April 2010 to achieve the vision under Article 21-A. The Act made it legally binding for state and local governments to follow the norms laid down under the Act.

The RTE Act 2009 guarantees admission to EWS children in private schools for up to 25% of all admissions that take place in schools at the entry level — nursery, kindergarten and Class I. These children do not have to pay tuition fees and are to be reimbursed for course material as well as uniforms. This clause is applicable up to Class VIII. The state can refuse to grant recognition to schools or withdraw recognition that has been conferred, for schools that do not adhere to the prescribed minimum quality, standards and rules.

¹ Refer to chart 1 in annexure

1.2 Reservation of Seats for Economically Weaker Section (EWS) Children

The mandate for reservation of 25 per cent seats in private unaided schools for EWS groups was a major step to bridge the gap between the quality of education offered by the government and private players.

Disadvantaged groups and weaker sections have been defined under Section 2, Clauses (d) and (e) of the RTE Act as:

A child belonging to a disadvantaged group refers to a child belonging to a Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, a socially and educationally backward class or such other group having disadvantages owing to social, cultural, economic, geographical, linguistic, gender or such other fact, as may be specified by the appropriate Government, by notification.

A child belonging to the weaker section refers to a child belonging to such a parent or guardian whose annual income is lower than the minimum limit specified by the appropriate Government, by notification.

The definition of a family in EWS reservation is, 'The person who seeks the benefit of reservation, his/her parents and siblings below the age of 18 years as also his/her spouse and children below the age of 18 years'. The Candidate's annual family income must be less than INR 8 lakhs per annum as per the update to the Constitution Amendment Act in January 2019. But historically, for school admissions in Delhi, the income of the family used to be less than INR 1 lakh annually.

1.3 Ideals and Implementation of the RTE Act and EWS Provisions

As mentioned above, the RTE Act provides for the admission of disadvantaged and poor children at the entry level, covering preschool and Class I. With these children moving up, the school gradually builds a more diverse population spread across all classes. Progression at this pace allows children the opportunity to grow up together and create bonds: bonds that can survive social walls. The larger objective is to provide a common place where children sit, eat and live together for at least eight years of their lives across caste, class and gender divides so that it narrows down such divisions in our society. Social inclusion of EWS children by providing a common platform of learning with the privileged children had been intended under the provisions of Section 12 (1) (C) of the Right to Education Act, 2009.

1.4 Other Significant Issues Affecting RTE

- Whilst the greater emphasis is on enrolment levels and infrastructure standards, the Act has been less than successful in providing an adequate focus on quality education.
- RTE Act only applies to EWS (Economically Weaker Section) children till Class VIII.
- Variations have also been observed even in terms of provisions of entitlements for EWS children across states.
- The government does not keep track of children admitted under the category in private schools.
- Various state rules do not even specify which agency or authority would maintain these records.

- Elementary education forms the basis of mental development in a child and equips him/her/with the analytical skills; confidence and competencies which help pave the way for a successful future for him/her/with. The abrupt ending at Class VIII does not help in closing the education loop.
- The act does not totally fulfill the other softer issues of how an EWS child grows up, most times with a feeling of unfairness in the company of more privileged children and its bigger repercussions in the future.

As of April 1st, 2023, a Delhi Assembly committee has recommended extending the benefits of free education to all students from Economically Weaker Sections studying in private schools up to Class 12. The assembly's Committee on Welfare of SC/STs urged the city government's Education department to consider its recommendation and take necessary steps to extend the benefits. But this is yet to be implemented as an amendment to the RTE 2009.



Figure 1

2. Research Methodologies and Primary Objectives

Most of the studies available so far have focused more on the various policies and schemes provided by the Government for the welfare of the economically weaker and socially disadvantaged sections of society. Acceptability and adaptability of the stakeholders to the implemented policies and provisions have not been stressed so far. There are very few studies that focus on social inclusion through the EWS quota in the private schools of Delhi. The present research is an attempt to fill the gap.

My work is based on the primary data collected from EWS families living in areas such as Zamrudpur, Arjun Nagar, Kotla Mubarakpur and Nizamuddin Basti [1] in South Delhi. I created a survey with qualitative questions and spoke to 50 EWS children and their parents in person. The students were in the age group of 4-19 years and are currently enrolled in Central and South Delhi's best private schools. A few adults from the EWS category were interviewed as well. They are currently in jobs after having successfully traversed the journey of school.

The other aspect of my study also covers conducting interviews with the heads of NGOs running primary and senior secondary schools in Delhi to understand the points of view of educators and administrators.

The specific objectives of the study were to find out the extent of implementation of the Right to Education Act, 2009 in Delhi, as well as to know the awareness and expectations of the various stakeholders. I tried to examine the regularity, participation and performance of the EWS students. The main objective was to identify the issues, if any; in achieving social inclusion and equality through the provision of EWS quota and to provide solutions for better implementation of the same.

