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## **Beyond Boundaries: Unravelling the Dynamics of Access, Quality, and Governance in Private Schools - A Case Study of Siwan, Bihar**

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### **Abstract:**

*This case study delves into the governance mechanisms influencing equitable education in Siwan, Bihar, particularly examining the role of School Management Committees in private schools. The study underscores the commendable efforts of these schools in upholding the principles of equitable and inclusive education. Despite challenges, collaborative efforts among stakeholders, including literate parents, are crucial in realizing the right to education for all children. The significance of Kasturba Gandhi Residential School as a beacon for continuing secondary education, especially for girls, is highlighted. The findings emphasize the need for ongoing collaborative initiatives to address the remaining challenges and promote quality education for children, irrespective of their socio-economic background.*

*The study reveals that private schools in Siwan, Bihar, are making commendable efforts to uphold the principles of equitable and inclusive education*

**[1]**

*through the implementation of RTE provisions. Governance mechanisms such as School Management Committees contribute to the effective management of schools and the promotion of quality education. While challenges remain, the study highlights the significance of collaborative efforts among stakeholders in realizing the right to education for all children, regardless of their socio-economic background.*

**Keywords:** Right to Education Act, Private Schools Initiatives, Educational Equity, Inclusive Classroom Practices, Educational Rights

## **1. Introduction:**

In recent years, the concept of inclusive education has emerged as a pivotal force globally, gaining particular prominence in the educational landscape of India. Defined by UNESCO as a transformative process, inclusive education aims to meet the diverse needs of all learners by fostering increased participation in learning and reducing exclusion both within and outside education systems. This approach extends its reach to support education for all, with a specific emphasis on dismantling barriers to participation and learning for historically disadvantaged groups, including girls, women, children with disabilities, and those who have been out of the traditional schooling system.

### **National Education Policy 2020: A Blueprint for Inclusivity:**

National Education Policy 2020 is another critical initiative aimed at achieving an inclusive and equitable education system in India. The policy sets ambitious goals for ensuring that all children have equal opportunities to learn and thrive. By 2030, it seeks to eliminate disparities in participation and learning outcomes across all genders and social categories. To accomplish this, the policy identifies key areas for targeted attention and support, including early childhood education, foundational literacy and numeracy, school access, enrolment, and attendance for underrepresented groups.

The policy also introduces the concept of Special Education Zones in disadvantaged regions based on specific social development and socio-economic indicators. It emphasizes joint monitoring by the Central and State governments to

ensure that underrepresented groups are included in the education system. Furthermore, the policy provides guidelines for creating inclusive school environments that address harassment, intimidation, gender-based violence, and exclusionary practices. It also calls for curriculum revisions to make education more inclusive.

A significant thrust of the National Education Policy 2020 is its targeted efforts to increase women's participation in education and address the gender imbalance among school teachers and students. Recognizing the importance of educating children from tribal, caste, and religion-based groups, the policy plays a crucial role in promoting the educational inclusion of students from marginalized sections of society.

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1992) emphasizes the importance of culturally sensitive teachers who can connect with students based on their cultural realities. This includes considerations such as family life, community experiences, linguistic backgrounds, and beliefs. Culturally sensitive pedagogy is believed to benefit all students by creating a caring community that values the experiences and abilities of each individual.

Promoters of inclusive education argue that individual differences among students should be seen as sources of diversity and richness. Achieving inclusivity requires a broad and flexible range of responses, necessitating a rethinking and restructuring of schools to be more culturally sensitive. This complex systemic vision involves various stakeholders in the education system, including parents, teachers, community members, and staff.

In India, inclusive education is primarily associated with elementary and secondary education but is also relevant to postsecondary education. UNESCO defines inclusion as a reform that supports and welcomes diversity among all learners. It emphasizes the need to eliminate discrimination and provide accommodations for disadvantaged students beyond those with disabilities. The multifaceted approach to achieving inclusivity in Indian education requires ongoing collaboration, innovation, and commitment from all stakeholders involved.

