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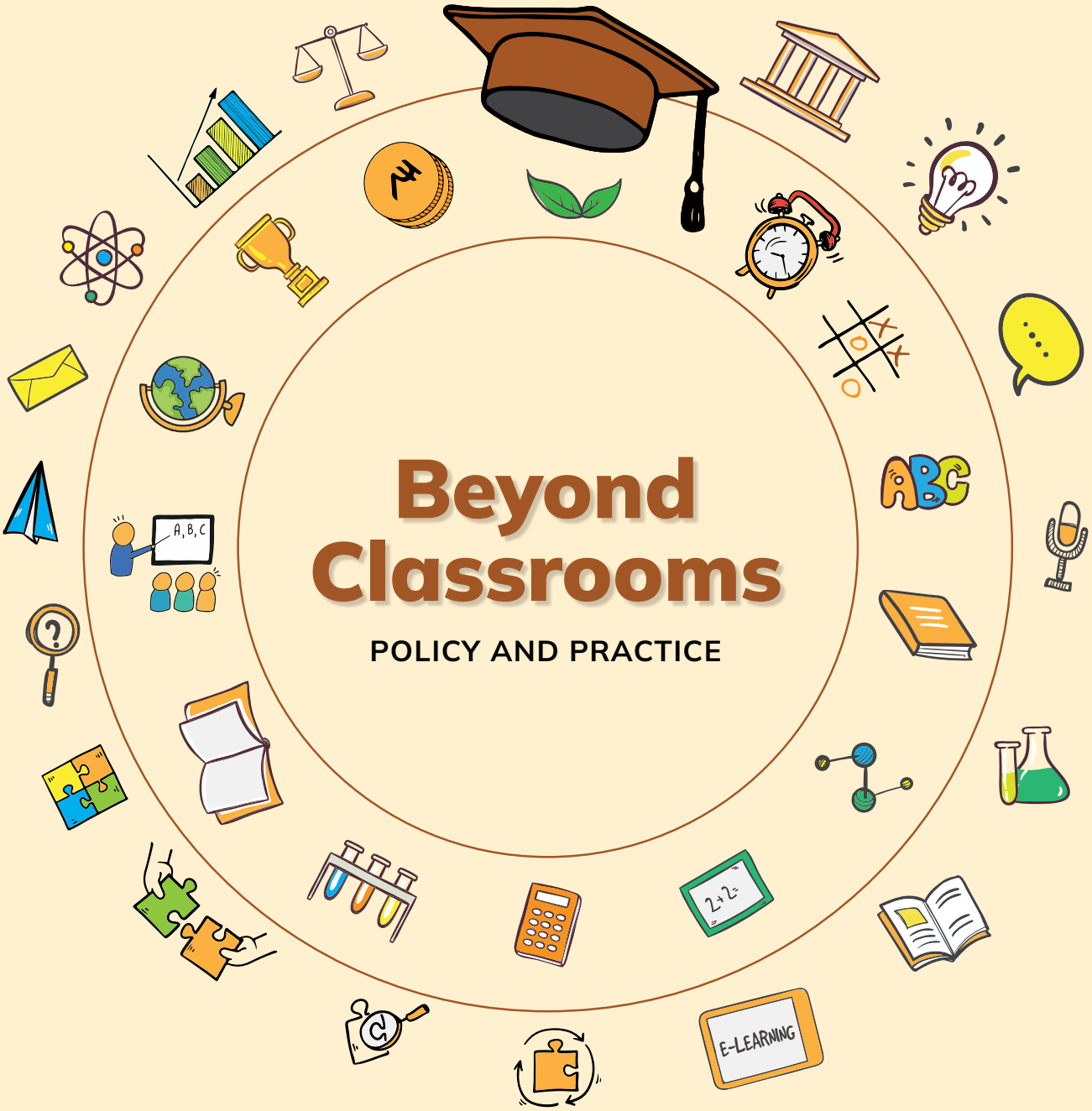
SOCIAL CHANGE THROUGH PUBLIC POLICY



Beyond Classrooms

POLICY AND PRACTICE

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Centre for CIVIL SOCIETY
SOCIAL CHANGE THROUGH PUBLIC POLICY

FRIEDRICH NAUMANN FOUNDATION For Freedom.
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Beyond Classrooms: Policy and Practice
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Project Lead:
Sadaf Hussain, Senior Consultant
Centre for Civil Society (CCS)

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Project Team:
Coordinators:
Dr. Heena Choudhary, Senior Associate, Research & Training Programs
Snehal Thakre, Associate, Research & Training Programs
Designer:
Ravi Kumar Yadav, Design Consultant

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INTRODUCTION

Education is often regarded as the foundation of national development, and its role in shaping human capital, promoting equality, and fostering societal progress cannot be overstated. Across the globe, countries continually strive to enhance their education systems, and India is no exception. Since the introduction of widespread educational reforms in the early 2000s, the Indian education system has seen numerous changes, most notably through policies such as the Right to Education (RTE) Act of 2009 and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. These efforts aim to address critical challenges such as access, equity, quality, and the overall relevance of education in a rapidly evolving world.

"Beyond Classrooms: Policy and Practice"; a comprehensive compendium, undertakes a bold and multifaceted examination of the pressing issues shaping India's education landscape. Drawing on empirical research conducted by scholars at the Centre for Civil Society, it delves into the intricate interplay between policy implementation, governance frameworks, and educational practices, and how they culminate in student outcomes. The insights presented here are indispensable for understanding both the triumphs and shortcomings of India's educational reforms, particularly in urban hubs like Delhi. At the core of this work lies a pivotal question: how can education systems transcend merely providing access to schools and instead focus on enhancing the quality of learning, ensuring equity, and empowering students to thrive in life.

The Journey from Access to Quality

One of the most significant shifts in India's education policy over the past two decades has been the move from focusing solely on access to addressing quality. The RTE Act, implemented in 2009, was instrumental in guaranteeing free and compulsory education for children aged 6 to 14. This policy resulted in a dramatic increase in enrolment rates, as millions of children, particularly those from economically weaker sections and marginalised communities, gained access to schooling. However, while the RTE Act succeeded in opening the doors of education to all, it soon became evident that access alone was not enough. The challenge now is to ensure that children who attend school actually learn and acquire the skills needed to thrive in society.

The NEP 2020 represents a bold attempt to address this challenge. While the policy maintains the emphasis on universal access to education, it also recognises that education quality must be at the heart of reform efforts. One of the key shifts in the NEP is its focus on foundational literacy and numeracy, acknowledging that many children, despite attending school, are not acquiring basic reading and arithmetic skills. This focus on early learning is critical, as studies have shown that children who do not master basic skills in their early years are more likely to struggle throughout their educational journey and are at greater risk of dropping out.

Beyond foundational skills, the NEP 2020 also champions a more holistic, learner-centered approach to education. By moving away from rote memorisation and textbook-driven instruction, the policy aims to foster critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. This approach is seen as essential in preparing students not just for exams, but for life in an increasingly complex and interconnected world. Vocational education, experiential learning, and multidisciplinary approaches are also emphasised, ensuring that students are equipped with a broad range of skills that will enable them to navigate future challenges.

Governance and Accountability in Education

A significant obstacle that persists in hindering educational advancement in India is the challenge of governance. The efficacy of an education system is contingent not solely on the policies instituted, but also on the institutional structures and processes that facilitate the effective implementation of these policies. India's education system, particularly within the public school domain, has long grappled with issues of suboptimal governance, marked by weak accountability frameworks, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and the mismanagement of resources.

Teacher absenteeism is one of the most striking examples of governance failures. Studies have shown that in many public schools, a significant percentage of teachers are absent on any given day, and even when present, the time devoted

to actual teaching is often limited. This issue is compounded by the fact that many teachers are burdened with administrative tasks, leaving them with less time to focus on instruction. Additionally, the lack of performance-based incentives means that there is little motivation for teachers to improve their teaching practices or go beyond the minimum requirements.

Improving governance in education requires a shift toward more effective management and accountability structures. One promising approach is the decentralisation of decision-making, giving schools more autonomy to manage their resources, hire teachers, and tailor instruction to the needs of their students. School Management Committees (SMCs), which involve parents, teachers, and local officials in the running of schools, are an example of how greater community involvement can enhance accountability and improve educational outcomes. However, decentralisation must be accompanied by appropriate oversight to ensure that resources are used equitably and effectively, particularly in underserved areas.

Equity and Inclusion in Education

Despite significant progress in expanding access to education, deep inequalities persist within the Indian education system. These disparities are particularly pronounced when it comes to students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, girls, and children from marginalised communities such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and minority groups. For these students, the barriers to education go beyond financial constraints; they include social and cultural factors, as well as systemic issues such as discrimination and inadequate support structures.

The RTE Act's provision for reserving 25% of seats in private schools for students from disadvantaged groups was a key step toward promoting inclusivity. However, the implementation of this provision has been fraught with challenges, including bureaucratic delays, document discrepancies, and resistance from some private schools. Moreover, even when students from disadvantaged backgrounds are admitted to private schools, they often struggle to fit into environments that are vastly different from their own social and cultural contexts.

In government schools, the issue of dropout rates continues to be a major concern, particularly among girls and students from marginalised communities. Factors such as child marriage, household responsibilities, and social norms that devalue girls' education contribute to higher dropout rates for girls. Additionally, the lack of gender-sensitive facilities and support for students with disabilities further exacerbates inequalities.

Addressing these inequities requires a multi-pronged approach. On the one hand, there is a need for targeted interventions that address the specific barriers faced by marginalised students. On the other hand, broader systemic reforms are needed to create an education system that is truly inclusive and supportive of all students, regardless of their background. This includes reforming curricula to make them more culturally responsive, providing adequate infrastructure such as gender-sensitive toilets, and offering support services such as counselling and mentorship for students at risk of dropping out.

The Role of Curriculum and Pedagogy

At the heart of any education system is the curriculum, and in India, the issue of curriculum reform has been a topic of intense debate. The traditional Indian education system has long been criticised for its over-reliance on rote memorisation and exam-focused teaching methods. While this approach may produce high scorers in standardised tests, it does little to foster critical thinking, creativity, or the ability to apply knowledge in real-world contexts.

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the need to reform curricula to make them more relevant to the needs of the 21st century. This includes not only integrating new subjects such as coding, artificial intelligence, and environmental studies, but also adopting pedagogical approaches that promote active learning and student engagement. Schools of Specialised Excellence, introduced in Delhi, represent one such initiative aimed at providing a more customised and skills-oriented education experience for students with specific talents and interests.

However, curriculum reform must go hand-in-hand with teacher training. Teachers play a crucial role in translating curricular goals into classroom practices, and without proper training and support, even the most well-designed curricula may fail to achieve their intended outcomes. Ongoing professional development, mentoring, and peer learning opportunities for teachers are essential to ensure that they are equipped to deliver high-quality instruction.

Conclusion

The journey towards creating an equitable and high-quality education system in India remains an ongoing endeavor. While significant advancements have been made, numerous challenges persist. The publication "Beyond Classrooms: Policy and Practice" offers a critical analysis of these challenges, emphasizing the need for a more comprehensive and integrated approach to educational reform. This approach extends beyond merely ensuring students' enrollment in schools and instead focuses on providing them with meaningful, relevant, and transformative learning experiences.

As India continues to emerge as a global power, the role of education in shaping its future trajectory cannot be overstated. The insights presented in this compendium underscore the paramount importance of sustained investment in the quality, governance, and inclusivity of the education system. Only by addressing these interrelated issues can India's education system fully realize its potential to empower all its citizens, ensuring that no child is left behind.

Sadaf Hussain
Project Lead

KEY INSIGHTS AND FINDINGS

1. From Access to Equity: A Comparative Analysis of the RTE Act and NEP 2020

The RTE Act succeeded in expanding school enrollment, but its primary emphasis on inputs like infrastructure resulted in lagging learning outcomes. In contrast, the NEP 2020 has shifted the focus toward fostering foundational literacy and numeracy, aiming to cultivate a more holistic and equitable education system.

2. Money Matters: A Study of Financial Investments and Educational Equity in Delhi Government Schools

Despite increased government expenditure on education in Delhi, particularly in infrastructure, the education system continues to face persistent challenges, including teacher shortages, high dropout rates, and underutilised budgets. These findings suggest the need for more efficient and effective management of educational resources.

3. Lost in the System: Document Discrepancies and Other Barriers to RTE Admissions in Delhi

Procedural gaps, such as document discrepancies, hinder the admission process under the RTE Act for students from economically weaker sections. These barriers disproportionately affect access to private schools.

4. Delhi's Education System: Examining Shifting Enrolment and Dropout Patterns

While public school enrolments have increased in the aftermath of the pandemic, dropout rates remain persistently high, particularly among girls and students from marginalised communities. The continued preference for private schooling underscores the persistent inequities within the public education system.

5. Educational Dilemmas: Public School Teachers' Choices Between Public and Private Schools for Their Children

A significant proportion of public school teachers in Chennai elect to enrol their children in private educational institutions, citing the perceived superior quality and infrastructure, which suggests a lack of faith in the public school system.

6. Balancing Excellence: Curriculum and Infrastructure in Delhi's Schools of Specialised Excellence

Whilst the curriculum in Delhi's Schools of Specialised Excellence is perceived as a progression towards educational innovation, deficient infrastructure and constrained extracurricular offerings impede the holistic student experience.

7. Exploring the Impact of School Autonomy on Educational Performance

Providing schools with increased autonomy may enhance student achievement and teacher morale, but insufficient monitoring could exacerbate the resource divide between urban and rural educational institutions.

CHAPTER

1

From Access to Equity: *A Comparative Analysis of the RTE Act and NEP 2020*

Durgesh Jha | Ojaswi Anand | Sanyam Mahajan

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a critical comparative analysis of the Right to Education Act, 2009, and the National Education Policy, 2020, examining their respective approaches to educational access, quality, and equity. While the RTE Act significantly increased school enrolment by guaranteeing free and compulsory education for children aged 6 to 14, it primarily focused on input factors such as infrastructure and teacher qualifications, neglecting the crucial aspect of learning outcomes. In contrast, the NEP 2020 aims to address these shortcomings by introducing goals for foundational literacy and numeracy, adopting a multidisciplinary approach, and incorporating vocational education at the secondary level. Furthermore, the NEP's emphasis on equity extends beyond economic disadvantages to include marginalized communities. This analysis highlights how the NEP's holistic, learner-centred approach strives to enhance the overall quality of education, while the RTE's efforts were largely successful in improving access to schooling.

Keywords: Right to Education (RTE) Act, National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, Educational Access, Learning Outcomes, Equity in Education, School Education, Children, Vocational Training

KEY FINDINGS

1. The RTE has been criticized for emphasizing input factors rather than improving learning outcomes.
2. While RTE led to high enrolment rates, foundational literacy and numeracy remained insufficient.
3. The NEP holds promise in addressing the gaps left by the RTE, focusing on educational equity and ensuring meaningful learning experiences for all students.

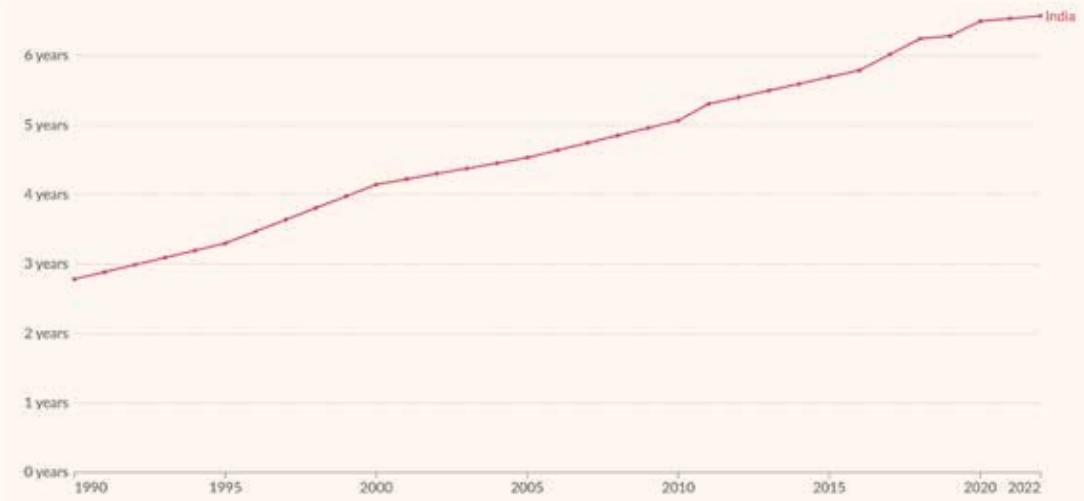
1. INTRODUCTION

Education serves as a key driver of national development by cultivating human capital and fostering social inclusion. It stimulates economic activity and enhances living standards through cognitive, psychomotor, and emotional growth. Consequently, providing affordable and accessible education for all is essential for both individual and national progress.

Since India's independence, significant strides have been made in universalising education, as evidenced by the ASER Report 2023, which indicates 98.4% enrolment for children aged 6-14 and 86.8% for ages 14-18. However, learning outcomes remain a concern, with over 57% of grade 5 students unable to comprehend a grade 2-level paragraph (ASER, 2024). The Right to Education Act played a pivotal role by guaranteeing free education for ages 6-14, and the National Education Policy 2020 aims to expand this to ages 3 through grade 12. Nevertheless, the NEP has faced criticism for prioritising access to schooling over the quality of education.

Early educational experiences are paramount, as primary schooling lays the foundation for lifelong learning. Robust early education in literacy, numeracy, and social skills enhances future academic success (Sherboeva, 2024). India has made notable progress, with the average years of schooling for individuals aged 25 or older increasing from 2.88 in 1990 to 6.5 in 2022, a trend observed across nearly all population subgroups.

Figure 1: **Increase in years of schooling**



A complex legislative framework governs India's educational landscape, with education falling under the Concurrent List, allowing both the central and state governments to share responsibility. Although implementation may vary across states, two key policies have shaped the education sector: the Right to Education Act and the National Education Policy 2020. Both policies aim to enhance educational outcomes and universalize access, but they influence institutions in distinct ways by shaping incentives, objectives, and learning outcomes.

This paper undertakes a critical comparative analysis of the NEP 2020 and the RTE Act 2009, focussing on the RTE's intended objectives, its effectiveness over the past decade, and the challenges faced by educational institutions and stakeholders. Furthermore, it explores how the NEP 2020 addresses these challenges, proposing strategies to augment access, quality, and equity in education. By examining these policies through the lenses of aspirations, economic burden, and private sector involvement, the study aspires to provide a comprehensive understanding of their societal impacts and suggest improvements for future policy design, contributing to the ongoing discourse on the future of education in India.

1.1 THE INDIAN EDUCATION POLICY LANDSCAPE

The broader policy outlook in India considers education to be a critical socio-economic welfare measure, viewing it as a public good central to governance and policy discussions. Education is perceived as a strategic imperative linked to national development and individual progress (Mehendale and Mukhopadhyay, 2021). The Right to Education Act 2009 and the National Education Policy 2020 are pivotal components of this policy narrative.

The establishment of the right to "free and compulsory education" as a fundamental right in 2009 represented a significant shift in India's education policy. However, this right was not a sudden policy invention, but rather the culmination of a long-standing vision rooted in welfare and governance discourse. It traces back to Article 45 of the Constitution, which, under the Directive Principles of State Policy, obligated the government to provide free education to all children up to age 14 within the first decade of the Constitution's implementation, despite not being legally enforceable (Sadgopal, 2010).

Sadgopal highlights that the Constituent Assembly, like modern lawmakers, faced challenges. While the Sub-Committee on Fundamental Rights initially included education as a justiciable Fundamental Right, the Advisory Committee later identified issues with this, citing concerns over insufficient government resources and the prioritization of other rights considered more urgent at the time.

The Right to Education Act, passed in 2009, made the government's duty to provide elementary education legally binding, making it a Fundamental Right. The Act guaranteed "free and compulsory education" for children aged 6-14 by adding Article 21-A to the Constitution (Bhattacharjee, 2019). This landmark legislation represented a significant commitment to educational equity. Importantly, the RTE Act also redefined the approach to education, focusing on input-based improvements and infrastructure changes, in addition to enhancing equitable access to education (Mehendale, 2014).

Over the years, India's education policy outlook has evolved, reflecting changing priorities and objectives. Early policies focused on increasing enrolment, particularly among marginalised groups. The emphasis later shifted to improving infrastructure, teacher training, and curriculum development. Only in recent times has the focus on educational quality and outcomes, rather than just access, gained prominence. However, the need to review and re-evaluate the Indian educational system was first recognised towards the end of the Third Five-Year Plan.

The 1964 Education Commission proposed reforms to support India's economic and cultural growth, while fostering national integration and a socialist societal framework. These recommendations led to the 1968 National Policy on Education, which aimed to ensure educational quality by aligning teacher salaries and service conditions with their qualifications and competence. Additionally, the policy introduced the 10 + 2 + 3 educational structures.

The 1986 National Policy on Education aimed to address disparities and promote equal educational opportunities, particularly for women, Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Scheduled Castes (SC). It sought to universalise elementary education and proposed establishing Navodaya Vidyalayas to provide quality education, especially in rural areas. The policy also emphasised vocational education, teacher training, decentralised management, and community participation. The 1992 Programme of Action under the 1986 policy introduced a common entrance exam for admission to professional and technical programmes nationwide. The most recent development, the National Education Policy 2020 approved on 29 July 2020, places emphasis on quality, innovation, and global competitiveness in education.

The Right to Education Act: A Closer Look

The Right to Education (RTE) Act of 2009 represented a robust commitment to educational equity, with the aim of ensuring accessibility and fairness within India's education system. The Act established education as a fundamental right, mandating "free and compulsory" education for children aged 6 to 14, and guaranteeing equal opportunities for all. By prioritizing equality, the RTE Act strives to eliminate disparities in educational access, particularly benefiting marginalized communities that confront multiple barriers to educational attainment (Mehendale, 2020).

The Act establishes a specific "framework of specificity" that mandates the government to provide education, holding authorities accountable for educational outcomes (Mehendale, 2020). It stipulates clear norms regarding pupil-teacher ratios, teacher qualifications, and a no-retention policy. Recognising the need for long-term development, the Act advocates for a gradual enhancement of educational infrastructure and resources, including infrastructure standards, inclusivity, and community involvement. These provisions underpin the government's responsibility in delivering quality education (Bhattacharjee, 2019).

The RTE Act has been criticised for prioritising input-based improvements, such as infrastructure and teacher qualifications, at times neglecting learning outcomes. However, academic Nalini Juneja (2013) argues that the quality of education extends beyond measurable outcomes, reflecting a broader vision of society and the role of education in preparing young people for the envisaged future. Ultimately, the RTE Act represents an important milestone in India's ongoing efforts to achieve universal and equitable education.

While the Right to Education Act has significantly improved access to education, it has faced criticism regarding both its policy design and impact. A notable issue is that increased enrolment has not translated into a corresponding improvement in learning outcomes, particularly in foundational literacy and numeracy. As of 2022–23, only 45%

of youth aged 14–18 demonstrate basic arithmetic proficiency, with a quarter lacking these foundational skills (Rukmini, 2024). The Annual Status of Education Report highlights that factors such as increased fees after grade 8, inadequate curriculum and pedagogy, and parental pressures, which disproportionately affect girls' education, often lead to a decline in enrolment at higher levels (Ghosh & Bandyopadhyay, 2018).

Since the RTE Act forbids holding students back (Iyer & Counihan, 2018)., it has also led to a general decline in learning levels). The Act's focus on input-based improvements has also been criticized. Research by Iyer found that most RTE infrastructure indicators were not statistically significant for student outcomes, with the exception of mid-day meals and the presence of a library, which had a positive impact on test scores. Furthermore, the RTE's goal of improving equity by reserving seats for students from economically weaker sections in private schools has only been partially successful. Bhattacharjee notes that since 2013, the fill rates for these reserved seats have been low, ranging between 20% and 26%, due to implementation challenges.

The implementation of the various RTE Act provisions has shown significant discrepancies across states. Despite the Act's national passage in 2009, the country experienced a slow and inconsistent rollout. As Sachdeva et al. (2015) point out, all states had only draughted RTE rules by early 2012, with many struggling to comply with its provisions until at least 2015. The adherence to the Act's quality standards continues to reflect this inconsistency in initial implementation, further highlighting regional disparities.