Further, three case studies were worked on to explore the qualitative aspect of the EWS quota. The case studies were selected based on the experiences and circumstances of the particular EWS families - the families that were satisfied with the RTE 2009, the families that stood for their rights and had an exemplary fight with the administration and lastly, the families that suffered during the course of availing EWS quota.

2.1 Limitations

- 1) The sample size of students and parents was limited to 50 as the analysis was required to be done thoroughly and within the stipulated time frame of the project. While the ideal size of the data set would have been 100+, that would have extended beyond the scope and time frame of the project.
- 2) Focus group discussions could not be conducted because of the paucity of time and also due to the reluctance of participants.
- 3) Students were hesitant to let me use their identities for fear of being ostracised by their peers or teachers.



Figure 2

3. Challenges and Outcomes of Social Inclusion

3.1 Documentation Challenges

EWS parents are under confident and scared of dealing with the school authorities and often find it hard to fill out forms etc. Most of the time, they have to ask friends and neighbours for help in filling up forms/ documents, getting information, guidance, and general advice/opinion. Sometimes, money also needs to be spent to obtain verified income certificates. Many respondents stated that the procedure of making the income certificate is not smooth. Another issue was the availability of birth certificates.

Most of the stakeholders (teachers, EWS and general category parents) mentioned that they were not involved at any stage

of formulation of the EWS quota and even after implementation, the perception of the beneficiaries and other stakeholders was not examined. This has been corroborated by other research papers on this topic as well.

The 'First come - First serve' method for providing admissions was followed in a large number of schools as reported by 50% of EWS families. However, the method was described as less transparent and corrupt by EWS parents.

3.2 Financial Difficulties

Approximately 65% of the EWS families were earning Rupees 1-1.5 lakh per annum while 35% of the EWS families were earning between Rupees 50,000-1 lakh per annum. About 65% of the EWS families mentioned that their children couldn't take part in co-curricular activities in school due to financial constraints. 85% of the EWS children had not availed excursions and field trips held in school as their parents could not afford the fee for the same.

They highlighted financial inability for buying copies, books, stationery, uniforms and transport. Though these are supposed to be provided by the school, some of the school's demand money for the uniform and stationery. The parents expressed their disappointment about being under pressure to pay for the fee, dress and ancillary charges for annual day functions, dance and music competitions, internal programs, activities, school day trips, excursions, olympiads etc.

3.3 Social Issues

Economically Weaker Section (EWS) children and their parents have expressed concerns regarding the lack of equitable opportunities to engage in co-curricular activities and school events. Even when such opportunities arise, the logistical challenges of organising and facilitating their children's involvement present significant obstacles.

A considerable number of students from the general category avail themselves of private tutoring, particularly in higher grades, which further compounds the pressure on EWS parents to strive for parity in order to secure equitable educational prospects for their children.

Additionally, they expressed concerns regarding the rigorous academic standards, particularly in relation to their children's proficiency in the English language and the complexity of the course materials. Within these households, literacy rates are generally low, resulting in limited support from parents, siblings, grandparents, or neighbours. Consequently, due to their inadequate grasp of the English language, comprehending the curriculum becomes a formidable challenge. Since a majority of subjects are taught in English, their academic performance suffers across all disciplines.

Furthermore, EWS children and their parents have emphasised the need for teachers to provide increased attention and foster interest, focus, discipline, and concentration among these students. It has been suggested that incorporating experiential learning methods instead of relying solely on rote memorization, along with the utilisation

of smart boards and other educational technologies, could accelerate their academic progress.

A significant majority of EWS parents have reported a lack of access to computers in their households. Many respondents have highlighted the practice of teachers assigning homework, projects, assignments, sample papers, and lessons online, necessitating the additional expense of printing these materials at a cybercafé. As most parents themselves are illiterate, they face challenges in operating computers effectively. This situation often leads to missed assignments and subsequently impacts their child's academic performance, particularly in higher grades where incomplete work results in grade deductions and disciplinary consequences.

Another psychological aspect that has emerged is the change in demands exhibited by EWS children after gaining admission to private schools. Observing their general category peers' access to various resources, these children develop a heightened sense of entitlement and begin demanding items such as fancy stationery, bags, meals and water bottles. When unable to fulfil these demands, their self-esteem diminishes, further magnifying their awareness of the existing disparities.

The significant disparity between privileged and disadvantaged groups has resulted in the development of an inferiority complex among EWS children. They perceive their peers as being more affluent and superior, leading to feelings of jealousy, envy, and, at times, even aggressive behaviour. Many EWS parents have also expressed discomfort in interacting with parents from the general category or new admissions, primarily due to their own non-payment of fees, which further exacerbates their sense of unease.

