

**POOR CHILDREN IN RICH SCHOOLS: A STUDY OF IMPLEMENTATION OF 25% FREE EDUCATION TO CHILDREN BELONGING TO ECONOMICALLY WEAKER SECTIONS OF SOCIETY UNDER SECTION 12 (1) C RTE 2009 IN PRIVATE AND PRIVATE AIDED SCHOOLS OF CHANDIGARH**

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**Abstract**

*This research paper is a part of a research study funded by ICSSR under its scheme IMPRESS. In the present descriptive survey study, an attempt has been made to study the compliance of admissions of EWS category students as per RTE 2009 and dropout rate amongst EWS students in private schools of Chandigarh. To understand the quality of education and the classroom learning environment, their perception regarding school, teacher behaviour, peer relationship, and classroom learning were studied in this study. Total 88 EWS category students from 18 unaided recognized private schools of Chandigarh were interviewed. Their responses were analysed using a simple percentage method. It has been found that the overall percentage of enrolments under RTE Section 12 (1) (c) has increased over the years. But still, it is far from achieving the target of reserved 25% seats under this provision. Large number of seats remain vacant under this quota. However, no major dropouts were reported amongst EWS students. The study has revealed that EWS category students have positive perception about the school. They have a conducive learning environment in the school, where they freely communicate, share things with their teachers and classmates.*

Education is transformative for the state and society. Access to education is a fundamental human right, as declared in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. The constitution framers of India enumerated the right to education in our Directive Principles of State Policy, under Article 45 Part IV. But, with the 86th amendment to the Constitution in 2002, India achieved a distinctive recognition of being one of 135 countries to make education a constitutional guarantee of every child, when The Right of Children to Free

and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 came into force on 1 April 2010 (PTI, 2002). It is one of the most important reforms in India's educational system. This legislation mandates

**"Every child of the age of six to fourteen years has a right to free and compulsory education in a neighbourhood school till the completion of elementary education"** (The Gazette of India, 2009). The RTE Act, to ensure that quality education becomes more accessible, includes private aided and unaided recognised schools in its purview through Section 12 (1) (c).

This section mandated that all private unaided schools, excluding minority institutions, must reserve a minimum of 25% of the seats at the entry level class for children belonging to economically weaker sections (EWS) and disadvantaged groups and provide free and compulsory elementary education till its completion. 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. Schools specified under this section include a school belonging to a specified category and an unaided school not receiving any kind of grant.

The intentions of the act and policy are impeccable. The perusal of related literature revealed that the enrollment of students under the RTE Act has increased over the years (Annual reports of ASER on rural India; Bhattacharjee, 2019; Indus Action report, 2018; NCPCR, 2017; State of Nation: RTE Section 12(1)(c) report, 2017; Dutta & Khan, 2017). The total number of students admitted under RTE Section 12(1)(c) has almost reached the 3.3 million mark in 2018-19 (Bhattacharjee, 2019). Though the enrollment has increased, the national fill rate of the seats allotted has oscillated between 20-26 percent since 2013. The dropout rate of learners in Delhi has come down from 26% (2011) to 10 % (2014) but after that no significant change has been noticed (NCPCR, 2017; Indus Action report, 2018)

The RTE Act was enacted to provide inclusive elementary education to all children, irrespective of their socioeconomic status and disability. Though there is educational and social inclusion of children in private schools, the process is not smooth (Dutta and Khan, 2017). Some studies (Gaddipati (2015); Dutta and Khan (2017), have reported differences among EWS students and non-EWS students. Non EWS students don't involve EWS students in the other activities and games. They are not friendly with them and don't treat them well. Even teachers have a biased and unfavourable attitude towards these children. EWS students

face difficulties in communicating with teachers and classmates due to language barriers.. However, in other studies the inclusion is largely positive as the children are very young and not aware of the differences (Sarangapani, Mehendale, Mukhopadhyay and Namala, 2014). Several studies have reported that the children have to face a number of issues due to language problems, family background, poor diet habits, lack of resources, financial constraints, lack of conducive environment and parents' accountability towards their children at home (NCPCR, 2017; Gaddipati, 2015; Sarangapani, Mehendale, Mukhopadhyay and Namala, 2014 ).