The National Education Policy 2020: A Closer Look

"Education is fundamental for achieving full human potential, developing an equitable and just society, and promoting national development. Providing universal access to quality education is the key to India's continued ascent and leadership on the global stage in terms of economic growth, social justice and equality, scientific advancement, national integration, and cultural preservation."- NEP 2020

The National Education Policy 2020 was introduced to holistically transform India's education system, recognising the need to harness the country's potential amidst evolving global and national contexts. With India projected to have the largest youth population in the coming decade, NEP 2020 aims to provide high-quality, inclusive, and equitable education. The policy emphasises the development of critical thinking, creativity, and interdisciplinary learning to prepare students for technological advancements and global challenges such as climate change and pandemics. It advocates for an experiential, comprehensive, and learner-centred approach, bridging the gap between current educational outcomes and future societal demands. Furthermore, NEP 2020 integrates India's educational heritage with modern pedagogical practices, aiming to foster ethical and emotional development alongside enhancing employability. Ultimately, the policy seeks to establish a world-class education system that supports India's growth as a leading global economy.

A key feature of NEP 2020 is its emphasis on promoting multidisciplinary and flexible learning.

NEP 2020 adopts a comprehensive and inclusive approach by engaging a diverse range of stakeholders, including students, teachers, parents, marginalised communities, the private sector, policymakers, and regulatory bodies. The policy builds upon the foundations laid by previous educational frameworks and recommendations, such as those from the Education Commission, the Justice J.S. Verma Commission, the National Policy on Education 1986/92, the Right to Education Act 2009, and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016. At its core, NEP 2020 aims to cultivate individuals with critical reasoning abilities, empathy, resilience, and moral courage while fostering a scientific temperament, creativity, and ethical values.

Key objectives include:

1. Recognising each student's unique capabilities and promoting holistic development.
2. Achieving foundational literacy and numeracy by Grade 3, with a goal for universal FLN by 2026-27.
3. Offering flexible learning paths and removing subject and stream barriers for a multidisciplinary education.
4. Emphasising conceptual understanding, critical thinking, and regular formative assessment.
5. Integrating technology to improve access and remove language barriers, promoting multilingualism and respecting local diversity, and ensuring equity and inclusion for all students.

6. Aligning curriculum across all education levels and prioritising teacher recruitment, development, and working conditions.
7. Establishing a balanced regulatory framework promoting transparency, innovation, and autonomy.
8. Building research infrastructure and raising investments in public and private education sectors.

2. METHODOLOGY

For our research, we primarily rely on secondary sources, including a wide range of literature such as research papers, policy briefs, white papers, and reports, as well as the original policy documents and texts published by the government. This paper aims to conduct a cross-policy and policy-narrative analysis of the Right to Education (RTE) Act 2009 and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The primary objective is to undertake a comparative policy analysis of these two key frameworks.
To achieve this, we employ the Policy Narrative Framework Analysis (POLiFRAME),, which integrates causal layered analysis to connect policymakers' narratives with their underlying theories of change. This approach allows us to identify deficiencies, problems, scenarios, and visions within the policy narratives (Miedziński, 2018). In doing so, this paper seeks to establish the continuities and contradictions in the policy designs of both frameworks through the lens of policy narrative framework analysis (POLiFRAME).

To assess and compare the two policies, and draw policy recommendations, we rely on certain evaluation metrics. The framework for this comparative analysis is partially derived from the indicators used by Faubert (2009) to assess school and educational outcomes. By adapting this to the Indian context and emphasising the needs and perspectives of diverse stakeholders, we have identified three key areas of interest, each with two proxy indicators or variables.

Our framework of assessment is described in the following table:

Table 1: Framework for assessment

Academic Aspirations and their Impacts on Individuals	Attitudes towards formal education and expenses on supplementary education
	Institutionalisation of private tutoring and coaching centres
Learning Outcomes and Educational Quality	Foundational literacy and numeracy skills (FLN)
	Emphasis on employment-oriented vocational training and skill-based education
Regulation of Private Schools	Compliance with norms for infrastructure and operations
	Regulation of Private Schools

3. FINDINGS

1. Similarities and Divergence in RTE 2009 and NEP 2020

The Right to Education Act 2009 and the National Education Policy 2020 represent transformative steps in the evolution of the Indian education system. While both frameworks address aspects of educational access and quality, there are several similarities and differences between the two.

a. **Comprehensiveness:** Compared to the National Education Policy 2020, the Right to Education Act is substantially less comprehensive. While the Right to Education Act focuses on a specific set of objectives and concerns, as outlined previously, the National Education Policy 2020 aims to provide a more holistic and wide-ranging policy direction for the Indian education system.

b. **Distinct Nature:** The RTE and NEP 2020 diverge in their fundamental nature. The RTE is a legislative enactment that entrenches education as a fundamental constitutional right under Article 21-A. In contrast, the NEP 2020 is a policy document outlining comprehensive reforms aimed at transforming the educational ecosystem through a holistic, inclusive, accessible, and multidisciplinary approach. While non-compliance with the NEP 2020 recommendations would not result in legal consequences, the RTE's statutory footing means it is legally binding.

c. **Focus:** While the RTE focused on ensuring universal access to education for children between the ages of 6 and 14 years, the National Education Policy 2020 has a much broader mandate and target group. The NEP considers questions related to the education of children from 3 to 18 years of age, with its provision for Early Childhood Care and Education. Furthermore, the NEP restructures the school curriculum from a 10+2 system to a 5+3+3+4 system, with preschool to Grade 2 as the 'Foundational Stage', Grade 3 to 5 as the 'Preparatory Stage', Grade 6 to 8 as the 'Middle Stage', and Grade 9 to 12 as the 'Secondary Stage'. This expansion of the educational purview under the NEP aims to address the age groups that were previously left out.

d. **Inclusive education:** The RTE Act recognises children from disadvantaged and economically weaker groups. Disadvantaged groups refer to those who are socially, educationally and culturally marginalised, such as scheduled castes and tribes. Economically weaker sections are children whose parents have an income below a minimum limit set by the government. Likewise, the NEP aims to address gender and social disparities in education by focusing on Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups. SEDGs encompass diverse identities including gender, sociocultural background, geography, disabilities, and socioeconomic status. While the RTE Act reserves 25% of seats for economically weaker and disadvantaged groups to support them, the NEP 2020 encourages programmes and initiatives to empower these groups. The NEP also believes its recommendations on early childhood care and foundational literacy and numeracy are crucial for underrepresented and disadvantaged groups.

e. **Approach to assessments and detentions:** According to the Right to Education Act, section 16, no child shall be detained in any class until the completion of elementary education. The Act also emphasises that children should be assessed through a continuous and comprehensive evaluation system to ensure they are learning effectively. In contrast, the National Education Policy advocates for assessments that promote learning and development through analysis, critical thinking, and conceptual clarity. The NEP has also proposed establishing the National Assessment Centre, PARAKH, as a standard-setting body under the Ministry of Education. This body will set norms, standards, and guidelines for student assessment and evaluation across all recognized school boards in India. Furthermore, the National Curriculum Framework for School Education, based on the NEP 2020, states that at the foundational stage, most assessments will involve observations made by teachers rather than explicit testing of student abilities. The framework also proposes using worksheets to provide teachers with information about children's learning progress and no exams until Class 2. Additionally, the NEP introduces two board exams and divides subjects into eight curricular areas for Class 10 students, while also ending the separation of science, arts or humanities, and commerce streams for higher secondary students.

f. **Quality education:** The RTE Act focuses heavily on inputs, such as system, school, and teacher requirements, rather than addressing the issue of educational quality. In contrast, the NEP takes a more student-centric approach, recognising and nurturing each student's unique capabilities. The NEP emphasises the development of both cognitive and non-cognitive skills, including critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and multidisciplinary learning. Furthermore, the NEP's approach to assessment aims to promote learning and development, moving away from a content-heavy curriculum towards a more holistic, learner-centred education system.

g. Teacher's training and qualification: RTE Act mandates that teachers possess the necessary qualifications and training as prescribed by the appropriate authority, ensuring a competent teaching workforce. It also emphasises the need for continuous professional development, highlighting the importance of ongoing training to enhance teachers' skills and effectiveness in the classroom. Additionally, it establishes a requirement for maintaining a specific teacher-student ratio, which is crucial for facilitating effective teaching and learning, thereby fostering an environment conducive to the holistic development of children. However, the Act lacks detailed provisions for teachers. In contrast, the National Education Policy 2020 places teachers at the heart of educational reforms. The NEP recommends instituting a large number of merit-based scholarships across the country for 4-year integrated Bachelor of Education programmes. It also focuses on strengthening Teacher Eligibility Tests (TET) to improve the quality of test material in terms of both content and pedagogy. Furthermore, the NEP underscores the importance of ensuring decent and pleasant service conditions for teachers, including adequate and safe school infrastructure.

The NEP 2020 emphasises the integration of technology in education, such as online learning and digital resources, especially in the context of the Digital India campaign. The COVID-19 pandemic and emerging technological developments have made this integration increasingly relevant and significant. In contrast, the RTE Act does not address the integration of technology. Additionally, the NEP highlights the importance of vocational education, an aspect not covered by the RTE Act.

The RTE Act primarily focuses on ensuring access to elementary education, aligning with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) to guarantee quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all, as well as inclusive and equitable education. Similarly, the NEP 2020 is based on SDG 4, but it expands the scope to enhance employability in the job market. The NEP recommends the integration of vocational education programmes into mainstream education as one such approach.

2. Comparative Analysis of the Metrics and Indicators in the RTE Act and NEP 2020

I. Increasing Academic Aspirations and Its Impacts

a. Burdens on Individuals

Educational aspirations are a multifaceted and dynamic construct influenced by various factors, including individual life experiences, social identities, self-beliefs, and policy interventions. Establishing a direct causal link between aspirations and a single factor is methodologically challenging. However, given the global emphasis on expanding educational access, it is imperative to explore the impact of this access on educational attainment and aspirational outcomes.

The Right to Education Act and the National Education Policy 2020 both prioritise increasing educational access, which appears to have influenced aspirations for higher education. The RTE Act's provision of free education for children aged 6 to 14 has contributed to a substantial rise in the Gross Enrolment Ratio for secondary education, increasing from 47.01% in 2007-2008 to 86.8% in 2022-2023. This spillover effect suggests a positive association between enhanced educational access and heightened aspirations for further educational advancement.

At the same time, this rapid expansion of access has led to increased pressure and expectations on individuals, particularly from marginalised communities, to pursue higher education.

Building on the successes of the Right to Education Act and the Samagra Siksha Abhiyan, the National Education Policy 2020 aims to extend educational access to all children aged 3 to 18, targeting a 100% Gross Enrolment Ratio from preschool to the secondary level by 2030. While this nationwide expansion is beneficial, the individual impact is more nuanced. Increased access to education is likely to enhance children's foundational learning, critical thinking, and decision-making skills, which may consequently raise parental aspirations for their children's educational outcomes.

Nonetheless, there are concerns regarding the quality of education in public schools, particularly among underprivileged households. As documented by Sharma, many families supplement state-run schooling with private tutoring or enrol their children

in private schools, frequently taking on loans to cover these expenses. On average, households devote 35% of their income to education, driven by the perception that private tutoring is vital, even for young learners, yet many remain dissatisfied. This dissatisfaction is concerning, as parental, especially maternal, aspirations are strongly associated with academic performance (Serneeels & Dercon, 2020).

b. The institutionalisation of the Coaching Industry Culture

The implementation of the Right to Education Act has led to increased educational access for students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. This expansion of educational opportunities has in turn fuelled rising academic aspirations among these students and their families. Consequently, there has been a marked increase in household expenditure on supplementary education and private tuition. Research by Chatterjee et al. (2020) suggests that in the post-RTE era, private tuition has become an integral, almost indispensable, component of the education system. The scholars found a significant causal relationship between the RTE's expansion of school access and the growth of the private tutoring industry. Specifically, in "educationally competitive districts," the RTE's broadening of school access resulted in a monthly increase of 53 new tutoring centres per billion people.

The rise in academic aspirations, particularly among students seeking better economic prospects, highlights how the Right to Education Act and the National Education Policy 2020 address private tuition and coaching. While the RTE Act does not explicitly address private tuition, Section 28 prohibits government school teachers from engaging in it, preventing conflicts of interest and ensuring their focus on classroom teaching. The Act indirectly acknowledges the need for supplementary education through School Development Plans, which aim to enhance teaching quality and reduce reliance on external tutoring.

Furthermore, the RTE's "No-Detention" policy, which prevents students from being held back until Class 8, may unintentionally increase the demand for private tuition, as students lacking foundational knowledge may require extra guidance that regular school lessons cannot provide.

NEP 2020 aims to move away from rote learning towards developing creativity and critical thinking. It emphasizes formative assessments over summative assessments, which can promote a coaching culture. However, the NEP's introduction of entrance exams for higher education and multiple board exams may inadvertently sustain the demand for coaching classes, as regular classroom teaching may not adequately prepare students for these high-stakes assessments.

II. Learning Outcomes and Quality

Developing human capital is a critical priority for every nation, as a more productive workforce enables greater scope for development. For individuals, better learning outcomes and education quality lead to improved living standards and greater employability. Thus, policies must ensure that learning outcomes and quality remain central in policy design. Here, we assess the impact of the Right to Education Act and the National Education Policy 2020 on two key areas: learning outcomes in terms of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy, and in terms of vocational training and skill-based education.

a. Learning outcomes in terms of FLN

Foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) skills are essential for individual development, as they lay the groundwork for future learning in areas such as reading, basic mathematics, and social interaction. However, a significant concern is that 25% of secondary school students are unable to read a text at a Grade 2 level in their regional language, and only 43.3% can divide a three-digit number by a one-digit number. Additionally, only 57% of students can read English sentences. The RTE Act did not adequately address FLN, but growing awareness has led to its inclusion as a priority in the NEP 2020.

The NEP 2020 emphasises the urgent need to achieve universal foundational literacy and numeracy skills, with foundational education being the highest priority. It has introduced the 5+3+3+4 schooling structure, ensuring that the first five years focus on the development of these essential skills. To this end, the government has launched several initiatives, including the National FLN Mission, which aims to achieve foundational literacy and numeracy proficiency for all children by Grade 3 by 2026-27, and the NIPUN Bharat program, designed to ensure foundational literacy and numeracy proficiency through the Samagra Shiksha scheme.

While these initiatives are crucial, we need policy changes to drive prompt and lasting progress in improving foundational literacy and numeracy. The focus should be on aligning goals, providing strong academic support, and implementing rigorous monitoring. These steps are vital to ensuring we

achieve the desired outcomes (Central Square Foundation, 2021).

b. Emphasis on employability in terms of vocational training and skill-based education

The All-India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) has noted that historically, lower socio-economic classes have stigmatized vocational education in India. Despite increased educational access, the RTE Act created a gap in fostering critical thinking because traditional pedagogies often emphasize rote learning over practical skills, hindering the effectiveness of vocational training (Kumar, 2020; Singha, 2022).

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 addresses this by aiming to "re-imagine vocational education," recommending its integration into mainstream education across all institutions over the next decade. By 2025, NEP seeks to expose at least 50% of learners in school and higher education to vocational training (NEP 2020, Ch. 16). Less than 6% of youth currently engage in vocational training, often viewing it as a fallback option (ASER, 2022). This undervaluation persists.

Vocational education was not covered under the RTE, which focused on primary education, and has been governed by outdated policies, most recently the National Policy on Education, 1986. The NEP 2020 aims to modernise this by introducing pre-vocational courses from Grade VI and making secondary education more flexible and interdisciplinary, offering new pathways to vocational education.

III. Regulations and Over-regulation of Private Schools

a. Fiscal management of schools

This section focusses on private unaided schools, as the rules and regulations for different school types (government, private aided, private unaided) vary due to their different financial models. Providing financial autonomy to schools, which are seen as public goods, is a delicate balance for the government.

Education is on the concurrent list, with the Union providing policy direction and the States handling execution and legislation. In this context, the States regulate the finances of private, unaided schools. This is evident in the RTE Act's funding process, where the central government provides grants-in-aid to the states rather than directly to the schools.

Aside from the RTE Act's general policy directions, such as prohibiting capitation fees, fiscal regulation primarily rests with the respective state governments. States further regulate through laws and regulations, including measures to prevent the commercialization of education, establishing Fee Regulation Committees, and setting guidelines for the use of earnings.

Similarly, the NEP also prohibits capitation fees and commercialization of education; neither policy elaborates extensively on fiscal regulation mechanisms.

3. Key Lessons for Policymakers

This paper has assessed the impact of the Right to Education Act and the National Education Policy 2020 on two critical areas: learning outcomes and the regulation of private schools.

a. A coherent national education policy is essential to streamline India's fragmented education landscape. Such a policy should consolidate existing regulations, provide clear implementation guidelines, and establish a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework. By integrating the Right to Education Act, National Education Policy 2020, and other relevant policies, a cohesive approach can be developed to guide educational initiatives nationwide. While this may be challenging given that education is a state subject and regions have diverse socio-economic contexts, there is a need for greater harmonisation across different government policies, schemes, and directives at various levels. Exploring feasible ways to achieve this within the constraints of the existing legal and constitutional system would be a worthwhile endeavour.

b. While we harmonise diverse policies to establish a cohesive and focused policy narrative, it is imperative to enable localised implementation within certain designated parameters. Empowering local education authorities to address specific contextual needs and challenges, implementing transparent accountability frameworks, and promoting public involvement can substantially enhance the governance of the education system. By granting increased autonomy to local administrative bodies, policymakers can facilitate more responsive

and effective policies tailored to the unique requirements of the local milieu.

c. Future policies aimed at improving learning outcomes must strike a balance between focusing on input-side improvements and directly improving learning outcomes. While infrastructural changes and input-based enhancements are important, they alone are not sufficient to raise achievement levels, as evidenced by the RTE Act's limited impact on learning outcomes. However, this does not mean policies should exclusively target learning outcomes, teacher performance, lesson quality, and student performance. Focusing solely on one aspect may not always yield the intended results. Even when prioritising outcomes, infrastructural inputs like libraries and food provision systems can play an auxiliary but important role in creating a conducive and constructive learning environment. Investing in foundational infrastructure, such as classrooms, libraries, laboratories, and sanitation facilities, particularly in underserved areas, is essential for establishing an effective learning environment.

d. Encouraging a more comprehensive and student-focused educational approach requires diminishing dependency on external coaching and reinforcing institutional support systems. To this end, it is crucial to establish adequate support structures within formal educational settings to assist struggling students and those necessitating aid for a variety of examinations.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the Right to Education Act and the National Education Policy 2020 highlights both the progress and ongoing challenges within India's educational landscape. The RTE has successfully enhanced access to education, acknowledged marginalised groups, and established a robust framework. However, the RTE has been criticised for prioritising input factors rather than directly improving learning outcomes. While the high enrolment rates reflect the RTE's positive impact, a persistent lack of foundational literacy and numeracy remains a concern.

In contrast, the NEP 2020 represents a transformative shift in educational policy. It emphasises the importance of quality and holistic education, making a concerted effort to address the gaps that the RTE could not fully resolve.

The NEP introduces an integrated, multidisciplinary, and holistic approach through its provisions. It proposes a 5+3+3+4 school system and the integration of vocational education into secondary schools, reflecting a commitment to aligning educational practices with developmental needs.

While the Right to Education Act has yielded tangible advancements, India's education system continues to fall short of the ideal. Fundamental restructuring of the system, enhanced quality of education, development of skilled professionals, and a greater emphasis on fostering critical thinking abilities remain pressing requirements. The National Education Policy 2020 holds the promise of transformative change in this regard. However, the ultimate efficacy of the NEP will hinge upon its effective implementation and ongoing evaluation. Crucially, the successful enactment of the NEP has the potential to ensure educational equity, which would in turn translate into more meaningful and enriching learning experiences for all students.

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CHAPTER

2

Money Matters: A Study of Financial Investments and Educational Equity in Delhi Government Schools

Aman Chauhan | Lazana Deshar
Shashwat Kotiyal | Swati Phogat

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the financial expenditure on school education in Delhi government schools, focusing on budget allocations and their impact on educational outcomes from the fiscal year 2013-14 to 2022-23. Drawing on data from various sources, such as state budget documents, the Economic Survey of the Government of NCT, the Praja Foundation Report, and the RBI State Finance Report, the analysis explores critical financial dimensions, including per-student expenditure, overall enrollment, and the classification of functional areas within school education. The key findings suggest that while significant investments have been made in infrastructure, classroom environments, and teacher training, primarily to enhance the perception of government-run schools, longstanding structural challenges persist. Gaps in outcomes, such as retention rates, dropout rates, classroom shortages, and student performance, underscore the need for deeper reforms to address the complex issues within the education system. This study provides a comprehensive overview of the financial management of school education in Delhi and its implications for policy reform and academic achievement

Keywords: Delhi government schools, state education finance, education budget, educational outcomes, functional areas in education

KEY FINDINGS

- **Improvements in School Infrastructure:** The analysis of budget allocations shows that investments in Delhi government schools have led to better classrooms, teacher training programs, and access to digital resources. However, some schools still have fewer resources compared to others.
- **Increase in Spending per Student but Uneven Impact:** The study finds a consistent rise in spending per student, reflecting the government's commitment to improving education quality. But the effects of this increased spending vary across schools. The COVID-19 pandemic also led to budget cuts that affected some key initiatives.
- **Growing Enrolment but Persistent Dropout Rates:** Government schools in Delhi have seen more students enrolled, especially after COVID-19, as families chose public education due to financial constraints. However, dropout rates, especially in secondary schools, remain high, undermining earlier progress.
- **Teacher Shortages and Overcrowding:** Despite increased investments, many schools still face shortages of regular teachers and lack enough classrooms. This has forced schools to operate in shifts, leading to overcrowded classrooms and less effective learning.
- **Unspent Education Budgets:** The study reveals that a significant portion of the education budget, up to 26% in some years, remains unspent. This underutilisation has worsened existing challenges, such as improving infrastructure and hiring more teachers, limiting the full impact of government investments.and ensuring meaningful learning experiences for all students.

1. INTRODUCTION

The educational landscape in Delhi exhibits marked disparities in accessibility and quality, disproportionately affecting marginalised communities (Bose & Sharma, 2023). Government-run schools serving low-income and disadvantaged populations frequently contend with resource scarcities, manifesting in inadequate infrastructure and substandard educational provision (Praja, 2017). The demand for high-quality, accessible education surpasses the current supply and investment, leading to the proliferation of numerous low-cost private schools across various localities (Endow, 2018). The reduction in government funding for public schools, further exacerbated by the pandemic, has intensified these challenges within an already vulnerable system. These complex dynamics underscore the pressing need for substantial improvements to ensure equitable access to quality education.

Delhi's schools witnessed significant growth in student enrollment, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic (Bose & Sharma, 2023). The efforts have been made to improve the infrastructure, implement curriculum reforms, and enhance learning pedagogy. This notable transformation has contributed to the increased student enrolment, altering the perception of Delhi's public education system to some extent. According to the State of Public Education in Delhi (Praja, 2017), enrolment in Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) schools increased by 19%, while

schools under the Directorate of Education (DoE) experienced an 18% rise between the academic years 2018-19 and 2021-22.

Furthermore, the education sector in Delhi has witnessed a substantial increase in budgetary allocations. These financial investments have been strategically directed towards addressing longstanding challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, insufficient teacher training, and the inequitable distribution of educational resources. The aim is to tackle these structural issues and drive meaningful improvements in the overall quality and accessibility of education within the city (Jha and Goyal, 2019).

Aim and objectives of the study

This study looks at how the Delhi government spends money on school education and how that affects student learning. It identifies what is working well and what challenges the government has faced in the reform process, focusing on how financial investments influence education outcomes and performance. The goal is to provide insights into how financial investments can improve education in Delhi.

This study aims to:

a. To investigate and analyse the disparities in educational funding across government schools in Delhi.
b. To evaluate the impact of financial investments on learning outcomes in Delhi's education system.
c. To conduct a comparative analysis of budget estimates and allocations across different states, including a breakdown of sub-headings.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The financial aspects of education in Delhi have been the subject of extensive scholarly attention, given their pivotal role in catalysing significant social transformations within the educational landscape. The Delhi education system has witnessed a marked increase in budgetary allocations, strategically directed towards addressing longstanding challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, insufficient teacher training, and inequitable resource distribution. These financial investments have been carefully designed to mitigate these systemic issues and drive improvements in educational outcomes. This review provides a comprehensive analysis of the financial policies implemented by the Delhi government, evaluating both their efficacy and the challenges encountered throughout this transformative process.