3.4 Positive Outcomes

A significant proportion of EWS parents have expressed satisfaction regarding their children's admission to private schools. They have observed substantial growth and development since their enrolment, noting improvements in various areas. EWS children experience enhanced exposure, leading to the development of better communication skills, increased diligence, improved confidence, and refined manners. Exposure to higher academic standards and active participation in co-curricular and other classroom activities stimulate their aspirations and foster dreams of transforming their destiny through education. The implementation of this policy has proven to be highly beneficial for the intended sections of society, facilitating genuine integration and positive outcomes.



Figure 3

4. Case Studies and Surveys

4.1 Case Study 1 - Ayushka

Ayushka, a 13-year-old student, attends a prestigious school in South Delhi and resides in Zamrudpur, a small urban village. Her father is unemployed, while her mother, Kiron, works as a domestic helper, undertaking household chores like *jhadoo pochha* [2] and *bartan dhona* [3]. Filled with hope and aspirations, Kiron enrolled Ayushka in a private school, believing that education would reshape their lives and empower her daughter to achieve independence. The initial years of Ayushka's primary education proceeded smoothly. Kiron made diligent efforts, seeking assistance from educated families she worked for, to support Ayushka with assignments, extracurricular activities, and academic queries. The teachers at her school created a supportive environment for EWS children, striving to establish parity between students from disadvantaged backgrounds and their general category peers.

However, from the sixth grade onward, Ayushka's circumstances took a turn for the worse. Despite her initial proficiency in art, craft, drawing, and academic subjects, she became increasingly distracted. Her academic performance declined, and she displayed passive-aggressive behaviour, immersing herself in video games for extended periods on her phone. It is likely that she faced mistreatment at home while her mother was away, compounded by the unsafe environment in her neighbourhood, contributing to her decreased attention and focus at school. Although the school attempted to foster a nurturing environment, Ayushka still encountered discrimination. Some of her peers looked down upon her, and despite the kindness of a few teachers, others exhibited impatience due to her inability to keep pace with her classmates. She experienced repeated feelings of inferiority stemming from her background, skin colour, and financial status. The situation escalated to the point where Ayushka expressed suicidal thoughts and began threatening self-harm unless her demands were met by her mother.

Currently, Kiron faces a challenging situation, striving to salvage her daughter's education and dreams while balancing her family responsibilities and work. This case study highlights the limitations of the EWS quota established by the RTE Act of 2009, intended to positively transform the lives of children like Ayushka and families similar to hers. Unfortunately, the implementation of this policy has led to further disparities and left a lasting psychological impact on Ayushka's vulnerable mind. Overcoming this experience and embracing it as a catalyst for personal growth will require immense courage and healing for Ayushka. Comprehensive societal transformation is necessary, encompassing changes in attitudes, school environments, neighbourhoods, and the implementation of new initiatives and policies.



Figure 4: (L) Poorna (Myself) (R) Ayushka

4.2 Case Study 2 - Rahul and Gaurav

Rahul and Gaurav, aged 23 and 21 respectively, reside in a modest room on the terrace of a house in Green Park, Delhi. Their father, Ram Bhavan, has been employed as a domestic helper for a South Delhi-based family for the past 35 years. Remarkably, Ram Bhavan initially joined this household as a young child, grew up within its premises, got married, had children, and continued to work diligently for the family. Fortunately, the family he served was highly educated and instilled in him the value of providing a good education for his children, thereby ensuring they wouldn't be limited to unskilled and uneducated labour. Rahul and Gaurav were enrolled in a reputable nearby private school in Safdarjung Development Area (SDA). During this period, the RTE Act of 2009 came into effect, but the family self-supported the school fees and other educational expenses.

Starting from 2011, when the RTE Act of 2009 became applicable, the family was well-informed and took advantage of the scheme's benefits. After Ram Bhavan submitted the EWS certificate and met the financial criteria, the children's education became free of cost. Both Rahul and Gaurav exhibited exceptional dedication and excelled in their academic pursuits as well as extracurricular activities. However, a new challenge arose after completing Class 8, as the Act only provided free education until that point. Fortunately, the family once again stepped in to offer support. Rahul completed his schooling in 2019, followed by Gaurav in 2021. Concurrently, both acquired computer skills through vocational training alongside their academic journey.

