

Gist of EPW December Week 3, 2019

Roadblocks towards the Right to Education

Context

A study in the slum communities of Delhi has identified and analysed the problems and challenges that parents and children from economically weaker sections and disadvantaged groups face while accessing the right to education.

Background

- In India, the lack of opportunities for affordable quality elementary education creates an everlasting pattern of huge differences in learning abilities among children of different schooling backgrounds.
- Section 12(1)(c) of the [RTE Act](#) mandates all unaided private schools, including aided minority schools, to reserve 25% of their entry-level seats for the economically weaker sections (EWS) and disadvantaged groups (DG) up to the completion of elementary education.
- The costs associated with the educational expenses of the children availing education under the RTE rules are reimbursed according to the financial norms of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan based on the stipulated unit costs from Classes 1 to 8.

What are the issues in implementing RTE?

- All states have free elementary education due to the compulsions of the RTE Act, bureaucratic delays inhibit its full implementation.
- Negligence towards recommended scholarships under the RTE Act and the lack of parental awareness about Section 12(1)(c) of the RTE Act were found to be major problems in popularising these welfare measures.
- In some states, schools raised issues of delayed reimbursements and lack of communication from the government as a barrier in the implementation of Section 12(1)(c) of the RTE Act.

Awareness of RTE provisions

- According to the RTE Act, it is the responsibility of private schools to publicise provisions for EWS children in their neighbourhoods and the study shows that there was minimal awareness among people about Section 12(1)(c) of the RTE Act.
- The study shows 63.2% of the respondents who know about the provision, have heard about Section 12(1)(c) of the RTE Act from their neighbours and relatives.
 - A large section of people who have heard about the RTE Act from their neighbours and friends applied for seats under the RTE Act.
- Other sources considered in the study was television, newspaper, etc. among which awareness spread by the government was the least.

Learning Outcomes of Students

- In the study conducted, the learning outcome of students admitted under the RTE is more likely to be better than that of students who were not enrolled under the RTE.
- The learning outcome of those students who were studying in private schools under the RTE was comparatively better than those who were mostly studying in government schools or students who did not get the opportunity to seek admission under the RTE.

Perception of Parents

- Most of the parents were not aware of the provisions of RTE and among those who knew about the RTE provision were critical about its implementation.
- Students under the RTE were only exempt from paying admission fees and tuition fees and they were paying fees for all other provisions or facilities provided by private schools, including school materials.
- Free supply of books and mid-day meals have to be given priority by the government because these are among the biggest hurdles for the new students under the RTE quota.

Way Forward

- People belonging to the backward sections were mostly unaware of the benefits provided to students under the RTE Act. Therefore, awareness camps should be arranged in all slum localities.
- Carry out functional changes in school management committees (SMCs). Along with their current responsibilities, SMCs should do these three things as well -
 - First, they should arrange week-long summer-orientation programmes for all new EWS/DG entrants before the school session starts.
 - Second, they should distribute all schooling materials to EWS/DG children once orientation programmes end so that when schools start functioning, every child belonging to EWS/DG would start improving their learning abilities as soon as possible without being deprived of essential schooling materials.
 - Third, they should monitor admission details of all EWS/DG students and its timely uploading on the website after completion of the orientation programmes.
- Concerted efforts should be put in to ensure that the benefits of EWS and DG quotas are not misused by people with vested interests.
- Some schools are functional only up to Class 5, that is, no higher classes were available in such schools. This is an alarming signal for children who want to enrol by availing the provisions of RTE rules because they may face difficulty in completing the rest of the higher classes till Class 8.
- Therefore, the government or respective private schools must ensure that children who are admitted through RTE continue their education, by facilitating their admissions in neighbourhood schools.

Conclusion

- Many people suggested that availing benefits under the RTE Act is difficult, and the process of securing a seat under the EWS and DG quotas is not transparent.
- Moreover, many parents are still not aware about the affirmative principles of the RTE Act.
- Thus, it seems that many provisions of the RTE Act, including the affirmative principle to reserve 25% seats in private unaided schools for EWS and DG students, are working just as any other scheme rather than being treated as a right.