## **2. Review of Literature:**

In the vast landscape of inclusive education, prevailing literature has

predominantly centered on its widespread implementation, often documented through assessment reports from governmental bodies and non-governmental organizations. This study, however, takes a distinctive approach by delving into the nuanced realm of private schools' implementation of the Economically Weaker Section (EWS) quota at the district level. Its objective is to shed light on various dimensions of social and educational inclusion, providing a unique perspective that addresses specific challenges and opportunities at this intersection.

At the heart of inclusive education lies a commitment to human rights, as articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations in 1948. Article 26 of this declaration underscores the right to education for everyone, emphasizing its free and compulsory nature at the elementary level. This commitment is paramount for the holistic development of individuals, fostering respect for human rights, understanding, tolerance, and peace. Building upon this foundation, Article 29 of the UN declaration in 1989 highlights the multifaceted aims of education, emphasizing the development of cognitive, emotional, and creative capacities.

Renowned economist and philosopher Amartya Sen (1999) accentuates the pivotal role of primary school classrooms and early childcare centres in shaping the future of children. Sen argues that childhood experiences significantly influence the capabilities adults possess, emphasizing the critical role of inclusive primary education in fostering equal opportunities for children from diverse socioeconomic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. Social inclusion, as conceptualized by Freiler (2001), extends beyond physical integration, focusing on making every child feel valued and accepted within society.

UNESCO (2005) characterizes inclusion not merely as a technical or organizational shift but as a comprehensive philosophy, process, and approach. Ainscow (2005) identifies key factors influencing the development of inclusive education systems, highlighting the role of school leadership, community engagement, education departments, evaluation mechanisms, and school development and review processes. Tikly and Barrett (2011) emphasize the economic rationale for investing in education, framing it as an engine for growth with wide-ranging benefits such as increased productivity, enhanced human capital, and improved macroeconomic conditions.

The implementation of the Right to Education (RTE) Act in 2009 marked a historic step towards providing quality education to all children aged 6 to 14. However, the Times of India reported challenges such as teacher shortages, untrained educators, and issues related to the student-teacher ratio, indicating the complexities in translating policy into effective practice. Subrahmanian (2009) underscores the pivotal role of education laws and regulations in shaping access for different segments of the population, while Sayed and Soudien et al. (2003) identify four types of discourses present in public policy discussions related to inclusion and exclusion.

Studies by Bennathan (1997) on nurture groups and Klasen (1999) on the necessity of targeted laws for disadvantaged groups underscore the positive impact of inclusive environments and the importance of tailored policies. The role of policymakers, schools, and teachers in driving change towards inclusion is emphasized by Pijl and Frissen (2009), while UNESCO (2009) provides policy guidelines outlining key elements in the shift towards inclusive education.

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in 2013 stressed the significance of awareness and preparedness for inclusive education, acknowledging the specific needs of disadvantaged and disabled children. Subban and Sharma (2006) explore teachers' perceptions, Naicker (2008) addresses educators' preparedness, and Maheshwari and Shapurkar (2015) emphasize reshaping school culture, policies, and practices for successful inclusive education.

In synthesizing this diverse literature, the study endeavours to bridge gaps, offer novel insights and contribute to the ongoing discourse on inclusive education, particularly within the context of private schools and the implementation of EWS quotas.