Presently, Rahul earns INR 23,000 per month, while Gaurav earns INR 19,000 per month. Their father, Ram Bhavan, at the age of 48, earns INR 11,000 per month. With the combined efforts of Ram Bhavan and his sons, they successfully purchased a small two-bedroom flat in Arjun Nagar, situated nearby, in anticipation of future family expansions. This case study exemplifies an exceptional ecosystem of support that encompassed Ram Bhavan's wife, immediate relatives, the family he worked for (providing financial assistance, resources, and guidance), teachers at the school, friends, and tutors at coaching centres. Each entity played a vital role in facilitating Ram Bhavan's quest to change the lives of his children, and the children themselves displayed remarkable determination. Despite facing alienation, biases, bullying, and mental hardships, they remained steadfast in their pursuit of knowledge. This inspiring story underscores the transformative power of

education in altering circumstances and shaping destinies. To truly bring about a significant impact, we must foster an inclusive and supportive ecosystem rather than relying solely on isolated policies with the hope of their efficacy. These aspects will be further explored in my concluding remarks.



Figure 5: (L) Poorna (Myself) (R) Gaurav

4.3 Case Study 3 - Mohd. Hanzala and Khulela

Tasveer Bano, a resident of Nizamuddin Basti, resides with her husband, employed as a *maali* [4] in the Delhi Golf Club, and their two children, Mohd Hanzala (aged 18) and Khulela (aged 17). Tasveer embarked on a lengthy and strenuous journey to secure admission for her children in private schools through the EWS quota of the RTE Act 2009, once it was implemented during the nursery admissions of 2011. She was determined that her children receive an education comparable to that of their peers in the general category at these esteemed schools. While Mohd Hanzala flourished in a supportive environment at his prestigious South Delhi private school, Khulela Bano struggled to fit in at her South Delhi private school. Although Hanzala successfully completed his Class 12, his sister is slated to repeat Class 11.

Despite his mostly positive experience overall, Hanzala encountered significant challenges along the way. In 2018, as he prepared to transition to Class 9, his school declared that he was no longer eligible for free education and suggested seeking admission elsewhere if the family could not afford the fees. This situation is not uncommon, as many private schools require EWS students to pay fees after Class 8 when the RTE window closes. Nevertheless, Tasveer Bano contested this decision and emerged victorious after a rigorous legal battle. Notably, lawyer Ashok Aggarwal, a social activist who represented Tasveer Bano, highlights that the school's position was weakened due to its establishment on government-owned land.

He further notes that while studying in private schools is a dream come true for families like Hanzala's, the EWS quota places children in a new social class straddling two different worlds. "These children (going to private schools under the EWS quota) often lose association with their neighbourhood contemporaries because of the difference in their exposure and education standards. But they don't fit into the elite circles either since they do not have similar means as those

students,” he says. Although Hanzala says he never experienced any differential treatment from his teachers, most of his friends at school are also from the EWS category. Despite the challenges he faced, Hanzala said he enjoyed going to school so much that he would do it all over again if given the chance. He is now all set to support the family by becoming a hairdresser.

This case study serves as evidence that despite the existence of policies, legal intervention becomes necessary at times due to the lack of consistent application. It highlights the importance of a comprehensive follow-up plan within the policy framework to prevent cases like those of Hanzala and Khulela from recurring. Without such measures, only the fortunate and determined individuals may successfully navigate the complex policies, while others risk falling through the cracks unnoticed. Khulela's experience indicates that she faced greater adversity and continues to struggle in finding her path. This underscores the need for sustained efforts to ensure equitable and consistent implementation of educational policies to prevent the marginalisation of vulnerable students.



Figure 6: Hanzala (4th from left) with his friends in front of his school

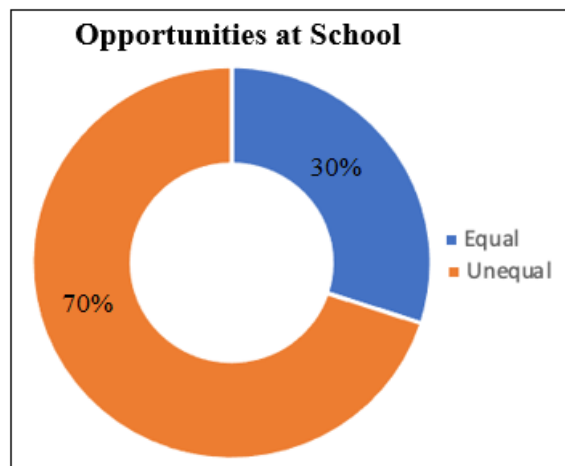
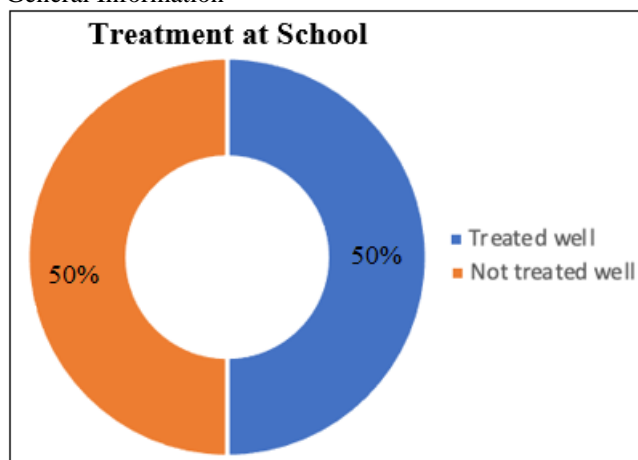


Figure 7: (From left to right) Hanzala, Tasveer Bano, Khulela

4.4 Surveys & Analysis

The following pie chart doughnuts have been created from the data collected through the qualitative survey² conducted for this study.