Existing research emphasises the pivotal role of financial resources in shaping educational performance. The Input-Output model posits a direct relationship between financial investments and enhanced student outcomes, as well as improved educational quality (Jones & Brown, 2019). Furthermore, the Equity Theory underscores the significance of equitable resource allocation, ensuring that all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background or geographic location, receive equal learning opportunities (Johnson, 2021). This approach aims to mitigate disparities in educational resources and narrow the achievement gap among different student groups (Lee, 2023). For instance, a study by Johnson (2021) found that targeted funding in low-income urban areas led to improvements in student achievement and retention (Davis & Evans, 2022).

The "Delhi Education Revolution" exemplifies a large-scale educational reform initiative, supported by substantial financial investments in key areas such as school infrastructure, teacher training, curriculum development, and community involvement. According to The Bastion (2023), these reforms are founded on four core principles and have resulted in qualitative enhancements in education and student performance. Comparative studies of educational reforms indicate that strategic financial interventions, when combined with sustainable governance structures, are essential for achieving intended educational outcomes (Kumar & Andersson, 2021). For example, an analysis of reforms in Singapore and Finland highlighted the importance of sustained, efficient funding and targeted investments in both professional development and infrastructure as drivers of educational success.

Emerald's research (2023) emphasises the importance of financial sustainability in educational reforms. While the initial capital investment may be considerable, the long-term returns, both in educational and social terms, justify these expenditures. The study advocates for the development of sustainable funding strategies to ensure continued financial support for educational improvements beyond the initial reform phase. Global experiences with educational reforms demonstrate the effectiveness of targeted investments in school infrastructure, teacher

preparation, and public-private partnerships in enhancing learning outcomes.

The development of school infrastructure has been pivotal in improving the quality of education. A study conducted in Mumbai, India, found that schools with modernised classrooms and updated teaching aids experienced increased student attendance and better academic performance (Patel & Desai, 2022). Such enhancements create an environment conducive to active learning and more effective teaching methods.

The role of professional development for educators has been crucial in raising teaching standards and improving student outcomes. Research by Kim and Lee (2021) highlights the success of South Korea's comprehensive professional development programmes, which promote modern teaching strategies and ongoing educator training. These programmes have significantly contributed to improving the quality of instruction and student engagement.

Public-private partnerships have emerged as a valuable mechanism for enhancing educational programs. According to Johnson & Smith (2023), collaborations between schools and private organisations have provided additional resources and expertise. In the United States, partnerships with technology companies have introduced new classroom technologies, improved student IT proficiency, and increased the availability of instructional materials (Johnson & Smith, 2023).

In conclusion, the financial reforms in Delhi's education system, alongside global examples, highlight the importance of sustained investments in infrastructure, teacher training, and public-private partnerships. However, challenges related to equitable resource distribution and financial sustainability remain critical to ensuring long-term success in educational outcomes.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a secondary research approach to analyse state budget reports, focusing on classifying and categorising education-related expenditures. Government budgets traditionally divide expenditures into two main groups: 'Revenue' and 'Capital.' Prior to the 2016-17 fiscal year, there was an additional distinction between 'Plan' and 'Non-Plan' expenditures, but this has since been discontinued. Our analysis considers both 'Revenue' and 'Capital' expenditures, including the previous 'Plan' and 'Non-Plan' classifications, to gain a comprehensive understanding of financial allocations within the education sector.

To thoroughly examine school education expenditure, we analyse the budget heads '2202' and '4202', which are designated for education spending. This approach ensures the inclusion of all expenditures under these codes, regardless of the department involved. Specifically, we examine sub-major heads for 'Elementary Education' and 'Secondary Education,' as well as the general allocations under '2202-80' that contribute to school education.

Recognising that not all education-related expenditures fall under these heads, the analysis also includes spending for disadvantaged communities under budget heads '2225' and '4225,' focusing on the education minor head (277). This inclusion captures all relevant education expenditures, even when channeled through other departments.

Data Sources

The primary data for government expenditures and allocations are derived from state budget documents published by the respective Finance Departments, covering the period from 2013-14 to FY 2022-23. Additional data sources, such as the Economic Survey of Delhi, the Praja Foundation Report, and the RBI State Finance Report, are used to provide context and validate the findings.

Limitations

The methodology covers most government spending on school education, but some expenditures were unavoidably excluded. Expenditures under broad categories like 'Adult Education' and 'Art and Culture' were left out, as it was difficult to separate school-related spending from other educational components. Similarly, where it was hard to distinguish school-specific expenditures under budget heads '2225' and '4225,' those amounts were not included in the analysis.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Public finance of school education

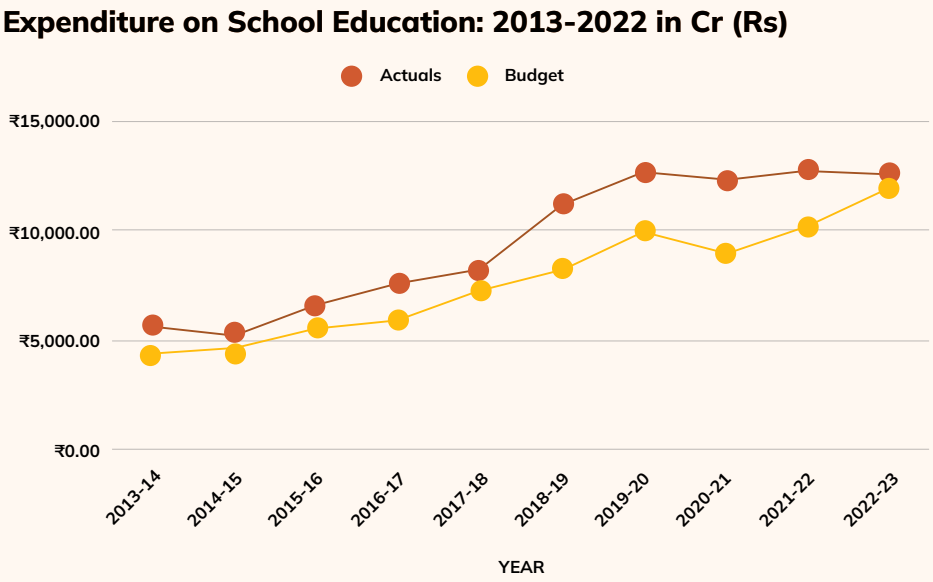
Public expenditure on school education in Delhi takes place across three levels: central, state, and local. The central government's primary contribution comes through Centrally Sponsored Schemes, which are routed via the state budget. The state government bears the majority of education spending, with a portion being provided as Grants-in-Aid to local bodies. In the case of MCDs, Grants-in-Aid (GIAs) account for over 80-90% of their education budget, rendering the state budget analysis a comprehensive representation of public education spending in Delhi.

Table 2: Expenditure on education as a percentage of GSDP of Delhi (₹ in Crores)

Years	Expenditure on Education (in Crore Rs)	Total Budget	% share of Exp in Total Budget	GSDP of Delhi at current prices (in Crore Rs)	% Exp on Edu to GSDP
2013-14	4370	34051	12.83	391125	1.11
2014-15	4755	30,940	15.36	494803	0.96
2015-16	5692	35196	16.17	550804	1.03
2016-17	6002	37263	16.12	616085	0.97
2017-18	7288	40927	17.8	677900	1.07
2018-19	8266	46245	17.87	738389	1.11
2019-20	10,017	51186	19.56	792911	1.26
2020-21	9006	52468	17.16	744277	1.12
2021-22	10,236	61172	16.73	881336	1.16
2022-23	11,934	64110	18.61	1014688	1.17
2023-24(B)	13,985	78800	17.74	1107746	1.26

In 2022-23, the Government of Delhi allocated approximately 1.17% of its Gross State Domestic Product towards school education expenditure. Despite a re-prioritization of education funding since 2014-15, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted this trend, with spending dropping from 1.26% of GSDP in 2019-20 to 1.12% in 2020-21. The full extent of the pandemic's impact on education remains unclear. Furthermore, while the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD) dedicates over 17% of its total expenditure to education, this proportionally higher figure is partially attributable to the government's relatively limited expenditure responsibilities compared to other states.

Figure 2: Government Spending on Education: Quantum and Growth



Over the past decade, Delhi's expenditure on school education has consistently risen, with the highest level of spending recorded in fiscal year 2022-23, excluding a decline in 2020-21. During this period, the average annual expenditure amounted to ₹7,743 crore, reflecting an average growth rate of 12.24% and a strengthened emphasis on education. Furthermore, the gap between budgeted and actual spending has narrowed, indicating enhanced financial management. Key indicators to examine the relationship between finance and education, such as per-student expenditure, student enrolment, and a detailed budget analysis, will be explored in the subsequent sections.

4.1.1 Per-Student Expenditure on School Education

Assessing the sufficiency of a state's education expenditure in relation to its student enrolment is essential. Table 2 outlines the financial resources allocated per student in Delhi Government schools. The per-student expenditure analysis utilises enrolment data from the U-DISE.

Table 3: Year-wise Per Child Expenditure, Annual Growth rate in Per-Child Expenditure and Total Enrolment

Year	Per-Child Expenditure (In Rs)	Annual Growth rate (%)	Total Enrolment
2013-14	27435	Base Year	15,92,813
2014-15	31265	13.96%	15,20,829
2015-16	38146	22.01%	14,92,123
2016-17	39761	4.23%	15,09,514
2017-18	49894	25.48%	14,60,675
2018-19	56226	12.69%	14,70,470
2019-20	67,215	19.54%	14,90,271
2020-21	56435	(-16.04%)	15,98,359
2021-22	59,069	4.67%	17,32,886
2022-23	66,896	13.25%	17,85,000 (estiamted

Source: (Enrollment: UDISE + 2021, Economic Survey 2023-24)

4.1.2 Financial Analysis of Per-Child Expenditure

Table 2 reveals a steady increase in per-student education expenditure from 2013-14 to 2022-23, underscoring a growing emphasis on education and improved resource allocation per student. The average per-student spending during this period is approximately ₹49,234. The highest percentage increase was observed between 2017-18 and 2019-20, while a 16.04% decline occurred in 2020-21, likely due to the pandemic's economic impact. Despite these fluctuations, the overall trend indicates a 9.04% average annual growth rate in per-student spending. However, this analysis focuses solely on per-student expenditure and does not account for factors such as inflation, population growth, or policy changes, which could influence the broader education landscape.

4.2 Expenditure and Enrollment in School Education

The expenditure on school education in Delhi is spread across the Education and Social Welfare Departments. Within the Education Department, the expenditure from specific budget heads of DoE was examined and compared with enrolment data.

Table 4: Expenditure on School Education in Delhi: 2013-14 to 2022-23 (in Rs Crores)

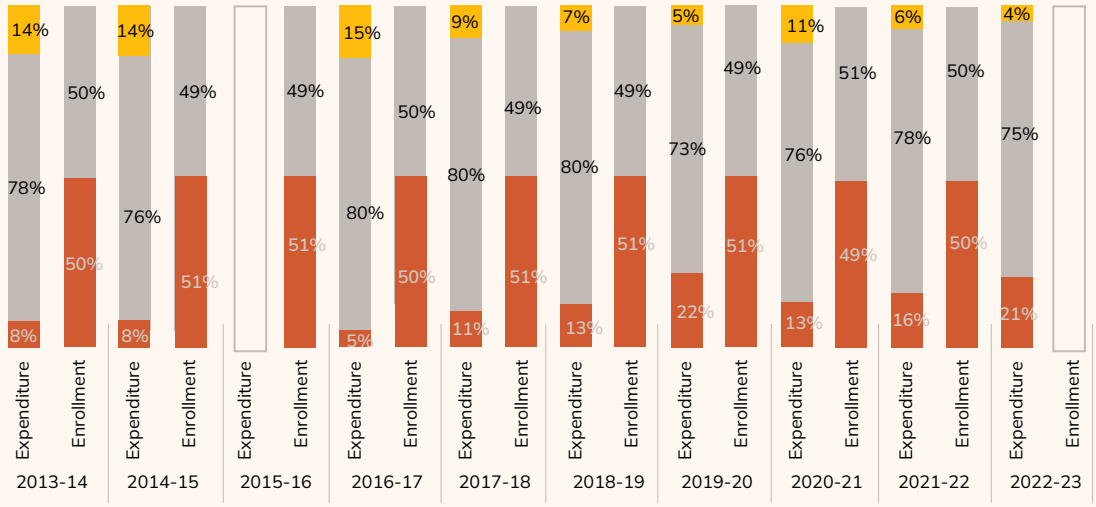
Year	Elementary Education (R)	Secondary Education ®	Capital Expenditure	Other Exp (General & Sports & Youth Service) 2202 80 + 2204	Welfare of SC/ST/ OBC	Total Expenditure (In Crore Rs)	Enrollment in Elementary Schools	Enrollment in Secondary Schools
2013-14	382	3433	43	289	222	4370	802482	790331
	(8%)	(78%)	(0.98%)	(6.60%)	(5.08%)		(50.3%)	(49.7%)
2014-15	423	3657	29	420	226	4755	774612	746217
	(8%)	(76%)	(0.60%)	(8.83%)	(4.75%)		(50.9%)	(49.1%)
2015-16						5692	761859 (51%)	730273 (49%)
2016-17	334	4865	235	430	87	6002	760137	749377
	(5%)	(80%)	(3.91%)	(7.16%)	(1.44%)		(50.3%)	(49.7%)
2017-18	861	5849	224	137	217	7288	746375	714300
	(11%)	(80%)	(3.07%)	(1.87%)	(2.97%)		(51%)	(49%)
2018-19	1123	6670	99	204	171	8268	748467	722003
	(13%)	(80%)	(1.19%)	(2.46%)	(2.06%)		(50.8%)	(49.2%)
2019-20	2211	7295	38	263	210	10,017	761303	728968
	(22%)	(72.8%)	(0.37%)	(2.62%)	(2.09%)		(51%)	(49%)
2020-21	1182	6930	3.7	865	26	9006	784135	814224
	(13%)	(76%)	(0.04%)	(9.60%)	(0.28%)		(49%)	(51%)
2021-22	1682	8083	132	231	108	10,236	858970	873916
	(16.4%)	(78%)	(1.28%)	(2.25%)	(1.05%)		(49.5%)	(50.5%)
2022-23	2526	9065	59	196	95	11,941	-	-

(Source: State Budget, Delhi., UDISE 2021)
Note:* Includes budgetary codes 2202 01, 2202 02, 2202 80, 2225 01 277, 2225 01 789)

Table 3 demonstrates a slight variation in the enrollment numbers of elementary and secondary students in Delhi government schools over time. From 2013 to 2020, the number of students enrolled in elementary schools was higher in secondary schools in absolute terms. However, students from classes 1st to 8th attend elementary schools, while those from classes 9th to 12th attend secondary schools. So, proportionally, the number of secondary education students is higher than that of elementary education students.

4.2.1 Focus towards Secondary Education in terms of Expenditure.

Figure 3: Distribution of Expenditure and Enrollment in Government Schools: Elementary vs Secondary Education(2013-14 to 2021-22)



Source: Budget Document , UDISE 2021

In absolute terms, from 2020-21 (see Figure 2), there has been higher enrolment in secondary education than elementary education in Delhi. MCD schools operate up to Class 5, leading many students to shift to Delhi Government schools afterward. As a principal from Government Co-ed Sarvodaya Vidyalaya, Rohini, explained, parents often start their children in low-fee private schools for a strong foundation but later switch to government schools due to rising fees in private institutions (Times of India, 2021).

Over 77% of the budget goes toward secondary education, maintaining a consistent expenditure on elementary and secondary education. Per-child spending is significantly higher for secondary education compared to elementary education. This investment is reflected in the consistently higher pass percentage at the Senior Secondary level in Delhi Government schools, outperforming the national average over the past eight years (Economic Survey 2023).

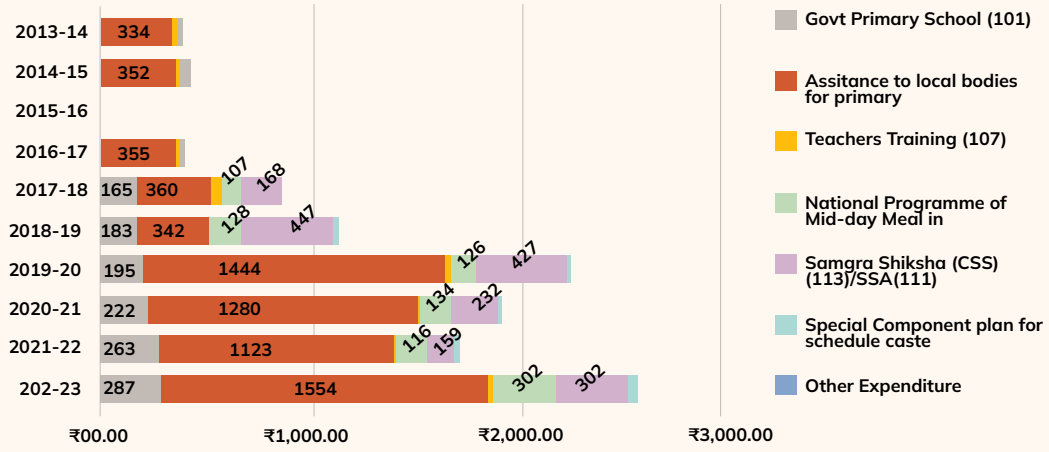
4.2.2 The Elementary Education: A Renewed Outlook

Delhi's education budget has demonstrated a renewed emphasis on elementary education. Prior to 2016-17, spending was largely limited to supporting local bodies, teacher training, and related initiatives. However, from 2017-18 to 2022-23, the expenditure portfolio has become more diversified, with investments in government primary schools growing at an average annual growth rate (AAGR) 11.78%. This increased allocation may be influenced by political considerations, as the Municipal Corporation of Delhi schools were previously under the control of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) until the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) gained the majority in recent elections.

Historically, MCD schools accounted for over 60% of elementary education expenditure, primarily funded through Grants-in-Aid from the Delhi Government, covering 80-90% of their education costs. Additionally, the Centrally Sponsored Schemes,

including the Mid-Day Meal and Samagra Shiksha programs, have seen increased spending, with the state and central governments sharing costs in a 60:40 ratio. The Samagra Shiksha program has replaced earlier initiatives like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha, expanding its scope to include grants for infrastructure, general aid, and salaries. In 2022-23, the Centrally Sponsored Schemes made up over 25% of the total expenditure, with spending trends generally rising, except during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 4: Expenditure on the Elementary Education from (2013-14) to (2022-23)



Teacher training expenditure averaged ₹10 crore annually over the past five years. Overall, Delhi's growing and diversified spending on elementary education emphasizes infrastructure, governance, and inclusive education, aligning with broader reforms like the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

4.3. Functional Areas within School Education

The data indicates increased investment in Delhi's education system. This investment targeted key areas such as infrastructure upgrades, universal access to education, dropout reintegration, vocational courses, and digital learning, in line with the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020. As Delhi aims to meet global standards, budget allocations reflect the government's priorities, with initiatives focused on improving educational access, innovation, and skill development.

Figure 5: Expenditure on the Core Areas (Functional Areas) from the Year (2013-14)to(2022-23)

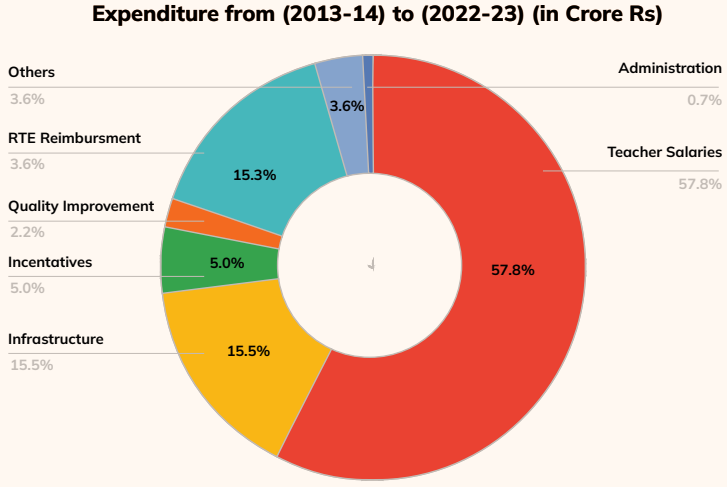


Table 5: **Detailed figures of the Functional Areas**

Year	Admin	Teacher Salaries	Infrastructure	Incentives	Quality Improvement	RTE Reimbursement	Others
2013-14	33	2454	842	269	58	15	30
2014-15	34	2676	949	255	64	26	102
2015-16	45	3399	1460	278	78	37	123
2016-17	49	3343	1980	271	125	38	107
2017-18	59	4042	862	428	98	58	321
2018-19	52	4655	578	416	239	79	417
2019-20	54	5107	1446	512	191	168	512
2020-21	51	5033	721	212	87	218	298
2021-22	47	5430	1409	426	388	307	245
2022-23	58	6146	1071	608	267	211	466
Total	**482**	**42285**	**11318**	**3675**	**1595**	**11157**	**2621**

The breakdown of education sector spending from 2013-14 to 2022-23, as shown in Table 4, highlights the government's priorities. The largest share, 57.8%, is allocated to teacher salaries, emphasising the importance placed on maintaining a stable and well-compensated workforce. Infrastructure spending, at 15.5%, demonstrates a strong focus on developing educational facilities. Additionally, 15.3% of the budget is dedicated to Right to Education (RTE) reimbursements, ensuring equitable access to education. Incentives such as scholarships and subsidies receive 5.0%, while quality improvement initiatives account for only 2.2%, suggesting potential for further investment in raising educational standards. Miscellaneous expenditures make up 3.6%, and administrative costs are kept relatively low at 0.7%. Overall, the spending pattern prioritises salaries and infrastructure, with a more modest focus on access and quality improvements.

5. FINDINGS: A CLOSER EXAMINATION OF THE EDUCATION BUDGET

The Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SMSA),, India's primary initiative for universal education, faces ongoing budgetary constraints. In states like Delhi, the approved budget for this programme has consistently fallen short of government proposals, reflecting broader issues of inadequate school funding. For instance, funding for the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan in 2020-21 was just 58% of the previous year's spending, exacerbating existing resource shortages.

A key component of the SMSA, Special Training Centres for out-of-school children, plays a crucial role, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, many areas lack these training centres due to insufficient school infrastructure, and funding has been reduced instead of increased. The budget per child remains low at ₹6,000, and the overall allocation for the Special Training Centres and skill training initiatives is inadequate to address the growing needs. Additionally, unutilized funds in secondary education add to the inefficiencies, with schools struggling to manage funds due to administrative burdens and unpredictable disbursements.

Furthermore, the lack of comprehensive school mapping in Delhi reflects a critical gap in the implementation of the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, limiting effective educational planning. The Mid-Day Meal programme, another crucial initiative, also faces budget cuts and irregular distribution, exacerbated by the pandemic. A significant reduction in grants for local body schools has led to layoffs of contract teachers, delayed salaries, and lower per-student expenditure compared to central government-run schools.

Funding for scholarship programs targeting marginalised students has been drastically reduced, with the budget allocation in 2020-21 plummeting to just 10% of the previous year's level,

consequently leading to a decline in the number of beneficiaries. The policy shift from providing broad-based scholarships to prioritising private coaching support for high-achieving students raises concerns regarding the government's strategic priorities. Furthermore, the centralised National Scholarship Portal (NSP) system has become increasingly challenging for students to access due to bureaucratic obstacles and irregular disbursement of funds.

Difficulties also extend to the implementation of other entitlements under the RTE Act, including delayed payments for school uniforms and the complexities associated with the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) initiative, exacerbated by the lack of adequate Aadhaar coverage. Approximately 25% of students in Delhi government schools lack Aadhaar cards, contributing to exclusions in the delivery of these benefits. Despite improvements in school infrastructure, more fundamental structural challenges continue to persist.