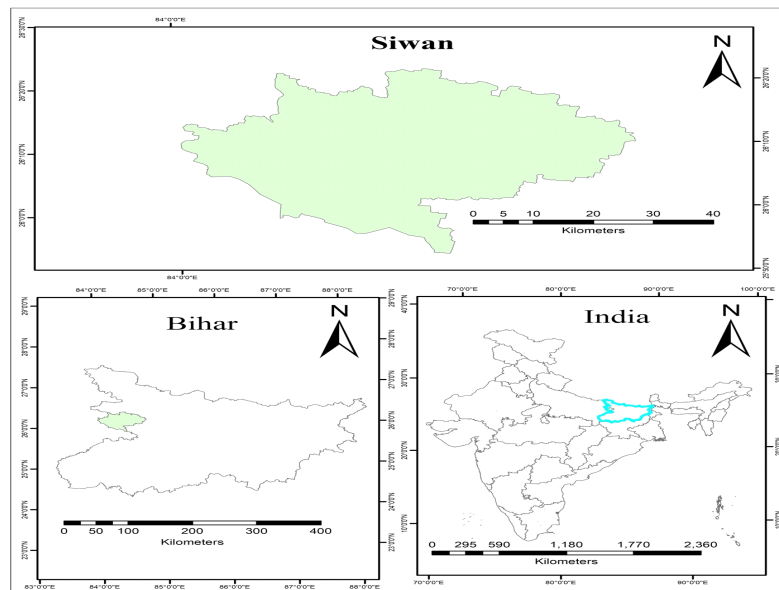
### **3. Study Area:**

Nestled in the western part of Bihar, Siwan stands as a testament to a captivating blend of historical richness and geographical diversity. Originally a segment of the Saran district, Siwan holds a unique place in history as an integral part of the ancient Kosala Kingdom, and its modern district boundaries were officially demarcated in 1972.

Geographically, the Siwan district shares its borders with the Gopalganj district to the north and northeast, while the Saran district lies to the southeast. To the west and south, Siwan is flanked by the Deoria and Balia districts of Uttar Pradesh, making it a strategic crossroads in the regional landscape. Siwan is strategically positioned in the North Bihar Plain, renowned for its alluvial plains and fertile soil. The district comprises 1530 villages in 19 Community Development (C.D.) Blocks.

Spanning an expansive 2219 square kilometres, the Siwan district is situated between latitudes  $25^{\circ} 58' \text{ N}$  and  $26^{\circ} 23' \text{ N}$  and longitudes  $84^{\circ} 1' \text{ E}$  and  $84^{\circ} 47' \text{ E}$  (Fig.1). It lies within the Indo-Gangetic plain, encompassing the Gandak and Ghagra sub-basins of the Ganga basin. The Ghaghra River, also known as Saryu in Uttar Pradesh, courses through the district, originating in the lower Himalayas and entering Siwan at Guthni. The region is adorned with several ephemeral streams, including Gandak, Nikri, Jharhi, Daha, and Dhamhi. Siwan experiences a sub-tropical to sub-humid climate, featuring frigid winters and blistering summers.

In education, Siwan has demonstrated notable progress, showcasing an average literacy rate of 71.59% in 2011, a substantial improvement from 51.65% in 2001. Male literacy stands at 82.77%, while female literacy reaches 60.35%. This positive evolution underscores the district's unwavering commitment to advancing educational opportunities for its residents.



**Fig. 1: Location map of the Study Area**

#### 4. Methodology:

This research employs a qualitative methodology to investigate the current state of inclusion in regular schools, focusing on understanding people's awareness and knowledge within the research context. The choice of qualitative research allows for a nuanced exploration of feelings, thoughts, and experiences.

Data collection involves the use of questionnaires as the primary method. Questionnaires are suitable for gathering standardized information from a large number of participants, capturing both quantitative and qualitative data. Interviews, conducted in a semi-structured format, offer a flexible and in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives.

Purposive Stratified Random Sampling (PSRS) is employed for participant selection, ensuring diversity in age and gender to provide a comprehensive view. Consent is obtained before distributing questionnaires. Additionally, participant observation, specifically using the participant observation method, aids in collecting detailed field information by immersing researchers in the experiences and behaviours of individuals or communities.