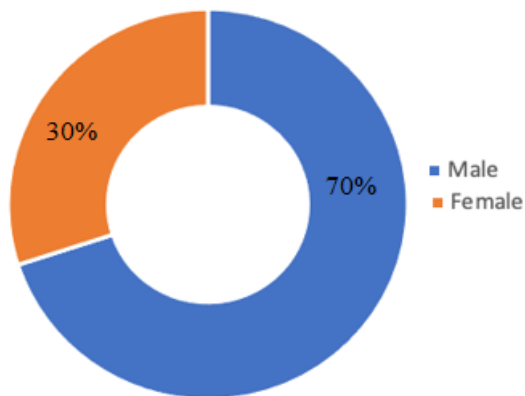
General Information



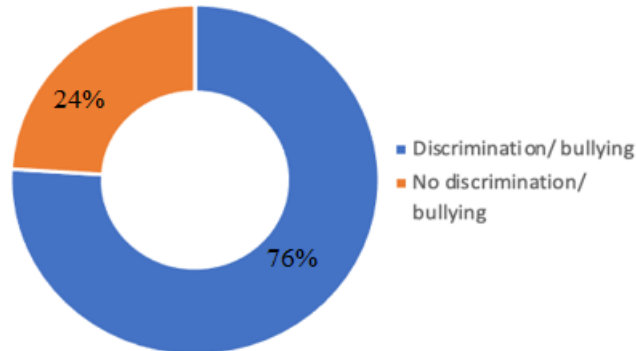
Demographic Information

² Refer to the Qualitative Survey questionnaire in Annexure.