5.1 Infrastructure

Table 5 provides an overview of the status of core facilities in schools from 2016-17 to 2022-23, indicating a consistent enhancement of educational infrastructure. The availability of playgrounds increased from 87.37% in 2016-17 to 96.3% in 2022-23. Essential amenities such as boundary walls, gender-segregated toilet facilities, and drinking water sources have maintained near-universal accessibility. Electricity access likewise improved, reaching 100% from 2017-18, up from 99.9% in the preceding year. Notably, the provision of computer facilities has seen substantial growth, rising from 87.18% in 2016-17 to 98.74% in 2022-23. Nevertheless, the infrastructure landscape remains uneven, with disparities observed across different school categories and geographical locations.

Table 6: Percentage of schools having access to basic infrastructure facilities from 2016-17 to 2022-23

% of Schools having Access to	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Playgrounds	87.37	88.06	85.89	88.28	93.27	96.47	96.3
Boundary wall	99.9	99.88	100	100	100	100	100
Girls Toilets	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Boys Toilets	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Drinking Water Facility	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Electricity Connection	99.9	100	100	100	100	100	100
Computer Facility	87.18	88.82	89.26	97.56	100	100	98.74

Source: UDISE 2021-22

The number of DoE schools in Delhi increased from 992 in 2013-14 to 1,047 in 2021-22. According to the Economic Survey, around 20,000 additional classrooms became functional in 2021–22, with 27 new school buildings completed citywide. Sanctions were issued for 20 more school buildings by the PWD and 8 by DTTDC. Of the 728 school buildings, CCTVs have been installed in 619, with work underway in 19 more, and the remaining 90 will start once sites are available. Additionally, the construction of 982 classrooms is ongoing, set for completion in 2023-24, along with continued development of geography and science labs, strengthening the three-tier library system, and ongoing repairs and maintenance.

5.2 ENROLLMENT IN SCHOOLS

Over the past eight years, enrollment in Delhi's state government schools has fluctuated. From 2014-15 to 2017-18, there was a steady decline, possibly due to students moving to private schools or issues within the public education system. However, from 2018-19 onwards, enrolment began rising, with a notable 9% increase in 2021-22. This growth may be attributed to improvements in school facilities, educational reforms, and the financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led many families to choose public schools.

Table 7: Enrollments of students in various schools from 2014-15 to 2021-22

Total Enrollments in Delhi Government Schools from 2014-15 to 2021-22								
Type of School	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
MCD	9,14,585	8,95,437	8,52,008	7,91,040	7,61,410	7,67,352	7,94,776	9,05,405
% Change in Enrolments Year on Year	2%	-2%	-5%	-7%	-4%	1%	4%	14%
State Government	15,38,068	15,09,264	15,27,543	14,81,014	14,98,085	15,19,651	16,19,726	17,62,480
% Change in Enrolments Year on year	-3%	-2%	1%	-3%	1%	1%	7%	9%
Central Government (K.V.)	1,01,235	1,06,618	1,10,546	1,11,174	1,15,596	1,19,347	1,24,591	1,25,839
% Change in Enrolments Year on Year	3%	5%	4%	1%	4%	3%	4%	1%
Other School	18,54,441	19,15,656	19,49,712	20,05,078	20,41,680	20,67,293	19,37,540	17,78,383
% Change in Enrolments Year on year	16%	3%	2%	3%	2%	1%	-6%	-8%
Other schools include: Central Govt, Government Aided, Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya, Other Govt. managed schools, Private Unaided (Recognized), Social welfare Department, Tribal Welfare Department								

Enrollment trends across different school types in Delhi reflect broader social and educational changes. After years of stagnation, state government schools have seen a rebound, likely due to quality improvements, increased accessibility, and the economic impact of the pandemic. Central government schools remain consistently popular, while fluctuating enrolments in the Municipal Corporation of Delhi and other schools suggest changing public confidence in various education systems. These trends indicate a shifting educational landscape in Delhi, where state-run government schools are increasingly becoming the preferred choice for many families.

5.3 PASS PERCENTAGE

Table 8: Pass percentage of cbse results in delhi and india: 2016 to 2023

PASS PERCENTAGE OF CBSE RESULTS IN DELHI AND INDIA: 2016 to 2023									
Area	Class Level	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Delhi	Secondary	89.25	92.44	68.9	71.58	82.6	97.5	97	91.1
	Sr. Secondary	88.91	88.27	90.64	94.24	97.9	99.9	98	94.1
All India	Secondary	96.21	93.06	86.7	91.1	91.4	99.04	94.4	93.1
	Sr. Secondary	83.05	82.02	83.01	83.4	88.7	99.37	92.71	87.3
Directorate of education, GNCTD									

Delhi's secondary-level examination results generally lagged behind the national average, particularly in 2018 when the pass rate was significantly lower (68.9%) compared to the national average of 86.7%. However, by 2021, Delhi's pass rate had surpassed the national average (97.5% vs. 99.04%), reflecting a significant improvement. At the senior secondary level, Delhi's pass rates have been more closely aligned with, and at times have even exceeded, the national average. In 2021, Delhi's senior secondary pass percentage was exceptionally high (99.9%), almost reaching the national average of 99.37%. While a post-pandemic decline was observed in 2023, with Delhi slightly trailing the national average (94.1% vs. 93.1%), the overall performance remained robust.

The data suggests that Delhi's education system has undergone a period of substantial transformation, particularly at the secondary level. It transitioned from a period of struggle in 2018 to achieving some of the highest pass rates by 2021. This may reflect the impact of targeted educational reforms, improved teaching methods, or a greater emphasis on student support systems. The slight declines seen in 2023 could indicate a return to more stringent assessment standards post-pandemic, but the overall trajectory remains positive. The relatively stable and strong performance at the senior secondary level suggests that the foundations laid in the earlier years have effectively supported students as they progress to higher education.

Table 9: Comparison between State Government and Private Schools: X Results

Year	Government schools		Private Schools Pass In (%)	Overall Pass in(%)
	State Government Pass in(%)	Central Government Pass in (%)		
Mar-16	89.25%	99.52%	95.43%	91.76%
Mar-17	92.44%	99.83%	92.85%	-
Mar-18	68.90%	97.03%	89.45%	78.62%
Mar-19	71.58%	99.79%	93.18%	80.97%
Mar-20	82.61%	99.23%	90.19%	85.86%
Mar-21	97.52%	100%	-	98.19%
Mar-22	81.27%	96.61%	96.86%	86.55%
Data for private schools is not being maintained separately for March 2021, and detailed information has not been uploaded on the website				

Table 10: Comparison between State Government and Private Schools: XII Results

Year	Government schools		Private Schools Pass In (%)	Overall Pass in(%)
	State Government Pass in(%)	Central Government Pass in (%)		
Mar-15	88.11%	95.94%	89.75%	86.13%
Mar-16	88.91%	95.71%	86.67%	87.01%
Mar-17	88.27%	95.96%	84.02%	88.37%
Mar-18	90.64%	98.06%	89.38%	89%
Mar-19	94.24%	99.43%	82.59%	91.87%
Mar-20	97.92%	98.62%	82.59%	94.39%
Mar-21	99.95%	100%	82.59%	99.84%
Mar-22	96.29%	97.04%	82.59%	96.29%

While comparing X and XII results (tables 8 and 9) over the years from 2015 to 2022, they reveal distinct trends in the performance of state government and private schools. State government schools demonstrated fluctuating pass rates, particularly in the X results, where their performance saw significant dips in 2018 and 2019 followed by a strong recovery during the pandemic years, reaching a peak in 2021. This variability suggests that state government schools faced challenges, especially the poor learning outcome of students in the 9th standard, but also benefitted from interventions or relaxed evaluation criteria during the COVID-19 period. In contrast, their XII results reflect a more consistent upward trajectory, especially post-2018, culminating in a remarkable 99.95% pass rate in 2021 before a slight decline in 2022.

While private schools consistently outperformed state government schools in the earlier years of the period, especially in X results, the latter's significant improvements, particularly during the pandemic, allowed them to occasionally surpass or closely match private schools' performance. This suggests that while private schools offer steady and reliable outcomes, state government schools, despite their earlier struggles, have shown considerable potential for improvement when provided with the right support and circumstances.

Overall, the comparison reveals that state government schools, though initially lagging, have demonstrated a capacity for substantial improvement, narrowing the gap with private schools. However, sustaining this progress in the long term remains crucial for ensuring consistent educational quality across all school types.

5.4 Learning outcome & management performance

Table 11: Performance by School Management (VIII standard)

Subject		Percentage correct answer				Percentage of children							
						At basic and below basic level				At proficient and advance level			
		State	Aided	Private	Central	State	Aided	Private	Central	State	Aided	Private	Central
Language	State	49	52	69	60	77	69	36	53	23	31	64	47
	National	48	48	60	59	75	75	54	56	25	25	46	44
Mathematics	State	30	30	44	38	90	88	58	71	10	12	42	29
	National	36	31	38	39	72	84	70	68	28	16	30	32
Science	State	35	36	50	44	86	81	48	63	14	19	52	37
	National	38	35	43	44	75	83	65	63	25	17	35	37
Social Science	State	34	36	46	39	94	92	67	9	6	8	33	18
	National	39	36	41	40	87	87	78	79	21	13	22	21

Source: NAS Report 2021

Table 12: Performance by School Management (X standard)

Subject		Percentage correct answer				Percentage of children							
						At basic and below basic level				At proficient and advance level			
		State	Aided	Private	Central	State	Aided	Private	Central	State	Aided	Private	Central
Language	State	30	30	41	35	84	82	54	69	16	18	46	31
	National	32	29	34	36	78	87	74	66	22	13	46	34
Mathematics	State	34	36	48	43	94	91	65	78	6	9	35	22
	National	34	32	37	41	93	98	87	81	7	2	13	19
Science	State	37	39	55	47	89	83	45	64	11	17	55	36
	National	35	34	40	44	89	93	79	71	11	7	21	29
Social Science	State	48	53	71	59	25	19	6	15	75	81	94	85
	National	39	37	50	54	47	49	31	24	53	51	69	76
MIL	State	47	46	51	46	82	83	72	81	18	17	28	19
	National	39	40	43	45	92	92	87	81	8	8	13	19

Source: NAS Report 2021

The data from the NAS Report 2021 provides a detailed analysis of student performance across various subjects in different types of schools:

8th Standard (see Table 10):

1. Language

1. **State Schools:** 49% of students answered correctly, with 77% at basic or below basic levels, and only 23% achieving proficient or advanced levels.
2. **Comparison:** Private schools performed better with 60% correct answers and 46% proficiency, while aided schools were on par with state schools at 52% correct answers. Central schools outperformed others with 69% correct answers and 44% proficiency. Nationally, the performance was slightly better, with 60% correct answers and 46% proficiency.

2. Mathematics

1. **State Schools:** Only 30% of students answered correctly, with a large 90% at basic or below basic levels and just 10% reaching proficiency.
2. **Comparison:** Private schools again performed better with 44% correct answers and 42% proficiency, while aided schools matched the state schools with 30% correct. Central schools led with 38% correct answers and 32% proficiency. Nationally, the performance was also higher, with 38% correct answers and 32% proficiency.

3. Science

1. **State Schools:** 35% of students had correct answers, with 86% at the basic or below basic levels, and 14% proficient.
2. **Comparison:** Private schools did better with 50% correct answers and 37% proficiency, while aided schools were slightly better than state schools with 36% correct. Central schools again outperformed with 46% correct answers and 37% proficiency. Nationally, performance was higher, with 43% correct answers and 37% proficiency.

4. Social Science

1. **State Schools:** 34% of students answered correctly, with 94% at basic or below basic levels and only 6% at proficient levels.
2. **Comparison:** Private schools led with 46% correct answers and 33% proficiency. Aided schools performed similarly to state schools, with 36% correct. Central schools, despite achieving 39% correct answers, demonstrated a higher proficiency rate of 18%. National performance was better overall, with 41% correct answers and 21% proficiency.

10th Standard (See Table 11)

1. Language

1. **State Schools:** 30% correct answers, with 84% at basic or below basic levels, and only 16% proficient.
2. **Comparison:** Private schools performed significantly better with 41% correct answers and 46% proficiency. Aided schools matched state schools with 30% correct. Central schools again led with 35% correct answers and 31% proficiency. Nationally, the performance was slightly better, with 34% correct answers and 34% proficiency.

2. Mathematics:

1. **State Schools:** 34% correct answers, with a massive 94% at basic or below basic levels, and only 6% reaching proficiency.
2. **Comparison:** Private schools performed better with 48% correct answers and 35% proficiency, while aided schools lagged behind state schools with 32% correct. Central schools performed similarly to private schools with 43% correct answers and 22% proficiency. Nationally, the performance was higher, with 37% correct answers and 19% proficiency.

3. Science:

1. **State Schools:** 37% correct answers, with 89% at basic or below basic levels, and only 11% proficient.
2. **Comparison:** Private schools outperformed with 50% correct answers and 55% proficiency, while aided schools were lower than state schools with 35% correct. Central schools again performed better with 45% correct answers and 29% proficiency. National performance was slightly higher with 40% correct answers and 29% proficiency.

4. Social Science:

1. **State Schools:** 48% correct answers, with 75% at basic or below basic levels, and 25% proficiency.

2. **Comparison:** Private schools were significantly better with 71% correct answers and 69% proficiency, while aided schools performed similarly to state schools with 53% correct. Central schools outperformed all others with 59% correct answers and 85% proficiency. Nationally, the performance was slightly better with 54% correct answers and 47% proficiency.

State-run schools lag behind private institutions and national benchmarks across both 8th and 10th grade subjects. The discrepancy is particularly pronounced in Mathematics and Science, where a significant proportion of state school students exhibit only basic or below-basic proficiency, with a limited number reaching the proficient level. Conversely, private schools consistently outperform their state-run counterparts in all subjects, with a greater share of students achieving proficient and advanced achievement levels. Meanwhile, government-aided schools generally matched or modestly underperformed state schools in most subjects, positioning them as the least successful management type in several instances.

5.5 Enrollment in Nios

Table 13: Student enrollments in Patrachar and NIOS schools in the following year in comparison to numbers of students who failed in class 9 and 11

	Indicator	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Status of State School Students in 9th standard	Total NO Of Students Enrolled in 9th Std	2,59,705	2,88,094	3,11,824	2,89,682	2,81,346	2,92,450	2,51,334	2,53,854
	No of Students who Failed in 9th Std	1,17,087	1,24,029	1,72,995	1,17,119	1,24,072	60,635	42,401	NA.
	Students Enrolled in Patrachar/NIOS in the Following Years		3,165	65,451	2,830	21,542	21,857	15,525	473**
	Total No of Students Missing Out of the Education System	-	1,13,922	58,578	1,70,165	95,577	1,02,215	45,110	41,928**
Status of State School Students in 11th standard	Total No of Students Enrolled in 11th Std	2,04,051	1,66,150	1,50,480	1,71,613	1,36,300	1,67,082	1,69,413	2,45,724
	No of Students who Failed in 11th	70,640	43,142	36,304	39,819	24,138	5,420	4,008	NA*
	Students Enrolled in Patrachar in the Following Years		7,032	6,373	5,533	7,077	5,978	1,732	1,587
	No of Students Missing Out of the school system		63,608	36,769	30,771	32,742	18,160	3,688	2,421

According to the Praja Foundation report 2022, although there has been a decline in the number of students failing in grades 9 and 11, enrolment in the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) remains low. This suggests that a significant proportion of students are dropping out of the education system altogether. The situation is particularly dire for grade 9 students.

1. Out of the students who failed 9th grade in 2019-20, only 26% enrolled in Patrachar and NIOS for the 10th standard exam in 2020-21. What happened to the remaining 74% who failed 9th grade? [The pass rate for students who took the Patrachar 10th standard exam was 39% in March 2022, while it was 81.27% for the 10th standard state board exam in the same period.]

2. Out of the students who failed 11th grade in 2020-21, only 40% enrolled in Patrachar for the 12th standard exam in 2021-22. What happened to the remaining 60% who failed 11th grade? [The pass rate for the Patrachar 12th standard exams was 70% in March 2022, while it was 96% for the 12th standard state board exam in the same period.]

The data highlights a concerning trend of students either dropping out or failing to transition to open schooling systems after setbacks in the traditional academic pathway.

Table 14: Student enrollments in Patrachar and NIOS schools in comparison to fall in enrollments from Class 9 to Class 10 in State Government schools

	Year	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
State Government Schools	9th Enrollment	2,59,705	2,88,094	3,11,824	2,89,682	2,81,346	2,92,450	2,51,334	2,53,854
	10th Enrollment	1,40,570	1,42,618	1,64,065	1,38,829	1,72,563	1,57,274	2,31,815	2,08,933
	Number of students who did not go from 9th to 10th Standard	1,17,087	1,24,029	1,72,995	1,17,119	1,24,072	60,635	42,401	-
	%	45%	43%	55%	40%	44%	21%	17%	-
Patrachar	10th standard	2,04,051	1,66,150	1,50,480	1,71,613	1,36,300	1,67,082	1,69,413	2,45,724
	Enrollment	1,656	3,165	65,451	2,830	4,037	3,233	530	473
	Number of students who appeared for 10th Board exam	1,516	2,900	62,275	2,663	3,163	3,000	455	443
	Number of students who passed	25	74	1,351	248	1,027	797	213	174
	Pass Percentage	2%	3%	2%	9%	32%	27%	47%	39%
NIOS	10th standard								
	Enrollment	-	-	-	-	17,505	18,624	14,995	-
	Number of students who appeared for 10th Board exam	-	-	-	-	17,505	18,624	14,995	-
	Number of	-	-	-	-				-
	students who passed	-	-	-	-	12,096	17,737	14,995	-
	Pass Percentage	-	-	-	-	69%	95%	100%	-

Table 15: Student enrollments in Patrachar schools in comparison to fall in enrollments from Class 11 to Class 12 in State Government schools

	Year	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
State Government Schools	11th Enrollment	2,04,051	1,66,150	1,50,480	1,71,613	1,36,300	1,67,082	1,69,413	2,45,724
	12th Enrollment	1,41,891	1,33,411	1,23,008	1,14,176	1,31,794	1,12,162	1,61,662	1,65,405
	Number of students who did not go from 11th to 12th standard	70,640	43,142	36,304	39,819	24,138	5,420	4,008	-
	%	35%	26%	24%	23%	18%	3%	2%	-
Patrachar	12th standard	2,04,051	1,66,150	1,50,480	1,71,613	1,36,300	1,67,082	1,69,413	2,45,724
	Enrollment	6,652	7,032	6,373	5,533	7,077	5,978	1,732	1,587
	Number of students who appeared for 12th Board exam	6,060	6,355	5,248	5,172	6,028	5,666	1,580	1,506
	Number of students who passed	1326	2098	2,026	2361	3,195	3,712	916	1,050
	Pass Percentage	22%	33%	39%	46%	53%	66%	58%	70%

The academic literature has highlighted significant systemic challenges within the Delhi government school system that call into question the integrity and fairness of the educational outcomes. Allegations have emerged of data manipulation, student filtering, and a lack of transparency behind the seemingly high performance of these schools in CBSE Class 10 and 12 examinations. According to reports, the government has been redirecting students who repeatedly fail in Classes 9 and 11 to alternative schooling options like Patrachar Vidyalaya or open board exams, while reclassifying them as "regular" Class 10 students and placing them in specially designated "Vishwas" sections. This practice effectively removes their passing ratios from the school's performance metrics, artificially inflating the overall success rates. Interviews with various school stakeholders, including principals, teachers, students, and parents, suggest a conscious effort to filter out struggling students in order to boost the school's passing percentages. Patrachar Vidyalaya receives many of these students, particularly from the "Vishwas" group. The proliferation of parallel schooling systems, such as those affiliated with the NIOS, has been identified as a mechanism to segregate weaker students from the regular pass percentages, thereby obscuring the true educational outcomes.

A significant proportion of students who remain in the education system are directed towards alternative schooling options, such as enrolling in the NIOS boards within their government schools or the CBSE Patrachar Vidyalaya program. Despite observed improvements in pass percentages, the academic performance of Patrachar Vidyalaya schools continues to be suboptimal, with passing rates of only 39% for Class 10 and 70% for Class 12. Qualitative evidence gathered through interviews with parents and students who have either withdrawn from the system or enrolled in Patrachar Vidyalaya suggests a lack of adequate counselling and support from the government schools, which has contributed to elevated dropout rates. The systemic failure to effectively address these high dropout rates is evident in the insufficient assistance and interventions provided to struggling students.

While initiatives like Mission Chunauti aim to support underperforming students, the reality is a systematic process of segregation and exclusion starting as early as Class 6. Students who underperform are placed in separate classrooms, leading to less attention from teachers and eventual removal from the system by Class 9. This early filtering exacerbates dropout rates and undermines the inclusivity that Mission Chunauti was intended to promote.

A related issue is the discouragement of students from taking science subjects in senior secondary classes, further exacerbating educational inequality. A 2022 RTI inquiry found that only 279 out of 838 higher secondary schools offer science courses. Many schools, particularly girls' schools, do not actively encourage science education due to concerns that poor performance in these subjects would adversely impact overall pass rates. This gender bias restricts educational opportunities for female students and perpetuates stereotypes, especially in science-related fields. Inadequate government funding (62.19 Lakh) for education also contributes to this discouragement.

5.6 Enrollment In Government Schools & Amount Of Student Completing School Education

Table 16: Total enrollments in State Government Schools from Class 7 to Class 12

Class	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
7	2,24,239	2,09,637	2,14,434	2,13,926	2,04,960	2,10,446	2,17,933	2,38,191
8	2,17,008	2,18,431	2,06,602	2,08,427	2,12,280	2,07,531	2,15,466	2,41,324
9	2,59,705	2,88,094	3,11,824	2,89,682	2,81,346	2,92,450	2,51,334	2,53,854
10	1,40,570	1,42,618	1,64,065	1,38,829	1,72,563	1,57,274	2,31,815	2,08,933
11	2,04,051	1,66,150	1,50,480	1,71,613	1,36,300	1,67,082	1,69,413	2,45,724
12	1,41,891	1,33,411	1,23,008	1,14,176	1,31,794	1,12,162	1,61,662	1,65,405

5.7 DROP OUT

Table 17: Total Dropouts in State Government Schools from 2014-15 to 2021-22

	Year	No. of Schools	Total No. of Students	No. of Schools	No. of Students	DropOut	Dropout %	Estimated Drop out in Numbers
State Government	2014-15	999	15,38,068	371	5,28,394	15,459	3	44,999
	2015-16	1,009	15,09,264	396	5,60,264	17,210	3	46,361
	2016-17	1,017	15,27,543	749	11,33,813	38,130	3	51,371
	2017-18	1,019	14,81,014	916	13,02,426	41,020	3	46,645
	2018-19	1,022	14,98,085	505	7,49,975	28,741	4	57,411
	2019-20	1,026	15,19,651	282	-	10,447	2	37,962
	2020-21	1,027	16,19,726	291	-	5,589	1	19,513
	2021-22	1,047	17,62,480	-	-	-	-	-

For estimation purposes, from academic year 2014-15 to 2018-19, from the data received of dropout and enrolment numbers, the proportion of dropout students to enrolment numbers calculated has then been used to calculate the estimate of the overall dropout for that year with the overall enrolment number. However, for 2019-20 and 2020-21, since school-wise enrolment could not be mapped for the schools where dropout data was received, the average per school dropout (calculated above, mentioned in the inferences) has been taken and multiplied with the total number of schools in those years to get the estimated dropout rate for all state schools.

While the Delhi government has celebrated improvements in the pass percentages for Classes 10 and 12 in CBSE board examinations, the results for Class 9 remain a significant concern. Students who fail twice are at high risk of dropping out, highlighting the need for immediate support. The pass percentage for Class 9 students in Delhi government schools has declined sharply, dropping from 84.72% in 2019-20 to 65.52% in 2022-23, below pre-pandemic levels. In 2018-19, around 42% of students failed, and the government reported that 40% of those who failed ultimately dropped out of school. (Indian Express)

5.8 SHORTAGE OF SCHOOLS & CLASSROOMS

The number of government schools in Delhi is severely lacking. The city's schooling structure comprises 1670 MCD primary schools and 1027 DoE schools, some of which are composite, while the rest extend from Class 6 onwards (UDISE, 2020-1). A large proportion of Government Schools (GSs) operate in shifts, implying that the actual number of school sites is lower than the total count. In fact, more than half of all GSs run in shifts, with two-thirds of government school enrolment in these shift-based schools.