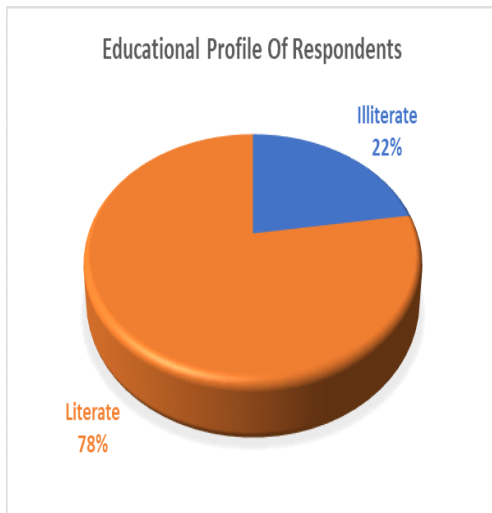
The sample consists of 60 respondents, including 40 parents of students enrolled under the EWS Quota and 20 educators and administrators involved in implementing the quota. This purposively chosen diverse group ensures a well-rounded understanding of the research topic. The study's robust methodology aligns with its objectives, emphasizing a comprehensive exploration of the human aspect of inclusion in regular schools.

This study profiles two schools in Siwan district, Krishna Gyan Niketan and Bihar Public School, representing rural and urban settings, receiving state funding for EWS students under the RTE Act. The 60 respondents, mainly parents of EWS students and professionals, provide diverse perspectives on the EWS Quota implementation. The research employs a qualitative approach, utilizing questionnaires, interviews, and observations, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of inclusion in Siwan's regular schools.

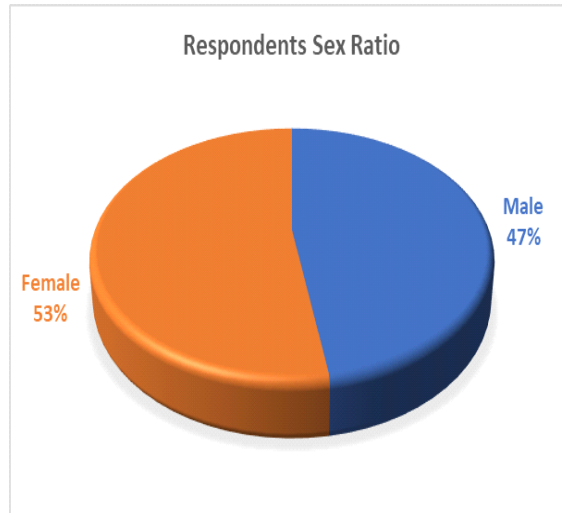


**Education Status:**

The parents of sampled EWS students were mostly educated. Literacy varied from 8<sup>th</sup> standard to graduation. 78 per cent of respondents were literate that is they could read and write in any language (Fig. 2). Since they were educated; they wanted their children to be educated also. They knew the importance of education. They were happy with the introduced provision of EWS Quota as their children are getting quality education at a subsidized rate.



**Fig. 2: Educational profile of parents of EWS students**



**Fig. 3: Sex ratio of respondents**

**Social Status:**

Out of the total sample size of parents, 53 per cent were females and 47 per cent were males as depicted in the above pie diagram (Fig. 3). Females were aware of the benefits of good and quality education and wanted their sons and daughters to concentrate on their studies. Males were happy that they didn't need to spend too much on their children's education because of EWS Quota.

Data was collected mainly through filling up of questionnaires from samples selected through purposive stratified random sampling technique. Data was collected from people related to EWS students i.e. their parents and administrators, teachers and officers in the education department related to EWS.



## 5. Result and Discussion:

The study focuses on assessing the implementation issues of the Economic Weaker Section (EWS) reservation provision in recognized private, unaided schools in Bihar's Siwan district. Two government-approved private schools, Krishna Gyan Niketan (rural) and Bihar Public School (urban), were selected for a comparative analysis of perspectives from government officials, parents of EWS students, and school administrators. The research explores the experiences of these stakeholders in implementing the EWS quota policy, considering constitutional provisions, Human Rights, and the Right to Education Act. A semi-structured questionnaire survey gathered insights from the three key stakeholders. The results are presented in three sections: Narratives of EWS quota implementing personnel, Narratives of private school administration, and Narratives from Parents of EWS students. The study also incorporates views from EWS students, identifying issues and proposing remedial measures for effective RTE implementation in private schools, particularly for EWS quota admissions.