NCPCR, 2017; Dutta and Khan, 2017; Gaddipati, 2015 have reported achievement gaps in EWS category students. They were not able to understand what is taught in classes, complete their homework and assigned tasks on time.. To overcome the achievement gaps and language barrier, parents are forced to send their children to private tuitions, which adds to their financial burden (Kakati, sinde and Sharma, 2017; NCPCR, 2017).

In Chandigarh, Section 12 (1) (c) of RTE Act got implemented from the academic year 2012-13 after the Supreme Court decision. The review of related literature revealed that there was no research undertaken to review the implementation of this provision in Chandigarh. This study was undertaken to fill in that void.

**Objectives:** The main objectives of this study were:

- To analyse compliance of admissions of EWS category students as per RTE 2009 in U.T. Chandigarh.
- To analyse dropout rate of learners admitted under EWS category in Union Territory of Chandigarh.
- To understand the perspective of children admitted under EWS Quota

**Research Questions:** In the light of above research objectives, following questions were framed:

1. What is the rate of compliance of admissions of EWS category students as per RTE 2009 in Union Territory of Chandigarh?
2. What is the dropout rate of learners admitted under EWS category in Union Territory of Chandigarh?
3. What is the perspective of children admitted under EWS Quota?

**Design:** The present study has used a descriptive survey method to collect the data from the selected schools. Onsite visits were conducted and students were interviewed.

**Sample:** The sample was selected using random sampling technique. Total 18 schools were randomly selected from the list of unaided recognized schools (total 79) of UT Chandigarh. From these schools, a total of 88 children were interviewed.

**Tools Used:** Based on the objectives of the study, a structured interview schedule was prepared to interview EWS students.

Admission data of private undivided schools from DEO office for the years 2012-13 to 2021-2022.

**Results and Discussions:** The interview responses of the students were analysed both quantitatively as well as qualitatively. The raw scores were converted into approximate percentages for the sake of convenience. The key findings that emerged from the study have been reported as under:

### **Compliance of admission of EWS students under RTE Section 12 (1) (c)**

To get an understanding of the trends of compliance of admission in Chandigarh with regards to the admissions under RTE Section 12 (1) (c), an analysis of the admission data submitted by all the private unaided schools to DEO for years 2012-13 to 2021-22 across Chandigarh was done. The data was studied with respect to following parameters:

- Total number of participating schools under RTE Section 12 (1) (c)
- Total number of seats reserved under RTE Section 12 (1) (c)
- Total number of seats filled under RTE Section 12 (1) (c)
- Total number of vacant seats under RTE Section 12 (1) (c)

The data procured from DEO office has been tabulated, year wise, in the Table 1 below:

Table 1:

Year	Total no. of participating	Total no. of seats reserved under RTE	Total no. of seats filled under RTE act (25%)	% Enrolment under RTE act (25%)	Total no. of seats lying vacant under RTE act
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	Schools	act (25%)			(25%)
2012-13	67	1142	672	58.84 %	470
2013-14	52	730	468	64.11 %	262
2014-15	51	751	615	81.89 %	136
2015-16	52	809	680	84.05 %	129
2016-17	53	782	678	86.70 %	104
2017-18	49	699	642	91.85 %	57
2018-19	51	736	631	85.73 %	105
2019-20	54	772	728	94.30 %	44
2020-21	56	820	754	91.95 %	66
2021-22	54	662	563	85.05 %	99

It has been found that the overall percentage of enrolments under RTE Section 12 (1) (c) has increased from 58.84% (2012-13) to 94.30% (2019-20), which has gradually declined to 85.05% over the period 2020-21 to 2021-22. Though, the total number of seats filled (or percentage enrolment) has increased on a year-on-year basis. But still, it is far from achieving the target of reserved 25% seats under this provision. It has been found that a large number of seats remain vacant under this quota. In the current year 2021-22, out of 662 seats reserved under this quota, 99 seats remained vacant.

**Decrease in number of participating schools:** The number of participating schools, who admit EWS students under this provision has reduced gradually. In the year 2012-13, 67 schools admitted EWS category students under this act. But in the current year 2021-22, only 54 schools have given admissions to these students. The major reason for the continuous change in the number of participating schools that emerged was that some schools declared them as minority institutions, hence RTE Act is not applicable to it. Some schools did not submit the admission data to the DEO office.