The Delhi government's school infrastructure is plagued by severe classroom shortages. Approximately 89% of schools under the DoE and 70% of MCD schools lack sufficient classroom space, with the deficit being particularly acute in Directorate of Education institutions, where 40% face acute deficits (2019-20). Estimates suggest that more than doubling the existing public schooling capacity would be required to address the shortage of government school infrastructure in the city.

To address this issue, the proposed solution entails establishing an additional 632 composite government schools and 275 primary government schools, coupled with expanding the classroom capacity of existing institutions. Implementing this plan would necessitate a significant expansion in the overall number of government schools and the recruitment of a larger teaching workforce. Estimates suggest that an investment amounting to up to 0.71% of Delhi's Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP), representing a 50% increase from current levels, would be required to tackle both the infrastructural and staffing deficits.

5.9 WORKING STAFF

Table 18: Department and post wise overall number of personnel as on 31st December 2021

Name of Post	Sanc-tioned	Work-ing	Con-trac-tual **	Vacant %
Education Departmental Staff				
DOE* HQ Department	63	40	-	37%
Secretariat Recruitment & Promotion Unit	139	50	-	64%
Ministerial Staff	3,373	1,410	-	58%
EX-cadre Post	157	106	-	69%
Gazette officer Cell	945	803	-	15%
Total	**4,677**	**2,409**	**0**	**50%**
Teaching Staff				
Principal	1,853	342	-	82%
Vice Principal	3,316	2,365	-	29%
Lecturers & Guest Teachers	19,178	13,657	3,189	12%
Total Teaching Staff	**24,347**	**16,364**	**3,189**	**20%**
Grand Total	**29,024**	**18,773**	**3,189**	**25%**

Note: Contractual staff was given for only Lecturer's & Guest Teachers

Another report highlighted critical gaps in Delhi government school staffing. It found a shortfall in the number of regular teachers, with the remaining responsibilities filled by guest teachers. There was a significant disparity between the sanctioned and filled positions, affecting both teaching and non-teaching staff.

As of 31st December 2021, the Directorate of Education had 29,024 sanctioned personnel posts, but only 21,962 were occupied (working and contractual), resulting in a 25% shortfall. The overall vacancy rate in the state education department was 50%, while the teaching staff vacancy stood at 20% during the same period.

The centralised and hierarchical structure of the school system curtails teachers' creativity and independence, leading to widespread frustration. Fieldwork in MCD and DoE schools revealed that teachers frequently feel "not free to teach" due to being overwhelmed with administrative responsibilities. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers had to devote significant time to compiling and reporting data on distributed and received worksheets. This routine applies across various curricula, leaving little scope for lesson preparation or student engagement. The administrative burden has become a systemic issue, with teachers perceiving themselves as mere paperwork processors rather than focusing on education. Compliance with numerous directives from government bodies further adds to their workload, often involving tasks perceived as superficial and unnecessary, such as taking pledges, making posters, and recording activities. A study commissioned by the GNCTD found that 66% of teachers identified non-teaching duties as a major impediment to effective teaching, with 93% indicating that paperwork consumes much of their time. In DoE schools, inadequate clerical staff exacerbates these issues, compelling teachers to handle administrative tasks, a problem also prevalent in MCD schools where IT or clerical positions are frequently unfilled.

5.10 School Development Plan

According to Section 22 of the Right to Education (RTE) Act 2009, every School Management Committee (SMC) constituted under Section 21 shall prepare a School Development Plan (SDP), which shall be the basis for the plans and grants to be formulated by the appropriate government or local authority. The SDP is to be prepared and signed by the principal, who is the chairperson of the SMC, and then submitted to the relevant education department before the close of the financial year to enable school-wise planning and appropriate allocation in the budget based upon requirements from the school.

Out of the 157 state schools, the proportion of schools that did not prepare the SDP increased from 32% in 2019-20 to 50% in 2021-22.

Table 19: Number of schools that prepared School Development Plan(SDP) in 2019-20 and 2021-22

District	Total Number of Schools	Number of schools (Data Received)	School Development Plan Prepared					
			2019-20		2020-21		2021-22	
			Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Central	40	13	85%	15%	54%	46%	54%	46%
East	117	25	20%	80%	4%	96%	4%	96%
North West A	110	68	78%	22%	65%	35%	69%	31%
North West B	134	38	66%	34%	47%	53%	47%	53%
West B	82	13	92%	8%	38%	62%	38%	62%
Grand Total	**483**	**157**	**68%**	**32%**	**48%**	**52%**	**50%**	**50%**

5.11 UNDER- UTILIZATION OF BUDGET

Table 20: Number of schools that prepared School Development Plan(SDP) in 2019-20 and 2021-22

Particular	B.E	Not Utilised	B.E	Not Utilised	B.E	Not Utilised	B.E	Not Utilised	B.E	Not Utilised	B.E	B.E
	2016-17		2017-18		2018-19		2019-20		2020-21		2021-22	2022-23
Total students	15,27,543		14,81,014		14,98,085		15,19,651		16,19,726		17,62,480	17,62,480
State Education Budget	7,508	20%	7,815	10%	10,963	NA**	12,443	21%	12,146	26%	12,659	12,378
Per Child Budget (In rupees)	49,153	9792 (20%)	52,770	5,019 (10%)	73,182		81,881	17,344 (21%)	74,989	19,548 (26%)	71,825	70,232

Out of the state budget allocation, 26% was not utilized in 2020-21. (Praja Report,2021)

5.12 CHALLENGES OF DIRECT BANK TRANSFER

The implementation of Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) in various government programs has led to significant issues, particularly in terms of exclusions and delays in payments. Many deserving households have been unable to access funds due to backend failures, resulting in rejected, blocked, or diverted payments. Schools also face this issue, as students without bank accounts cannot receive their entitlements, including money for the Mid-Day Meal (MDM) scheme.

Opening a bank account, especially one linked to Aadhaar, has become increasingly challenging for students due to requirements like an initial deposit, which is often unaffordable for low-income families. The lockdown exacerbated these issues, making it difficult for students to obtain Aadhaar cards or open bank accounts. Even after opening accounts, backend failures frequently result in non-receipt of payments.

Teachers are tasked with helping students open bank accounts but are not involved in ensuring that funds are credited to the accounts. There is a lack of communication and transparency from the government regarding the flow of funds, and teachers report that complaints through official channels go unresolved. The government's focus on efficiency and cost-saving through DBT has inadvertently led to the exclusion of many beneficiaries and increased uncertainty. There is an urgent need to streamline and make the payment system more inclusive to ensure that all eligible students receive their entitled benefits.

5.13 COVID: An Anomaly

i. **Decline in education spending:** In the years leading up to the pandemic, spending on school education in Delhi showed a gradual increase, with a 6% rise between 2017-18 and 2018-19 and a further 10.3% increase between 2018-19 and 2019-20. A significant rise in capital expenditure, which more than doubled in a year, primarily drove this growth, reflecting the need to expand the capacity of public schools. However, the pandemic caused a sharp 12% decline in overall education spending in 2020-21, severely affecting both central and state schemes, especially those aimed at marginalised communities. The focus on crucial capital expenditure was lost, and governments prioritised salary payments over other essential spending. Like the union budget, education in Delhi's budget was treated as a secondary priority, with new programs introduced during the pandemic failing to address the immediate crisis.

ii. **Enrollment:** After the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of students in government schools in the 2022-23 academic session was 17,89,385, while this academic year it decreased to 17,58,986, which is 30,399 less than the previous session. According to the information received from the DoE, there has been a decline in the number of children in government schools in all districts and areas except north west A

and central Delhi. An official of the DoE, seeking anonymity, said, "There were more admissions in government schools of Delhi during the pandemic. But as the situation became normal, some students again moved to private schools." He said that "failure" of some students in exams is also a reason behind the decline in their numbers. (Economic Times)

iii. **Passing Rate:** Following COVID-19, the pass rates for both CBSE Classes 10 and 12 saw a significant increase. In 2021, due to the pandemic, the CBSE Board did not conduct traditional exams and instead announced results based on an alternative set of assessment criteria. As a result, the overall pass percentages were nearly 100%, with 99.9% of Class 12 students and 97.5% of Class 10 students passing the CBSE exam in Delhi. However, the absence of formal exams raises questions about the integrity and credibility of these results.

iv. **Extent of Dropout:** Concerns have arisen regarding the pandemic's potential to drive substantial increases in school dropout rates, with reports suggesting many students have disengaged from the education system, while a sizable proportion remain unable to re-enter. However, the precise scale of these dropout figures remains uncertain. Moreover, the pandemic is believed to have exacerbated existing disparities in educational outcomes.

v. **Cutback in scholarship during the pandemic:** Coverage of students

Table 21: Number of schools that prepared School Development Plan(SDP) in 2019-20 and 2021-22

Scholarship	Achievements 2019-20	Achievements 2020-21	Target 2021-22
Reimbursement of tuition fees to students belonging to SC/ST/OBC studying in in private schools	25,414	5,916	20,000
Mukhyamantri Vidyarthi Pratibha Yojana for Marginalized Sections	NIL	NIL	l,oo,ooo
Pre- Matric Scholarship for SC Students (CSS)	14,643	NIL	14,500
Post-Matric Scholarship for SC Students CSS	19,537	NIL	15,000
Pre-Matric Scholarship to the OBC students (CSS)	11,205	6,666	7,000
Post Matric Scholarship for OBC Students CSS	8,948	6,713	7000
Jai Bhim Mukhya mantri Pratibha Vikas Yojna (SCSP)	NIL	941	48000
CM scholarship for meritorious students	29,508	Not disbursed*	subject to approval
Welfare of Educationally/Economically Backward Minorities	2.75 lakh	NIL**	Approx 2.50 lakh, subject to re-opening

Source: http://delhiplanning.nic.in/content/plan-document-2021-22

Note: The plan document lists the reasons as:* Financial restriction due to covid-19 ** Not implemented due to covid-19

Table 22: Scholarship Schemes for the Marginalized Communities (Rs Crores)

State Schemes	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2020-21	2021-22
Scholarship/Merit Scholarship to SC/ST OBC and Minority students - Class 1 to XII	74.1	54.4	33.5	1	0.18	1
Financial assistance for the purchase of stationery and merit scholarships to SC./ST/OBC/ Minorties student			97.7		10.86	
Reimbursement of Tuition Fees in Public Schools to SC/ST/OBC Students	38.4	39.9	50.5	48	14.6	33
Scholarships of educationally backward minority (EBM) students	12	11.5	18.8	20		20
Mukhyamantri Pariksha Fees Sahayta Yojana for class X and XII student			62.12			1
Chief Minister's Scholarship for Meritorious Students			7.4	8		8
Lal Bahadur Shastri Scholarship to the Meritorious Students	3	2.8				
Chief Minister super talented children coaching scheme	0.4		0.3	0.4	0	20
Ambedkar Pathshala				1	0.2	0.5
Jai Bhim Mukhyamantri Pratibha Vikas Yojna (SCSP *)		14.6	9.1	100	1.5	50
Mukhyamantri Vidhyarti Pratibha Yojana for the marginalised sections				150		150
Pre-Matric Scholarship						
Pre-Matric scholarship to SC Students (CSS)			4.4	4.2	1.6	4.2
Pre-Matric Scholarship to OBC Students (CSS)	0.6	0.6	1.7	1	1	1
Post-Matric Scholarship						
Post Matric Scholarship for SC Students (CSS)	3.1	7.3	2.3	10		10
Post Matric Scholarship for OBC Students (CSS)	1	1.8	2.8	2	2	2
Post Matric Scholarship Scheme	7	7.9	12.1	10	-	9.7
SUM	139.6	140.8	302.7	355.63	31.9	310.5

Source: Delhi state budgets.

Delhi has experienced significant reductions in scholarships, both in terms of funding and coverage, particularly affecting marginalized students. According to data (referenced as Table 21), there was a marked decline in scholarship coverage during 2020-21, with targets for 2021-22 falling short compared to 2019-20. Key scholarship programs, particularly those aimed at marginalized communities, have seen their funding drastically cut. The overall expenditure on scholarships in 2020-21 was less than one-tenth of the budgeted amount and of the previous year's expenditure (as shown in Table 2). Several scholarship schemes, while numerous, have minimal allocations and cater to a limited group, indicating a lack of comprehensive support.

The two main state scholarship schemes for SC, ST, OBC, and minority students, which had relatively higher allocations, have seen continuous reductions in funding, from ₹74 crores in 2017-18 to less than ₹1 crore in 2020-21. These schemes were merged with other programs, but even the combined expenditure was significantly lower than previous years, and there have been no fresh allocations for 2021-22. Teachers reported that funds for these schemes have not reached students' accounts for the past two to three years, leading to their de facto discontinuation.

During the pandemic, the cessation of scholarships for educationally backward minority students further exacerbated the situation, leaving many students without necessary financial support. Notably, the Mukhyamantri Pariksha Fees Sahayta Yojana, which previously covered exam fees for class X and XII students, received no funding in 2020-21. Additionally, there has been a shift towards funding coaching schemes for meritorious students, reallocating resources from broader scholarship programs, which has left many marginalized students without support.

The process for applying for scholarships has become increasingly complex and opaque, with verification rates for applications being alarmingly low. Teachers highlighted the difficulty in navigating these systems, leading to the exclusion of many eligible students, particularly those lacking necessary documentation. The pandemic has thus highlighted and exacerbated the existing gaps and inefficiencies in the scholarship system, with urgent need for reforms to restore accountability and ensure broader access to educational support.((Bose & Sharma, 2023))

Table 23: Student Scholarship via National Scholarship Portal: Delhi

		Applied					Verified to Applied %			
	2020-21	Gen	SC	ST	OBC	Total	Gen	SC	ST	OBC
Male	Pre-matric	10,874	333	57	2,321	13,585	36.7	46.8	40.4	33.6
	Post Matric/ Top Class/ MCM	3,733	424	88	1,481	5,726	42.2	52.6	31.8	40.6
Female	Pre-matric	11,248	424	63	2,258	13,993	40.1	61.6	23.8	34.2
	Post Matric/ Top Class/ MCM	5,447	275	64	1,347	7,133	43.6	47.3	26.6	38.7
Total		31,312	1456	272	7,409	40,449	39.8	52.9	30.5	36.1
Share of Social Group *		77.4	3.6	0.7	18.3		78	4.8	0.15	16.7

Source: https://nsp.gov.in/dashboard/statepage#
*The first four columns represent the share of the social group in overall applications while the last four columns represent the share of the social group in application verified

Students face challenges in applying for pre-matric and post-matric scholarships, citing that the application process is complex, time-consuming, and requires extensive documentation. The National Scholarship Portal (NSP) is difficult to navigate, and different portals must be used for various scholarships, adding to the confusion. Many eligible students, particularly from marginalized communities, are excluded due to the lack of required certificates, such as caste or income certificates. The process of obtaining these certificates is often costly and difficult, further hindering access to scholarships.

Table 24: ICT and allied interventions (in Rs crores) from 2017-18 to 2021-22

Schemes	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21(BE)	2020-21	2021-22
ICT	18					
Digital Classroom						250
Online Assessment						150
Virtual Model School						10
Introduction of Computer Science at +2 stage	28.1	119.4	70.6	170	70.3	170
Pratibha Fellowship for Digital Learning			16.9			

Source: State Budgets, GNCTD

The pandemic has highlighted the growing digital divide in education, making Information and Communication Technology (ICT) a critical focus for education policy. The budget for ICT in school education in 2021-22 saw a significant increase, nearly five times that of 2019-20, reflecting the government's commitment to expanding digital infrastructure in schools. Key initiatives included the digital classroom scheme, online assessment programs, and the virtual Delhi model school, although some programs, like the digital classroom scheme, saw no expenditure in 2020-21 despite being announced earlier.

The introduction of computer science at the +2 stage remains the only consistently funded ICT initiative, while other efforts like the Pratibha fellowship for digital learning have seen sporadic allocations. As ICT becomes increasingly integral to education, substantial public sector investments will be necessary, with careful design and implementation being crucial for success. The Kerala model, which integrated ICT through teacher-driven, state-coordinated training using free and open-source software, is often cited as an effective approach.

Meanwhile, the private sector has rapidly expanded its presence in the digital education space, driven by global Edtech companies. This shift towards digital and online education, accelerated by the pandemic, underscores the need for urgent regulation to ensure that education remains a public good and that digital content aligns with broader educational goals. Additionally, establishing public digital infrastructure, such as community centers and libraries, could help bridge the digital divide and support universal access to digital education over the long term.

5.14 PROGRESS OF THE PAST 10 YEARS

Table 25: Comparison of various items between 2013-14 and 2022-23

Items	2013-14	2021-22	2022-23
No. of DoE schools	992	1047	1039
Total Enrollment in government. Schools (in lakhs)	16.10	17.62	17.85
No. of Government. Aided Schools	211	203	201
Total Enrollment in government.aided Schools (in lakh)	1.64	1.42	1.41
Total no. of schools in delhi	5453	5619	5488
Total enrollment in delhi schools (in lakhs)	43.85	45.72	46.29
Expenditure on education as % of GSDP in Delhi	1.58	1.47	1.51
Expenditure on education as percentage of aggregate expenditure	18.1	21.2	21.1
Per child expenditure (in Rs.)	27435	59,069	66,896
Pass % in secondary	98.40	97	91.1
Pass % in senior secondary	86.78	98	94.1
Student teacher ratio	32	30	30

Over the past decade, Delhi's education landscape has seen notable progress, but the journey is far from complete. There has been a commendable rise in total enrollment in government schools, reflecting an increased trust in public education. Similarly, the substantial hike in per-child expenditure indicates a stronger financial commitment to enhancing student outcomes. The improvement in senior secondary pass percentages is another positive trend, suggesting that efforts to support older students are yielding results.

However, these gains are accompanied by areas of concern that require critical attention. The drop in secondary pass percentages points to challenges in maintaining consistent academic performance across all grade levels. Additionally, the reduction in the number of government-aided schools highlight issues that could impede further progress.

These fluctuations across different metrics underscore the complexity of the education system, where multiple factors—ranging from policy changes to socio-economic shifts—play a role in shaping outcomes. As such, a deeper, more nuanced examination is necessary to truly assess the impact of these changes. Education in Delhi remains a dynamic and continuous process, requiring sustained effort and innovation. While there has been meaningful progress, these indicators remind us that there is still a considerable distance to cover in ensuring quality education for all.

6. RECOMMENDATION

Despite positive changes as a result of educational reforms in Delhi, several crucial issues persisting in the region are still as follows:

6.1 Infrastructure

Ghosh and Bose (2022) highlight the urgent need for significant expansions to address the shortage of government schools (GSs) in Delhi. Their empirical analysis suggests that existing capacities must double to meet growing demand, including accommodating children currently enrolled in low-fee private schools (LFPSs) who prefer well-functioning GSs, as well as those out of school. The authors recommend constructing 632 new composite (K-12) GSs and 275 primary GSs, along with adding classrooms through vertical or horizontal extensions of existing buildings.

6.2 Enrollment in NIOS schooling

To address the alarming pass rates among students in classes 9 and 11, it is essential to streamline the enrollment process for open schooling, aiming for 100% enrollment of students who have failed. Enhanced support and counseling services are critical, as interviews with parents and dropouts indicate that inadequate guidance from government schools contributes significantly to dropouts.

Initiatives like Mission Chunauti, intended to support underperforming students, have inadvertently led to systematic exclusion by segregating struggling students as early as Class 6, thus exacerbating dropout rates. A shift from segregation to integration is necessary to ensure that all students receive adequate support to continue their education. Special attention should focus on improving learning outcomes in Class 9, as many students drop out after failing twice. Targeted interventions, including personalized learning plans and mental health support, are essential for at-risk students.

Additionally, a comprehensive strategy is needed to address out-of-school children (OSC). This includes accurately assessing the OSC population, tracking these children with community and NGO assistance, and strengthening Special Training Centres (STCs). Incentives for retention, such as scholarships, should be introduced to minimize dropout risks.

Finally, reducing the gap between sanctioned and working teaching staff is crucial for enhancing efficiency in the education system.

6.3 School management committee

The election and reconstitution of School Management Committees (SMCs) in Delhi schools are crucial under the Right to Education (RTE) Act but require urgent attention. SMCs play a vital role in school governance, particularly in allocating up to ₹5 lakh from the School Management Committee Fund and developing the School Development Plan (SDP) to outline the school's needs and goals.

Democratic elections ensure representation from parents, teachers, and the community, fostering inclusive governance. Without properly elected SMCs, schools may lack necessary oversight and strategic planning, leading to inadequate resource allocation and missed improvement opportunities.

Thus, prioritizing the election and reconstitution of SMCs is essential to uphold the RTE Act's principles and enable schools to achieve their potential through community-supported initiatives.

6.4 Reducing Administrative Burden on Teachers

To enhance teaching efficiency, reducing the administrative workload on teachers is crucial. Teachers' time on school management tasks should be capped at a minimal time of their school day. Hiring data operators for MCD schools and filling vacancies in clerical positions within the DoE schools would help alleviate the burden of record-keeping and data management. Streamlining data requirements at higher administrative levels is also recommended to ensure teachers can focus more on classroom instruction.

6.5 Improving Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) Systems

The shift to DBT for school uniforms has led to delays and inconsistencies in fund transfers, which place a financial strain on parents. To address these issues, the government should ensure timely and equitable distribution of funds and establish a grievance redressal mechanism. A digital interface providing real-time information on students' benefits should be developed, and the appointment of finance managers or officers in schools is recommended to manage these processes effectively.

6.6 Strengthening Scholarship Awareness and Accessibility

The awareness and accessibility of scholarships need significant improvement. Teachers and parents should receive regular training and orientation on available scholarships, application processes, and necessary documentation. The government should also facilitate more accessible access to essential documents like caste and income certificates through school-organized camps or by removing these requirements altogether. Additionally, a comprehensive survey should be conducted to assess the impact of changing scholarship conditions on application rates, with actions taken to address any identified issues.

6.7 Enhancing Communication and Support Systems

To improve the transparency and effectiveness of DBT and scholarship programs, better communication and support systems are needed. Schools should provide clear timelines for benefit allocations and detailed information on schemes and scholarships. The education department should advise banks on simplifying student processes, such as updating passbooks and establishing a transparent and time-bound grievance redressal system. Additionally, the separation of merit-based and stationery scholarships and the simplification of application processes would help ensure that all eligible students receive their due benefits.

6.8 Efficient budget utilization

Despite being allocated under different headings, the optimum utilization of resources is still in question as most of it goes underutilized. A comprehensive reform is needed to address this issue, focusing on effective budget planning and execution. Collective community involvement can also be ensured to establish clear, accountable, and transparent structures for better resource allocation and optimum resource utilization. Robust monitoring mechanisms can also be developed and practiced to ensure effective and transparent budget utilization.

7. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the financial dimension of educational policies and processes, which extends beyond simply constructing infrastructure or increasing budgets. It is about the willingness to invest resources strategically to drive meaningful improvements. The case of Delhi's school system provides a valuable example of how targeted financial measures can significantly enhance the educational landscape. Consequently, there is a need for more research to examine the impacts of financial investments and identify successful case studies that could be emulated in other contexts. Sustaining such finance-driven approaches in future policies, grounded in principles of financial sustainability and innovation, can contribute to further advancements in education within Delhi and across the country (Narang & Srivastava, 2020; Patel, 2021).

8. CHALLENGES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Despite positive changes from educational reforms in Delhi, several critical issues remain. A key concern is the proportional distribution of funding for interventions (Banerjee & Duflo, 2019; Ministry of Education, 2021). One crucial issue is the ongoing teacher training process. While efforts have been made to improve training, the challenge of providing professional development for all teachers persists (Narang & Srivastava, 2020). . Infrastructure maintenance is also a chronic problem. Significant progress has been made in constructing new structures and modernising existing ones, but the upkeep of these facilities requires sustained financial investment (Gupta & Sharma, 2018).