### Implementation of the RTE Act and its issues:

Various states grapple with the overarching challenge of budget allocation for the effective implementation of the Right to Education Act. The financial management dynamics between the central and state entities exhibit deficiencies, with states displaying poor internal financial control, retaining substantial balances, and witnessing irregularities in fund distribution. Debbarma (2011) identifies issues like fund misappropriation, diversion, irregular utilization, and delayed fund releases at different levels.

The agreement stipulates a 65:35 financial responsibility sharing ratio between the Centre and States under the RTE provisions. However, the allocated budgets of Rs 15,000 Crores and 21,000 Crores for the years 2010-11 and 2011-12, respectively, are considered insufficient given the program's objectives and the vast student population. States argue that the Central government's allocations are grossly inadequate for nationwide implementation. Experts propose an increase in the central government's share to 75 or even 90 per cent, with Uttar Pradesh advocating for 90 per cent central assistance. States like Haryana, Goa, Gujarat, and West Bengal seek a 75:25 budget ratio between the Centre and State.

Implementing the 25 per cent reservation for economically weaker section (EWS) children poses another significant challenge. Addressing dropout rates among economically disadvantaged children and ensuring the continued education of all EWS students until Class VIII prove challenging. Establishing universally accepted minimum learning standards for EWS students, given their diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, remains an elusive goal. The centralized monitoring of private schools nationwide presents a substantial hurdle in achieving successful implementation.

While the RTE provisions exempt EWS students from tuition fees in private schools, other significant expenses such as co-curricular activities, books, stationary, extra tuition fees, and development charges persist. The perceived economic burden on the parents of EWS students acts as a deterrent to minimizing dropout rates.

#### **Accounts of Government Officials:**

Government officials at both the Block Education Department and the District Education Department were interviewed to gather narratives on the implementation of the Right to Education (RTE) Act in the district of Siwan. A total of 20 officials, including the District Programme Officer and Block Education Officer, participated in the interviews. The questionnaire covered three subgroups: Section A for general information, Section B addresses the RTE Act and EWS quota, and Section C focuses on the implementation of the RTE Act in private schools.

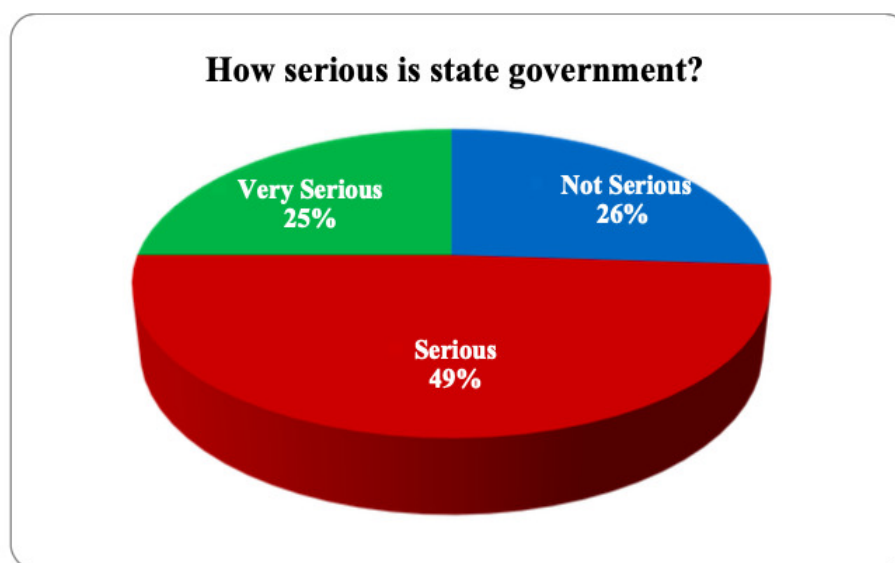
Regarding the financial responsibility sharing between the Centre and State in RTE Act implementation, the majority of government officials (around 70%) expressed satisfaction with the financial support from the Central government. Only 30% indicated dissatisfaction. Respondents highlighted that the Centre provides technical support for capacity building to state government officials.

