



EWS RESERVATION: BEYOND IMPLEMENTATION

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Abstract

Education is the birth right of every individual- be it from any religion, race, creed or caste. The Govt. of India brought into implementation the Right to Education Act 2009 as its initiative to provide free and compulsory education to all up to elementary level. The 25% reservation for the Economically Weaker Section (EWS) in all the private schools was a landmark that provided the equality of opportunity to the low income groups to get their wards admitted in the private schools. This initiative by the Government was appreciated all over India and many students from low socio-economic background were benefitted from it. But, the question underlying is that are these students accepted whole heartedly by the administrators, teachers and students of those schools? The present paper focuses on two issues: one pertaining to the attitude of private schools (administrators and teachers) towards the reservation and the other one related to the conditions faced by the students admitted under the EWS category. The results and findings of the study are discussed in detail in the sections in the paper.

Keywords: Economically Weaker Section (EWS), Attitude

INTRODUCTION

The Indian Parliament in 2009 passed the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, as landmark legislation. Section 12 (1) (c) of the ACT mandated reservation of a minimum of 25% of the seats at the entry level class for children belonging to economically weaker sections (EWS) and disadvantaged groups in all private unaided schools; excluding minority institutions. The cost of education of these children is to be reimbursed by the government to the extent of per child expenditure incurred by the state or the actual school fees, whichever is less. The provision was initially challenged in the Supreme Court and after April 2012,

when the Supreme Court of India upheld the constitutional validity of the Act through its judgement, section 12 (1) (c) became applicable. In the light of the RTE Act, the model rules framed by the Central Government state that children admitted under Section 12 (1) (c) shall not be segregated from the other children in the classroom, nor shall their classes be held at places and timings different from the classes held for other children. It further provides that these children shall not be discriminated from the rest of the children in any manner pertaining to entitlements and facilities such as textbooks, uniforms, library and ICT facilities,

extracurricular activities and sports. The problem lies with the view several schools take towards EWS admissions.

The present paper focuses on two issues: one pertaining to the attitude of private schools (administrators and teachers) towards the reservation and the other one related to the conditions faced by the students admitted under the EWS category. The sample consisted of Principals/ Administrators, Teachers and Students of various private schools of Delhi. Non-participative observation and interview techniques were used to collect data. The data was recorded on a piece of paper for ease of interpretation later on. Since, the investigator could not get the permission of audio recording the facts, so it was preferred to record them in written form.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study the attitude of private school administrators towards the 25% reservation for EWS category students.
- To study the attitude of private school teachers towards the 25% reservation for EWS category students.
- To study the attitude of private school students towards the 25% reservation for EWS category students.
- To study the condition of EWS category students in the classrooms as well as in the schools.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present study focuses on the following research questions:

R.Q 1: Are the students of EWS category given equal treatment by the school administrators in the schools?

R.Q 2: Are the students of EWS category given equal treatment by the school teachers in the schools?

R.Q 3: Are the students of EWS category considered at par by the peer group?

R.Q 4: Are the students of EWS category facing any difficulty in the school?

METHODOLOGY

Purposive and Convenient Sampling techniques were used wherein those schools were selected who gave the permission to conduct the study. Interviews of parents, teachers, students and administrators were conducted and the responses were recorded.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

As far as the first issue pertaining to the attitude of private

schools towards the reservation is concerned, the investigators approached various private schools for their opinion on the issue. At first the administrators/Principals were reluctant to provide information or say anything on the topic. They agreed to share their thoughts only when they were assured of anonymity of their name and their school's name. Their viewpoints could be summarized as " *The 25% number amounts to a critical lot and there is lack of clarity in the reimbursement to be made to private schools. Moreover, this provision has opened the private schools for greater governmental interference and we are supposed to declare our fees publically*". Furthermore, they hold the view point that students from EWS category fail to cope with the demands put on them by the school environment and this poses a problem to the school authorities. Parents of other students are also reluctant to teach their children with these students. The parents at the time of admission enquire if EWS category children have separate classrooms. According to the school authorities, the Government can only pay the fees of these students, but what about the other expenditures of the school that include sports Day or Annual day celebrations, picnics and excursions.

The investigators also took permission from the authorities to visit the classrooms and observe the behaviour of the students. Non-participative technique of observation was used by the investigators. Also students and teachers were interviewed in this regard promising them the anonymity of name.

It was observed that the EWS category students were discriminated against by the fellow students. Students do not like to share their lunch with these students during the recess break. When asked as to why they do not share their lunch with these students, the students replied that their parents have told them not to sit or even talk to these students as these students have low standard of living. These students are a target for other students and usually face bullying and lewd comments are passed on them. They hesitate to ask any query when the teacher is teaching due to bullying from other classmates. These students are forced to sit down whenever they enquire anything. The teachers seemed helpless in this regard.