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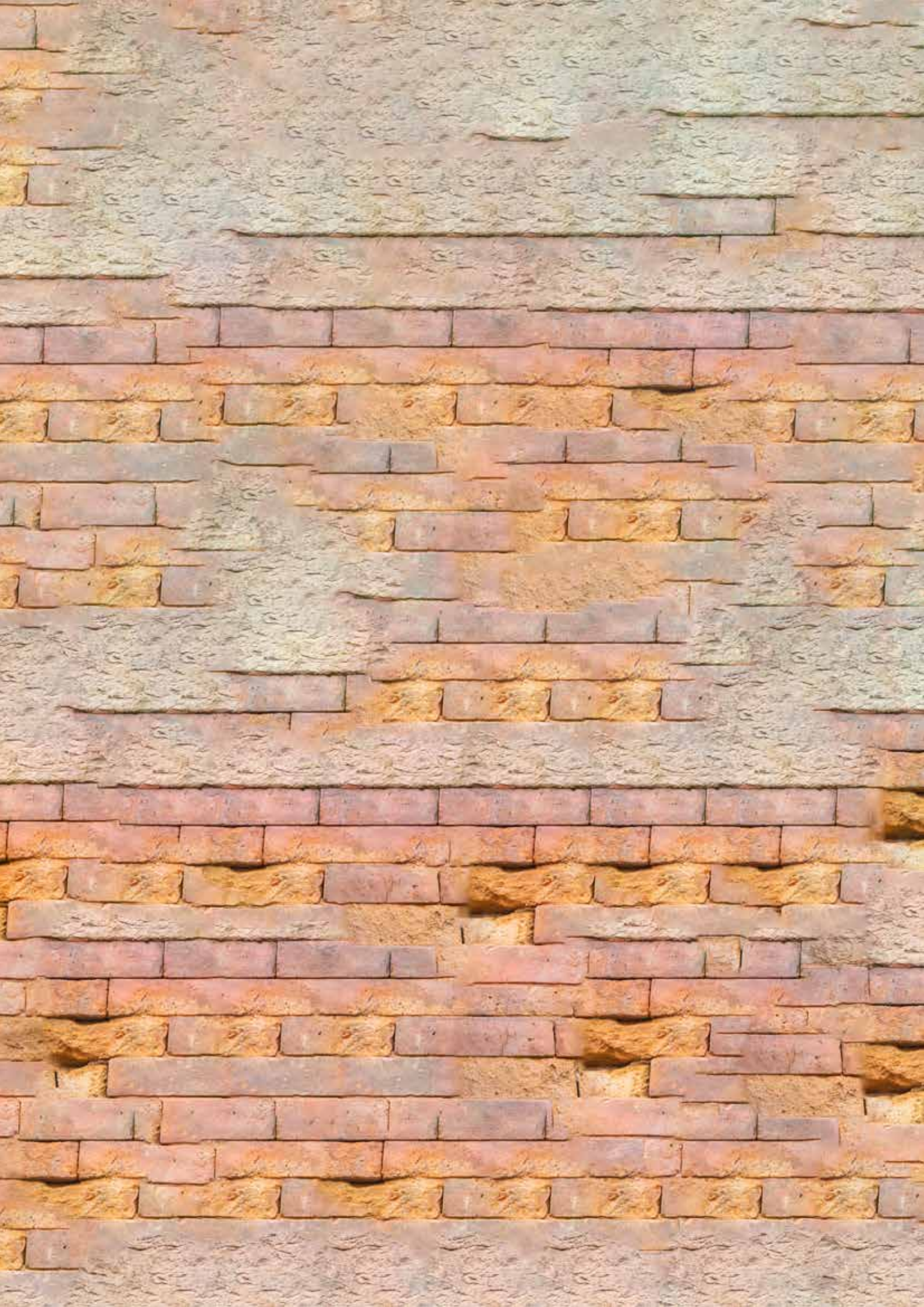
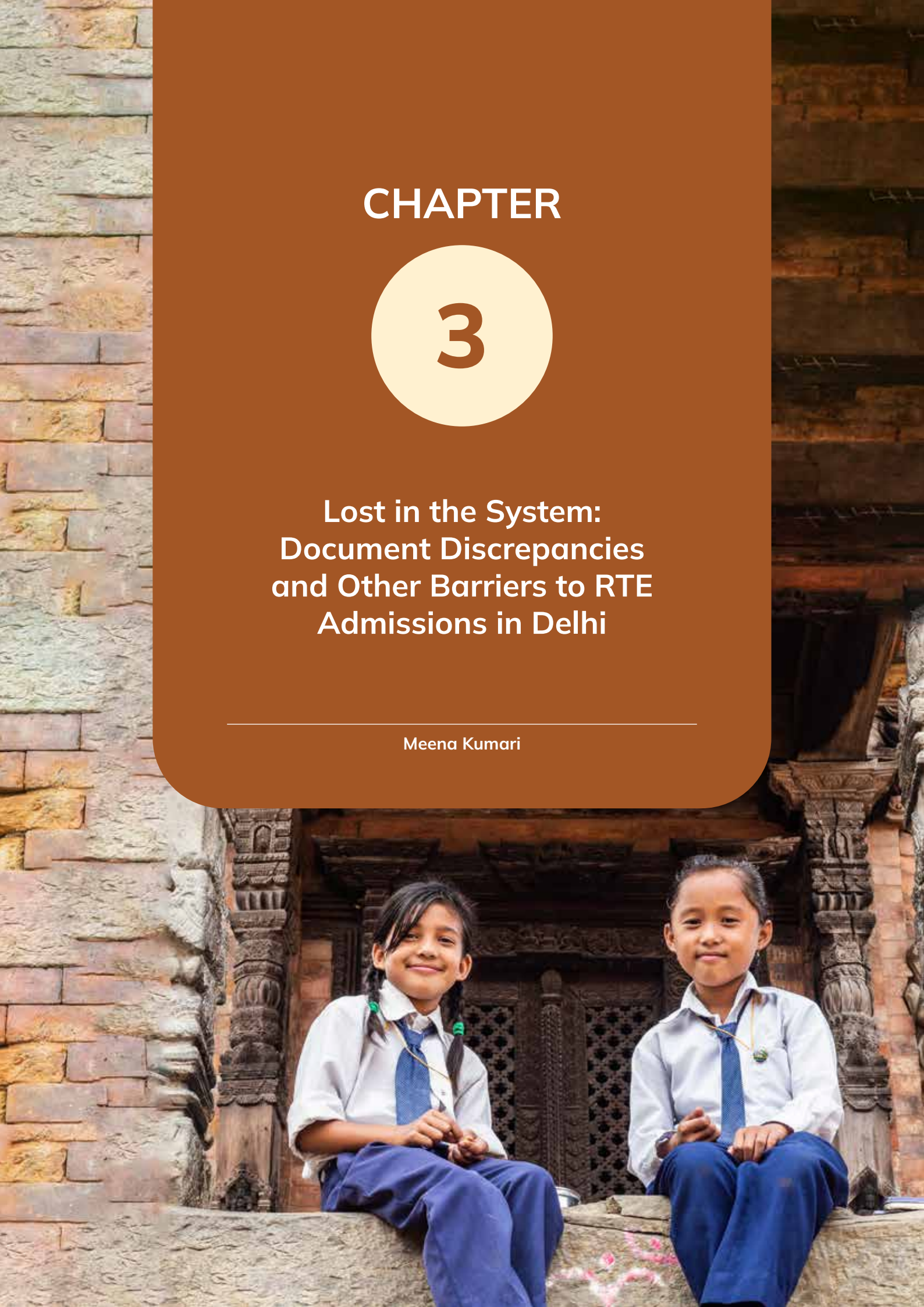


CHAPTER

3

Lost in the System: Document Discrepancies and Other Barriers to RTE Admissions in Delhi

Meena Kumari



ABSTRACT

This study examines the significance of the Right to Education Act, 2009, and undertakes a critical analysis of the formal admission process to identify procedural gaps and uncover the challenges faced by parents. The primary aim of the research is to offer constructive and actionable recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of the admission process under the RTE Act. Employing a mixed-method approach, the study integrates an analytical review of the regulations and circulars issued by the Government of NCT Delhi pertaining to the admission process under Section 12, alongside a qualitative analysis based on interviews with parents whose children were allocated seats through the Directorate of Education's computerized lottery system in Delhi. The scope of the research is limited to the admission process for Economically Weaker Section category students in Delhi, specifically those admitted to unaided private schools at the entry level for the academic session 2024-25. The study's findings contribute to the literature by exposing the disparities between the prescribed and actual admission processes, highlighting parental experiences and discrepancies in documentation, which impede the realization of the Act's intended outcomes.

Keywords: Admission Process, Documents, Unaided Private Schools, Right to Education (RTE) Act, Economically Weaker Sections (EWS), Document Verification, Private Schools, Grievance Redressal

KEY FINDINGS

- A clear gap exists between the formal (de jure) and practical (de facto) admission processes under the RTE Act, particularly during the document verification stage.
- While parents generally found the online registration process straightforward, many struggled with digital literacy, relying on external support to complete applications.
- Some schools arbitrarily denied admissions despite seats being allocated through the computerized lottery system, citing reasons like document discrepancies or seat unavailability.
- Errors or minor inconsistencies in documentation led to admission denials. Issues such as name mismatches across documents or unclear eligibility criteria for orphaned and transgender children were common.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ensuring educational opportunities for children is a collective responsibility of society. Education serves as a vital tool for advancing equality and social justice. The Right to Education Act of 2009 represents a significant legislative initiative aimed at guaranteeing inclusive education for all, thereby upholding the principles of equality and social justice. The RTE Act is founded upon Article 45 of the Indian Constitution, which in turn was derived from Article 36 of the Draft Constitution.

It reads as follows:

> *Every citizen is entitled to primary education, and the State shall endeavour to provide, within ten years from the commencement of this constitution, free and compulsory education for all children until they reach the age of fourteen. (Draft Constitution of India 1948, Art. 36)*

In 1998, the government established the Tapas Majumdar Committee to propose a constitutional amendment mandating free and compulsory education for all children aged 6-14 years, as well as to recommend relevant central legislation to enforce this directive. This effort culminated in the insertion of Article 21A by the Constitution (Eighty-Sixth Amendment) Act, 2002, which stipulated that the State must provide free and compulsory education to all children between the ages of six and fourteen (The Constitution [86th Amendment] Act, 2002). To ensure the effective implementation of Article 21A, the Parliament subsequently enacted the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (hereafter the RTE Act 2009), which guarantees free and compulsory education for children within this age cohort.

The Right to Education Act 2009 establishes a framework to ensure universal access to free and compulsory elementary education for all children aged 6-14 years (RTE Act 2009, Sec 3). The Act covers a range of school types, including those directly run by government or local authorities, as well as aided schools that receive partial or full

government funding and unaided private schools. Government and local authority-operated schools must provide free and compulsory elementary education to all enrolled students. Aided schools are required to offer free education to a proportion of their students, based on the annual aid and recurring costs, with a minimum of 25% of the student strength. Furthermore, specified category schools and unaided private schools are mandated to admit at least 25% of their class size from economically disadvantaged or weaker sections of society in Grade 1. These admission requirements also apply to preschool programmes offered by these schools (RTE Act 2009, Sec 12).

The RTE Act's focus on ensuring equitable access to quality elementary education has faced numerous challenges in its implementation. One of the key obstacles is the limited understanding among stakeholders, such as parents and school authorities, regarding the provisions and requirements of the Act.

The objective of universal free and compulsory elementary education cannot be fully realised solely through government-run or publicly-assisted schools. Consequently, Section 12 (1)(c) of the Right to Education Act mandates that private unaided schools also provide free and compulsory education to children from disadvantaged and economically weaker sections of society.

Statement of Problem

While incorporating a detailed admission process directly into the Act may not be practical, as the admission system often necessitates frequent adjustments and amending the Act is a lengthy procedure, the admission process must be streamlined, accessible, timely, and transparent to achieve the goal of providing free and compulsory primary education.

In 2022, a writ petition was filed, highlighting that approximately 50,000 children were still awaiting admission under the weaker section category as mandated by the RTE Act 2009 (Justice for All vs. Hon'ble LG & Others, W.P.(C) 2096/2022 & CM APPL. 28430/2022). The petition further alleged that schools were not filling the required quota seats, which constitute 25% of the total seats. Additionally, a batch of petitions was brought before the Delhi High Court concerning admissions under the Economically Weaker Section (EWS) category of the RTE Act 2009 (Shabnam vs. Govt of NCT of Delhi, 2022/DHC/005622). In these cases, students had been issued letters confirming their admission to schools by the Director of Education, Government of NCT Delhi, in accordance with the RTE Act 2009. Despite the computerized lottery results being communicated to the respective schools, the schools refused to admit these students.

The Government of Delhi has issued and notified several circulars and rules that unaided private schools must comply with in the admission process under the RTE Act. Additionally, a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) was developed by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights in 2020-21 to ensure the proper and effective implementation of Section 12 (1)(c) (NCPCR, 2021).

The objective of this research is to critically examine the admission process as outlined in policy documents, identify any loopholes, and explore the ground realities, including the challenges faced by parents during the implementation of the admission procedures.

Research Questions

The research aims to investigate the following questions:

1. Are there any disparities between the admission process as formally stipulated and its practical implementation?
2. What obstacles do parents confront during the admission process?

2. LITERATURE OVERVIEW

The Right to Education Act outlines various provisions pertaining to admissions, yet it fails to specify the precise procedures, necessary documentation, or other formalities. Several studies have explored the admission process under the Act. For example, the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR, 2017) conducted a study that quantitatively examined the admissions of students from the Economically Weaker Section (EWS) and Disadvantaged Group (DG)categories in Delhi, as well as the dropout rates from 2010 to 2016, in order to assess compliance with Section 12(1)(c) of the RTE Act. However, the current study aims to undertake a focused analysis of both the official and actual admission processes for the academic session 2024-25 in Delhi, with a particular emphasis on identifying the challenges encountered by both schools and parents.

Likewise, a study undertaken by Development & Research Services Pvt. Ltd. (2021) examined a

sample of admissions under Section 12(1)(c) of the RTE Act across the states of Delhi, Karnataka, and Madhya Pradesh from 2015 to 2018. While this research offered a broad overview of the admission practices during that period, it did not provide a detailed comparative analysis of the official versus actual processes, nor did it specifically investigate the procedural difficulties encountered by parents and schools regarding the 2024-25 academic year.

Indus Action's study (2023) examined the diverse processes used by various states to implement Section 12(1)(c) of the RTE Act 2009, providing valuable insights into the roles of governmental bodies and educational bureaucrats. The study shed light on best practices and the challenges associated with implementing this provision. While it briefly touched on the admission process in Delhi for 2023, it did not delve into the specific difficulties encountered by parents and school authorities.

In addition to these studies, several Public Interest Litigations (PILs) have been filed, advocating for the effective implementation of the fundamental right to free and compulsory education. These PILs have also highlighted critical flaws in the admission process, drawing attention to the need for reform and better enforcement of RTE provisions.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a mixed-method research design to comprehensively investigate the research questions, combining both depth and breadth of analysis. The investigation was structured in two distinct stages to capture the various dimensions of the admission process under Section 12(1) (C) of the Right to Education (RTE) Act.

The initial stage involved an in-depth and critical examination of the rules and directives issued by the Government of the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi. This entailed a detailed analysis of the official guidelines governing the admission process for students from Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) under the RTE Act. The objective was to uncover any inherent weaknesses or inconsistencies in the formal, on-paper process. This stage focused on identifying the gaps between policy prescriptions and their practical implications, laying the groundwork for a more nuanced understanding of the theoretical operation of the process.

In the second stage, a qualitative, interview-based approach was adopted to explore the lived experiences of parents navigating the admission process. Interviews were conducted with parents whose children were allocated seats by the Directorate of Education (DoE) in Delhi. This stage aimed to gather rich, first-hand insights into the practical challenges and barriers encountered by families during the admission process, complementing the document analysis from the earlier stage. The qualitative approach allowed the study to capture personal narratives and experiences, highlighting any discrepancies between policy intentions and real-world outcomes.

Sampling and Data Collection

The study participants comprised families of children categorised under the Economically Weaker Section in Delhi, as defined by the Right to Education Act of 2009. A purposive sampling strategy was adopted, targeting parents whose children were directly impacted by the admission process. These parents were recruited with the assistance of community leaders affiliated with Indus Action and the Centre for Civil Society, who facilitated the necessary contacts and coordination. The data collection involved a semi-structured interview protocol, incorporating both closed-ended and open-ended questions to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the parents' perspectives. This format provided the researchers with the flexibility to explore specific issues in greater depth while maintaining a structured approach.

The study involved interviews with 15 parents, representing a diverse range of experiences within the EWS admission process. The participants were divided into two groups: those whose children had successfully gained admission and those whose children were not admitted, despite being allocated seats through the computerised lottery system. This approach facilitated a comparative analysis of the experiences of both groups, enabling the researchers to identify factors contributing to successful or unsuccessful admissions. Prior to the interviews, the participants provided informed consent and were briefed on the purpose and scope of the study, ensuring adherence to ethical research practices.

Limitation

This research is limited in its scope, focusing solely on EWS category students in Delhi who were

allocated seats in private unaided schools at the entry level (class I) through a computerised lottery system administered by the Directorate of Education for the 2024-25 academic year. As such, the findings may not be generalisable to other geographic contexts or student populations beyond this specific cohort. Furthermore, the study's temporally confined nature, examining a single academic session, may constrain its ability to provide insights into long-term trends in the admission process under Section 12 (1) (c) of the relevant legislation.

4. ADMISSIONS UNDER SECTION 12(1) (C) OF RTE ACT, 2009 IN DELHI

The Delhi Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Rules, 2011, were promulgated by the Lieutenant Governor of the National Capital Territory of Delhi, pursuant to the powers vested under Section 38 of the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009. These rules outline the procedural framework required for the effective enactment of the objectives stipulated in the RTE Act, 2009. The rules are delineated into nine distinct sections, each of which furnishes detailed guidelines addressing various dimensions of the education system. These include guidelines for the formation and duties of School Management Committees (SMCs), provisions for special training programs to address learning disparities, and the delineation of responsibilities assigned to the government, local authorities, schools, and teachers. Furthermore, the rules establish standards for curriculum development and define the roles and functions of the Delhi Commission for the Protection of Child Rights, ensuring the comprehensive enforcement of the RTE Act's mandates in the NCT of Delhi.

Additionally, Rule 10 of these rules addresses the issue of admissions, explicitly prohibiting the segregation of children admitted under Section 12 (1)(c) of the RTE Act, 2009, from other children.

Furthermore, Rule 10, sub-rule (4) of the Delhi Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Rules, 2011, grants the government the authority to periodically prescribe the admission procedures through official notifications. This ensures that the admission process remains adaptable and aligned with evolving policy requirements (RTE Rules 2011). For the 2024-25 academic year, the Directorate of Education in Delhi issued the following public circulars and notifications:

1. A circular on 17 January 2024 detailing the tentative vacancies for online admission of students from the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS), Disadvantaged Groups (DG), and children with disabilities at the entry-level classes in private unaided schools in Delhi.
2. A circular on 24 April 2024 providing guidelines for admission under the EWS/DG and children with disabilities categories at the entry-level classes in private unaided schools in Delhi for the 2024-25 academic session.
3. A circular on 31 May 2024 outlining the guidelines for admission under the EWS/DG category at the entry level (Nursery/KG/Class-1st) in private unaided schools in Delhi for the 2024-25 academic session, to be selected through a computerised draw of lots

1. Eligibility Criteria

Section 12(1)(c) provides that the school shall admit children belonging to weaker sections and disadvantaged groups.

1. Children belonging to economically weaker sections

a. Children belonging to families registered under Antodaya Ana Yojana (AAY)
b. Children belonging to households fall in the Below Poverty Line (BPL) list prepared by the state.
c. Children belonging to such parents whose annual income is lower than the minimum limit prescribed by the government.

The Delhi government provides that if the annual income is less than one lakh rupees. Recently, a division bench of the Delhi High Court increased the threshold income for school admission in the EWS category to 2.5 lakh; however, it was further challenged in court; therefore, the threshold limit is still less than one lakh rupees (The Hindu, 6 March 2024).

2. Children belonging to disadvantaged groups:

a. Children belonging to Scheduled Castes (SC)
b. Children belonging to Scheduled Tribes (ST)
c. Children belonging to Other Backward Classes (non-creamy layer) (OBC-NCL)
d. Children with disability (CWSN-Children With Special Needs)
e. Orphans

f. Transgender
g. Children living with or affected by HIV

The Delhi Government reserved 22% of seats for children belonging to SC, ST, OBC-NCL, orphans, transgender people, and children living with or affected by HIV, and 3% of seats are reserved for children with disabilities (CWSN-Children With Special Needs).

1.1 Age limits

a. For Nursery: 3-5 years
b. For KG: 4-6 years
c. For class 1: 5-7 years

According to the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the minimum age for admission in Class 1 is 6 years. However, the Directorate of Education circular in Delhi allows children to be admitted to Class 1 up to the age of 7 years. Recently, the Ministry of Education, Government of India, has requested all states and Union Territories to follow the uniform criteria of a minimum age of 6 years. Yet, for the academic session 2024-25, the DoE circular in Delhi continues to deviate from the National Education Policy.

Regarding children with special needs, the age criteria are 3-7 years for Nursery, 4-8 years for Kindergarten, and 5-9 years for Class 1.

1.2 Documents Required for Admission under Sec. 12(1) (c)

Aadhar Card of Parents: To apply for admission, it is necessary to provide the Aadhar number of parents. However, the Aadhar card of the child is not mandatory.

1. Proof of date of birth can be provided through a birth certificate, Aadhar card, Hospital/ Auxiliary/Midwife register record, Anganwadi record, or an affidavit of parents/guardians regarding the child's age.
2. Residential proof can be established through an Aadhar Card, Voter Identity Card, Electricity Bill, Telephone Bill, Water Bill, House Tax Receipt, Ration Card, Driving Licence, Certificate from Tahsildar/ local authority, Certificate by Employer, or Certificate of Child Welfare Committee if the child is living in a child care institution.
3. Children applying under the EWS category can provide an AAY Card, BPL Card, or Income Certificate as per the limit prescribed by the appropriate Government.

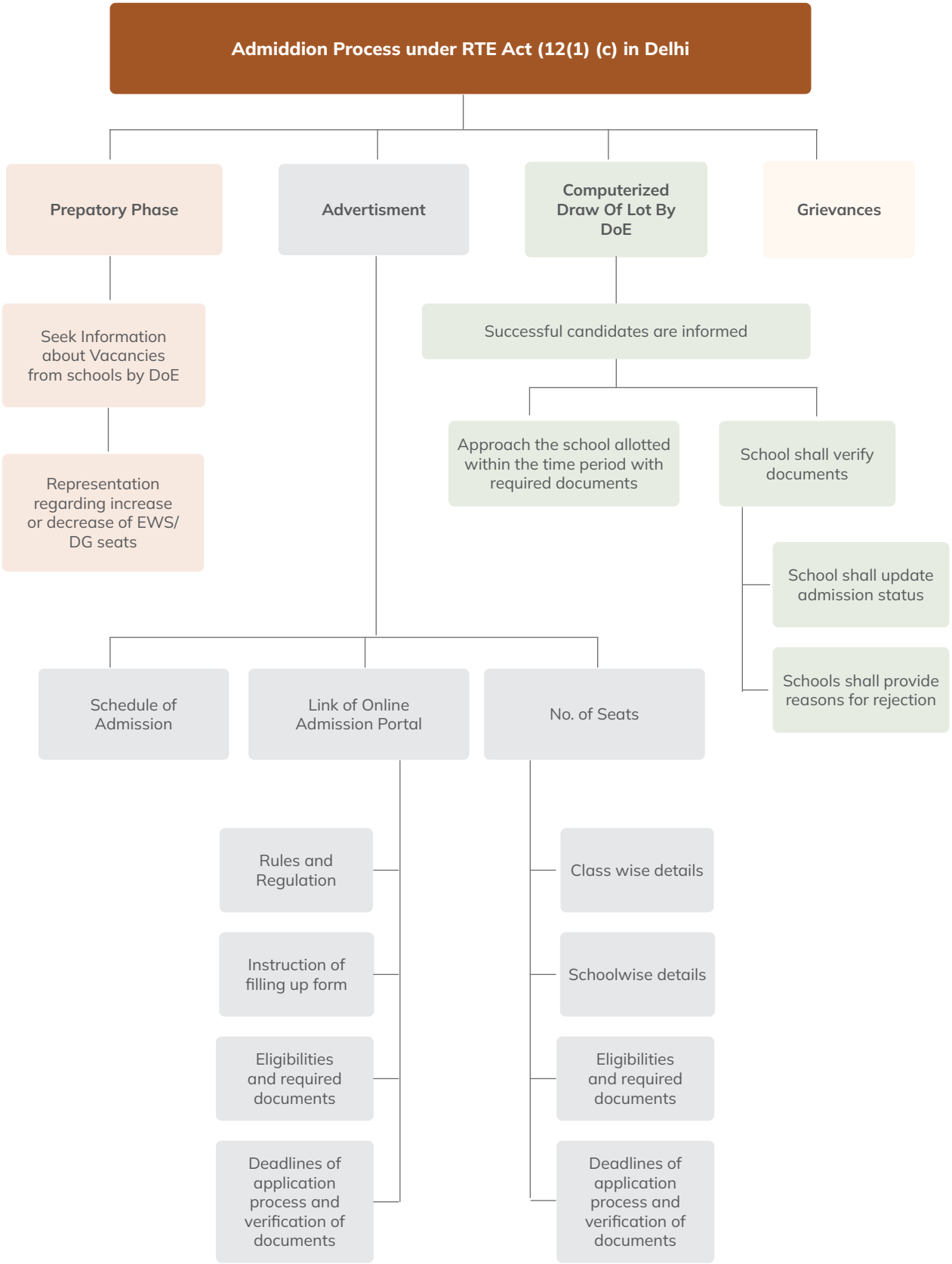
Applicants in possession of a Below Poverty Line (BPL) card, ration card, or food security card are not required to submit an income certificate.