According to government officials, all private schools in the district adhere to RTE Act provisions, and those implementing the EWS quota obtain school codes from the state government after meeting prescribed criteria. The district administration, particularly the office of the District Education Officer (DEO), issues guidelines and monitors private schools, occasionally checking school enrolment registers. However, there is a perceived lack of strict punishment for

defaulters and inefficiency in promptly addressing complaints. The survey revealed that no private schools charged capitation fees or conducted admission tests for EWS students.

Government officials affirmed that, per the Act, schools do not retain students in the same class in the new academic session. The survey also gathered opinions on the implementation of the Act, with officials stating that the Bihar government occasionally modifies provisions and extends implementation deadlines. They noted efforts to optimize teacher-pupil ratios and promote teaching in regional languages alongside Hindi.

Approximately 49% of the officials believed that the Bihar government is serious about implementing the RTE Act in private schools, while 25% strongly asserted its seriousness, linking it to Sarva Siksha Abhiyan and other educational inclusion initiatives. Combining responses of “serious” and “very serious,” 74% of officials considered the Act’s implementation successful. The remaining 26% cited poor financial reimbursement to private schools for EWS student enrolment as a factor indicating the state government’s lack of seriousness (Fig. 4).



*Source: Primary Survey*

**Fig. 4: How serious is the state government in implementing the RTE Act in the State?**

District officials identified issues of the state government bearing financial responsibility for RTE students and bureaucratic delays and malpractices hindering the smooth transfer of funds to private schools. Despite these challenges, when asked to rate the nature of implementation, 95% of officials chose options such as “good,” “very good,” or “excellent,” indicating overall positive perceptions of the RTE Act’s implementation.

### **Private School Administration:**

Perspectives of Private School Administration: The Headmaster at Krishna Gyan Niketan in Bhithi, Siwan, emphasized a significant challenge in the form of inadequate tuition fee reimbursement for implementing the EWS quota. Despite three years of EWS implementation, the school has not received the expected financial support from the government. This highlights deficiencies in the financial aid transfer mechanism, leading to delays and impacting rural private schools’ ability to compensate their teachers promptly. The Vice Principal of Bihar Public School in Siwan raised a crucial concern, advocating for clear government guidelines on income and other criteria for EWS student selection. Ambiguities in these criteria, according to him, allow some private schools to exploit loopholes and shirk their responsibilities in selecting EWS students at the entry-level.

Some private schools adopt a policy of waiving fees for a second child from the same parents if both are enrolled. However, there is an observed trend of the same student benefiting from fee waivers being listed under the EWS quota for reimbursement. This practice raises ethical concerns, as it results in double counting and financial gains for the school, constituting malpractice. The Headmaster of a rural private school highlighted concerns about students from economically weaker sections enrolling simultaneously in two schools. Exploiting the EWS scheme in private schools and simultaneously enrolling in nearby government schools for additional benefits diverts students’ focus from their education.

A robust monitoring mechanism exists for private schools in the state. Block Education Officers (BEOs) conduct regular visits, overseen by the District Education Office (DEO). Periodic reports are submitted to the District Magistrate, ensuring accountability in the implementation of the Right to Education (RTE) Act and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan at the district level. Staff at Krishna Gyan Niketan School noted a lack of awareness among parents from economically weaker sections

regarding RTE Act provisions and the benefits for their children in private schools. Some schools proactively reach out to parents, requesting income-proof documents for EWS admissions. In cases where parents don't provide the necessary documentation, schools may accept a copy of the Ration Card, reflecting a positive approach in rural private school administrations towards inclusive education.