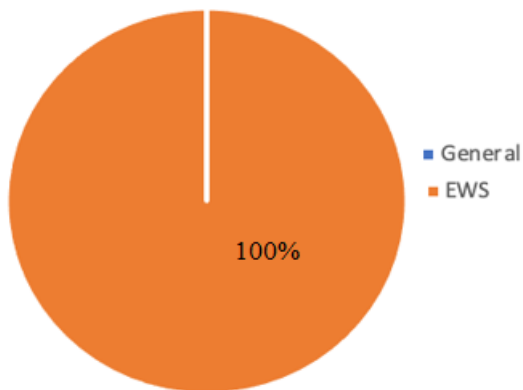
Gender Distribution



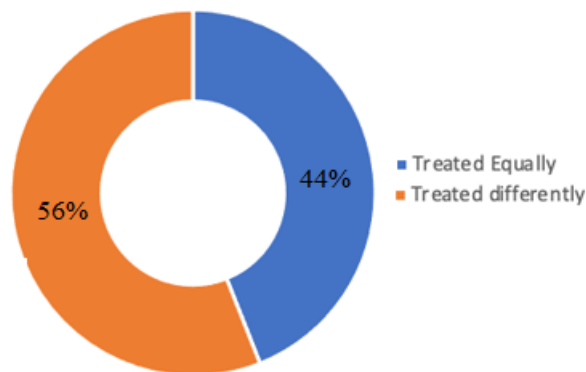
Discrimination/ Bullying



Category

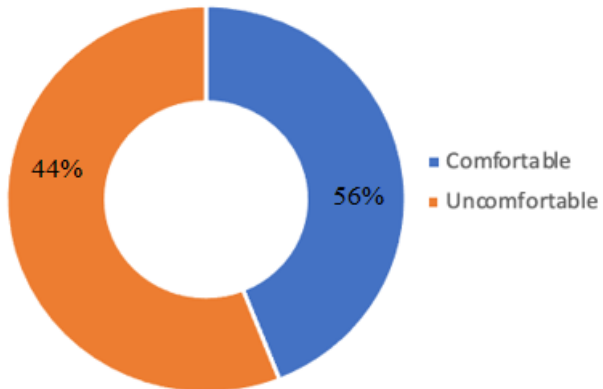


Treatment by Teachers

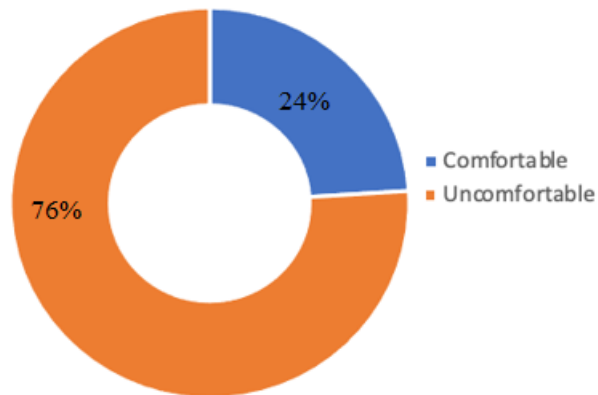


School Environment

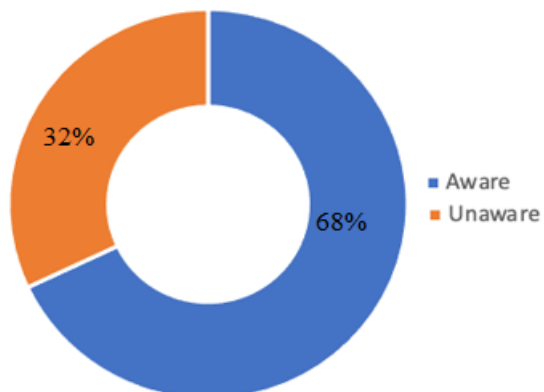
Comfort at School



Participation in Class

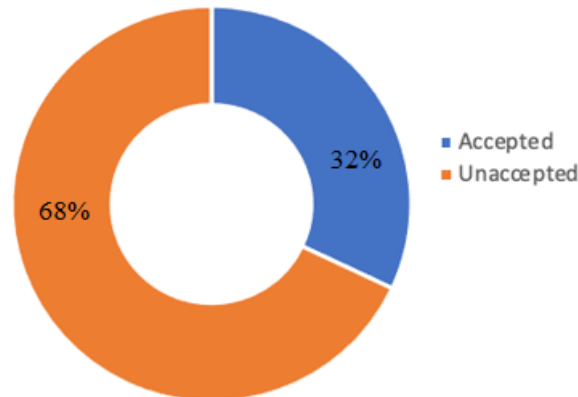


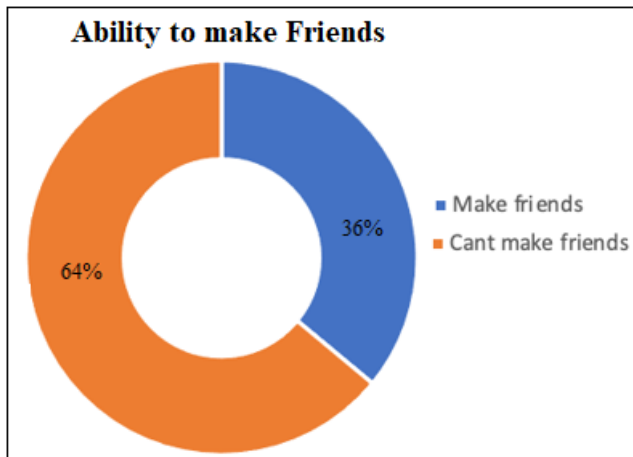
Awareness of Inclusivity Programs



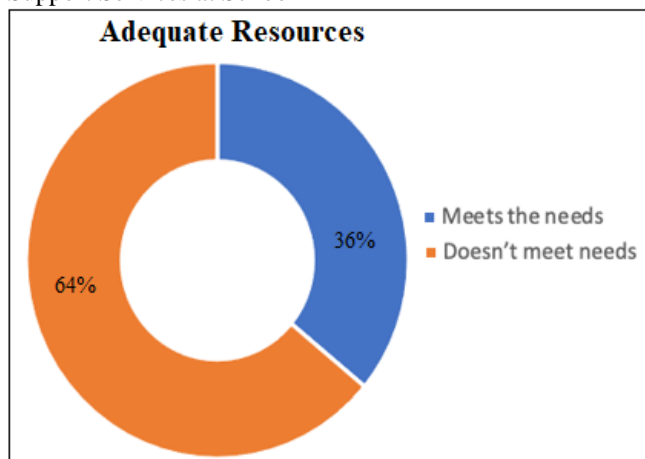
Peer Relationships

Acceptance by Peers





Support Services at School



5. Suggestions and Solutions - Where do we go from here?

Extension of EWS quota until completion of secondary education: It is recommended that the EWS quota be extended beyond Grade VIII, as transitioning to senior classes can be particularly challenging for adolescents due to physical and psychological changes. Abrupt changes in schooling may have detrimental effects, potentially hindering social inclusion efforts.

Establishment of EWS facility centres for parents: To address the lack of understanding among EWS families about the provisions of the quota, it is suggested that EWS facility centres be established in proximity to EWS colonies and villages. These centres would serve as accessible resources where parents can seek guidance and information regarding admissions and other matters related to the EWS quota in private schools.