1. Children applying under the disadvantaged categories of Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST), and Other Backward Classes-Non-Creamy Layer (OBC-NCL) may provide category certificates issued by the Revenue Department of the Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi. The prerequisite of a minimum residency period of three years in Delhi for these categories has been waived.
2. Children affected by HIV may submit their own or their parent's medical certificate.
3. Transgender children must provide a medical certificate from a Civil Surgeon or Superintendent of a government-recognised hospital.
4. Orphan children must submit a certificate from the Child Welfare Committee under (Care and Protection of Children) the Juvenile Justice Act 2015.

1.3 Within what period do documents need to be submitted?

Admitted students were expected to submit the necessary documents for verification to the assigned school within the timeframe communicated via SMS notification to successful applicants.

2 Admission Process



2.1 Online Process

For the 2024-25 academic year, the Directorate of Education implemented a computerised online admissions system.

The online application form can be accessed through the Directorate's website (www.edudel.nic.in). This website also provides a list of schools recognised under the DSEAR 1973 and those provisionally recognised under the RTE Act 2009 that are participating in the online process. Additionally, it offers instructions for completing the application form and a link for registration.

2.2 Single Registration and Single Application

Applicants must register for admission using a single mobile number. The registration link was available on the website of the Directorate of Education (DoE).

For each child, only a single application should be submitted. Filing multiple applications for the same child will result in the cancellation of all applications. Applicants must submit the application within the provided admission schedule.

2.3 Computerised Lottery and Verification of Documents

A computerised lottery has been conducted by the DoE. Applicants are able to check on the website whether they have secured a seat or not.

Successful applicants must approach the assigned school within the specified time frame, equipped with the required documents listed on the website. If admission is denied, the school shall provide the reasons for the same. Furthermore, schools are mandated to update the admission status on the department's website (www.edudel.nic.in).

2.4 Other Facilities available to such Students- Books and Uniforms

According to Rule 8, children attending schools under Section 12 (1) (c) are entitled to receive free textbooks, stationery, and uniforms. The explanation of this rule stipulates that the responsibility to provide these free entitlements lies with the respective schools.

2.5 Grievance Redressal

If any parent has concerns, they can approach the relevant Education Department. For grievances against private unaided recognised schools under the DoE, MCD or NDMC, parents can contact the relevant education department in Delhi.

2.6 Non-observance of the Rules and Regulations

i. By Parents

If parents register a child using multiple mobile numbers or submit multiple applications, the child's candidature shall be cancelled. According to the rules, a child can only avail of a single admission opportunity at the entry level. In some cases, parents or guardians have manipulated their residential address to secure admission to their preferred school. If any parent or guardian provides inaccurate information, the children's admission will be cancelled. Furthermore, if it is found that fraudulent documents were used to obtain admission, the admission shall be revoked.

In the case of Master Singham vs. DoE, GNCTD & Sanskriti School, it was alleged that in 2013, the father of a student obtained a misleading Income Certificate and secured his son's admission to Sanskriti School under the EWS category. The fraud was discovered in 2018, and the school filed an FIR against the individual and issued a notice for admission cancellation. The father then filed a writ petition against the cancellation order in the Delhi High Court. The court set aside the cancellation order and imposed a compensation of 10 lakh rupees on the father. While the court emphasised the student's academic prospects and future, it is concerning that the fundamental rights of the student and parent who lost this opportunity due to the fraud were not adequately addressed.

ii. By Schools

The circular imposes various restrictions on schools, mandating that they must not deny admission to successful applicants, charge tuition fees, or request income certificates if the applicant provides an AAY/ BPL card. Additionally, schools are prohibited from denying admission based on the distance range. However, the circular does not specify any clear penalties for schools that fail to comply with these regulations. While the option of derecognising a non-compliant school exists, this measure may have adverse consequences for the futures of other students enrolled at the institution, rendering it a challenging solution for compelling schools to admit the eligible applicants.

Multiple cases, such as Ayesha Sankhla vs Govt of NCT Delhi, Shabnam vs Govt of Delhi NCT, and Tarun Kumar & others vs. The Principal, Happy Hours

School & others, have documented instances where schools denied admission to applicants who had fulfilled all the required criteria and submitted the necessary documentation.

5. Admission Process in Practice and Difficulties Faced by Parents

This study aims to investigate the discrepancies between the de jure (on-paper) and de facto (in practice) admission processes, as well as the obstacles encountered by parents during the admission process. After reviewing the official, documented admission procedures, this section focuses on analysing the practical implementation of these procedures. It involves a detailed examination of factual data and insights provided by participant parents who applied for admission under the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) category for the academic session 2024-25. These parents were allocated seats through the computerised lottery system administered by the DoE. The study objective is to identify gaps and inconsistencies between the official process and its execution on the ground, highlighting any barriers faced by parents during this process.

The mere enactment of legislation or establishment of a procedure does not guarantee seamless implementation. While a significant portion of the admission process, from registration to school allocation, is conducted online, several challenges arise in the later stages, raising concerns about the effective enforcement and realisation of the Right to Education Act, 2009. These challenges cast doubt on the practical execution of the policy and its intended outcomes.

In this study, parents were categorised into two groups based on the outcomes of the admission process under the EWS category for the academic session 2024-25. This segmentation allows for a comparative analysis of the experiences of those whose children were successfully admitted and those who encountered difficulties or were not admitted, thus providing deeper insights into the operational shortcomings and barriers within the system.

Group 1: Parents Whose Children Were Admitted

This group examines the experiences of parents whose children were successfully admitted through the computerised lottery system run by the Directorate of Education. The study looks at their journey from registration to final admission, including an assessment of their satisfaction with the procedures, any difficulties they faced, and the effectiveness of the grievance process. The analysis aims to identify both the positive and challenging aspects of the system for these parents, providing insights into how well it worked for those who secured admissions.

Group 2: Parents Whose Children Were Not Admitted

This group examines the experiences of parents whose children, notwithstanding their allocation of placements through the computerised lottery system, were ultimately denied admission to the designated schools. The study investigates these parents' journeys through the admission process, with a particular focus on the specific challenges they encountered. It explores whether they received sufficient support from the relevant authorities, the nature of the issues that arose, and the manner in which their grievances were addressed, if at all. This analysis aims to uncover the systemic shortcomings, identifying the points at which the admission process failed for this cohort of parents.

6. Findings

The research study uncovers numerous significant findings that elucidate both the strengths and weaknesses of the admission processes governed by the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009. These findings provide critical insights into the discrepancies between policy and actual practice, as well as the challenges experienced by parents in navigating the system.

1 Difference Between On-Paper and In-Practice Admission Processes

While there appears to be no overt discrepancy between the prescribed phases of the admission process, the eligibility criteria, and the required documentation outlined in the regulations, and their implementation in reality, certain stages, particularly those involving schools, present substantial challenges. The initial steps, including registration, application, and the computerised lottery system, are generally regarded as fair and transparent. However, issues arise in the later stages, particularly concerning document verification and the role of schools in the admission process.

2 General Satisfaction with Online Registration

A majority of parents from both groups expressed satisfaction with the online registration and

lottery system. Most found the process relatively straightforward to navigate, and the online procedures aligned with the formal, on-paper guidelines. This indicates that the digital infrastructure for initial registration is functioning effectively in providing access to applicants, as intended.

3 Issues with Access and Technology

While parents generally expressed satisfaction with the online registration and application procedures, some encountered difficulties in accessing the online systems due to a lack of digital proficiency, despite having access to smartphones. Many applicants required external assistance, such as from cybercafés, friends, or acquaintances, to complete the necessary registration and application processes. This highlights a discrepancy in digital inclusivity, where simply having access to technology does not necessarily equate to the capability to use it effectively, which may disadvantage certain segments of the applicant population.

4 Arbitrary Denial of Admission by Schools

The study uncovered a critical issue where certain schools arbitrarily denied admission to students who had been allocated placements through the DoE's computerised lottery system. Multiple parents in the disadvantaged group reported that their children were refused admission, with some schools even rejecting to verify the necessary documents. In numerous cases, schools simply informed parents that no seats were available, despite the official allotments.

Case 1:
Two parents described how their children were allocated seats at Dev Convent School through the lottery process, but the school refused admission, citing a lack of available places. This issue points to a significant breakdown in communication between schools and the DoE. Schools are required to provide accurate information on seat vacancies during the preparatory stage of the admission process. Any changes in seat availability should be promptly communicated to the Directorate, allowing parents to explore alternative options if necessary. Had the school communicated effectively in these instances, parents could have pursued other placements. As a result of this failure, some parents were compelled to enrol their children in the same school by paying tuition fees, thereby circumventing the provisions of Section 12 (1)(c). Others had to make alternative arrangements for their children's education.
Such cases represent a violation of the children's fundamental rights as guaranteed under the RTE Act, as they were denied their entitlement to free and compulsory schooling.

5 Document Verification at Schools

Parents from both groups reported varying experiences with the document verification process. Some parents in Group 1, whose children were successfully admitted, described the verification process as smooth and without any major issues. However, other parents encountered significant difficulties, with school authorities pointing out minor discrepancies in documents. These trivial issues often caused delays, forcing parents to make multiple visits to the school, resulting in missed workdays and financial strain.

Errors in Documents

A recurring issue for Group 2 parents, whose children were denied admission, was errors in documentation. Several parents reported that mistakes in their documents led to the refusal of admission by the school authorities. Two notable cases are presented below:

Case 1
One parent applied under the EWS category using a ration card, where the mother's maiden name was listed. However, in other documents, the maiden name included a surname, leading the school authorities to deny admission due to this discrepancy. The school provided a very short window for correcting the ration card, and the parent was unaware of how to rectify the issue. Additionally, the school offered no guidance or support on how to resolve the problem.

Case 2
Another parent had already enrolled their child in the pre-primary section of the same school and applied for admission to Class I under Section 12 (1) (c) of the RTE Act, 2009. A friend assisted in completing the registration, but they mistakenly added 'Singh' as the child's surname. Although a seat was allotted, the school denied admission due to this error in the child's name on the application form. This issue, involving minor errors in documentation, was reported by multiple parents.

6 Lack of Clear Communication and Support

The study identified a significant lack of clear communication and support from school authorities, particularly for parents from the disadvantaged group (group 2). According to official guidelines,

schools are mandated to establish Help Desks to assist parents throughout the admission process and provide necessary information. However, many parents, especially those in the disadvantaged group (group 2), reported that these support mechanisms were either absent or ineffective. There was a dearth of consistent communication, guidance, and support, compelling parents to navigate the process independently, often resulting in confusion and stress.

7 Charges for Books and Uniforms

The research revealed that all parents whose children were admitted under Section 12 (1)(c) were required to pay for books and uniforms. Some parents had to purchase uniforms directly from the market. Despite these charges, the schools did not provide any assurance that the costs would be reimbursed, as stipulated by the RTE provisions.

8 Grievance Redressal

The study revealed a significant lack of awareness and avenues for grievance redressal among parents. Although many parents encountered problems during the admission process, they did not file formal complaints or report their grievances to the relevant authorities. This was largely attributable to a deficiency in knowledge regarding the appropriate procedures and channels for lodging complaints, underscoring a critical shortcoming in the system's capacity to address the concerns of the affected stakeholders.

9 Lack of Empathy from School Authorities

The study found that many parents expressed feeling undervalued and unwelcome during the admission process. Several participants reported encountering dismissive attitudes from school authorities, which compounded their sense of frustration. The perceived lack of empathy and support contributed to an overall negative experience for numerous parents, further highlighting the systemic deficiencies in the implementation of the RTE Act's admission provisions.

10 Gaps in Documents Enumerated for Admission

The study identifies several shortcomings in the list of documents required for admission under the Economically Weaker Section category, as specified in the official circulars. These gaps have generated confusion and practical obstacles for applicants, especially in instances where the documentation is ambiguous or lacks sufficient detail.

Income Certificate

A significant issue pertains to the income threshold for EWS admissions in Delhi. The current circular sets the annual income limit at one lakh rupees. However, a recent ruling by the High Court of Delhi increased this threshold to five lakh rupees (Thapliyal, Nupur. Live Law, March 5, 2024). This discrepancy has created confusion among applicants, as it is unclear whether the applicable threshold is one lakh or five lakh rupees. While the circular provides a one lakh limit, it fails to clarify that this limit is in place due to an ongoing appeal against the High Court's decision. To avoid confusion and ensure transparency, the circular should explicitly reference the legal context and clarify the current income criteria for EWS admissions.

Documents for Orphaned Children

The circular also lacks sufficient detail regarding the documentation required for orphaned children seeking admission under the RTE Act. While it refers to the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, the definition of an orphan is complex and requires legal interpretation. The Juvenile Justice Act includes provisions for children in need of care and protection, as well as children in conflict with the law, making the definition of 'orphan' unclear in practical terms for admission purposes. The circular should provide a simplified and clear definition of orphan children and specify the exact documents required for admission. Furthermore, the circular does not address the situation of orphan children living with extended families rather than in children's homes, creating additional ambiguity for such applicants.

Documents for Transgender Children

Despite the existence of a Standard Operating Procedure (SoP) mandating a medical certificate from a civil surgeon or superintendent of a government-notified hospital, the circular fails to mention any specific documentation required for transgender children. Authorities involved in the admission process intend to use SoPs, but the circular itself lacks a clear provision to inform parents and guardians about the required documentation for transgender children. Transgender applicants, who may not be aware of the specific requirements unless directly communicated in the circular, bear an unnecessary burden due to this lack of information. To ensure inclusivity and accessibility, the circular should explicitly mention the required documents for transgender children as part of the admission process.

7. Suggestions and Conclusion

The study findings highlight significant discrepancies between the intended (de jure) Right to Education (RTE) Act admission process and the actual (de facto) experiences of parents. While the computerized lottery system is perceived as fair and transparent, challenges emerge in the later stages, particularly regarding schools' document verification and admission handling. As aptly noted, "It's like the proverbial, unwilling horse: You can somehow take him to the pond, but cannot make him drink" (Indian Express, 17 August 2024). The structured process fails in certain areas due to inconsistent implementation, communication barriers, and schools' arbitrary actions. To address the identified gaps, the following recommendations are proposed:

a. **Opportunity to Rectify Mistakes During Registration and Application:** Parents should be provided an opportunity to correct errors in their registration and application forms, preventing minor mistakes from resulting in admission denial and enabling smoother processing.

b. **Submission of Undertakings for Name Discrepancies:** In cases of minor name discrepancies across documents, parents should be allowed to submit an undertaking or affidavit clarifying the error, rather than facing outright rejection.

c. **Clear Instructions Regarding Document Consistency:** At the registration stage, parents should receive explicit instructions to ensure all details in their documents and application forms match exactly, to avoid confusion or delays during verification.

d. **Reasonable Time for Error Rectification:** Schools should provide a reasonable period for parents to correct any documentation discrepancies, alleviating undue pressure on families and reducing arbitrary admission denials.

e. **Direct Subsidy for Books and Uniforms:** Instead of relying on schools to provide books and uniforms, a direct subsidy should be given to parents, empowering families, ensuring transparency, and preventing unreasonable school charges.

f. **Addressing Arbitrary Denial of Admission by Schools:** The arbitrary denial of admission, particularly for children allotted seats through the lottery, represents a fundamental rights violation under the RTE Act. An alternative solution could be introducing education vouchers or coupons, which parents can use exclusively for school fees, to prevent arbitrary denials and ensure timely reimbursement for schools, while promoting fairness, parental dignity, and healthy school competition.

Bringing together children from diverse backgrounds can improve learning experiences, as modern teaching methods have shown. However, the full benefits of the Right to Education Act in creating such enriched classrooms have not been achieved, and the progress of the RTE has been less positive than expected.

While laws and regulations alone cannot resolve every issue that arises, carefully designed policy changes and thoughtful implementation can lead to meaningful and lasting improvements in the education system. The overarching aim should be to continuously refine the admission process, making it as inclusive, transparent, and fair as possible, in order to truly fulfil the purpose and vision of the RTE Act. By addressing the identified gaps, barriers, and areas for improvement, policymakers and education authorities can work towards ensuring equal access to quality education for all children, regardless of their socioeconomic background or personal circumstances. This will not only uphold the fundamental rights and principles enshrined in the RTE Act, but also create enriched, diverse classrooms that can foster greater mutual understanding, learning experiences, and positive outcomes for all students.

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CHAPTER

4

Delhi's Education System: Examining Shifting Enrolment and Dropout Patterns

Anshika Priyamvada | Naorem Nitish |
Roselin Indani Losan

ABSTRACT

This study employs an exploratory research approach to investigate the shifting patterns of school enrolment and dropout rates in Delhi over the past decade. Utilizing a mixed-methods design, the research integrates quantitative analysis of Unified District Information System for Education datasets from 2014 to 2021 with qualitative insights obtained through interviews with administrators within Delhi's education system. The findings reveal a significant improvement in enrolment ratios and a reduction in dropout rates in recent years. However, the increasing preference for private schooling, driven by perceptions of superior educational quality, underscores the growing inequality in access to education. This study is particularly timely, addressing the pressing need for a more nuanced understanding of the school education system in Delhi.

Keywords: School Enrolment, Dropout Rates, Public vs. Private Schools, COVID-19 Impact, Education Policy, Delhi Education System

KEY FINDINGS

- **Enrolment and Dropout Dynamics:** Enrolment in Delhi's public schools has increased in recent years, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic, as financial pressures have compelled families to transition from private to government schools. However, dropout rates, though decreased, continue to be substantial.
- **Preference for Private Schooling:** Despite governmental efforts, many parents still favour private schools due to perceptions of superior infrastructure and teaching quality, further exacerbating educational inequalities.
- **"Natural" versus "Artificial" Dropouts:** The study distinguishes between students who discontinue their education for inherent reasons and those who do so due to external factors.
- **Gender and Marginalisation:** Girls and children from marginalised communities experience higher dropout rates owing to social norms, lack of gender-sensitive facilities, and inadequate support for students with disabilities.
- **Post-COVID Initiatives:** Programmes like Mission Buniyaad, while beneficial in some respects, have also inadvertently stigmatised lower-performing students, contributing to dropout rates. The persistent digital divide remains a significant barrier to equitable education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Examining educational outcomes necessitates a focused investigation of enrolment and dropout trends, as these serve as fundamental indicators of an education system's health and efficacy. Enrolment rates provide insight into the extent to which a population accesses educational opportunities, while dropout rates reveal the system's capacity to retain students and sustain their educational journeys. High enrolment and low dropout rates are emblematic of a robust educational system, whereas significant deviations from these metrics signal underlying challenges with profound individual and societal implications (Koenig and Hauser, 2011).

In the Indian context, public schools frequently face substantial difficulties in maintaining both high enrolment and retention rates. There exists a prevalent perception among parents that public schools are inferior to private institutions, particularly in terms of educational quality and the learning environment provided (Lahoti and Mukhopadhyay, 2019). This perception prompts many parents to either avoid enrolling their children in public schools altogether or to withdraw them prematurely, further exacerbating dropout rates. While the government's policies, such as the Right to Education Act 2009, aim to make education accessible to all, ensuring long-term retention and educational engagement remains an enduring problem.

The present study focuses on the Delhi education system, which, like many other Indian urban centres, grapples with the complexities of enrolment and dropout dynamics.

High dropout rates in India's public education system not only disrupt individual academic trajectories but also pose broader challenges for national development (Fägerlind and Saha, 2016). Prematurely exiting the formal learning system often leaves students ill-equipped with the necessary skills for gainful employment (Custodio and O'Loughlin, 2017), perpetuating cycles of poverty and economic inequality as these individuals face limited job prospects and reduced social mobility. Furthermore, high dropout rates constrain the nation's economic progress by limiting the potential of its workforce.

The implications of dropout extend beyond economic factors, as students who leave school early frequently miss out on crucial social, emotional, and cognitive development opportunities. Education plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals' capacity to engage as informed citizens and contribute meaningfully to societal advancement (Swargiary, 2024). Consequently, when students discontinue their studies, the nation loses not only potential economic contributors but also active participants in building stronger, more inclusive communities.

To address these challenges of school dropout and low enrolment, policymakers and educators need to work together. Effective interventions should focus not just on ensuring access to schools, but on improving the quality of education, creating more inclusive and supportive learning environments, and tackling the socio-economic barriers that prevent children from continuing their education. Policies that promote skill development and vocational training can also help bridge the gap between education and employment, giving students practical pathways to improve their livelihoods and contribute to national development.

In contrast to national trends, the state of Delhi has seen notable success in addressing persistent challenges of enrolment, dropout, and student retention in its public school system. Over the past decade, Delhi has made significant improvements in these key educational performance indicators. Between 2014-2015 and 2020-2021, the estimated dropout rate in state government schools in Delhi fell dramatically, from 44,999 to 19,513. This substantial decrease highlights the effectiveness of policy interventions and reforms aimed at keeping students in school.

At the same time, the annual percentage change in enrolment rates remained relatively stable, fluctuating between -3% and 1%. However, in 2020-2021 and 2021-2022, there was a significant rise in enrolment, with increases of 7% and 9% respectively. This simultaneous reduction in dropout rates and growth in enrolment underscores the success of initiatives implemented by the Delhi State Government to enhance the accessibility and appeal of public schooling.

These achievements suggest that Delhi has developed effective strategies for improving educational outcomes, even in the face of a widespread preference for private schooling across India. By addressing the root causes of dropout and creating an environment that encourages continuous enrolment, Delhi has positioned itself as a model for other Indian states. The state's ability to reverse unfavourable trends in dropout and enrolment offers valuable insights into the potential for educational reform across the country, demonstrating how focused policies and sustained efforts can yield tangible improvements in the public education system.