While inclusive classroom practices were evident, discomfort among EWS students during play activities and in shared spaces post-school hours was noted. This discomfort may arise from the proximity of EWS students to their peers from the same neighbourhoods. Contrary to expectations, there seemed to be no clear demarcation between EWS and other students, indicating room for improvement in fostering truly inclusive educational environments.

### **Accounts of Parents of EWS students:**

The narratives of parents of Economically Weaker Section (EWS) students shed light on the complexities and nuances surrounding the implementation of EWS quotas in private schools. While the intention behind providing such quotas is commendable, the literature highlights the potential challenges, particularly in classrooms with diverse economic backgrounds, which can inadvertently create stress for EWS students.

In his work "A Pedagogue's Romance" (2008), Professor Krishna Kumar emphasizes the transformative potential of education, likening children to stem cells with the capacity to exceed predicted outcomes. However, for this open and liberal learning environment to flourish, it is essential that students, including those under EWS quotas, are free from mental inhibitions.

Parents, as crucial stakeholders, navigate interactions with school administrations and advocate for the best opportunities to secure quality education for their children. Understanding the characteristics of these parents, such as age and educational background, is vital. The majority of the sampled parents fall within the 30-40 age brackets, and a significant portion are literate.

The educational background and gender composition of the respondents. Females, more prevalent in the sample due to survey timings, graciously shared their views during surveys conducted in both villages and urban areas.

The parent's perspective on obtaining seats under the EWS quota indicates a relatively positive trend. A significant 71% of respondents found the process easy, highlighting the increased ease of admission for students from weaker sections compared to earlier times. However, 29% of parents, mainly from district town schools, expressed the view that securing the EWS quota in their preferred private schools was challenging.

While parents perceive the implementation of the EWS quota under the Right to Education (RTE) Act as satisfactory (70% satisfaction rate), the researcher's observation suggests a more limited implementation. Despite this, the majority of parents are content with the implementation. In terms of information sources about the RTE Act and EWS quota, 43% of parents cited electronic media and 20 per cent each Print media and Government advertisements respectively as their primary knowledge providers (Table 1).

The financial constraints faced by parents with meagre incomes from labour and agriculture pose challenges in meeting educational expenses for their children. They express difficulty in providing secondary education, particularly for girls, without government support. The Kasturba Gandhi Residential School is identified as a beacon of hope for continuing the education of girls from economically weaker sections until the secondary level.

**Table 1: Primary source of knowledge received about EWS quota**

Sr. No.	Primary Source	Respondents	Response in per cent
1	Print Media	8	20
2	Electronic Media	17	43
3	NGOs	3	05
4	Government Advertisements	8	20
5	Any other source	4	12
	<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Primary Survey*

As per the view of parents of EWS students, because of their meagre monthly income primarily from labour and agriculture, they face difficulty in meeting

expenditure on teaching aid for their son and daughter. Without the support of the government, they face difficulty in giving secondary-level education to their ward, especially to girl children. However, they have noticed Kasturba Gandhi Residential School for girl children of weaker sections as a ray of hope to continue girl child education till secondary level.

## **6. Conclusion:**

Education stands as a crucial catalyst for economic development and societal progress. Despite challenges in the uniform implementation of the Right to Education Act across states, its commendable commitment to unrestricted formal education and the advancement of students through higher levels is noteworthy. The Act's empowerment of states and union territories for efficient rule crafting presents an opportunity for impactful reforms. To overcome existing hurdles, an integrated approach, combining diverse interventions and strategies, is essential. By doing so, India can harness education's transformative power, unlocking potential and enhancing the quality of life for its educated populace.

Moreover, the Act introduces systematic and substantial reforms that empower states and union territories to craft rules and regulations. These reforms can be implemented efficiently within specified timelines. To address these challenges effectively, adopting an integrated approach is imperative, synthesizing and coordinating diverse interventions, strategies, and provisions. In doing so, India can continue to harness the transformative power of education, nurturing latent talents and improving the quality of life for its educated citizens.

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