Introduction of grievance drop boxes for EWS parents: Implementing grievance drop boxes in schools would provide a confidential avenue for EWS parents to express their concerns. A designated senior teacher should handle these grievances, ensuring privacy and appropriate follow-up actions.

Incentives for teachers supporting EWS children: The administration should offer incentives to teachers who voluntarily dedicate their time to provide supplementary

classes for EWS children, promoting enhanced academic support and fostering inclusive education.

Afternoon/Evening school/classes for EWS children: The School Education Department should encourage private schools to organise afternoon/evening classes specifically for EWS children. These classes would help EWS children cope with the English medium curriculum while ensuring the sociological impact is considered by providing them with a similar quality of education, infrastructure, teachers, and resources within their social group. Starting from Class IX, children can be integrated with the general category students for a mixed learning environment.

Financial assistance for EWS parents: Recognizing the financial constraints faced by EWS parents, providing financial assistance would alleviate the burden of expenses associated with sending their children to private schools. Financial support is crucial in ensuring continued social inclusion for EWS children.

Standardisation of belongings to foster equality: All private schools should establish standardised requirements for daily belongings such as stationery, lunch boxes, and uniforms to promote equality among students. Discouraging the concept of *canteen* [5] culture would ensure that all children have equal access to resources, as not all parents can afford to provide pocket money for the canteen.

Representation of EWS parents in school management committees: Encouraging the representation of EWS parents in school management committees would provide a platform for discussing important decisions related to curriculum, fees, and other relevant matters. This inclusion would empower EWS parents, enhancing their self-esteem and fostering a sense of value within the education system.

Orientation programs for all stakeholders: Regular orientation programs should be conducted by a team of experts consisting of educationists, sociologists, and psychologists. These programs would help alleviate fears and misconceptions among EWS parents while improving acceptance among the general category. Teachers and staff should also receive training to develop the necessary attitudes and skills to effectively engage with EWS children and their parents. Fair treatment of all children, irrespective of caste, gender, economic and social status, language, or culture, should be emphasised.

Hobby classes for EWS children: Private schools should organise free-of-cost hobby classes in the evenings to provide EWS children with exposure to their talents. Integrating EWS children with the general category students in informal settings through hobby classes would foster new horizons and positive relationships.

Field visits to enhance the dignity of labour: Encouraging field visits and community work in schools would promote the dignity of labour among students. By instilling an awareness of diversity and the value of different occupations, both EWS and general-category children would be less likely to develop inferiority or superiority complexes regarding their parents' work.

Accountability initiatives for left-out EWS families: While the EWS quota ensures access to quality education for a fixed percentage of children from weaker sections, there remains a substantial number of underprivileged children who are not included. The government must improve public schools to prevent the marginalisation of these children and provide them with quality education for a brighter future.

These proposed solutions aim to enhance the effectiveness of the EWS quota implementation, ensuring comprehensive support and opportunities for all deserving children from economically weaker sections.



Figure 8

6. Conclusion: Charting a path beyond this research

The current state of the world reflects a harsh reality of social and economic inequality. The concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a select few has exacerbated these disparities, leading to unequal access and distribution of economic and social resources within society. This unfortunate circumstance has resulted in certain communities being marginalised and disadvantaged. In this context, education emerges as a powerful tool for achieving social inclusion. However, the mere existence of the EWS quota in private schools is insufficient to accomplish this goal. It is imperative to consider the social, economic, and psychological barriers that hinder social inclusion and devise remedial measures accordingly. The concerns and constraints experienced by various stakeholders, as well as the financial limitations, must be strategically addressed to enhance the acceptability and adaptability of the EWS quota.

Furthermore, it is important to recognize that reservations and quotas only provide relief to a fixed percentage of economically weaker and socially disadvantaged individuals. Those left out may experience increased feelings of deprivation and despondency, posing a risk of further societal stratification rather than achieving genuine social inclusion. Sensitivity in developing curricula for children from different economic and social backgrounds is essential to ensure their full participation and success. The EWS quota, which seeks to foster social inclusion among underprivileged children, should consider their specific needs and circumstances instead of simply prescribing an existing curriculum.

Building better relationships among students from diverse backgrounds is crucial. Encouraging inclusive activities and events that promote teamwork, collaboration, and cultural

exchange can help break down barriers. For instance, organising group projects that bring together students from different backgrounds or conducting workshops on empathy and understanding can facilitate bridging the gap between them.

While the inclusion of EWS children in mainstream education has positively impacted their access to quality education, the challenge of social integration remains. Even by directly addressing these challenges, it remains uncertain whether we can truly create a more inclusive and equitable society where every child has the opportunity to realise their full potential.