#### **Dropout rate amongst EWS students admitted under RTE Section 12 (1) (c)**

The findings of the study revealed there were no major dropouts amongst EWS students. However, some cases of withdrawals have been found in some schools. The major reasons were:

- shifted to home town
- admitted to nearby school
- shifted to a new place as parents were migrant labourers

### **Interpretation of Interview Responses of EWS students admitted under RTE Section 12 (1) (c)**

#### **Perception of EWS students regarding schools**

School environment is an imperative factor for the learning processes of students. Data collected revealed overall positive perception for the school among EWS category students admitted under RTE Section 12 (1) (c). Of the 88 students interviewed, 99 % of students were happy going to their present school. 1% are those students who had joined school just before the onset of COVID-19 lockdown. All students liked their school very much and wanted schools to reopen, which had been closed due to COVID-19 pandemic.

Nearly 92 % of the students want to continue with the same school after completing their eighth class. 8 % of students admitted that they will not be able to continue in the same school. Amongst them few mentioned that the school is far from their place of residence and hence they will not be able to pay transport fees. Few others stated that the education is free till eighth class only. After that their parents can't afford the fees.

#### **Perception of EWS students regarding Teacher Behaviour**

Teacher's behaviour plays an important role in the overall development of students. During the interaction with the EWS students admitted under RTE Section 12 (1) (c), it was found teachers are quite friendly with the students and treat them well. There is no biasedness on their part. Around 97 % of students have reported that their teachers treat them well and are friendly to them. However, one parent shared an instance where her daughter was insulted and scolded in front of the whole class by her teacher. The teacher asked the girl to pay the fees and said harsh words that 'you have money for the food to eat but no money to pay the school fees'. This was traumatic for the child and she did not want to go to school. Parents were not able to help her in any way.

Of the sampled students, 99 % of students are comfortable in communicating with teachers and 95 % reported that their teachers help them whenever they ask for help. These results coincide with their overall positive perception regarding the school, which shows teachers' behaviour was very crucial in making a conducive environment for their happy learning.

#### **Perception of EWS students regarding Peer Relationship**

The relational climate of schools, be it teacher-student relationship or peer-peer relationship, is highly influential in nurturing a sense of connectedness and belongingness to school. In order to gain insight of peer -peer relationship, the sampled EWS category students were probed thoroughly by asking various interrelated questions. They were categorised as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Peer-Peer relationship

Interview questions	Yes	No	No answer
Friendly behaviour of classmates	84 (96%)	1 (1%)	3 (3%)
Sharing tiffin and other things with classmates	86 (98%)	-	2 (2%)
Communication with peer group	86 (98%)	-	2 (2%)
Participate in games along with classmates	83 (94%)	3 (3%)	2 (2%)

As it is evident from table 2 , children do not discriminate among themselves. Around 84 % of EWS category students stated that their classmates are friendly and treat them well. 98 % of EWS students reported they communicate easily with their classmates and also share tiffin and other things. Classmates reciprocate in the same manner. Nearly 94 % of EWS students stated that they play with their classmates at school.

### Perception of EWS students regarding Classroom Learning

The learning environment encountered by students has a significant impact on their behaviour, satisfaction, perceived well- being, aspirations and academic achievement. In this study an attempt has been made to perceive their learning behaviour. The results have been reported in table 3.

Table 3:

Interview questions	Yes	No	Need assistance
Understanding the content taught by teacher in class	84 (96 %)	-	4(4%)
Ability to do homework alone	55 (63 %)	-	33 (37 %)
Preparation for the examination	74 (84 %)	14 (16 %)	29 (33 %)

It may be observed from table 3 that 96 % of EWS category students understand the content taught by the teachers. Interviews with the teachers revealed that beside paying special attention, they use different strategies, bilingual mode of instructions, take extra classes and provide assistance as and when required to bring these students at par with other children in the class. This has been already discussed earlier in detail. 4 % of students were assisted by their family members or tuition teachers.



Table 3 shows that 63 % of students are able to complete their homework alone without any external assistance while 37 % of students admitted that they need assistance to complete their homework. Of these 37 %, the majority of them are assisted by their parents and siblings while ten students complete their homework in tuition.

Further, it is clear from table 3 that 84 % of students said that examinations are easy for them while 16 % of students admitted that the examinations were not easy for them. Overall 33 % opined that they would do better in examinations if they get some help in studies.

From the above results it may be concluded that EWS category students have positive perception about the school. They have a conducive learning environment in the school. They freely communicate, share things with their teachers and classmates. They are always a part of the group. Teachers take extra efforts to make teaching-learning meaningful. They like their school and never want to change it.

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