In an interview with teachers, on being enquired about the feelings that arose in the teachers upon seeing such children in their class, about 63% felt that it is Pity. They felt that they didn't have strong supportive family. About 31% felt nothing special about such children and only 6% felt that if taught with extra attention, these children may prove to be brighter than the rest of the class. The teachers showed their helplessness by quoting that it sometimes becomes difficult to control these students in the class. Some teachers felt that the IQ level of these students is low and they take much more time to learn things as compared to other class fellows. According to the school teachers these students have problem with completion of homework, communication skills and basic

etiquettes. "Students are fussy about with whom they want to sit," says Ms. Barkha, a teacher in a private school. She further revealed that parents continuously keep pressurizing the teachers about not making their wards sit with an EWS student, hence, encouraging the same mindset to trickle down among the students.

Also, teaching these students was reported as burdensome by the teachers as they are required to put in extra efforts for bringing these students at par with other students. Teachers felt that these students affect their result as well. Sometimes, low achievement of these students questions the teaching effectiveness of the teachers. Teachers are divided on the issue of whether there should be EWS category reservation or not. Teachers are of the opinion that EWS reservation should be promoted only if that does not affect or question the teaching efficiency of the teachers. The teachers recommended a separate grading/ evaluation system and modified curriculum for these students. Some teachers were totally against the admission of EWS students in private schools.

The interview with the EWS students revealed some eye opening facts about the condition of these students in the school. Some of the students revealed the fact that their parents have admitted them in this school with a dream that their children will excel but we are facing many problems here.

"Since we are not financially sound, we are not able to meet the daily expenses of the school. Sometimes we are debarred from participating in many activities due to its high payment."

"We have no friends. We have to search for alike to talk to and play with. We are made fun of and students make us feel inferior in all the areas."

"We try to work hard but could hardly match the level of expectation of the teachers."

"Students call us as "EWS category" rather than calling us by name."

The students revealed that they face these kinds of problems as many of them are the first generation learners. Their parents can't afford to pay high coaching fees, but still they manage somehow. "Every time we are made to realize that we should have rather taken admission in some government school", was a common grievance observed. It came to the notice of the investigators that some of the students have also dropped out from schools due to the attitude of the fellow students, teachers and their inability to cope with the demands of the school.

In response to **Research Question 1**, "Are the students of EWS category given equal treatment by the school administrators in the schools?", it was found that

administrators discriminate against these students due to the fact that these students are not able to meet the expenditure of the schools. Moreover, according to all the administrators these students affect the result of the school as well.

As far as **Research Question 2**, "Are the students of EWS category given equal treatment by the school teachers in the schools?" is concerned, it was observed that teachers feel helpless as they have the pressure from the parents of other children to keep their ward away from these children. Most of the teachers are of the view that the intellectual level of students from EWS category does not match rest of the students which ultimately affects their examination results.

In response to **Research Question 3**, "Are the students of EWS category considered at par by the peer group?", it was observed through non-participative observation that peer group do not treat these students at par with their socio-economic level and this is the reason that their parents have instructed them to stay away from them. Moreover, students do not like to share their lunch with these students and even do not want to play with them.

In response to **Research Question 4**, "Are the students of EWS category facing any difficulty in the school?", all the above research questions provide answer to this question. These students do face difficulty with their emotional, social and mental adjustment in the schools. Research questions 1,2 and 3 provide clues for the question no. 4.

EWS Inclusion: Intellectual Development or Emotional Deterioration?

EWS inclusion has no doubt, given a platform to the economically deprived class an opportunity to receive "Quality Education", however, it has also been observed that it has led to the creation of stressful environment for EWS category students in a disguised manner. In A Pedagogue's Romance (2008), Professor Krishna Kumar explains that „the romance and adventure of education lies in the fact that children, like stem cells, have the ability to transform themselves to something far beyond their predicted outcomes, that there is no guarantee that a particular input will produce a specific result." This kind of liberal learning is only possible if a child is free from any kind of mental inhibition.

However, it was found out by the investigators that the students belonging to EWS categories remained under constant fear of being harassed by their classmates. This led to gradual guilt formation and loss of self esteem which consequently made the child silent in the class.

Inability to match the level of the fellow students resulted in their withdrawal and resulted as a major demotivating factor in terms of the classroom participation and attitude towards learning.

CONCLUSION

When children from different socio-economic backgrounds are admitted to the same school and taught together, the teacher's role becomes extremely important. A teacher working in a mixed classroom must have substantial understanding of child psychology, especially of the effect of home and social environment on the growing child. The teacher of an integrative classroom must also be free of bias or stereotypes. The investigators suggest that there is a need to bring change in the attitude of the teachers and administrators for the effective implementation of the scheme. The teacher must increase her capacity to listen to these children with a desire to build on what they already know. Moreover, the view of society also needs to be changed so that these students could be included in the main stream. The stereotypes must be broken and the students from all sections of society should be entitled to equal dignity and respect.

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