In conclusion, the responsibility lies with students like us to learn from initiatives such as the EWS quota and construct the necessary bridges, both physically and mentally. The current work serves as a foundation, but it also faces its own set of challenges and limitations. The true value of these efforts will be witnessed in future generations, once the shortcomings have been identified, rectified, and implemented. Nonetheless, we must ensure that there is a genuine commitment to this initiative and that it does not fade away as just another well-intentioned but ultimately ineffective endeavour. Addressing the identified challenges requires unwavering determination, fearlessness, patience, and persistence, and I am hopeful that I can contribute in my own way towards its successful realisation.



Figure 9

Annexure

Chart 1- Significant government policies/interventions that have shaped the education landscape in India

- 1950: Constitutional mandate –It made education a directive principle of state policy. It states that “The State shall endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education to all children until they complete the age of 14 years”
- 1986: National Policy of Education (NPE) - Its principles state free and compulsory education for all children up to 14 years of age, adequate and satisfactory emoluments and training for teachers, emphasis on the development of languages, equalisation of education opportunities, high priority on science education and research, low cost and high quality textbooks for students and examinations to be introduced as a continuous evaluation process for learning assessment.

- 1993: Shri Unnikrishnan Judgment - The Supreme Court accorded the status of fundamental right to 'free and compulsory education' for all children till they attain 14 years of age.
- 1995: Mid-Day Meal Scheme - To enhance enrolment, retention and attendance and simultaneously improve nutritional levels among children.
- 1998: Education Ministers' Resolve - "Universal elementary education should be pursued in the mission mode. It emphasised the need to pursue a holistic and convergent approach towards UEE".
- 1999: National Committee's Report on UEE in the Mission mode -The Report emphasised the preparation of District Elementary Education Plans for UEE.
- 2001: Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) - Sought to provide useful and relevant elementary education for all children in the age group of six to 14 years by 2010. It recognized the need to improve the education system with active participation of the community and envisioned to bridge the prevalent gender and social inequalities, leading to a nationally integrated country.
- 2009: Right to Education (RTE)- Right to Education Act or The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act emphasises the importance of free and compulsory education for children who are in the age group of 6 to 14 years. The Act came into existence on 1st April, 2010
- 2020: National Educational Policy (NEP)- This is the first education policy of the 21st century and aims to address the many growing developmental imperatives of our country. This Policy proposes the revision and revamping of all aspects of the education structure, including its regulation and governance, to create a new system that is aligned with the aspirational goals of 21st century education, including SDG4, while building upon India's traditions and value systems.

3. Are you aware of any initiatives or programs in your school that promote inclusivity and support EWS students? [] Yes [] No If yes, please provide details: _____

Section 3: Classroom Experience

1. Do you feel that teachers treat all students equally? [] Yes [] No If no, please explain: _____
2. Do you feel comfortable participating in class discussions and activities? [] Yes [] No If no, please explain: _____
3. Are there any subjects or topics that you feel are not adequately covered in the curriculum? [] Yes [] No If yes, please specify: _____

Section 4: Peer Relationships

1. Do you feel accepted and included by your classmates? [] Yes [] No If no, please explain: _____
2. Are you able to make friends easily at school? [] Yes [] No If no, please explain: _____

Section 5: Support Services

1. Are there any support services or resources provided by the school to help EWS students? [] Yes [] No If yes, please describe the services/resources: _____
2. Do you feel that these support services adequately meet your needs? [] Yes [] No If no, please explain: _____

Section 6: Suggestions and Recommendations

1. What do you think can be done to make the school environment more inclusive for EWS students?
2. Are there any specific activities, programs, or resources that you believe would benefit EWS students?

Section 7: Additional Comments

Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences or suggestions for improving inclusivity in schools?

Thank you for your participation. Your input will greatly contribute to our research on promoting inclusivity for EWS students.

Qualitative Survey Questionnaire

General Information

1. What school do you go to?
2. Do the teachers give you equal opportunities?
3. What is your favourite subject?
4. Do you enjoy whatever course material is taught in school?
5. Do you wish they would explain certain concepts differently?

Section 1: Demographic Information

1. Gender: [] Male [] Female [] Other [] Prefer not to say
2. Age: _____
3. Grade/Class: _____

Section 2: School Environment

1. How comfortable do you feel at school? [Scale of 1-5] (1 - Not comfortable at all, 5 - Very comfortable)
2. Have you ever experienced any form of discrimination or bullying at school? [] Yes [] No If yes, please briefly describe the incident(s): _____

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Glossary of Terms

- 1) Basti: A basti is an overcrowded area where many underprivileged people live
- 2) Jhadoo - pocha: Routine task of sweeping and mopping the floors or cleaning the floors.
- 3) Bartan dhona: Washing utensils
- 4) Maali: Gardener
- 5) Canteen: the place in a school, factory, office, etc. where the people who work there can get meals