1.1 Government Initiatives

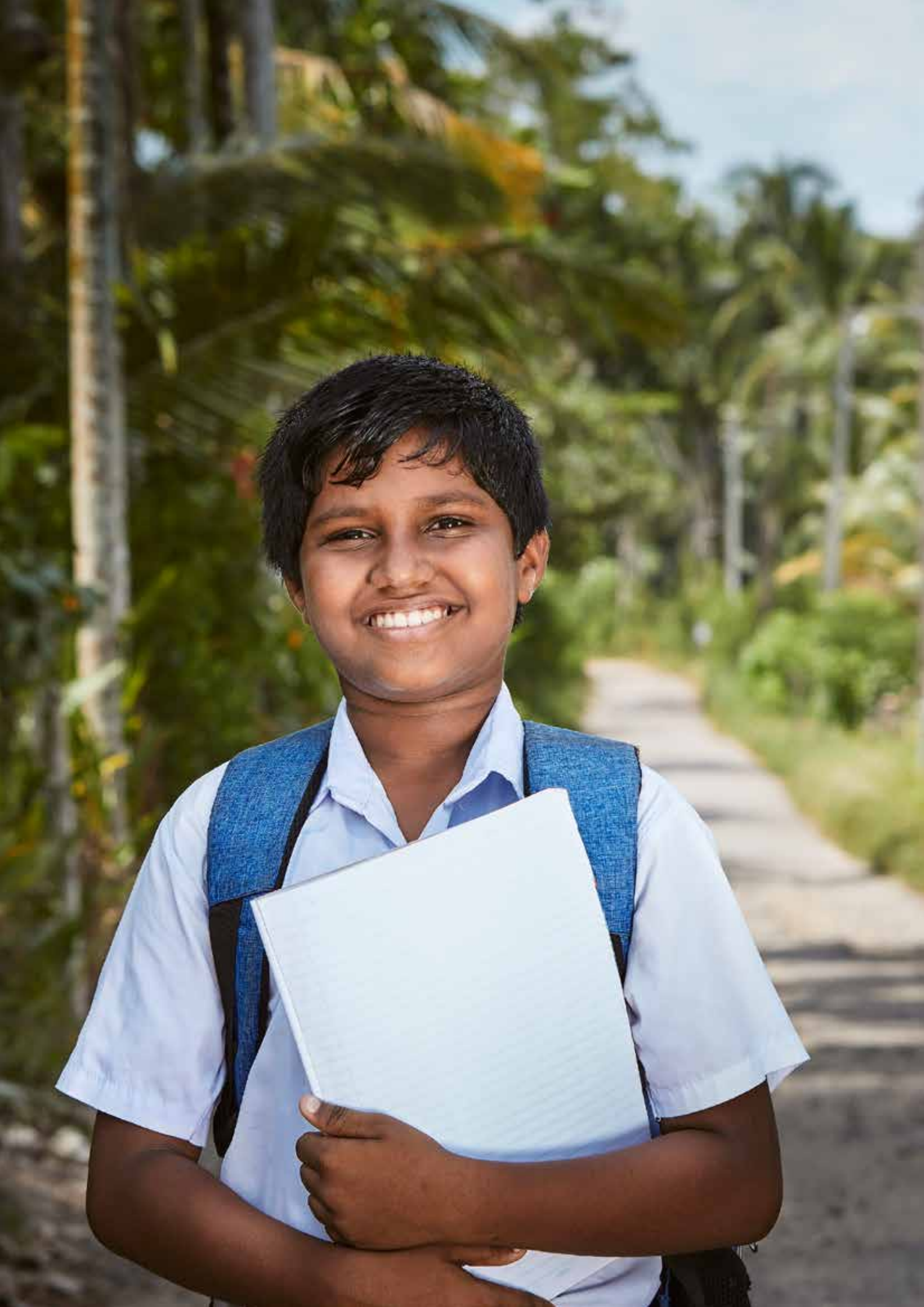
At India level

The Right to Education (RTE) Act of 2009 ensures free and compulsory education for children up to the 8th grade, mandating that schools reserve 25% of seats for economically weaker sections (EWS) and disadvantaged groups. This fosters inclusivity and equal access to education. Additionally, the Mid-Day Meal Scheme provides free lunches in government schools to improve children's nutrition, school attendance, and reduce dropout rates, especially among marginalized students. Another initiative, the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, extends education from pre-primary to class XII with focused interventions for girls, children with special needs, and marginalized communities. Together, these initiatives reflect the government's commitment to a more inclusive and equitable educational system.

At Delhi Level

The government launched various initiatives to enhance educational outcomes and address dropout rates. In 2016, they introduced Mission Chunauti, which categorised students in grades 6-9 into three groups based on their learning levels: Pratibha, Nishtha, and Neo-Nishtha. This enabled teachers to personalise instruction, providing remedial support where needed and advanced tasks for stronger students. However, this categorisation faced criticism from parents, as it led to feelings of insecurity among children due to the segregation based on learning abilities.

In 2018, the Delhi government launched Mission Buniyaad programme, which focused on strengthening foundational literacy and numeracy skills among students in grades 3-8. This initiative aimed to ensure students developed core reading, writing, and arithmetic proficiencies, thereby mitigating academic underachievement. It represented a shift from a narrow focus on syllabus completion to prioritising meaningful learning outcomes, supported by assessment reforms that emphasised understanding over rote memorisation. Specialised Teaching-Learning Materials (TLM),



such as Pragati, were introduced to cater to diverse learning needs and promote effective conceptual mastery. Furthermore, the government emphasised the cultivation of positive mindsets through transformative pedagogical approaches, adopting a more holistic perspective on education.

The Happiness Curriculum in Delhi schools seeks to promote the emotional well-being and social-emotional competencies of students through mindfulness and meditation-based activities. It focuses on developing self-awareness, empathy, and critical thinking skills to help students better manage their emotions and cultivate healthy interpersonal relationships. Complementary to this, the Entrepreneurship Mindset Curriculum (EMC) aims to equip students with essential life skills such as creativity, problem-solving, and adaptability, preparing them to navigate real-world and career-related challenges with an entrepreneurial mindset. Both initiatives strive to develop well-rounded individuals capable of navigating personal and professional complexities.

Non-governmental organisations and community-driven initiatives play a significant role in boosting student enrolment in Delhi. Organisations like Pratham and Teach for India concentrate on improving foundational literacy and providing mentorship, while the Salaam Baalak Trust works to facilitate educational access for underprivileged children. Additionally, the Each One, Teach One campaign, led by local groups, encourages community members to enrol children in nearby schools, which helps increase both enrolment and retention rates. These community-based efforts complement government initiatives, fostering a collaborative, community-driven approach to supporting education.

1.2 Gaps and Justification

Although the government has implemented various programmes to retain students and address dropout rates, there appears to be a notable dearth of research examining enrolment and dropout patterns in Delhi's public schools in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Developing a comprehensive understanding of the key factors and policy interventions that significantly influence changes in student enrolment is crucial for addressing dropout issues and further enhancing the educational system (Kishore and Shaji, 2012). Furthermore, the absence of robust scholarly literature investigating migratory trends among enrolled students represents a significant knowledge gap. Addressing these research gaps and investigating the determinants of student retention and attendance are critical steps towards a more accurate evaluation of the effectiveness of current government policies and initiatives aimed at reducing dropout rates.

1.3 Research Questions

This study attempts to answer the following research questions:

a. How have student enrolment and dropout rates in Delhi government schools changed over the past decade?
b. What key factors have influenced enrolment and dropout rates in Delhi government schools since COVID-19?
c. How have government policies and initiatives impacted enrolment and dropout rates in Delhi government schools post-COVID-19?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A substantial number of out-of-school children in Delhi and the issue of school dropouts remains a pressing concern. Notably, dropout figures for Delhi were absent from the minutes of Project Approval Board meetings under the Ministry of Education, suggesting a lack of available information. It has been emphasised that data on previously out-of-school children who have been integrated into the education system should be uploaded onto the PRABANDH portal, as this would enhance monitoring and reporting mechanisms in Delhi.

For a comprehensive assessment of any education system, dropout and enrolment rates are crucial indicators. Various studies have highlighted that these dynamics are influenced by a range of socioeconomic and cultural factors. It is a combination of both push factors, such as an inability to relate education to daily realities, and pull factors, like the need to support one's family, that result in withdrawal from school. Dropout rates have historically been higher among girls than boys, particularly in developing countries. Gender and caste-based disparities in school enrolment and retention have been well-documented in the Indian context. Research suggests that the lack of an inclusive curriculum that fails to address the diverse cultural and social backgrounds of students contributes to further disengagement and dropout. It is imperative to recognise the immediate benefits

of improving the educational situation in India, and this research has been instrumental in addressing and learning more about the causes of dropouts and enrolments in Delhi's education system.

The quality of school hygiene and the socioeconomic circumstances of students' families are significant determinants of school attendance and completion rates. Poor hygiene in schools, including inadequate sanitation facilities, lack of clean drinking water, and poorly maintained infrastructure, can lead to health issues that contribute to higher dropout rates. Furthermore, socioeconomic challenges such as poverty, gender biases, and lack of parental education exacerbate the problem. Studies have highlighted a link between these substandard school conditions and higher absenteeism and dropout rates, particularly among female students who face additional challenges due to inadequate menstrual hygiene management.

Socioeconomic factors also play a significant role in school dropouts. Poverty, the need for children to contribute to family income, and domestic responsibilities, especially for girls, are major reasons for withdrawal from education. Research indicates that higher dropout rates are associated with lower household income, lack of maternal education, and adolescent engagement in paid work. Substance abuse among boys is also a contributing factor. This multifaceted issue, where poor school hygiene and adverse socioeconomic conditions create a cycle of absenteeism and dropout, requires a comprehensive approach.

Addressing these challenges is crucial for improving retention rates in Indian schools. Interventions should focus on improving school infrastructure, providing economic support to families, and promoting gender equality in education. Targeted policies in these areas can significantly reduce dropout rates and enhance educational outcomes for all children across the country.

The Delhi example highlights a key, straightforward fact that is often overlooked in discussions of educational reform. Reforms involve more than just communicating compliance requirements through written policies or transferring technical knowledge through training. They require addressing the complex interplay of information, design, compliance, and the underlying attitudes, beliefs, and practices at the ground level. True change is about addressing these real-world experiences and realities. Numerous experiments and initiatives have struggled to have lasting impact because they fail to grapple with these fundamental factors. Simply maintaining the status quo is insufficient; the challenges facing the education system in Delhi make it clear that reform requires a more comprehensive approach. Organisations must adopt new frameworks and vocabulary to address the core issues of state capacity and competence.

One major reason for school dropout is financial hardship. Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds often face difficulties continuing their studies due to the burden of being the primary earner and the inability to afford school fees. While child labour is a less common factor, financial constraints account for around 50% of dropout cases (Kishore and Shaji, 2012).

Another key factor is a lack of student motivation to attend school. NFHS III (IIPS 2007) surveys identified "lack of interest" as the most prevalent reason for dropping out. An earlier NSSO survey (1998) found that 24.4% of respondents gave this as a reason for dropping out. Similar issues, such as "problems at school" and "lack of motivation," also play a role.

Poor academic performance stemming from learning difficulties and perceived "slowness" can also lead to disengagement and withdrawal from education (Kishore and Shaji, 2012; Khokhar, Garg, and Bharti).

Physical and mental disorders can significantly impact students' ability to attend school. The most common reasons cited are various physical conditions, followed by mental retardation (Kishore and Shaji). Severe physical disabilities, such as those caused by cerebral palsy and post-polio paralysis, accounted for a 33% of the cases. Some students even had to stop attending when their assistive devices, like tricycles, broke down.

Parental desires to discontinue their children's education are frequently cited as a significant factor contributing to school dropouts. Research indicates a statistically significant overrepresentation of female students being withdrawn from school by their parents, often to undertake domestic responsibilities such as caring for siblings (Khokhar, Garg, and Bharti). Some parents harbour beliefs that excessive education could lead to problems during marriage, while others do not consider completing education an essential requirement. Additionally, Indian students from the Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) categories exhibit higher dropout rates compared to their peers from other demographics (Chauhan, 2006).

The impacts of parental involvement in their children's education are often overlooked. School dropout is more prevalent among adolescents whose parents did not actively participate in parent-teacher association meetings, discuss academic progress with teachers, or oversee their homework during primary schooling. Conversely Active communication between parents and teachers and family involvement in school-related activities usually lower the chances of dropouts in lower secondary schooling (Anghel, R. Neacsa Lupu, C. Voicu, 2016). Furthermore, adolescents whose parents have attained higher educational qualifications demonstrate a lower probability of school dropout, consistent with existing research findings that suggest less-educated parents provide less encouragement for their children's education (Drèze and Kingdon, 2001).

Academic performance is a key concern for schools, and they often resort to expelling students with failing or below-average grades in an effort to maintain high success rates. Consequently, school dropout rates are disproportionately higher among adolescents with average or below-average academic performance, as these persistently low-performing students are more likely to be expelled, potentially skewing the overall performance metrics of their respective schools (Fetler, 1989).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs an exploratory mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data. The methodology consists of three key steps:

3.1 Quantitative Analysis:

The study analysed enrolment and dropout trends from the Unified District Information System for Education datasets spanning the period from 2014 to 2021, with the aim of identifying any notable changes over time

3.2 Qualitative Validation:

The trends identified from the quantitative analysis were then explored further through comprehensive interviews with 12 key stakeholders, including administrators, educators, and policymakers. This qualitative component provided a more nuanced and contextual understanding of the observed data.

3.3 Stakeholder Interviewees' Profile:

This study collected in-depth qualitative data from key people involved in education policies of Delhi government schools over the past decade. The researchers selected these stakeholders based on their important roles in policy development, administration implementation, and school management. The interviewees included five senior administrators from the Delhi Education Department, three policymakers, and five principals from Delhi government schools, totalling twelve participants. The researchers used a targeted sampling method, with two criteria: first, that the participants had been actively involved in the Delhi government education sector since 2015, and second, that they had held their positions at least since before the COVID-19 pandemic. Only those who met these conditions were selected for interviews.

3.4 Data Collection

The data collection process involved scheduling interviews with key stakeholders during their availability, such as break times or after work hours, to minimise disruption to their professional duties. Prior to each interview, participants were provided with a research overview and informed of their option to remain anonymous. The interviews were conducted using a carefully curated checklist designed to address the key research questions, while also cross-checking secondary data sources. The discussion began with open-ended prompts to elicit broader insights from the interviewees, enabling them to freely share their expertise. This was followed by more targeted, closed-ended questions aimed at verifying and supplementing the existing data. This structured approach facilitated an in-depth exploration of the stakeholders' perspectives and ensured comprehensive data collection.

3.5 Content Analysis:

The study further analysed the factors that contributed to the observed changes in enrolment and dropout patterns, based on the quantitative data and the insights gathered from the qualitative interviews.

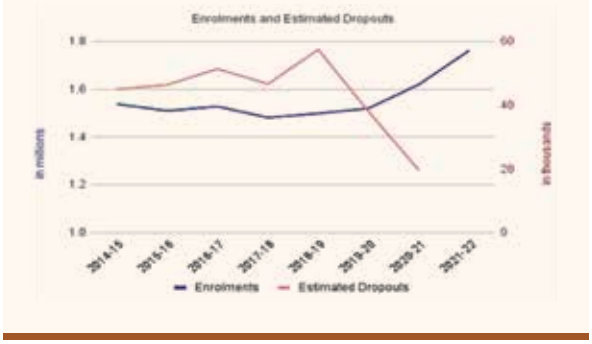
3.6 Study limitation:

This study adopts a qualitative methodology with a limited number of participants, which may constrain the generalisability of the findings to the broader population.

4. FINDINGS

Delhi's education system has undergone a significant transformation, marked by notable shifts in enrolment numbers and dropout rates. This section critically examines the dynamics of school enrolment and dropout rates in the city and delves into the underlying factors that contribute to these trends.

Figure 6: Enrolment and Estimated dropouts



Source: UDISE data

4.1 Growing Trend of Private Schooling in Delhi

The growing popularity of private schools in Delhi is a key factor influencing enrolment trends. Data indicates that the proportion of students attending private institutions increased from 35.21% to nearly 42% between 2013-14 and 2017-18, as reported by a Delhi Education Department official. This shift suggests that many parents perceive private schools as providing higher-quality education and better outcomes compared to government schools, despite the higher financial costs. This preference is often driven by the perceived advantages of private schools, such as better infrastructure, more disciplined environments, and higher academic standards. However, this trend also exacerbates educational inequalities, as not all families can afford private schooling. This leaves children from less affluent backgrounds at a disadvantage, further widening the socio-economic gap. The stagnation in government school enrollments reflects a growing lack of confidence in the public education system, often attributed to perceived deficiencies in teaching quality, infrastructure, and available resources.

4.2 Natural and Artificial Dropouts

During the interviews, there was a recurring discussion about "natural" versus "artificial" dropouts. Natural dropouts refer to students who leave school because of unavoidable personal or family challenges, such as financial struggles or health issues. Contrarily, systemic issues such as poor facilities, bureaucratic hurdles, or the difficulty in obtaining necessary documents like transfer certificates effectively push students out of the education system, leading to artificial dropouts.

Programs such as Mission Buniyaad and Chunauti, aimed at enhancing basic literacy and numeracy, may inadvertently lead to an increase in artificial dropouts. By placing students in groups based on their academic performances, these programs can stigmatize those who are struggling, making them feel disconnected and, over time, more likely to drop out. Furthermore, getting transfer certificates can be especially challenging for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, often leading to extended absences or even permanent dropouts.

4.3 Challenges for Marginalised Groups

Gender disparities remain a significant challenge in Delhi's education system, particularly for girls from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Qualitative insights revealed that girls are more prone to dropping out of school due to domestic responsibilities and cultural norms prioritising boys' education. The lack of gender-sensitive infrastructure, such as separate toilet facilities for girls, can further discourage their school attendance.

While attempts have been made to address these issues, such as constructing gender-segregated restrooms, these measures often fall short of tackling the deeper-rooted social and economic barriers impeding girls' educational attainment.

Similarly, children with disabilities face considerable obstacles in accessing high-quality education. Despite the government's commitment to inclusive education, many schools lack the necessary resources, including trained special education teachers and accessible facilities. Consequently, these vulnerable students are often marginalised from the education system or provided inadequate support, resulting in higher dropout rates among this population.

4.4 Challenges Facing Delhi's Public Schools

Systemic barriers continue to pose significant challenges, hindering the effectiveness of government schools in engaging students. One of the most pressing issues is the lack of adequate infrastructure and resources. Despite ongoing efforts to improve facilities, many schools still lack basic amenities such as science labs, libraries, or sufficient classroom space. These deficiencies can discourage students, especially at the secondary level where subjects like science become crucial for future opportunities. Overcrowded classrooms are another persistent problem, as the limited capacity of these schools is further strained by increasing enrolment, particularly during times of economic hardship.

To address these challenges, some interviewees suggested expanding school infrastructure and introducing flexible scheduling, such as morning and evening shifts, to accommodate more students and help reduce dropout rates. However, these solutions would require substantial investment and political commitment. Another concern is the limited educational options available to students. With restricted access to diverse curricula and extracurricular activities, students often become disengaged from their education. This issue is particularly prevalent in government schools, where the emphasis tends to be on rote learning and exam preparation, rather than fostering creativity and critical thinking. Expanding educational choices and providing more opportunities for students to explore their interests could help lower dropout rates and improve overall student satisfaction.

4.5 Need for focus on children from marginalised communities

While UDISE reports indicate a substantial decline in dropout rates and a consistent rise in enrolments within Delhi's government schools, ground insights reveal a more nuanced reality. Many children, particularly from vulnerable communities, continue to miss out on education, underscoring the need for greater emphasis on the inclusion of these marginalised groups.

Interviews suggest that government statistics may underreport dropout rates or overstate enrollment numbers. This could be due to factors such as the pressure on schools to meet enrollment targets, leading to inflated figures, as well as challenges in tracking transient populations, such as the children of migrant workers. Consequently, the dropout issue could be more extensive than what is captured in official reports, especially in areas where socio-economic barriers and limited access to education prevail.

4.6 Impact of Government Initiatives

In recent years, the Delhi government has launched several initiatives to address challenges in the education system. Programs like Mission Buniyaad, the Happiness Curriculum, and the distribution of tablets have been recognised for their potential to improve learning outcomes and reduce dropout rates. However, their effectiveness remains subject to debate.

Mission Buniyaad, designed to enhance basic literacy and numeracy skills, has helped many students catch up to grade-level standards. Yet, the program's practice of separating students based on academic performance has sparked concerns that it may alienate and stigmatise those who are struggling.

The Happiness Curriculum, introduced in 2018 to promote emotional well-being and holistic development, has received mixed feedback. While some educators have observed positive results, others question whether it adequately addresses the more pressing academic needs of students.

The introduction of technology-driven learning tools like tablets is seen as a positive step toward modernising Delhi's education system. However, the digital divide remains a significant issue, as not all students have equal access to the necessary technology and internet connectivity, potentially exacerbating existing inequalities.

4.7 The Role of Technology and Infrastructure

Enhancements to the physical infrastructure and integration of technology have had a positive influence on enrolment and dropout rates within Delhi's government schools. The provision of improved classrooms, laboratories, and sports facilities has created a more engaging learning environment. Additionally, initiatives such as midday meals and free textbook distribution have increased accessibility and appeal, particularly for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The integration of technology-enabled remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic

has also helped mitigate dropouts by facilitating continued education. However, the success of these efforts is contingent upon reliable internet access and teachers' proficiency in utilising technology effectively.

The research findings highlight the complex nature of dropout and enrolment challenges in Delhi's school system. While significant progress has been made in terms of infrastructure and technology, systemic barriers continue to impede advancement. The growing preference for private schooling, the persistence of natural and artificial dropouts, and the challenges faced by marginalised groups all underscore the need for a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to education reform.

4.8 Socio- Economic issues due to covid

Following the onset of COVID-19, many families experienced severe financial constraints due to the loss of livelihood. Consequently, the high fees forced them to transfer their children from private to government schools. According to findings from the principal of one of the Delhi government schools, there has been a notable increase in enrolment trends in these schools post-COVID. Families from lower economic strata primarily drove this surge by transferring their children to government institutions as a more affordable alternative.

4.9 Migration Due to Covid

The COVID-19 pandemic led to a nationwide shutdown, triggering widespread job losses and severe financial constraints for many individuals. Faced with this instability and uncertainty, a significant number of people were compelled to return to their native places. According to an administrative officer from the Delhi Department of Education, the pandemic triggered a substantial exodus from Delhi as residents relocated back to their hometowns.

An unintended consequence of this mass migration was the persistence of outdated data in educational records. As these families moved, they often failed to update or remove their children's records from their previous educational institutions. This issue was exacerbated by the Right to Education Act's provision that prevents the expulsion of students unless they voluntarily leave. Consequently, many students' names remained in school records, which, coupled with the RTE policy, contributed to an artificially low dropout rate during this period.

4.10 The Change in promotion policy post covid

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, the Delhi Department of Education introduced a revised academic promotion policy for students in grades 9 and 11. According to a senior departmental official, the rationale behind this policy change was to address the learning gaps that had emerged due to the prolonged school closures. As many students had been unable to physically attend classes during the academic year, they faced challenges in developing comprehensive subject knowledge. To mitigate the disparities in educational access and prevent students from forfeiting an academic year due to circumstances beyond their control, the policy incorporated the provision of grace marks to facilitate their advancement to the next grade. This measure aimed to maintain continuity in the educational trajectory despite the unprecedented disruption caused by the pandemic.

5. DISCUSSION

The examination of enrolment and dropout trends in Delhi's government schools over the past decade reveals significant fluctuations, influenced by a complex interplay of systemic, social, and policy-related factors. From 2013-14 to 2017-18, a rise in private school enrolment, from 35.21% to nearly 42% (Economic Survey of Delhi, 2019), highlighted concerns regarding the perceived quality of government schools. Families' preference for private schools, which were viewed as offering superior infrastructure and academic standards, contributed to widening the gap for socio-economically disadvantaged students (Kishore & Shaji, 2012; Anghel et al., 2016).

Dropout rates spiked between 2018-19, driven by financial challenges, health issues, and systemic shortcomings such as inadequate infrastructure and bureaucratic delays (Kishore & Shaji, 2012; Anghel et al., 2016). Initiatives like Mission Buniyaad, designed to improve literacy, may have inadvertently stigmatised underperforming students, further exacerbating dropout rates (Fetler, 1989). Marginalised groups, including girls and children with disabilities, faced disproportionately higher dropout rates due to societal norms and lack of support (Khokhar et al.).

In the post-pandemic period, government interventions such as Mission Buniyaad, the

Happiness Curriculum, and the distribution of tablets have demonstrated some positive effects on literacy and emotional development, though challenges like the digital divide have persisted (Chauhan, 2006; Anghel et al., 2016). Despite a reported decrease in dropout rates after 2020, the data may be inflated due to pressures on schools to meet enrolment targets (Nair, 2023) and issues related to unreported student exits during mass migration.

Additionally, a revised promotion policy for students in grades 9 and 11, which introduced grace marks to address learning gaps caused by the pandemic, has helped to prevent academic delays and reduce dropouts (India Today, 2022). The financial constraints experienced by families have also contributed to a shift from private to government schools, leading to increased enrolments (India Today, 2022).

While the implemented policies have had some positive impacts, challenges remain in ensuring data accuracy, addressing systemic inequities, and providing equitable access to resources, all of which must be addressed to achieve sustained improvements.

6. CONCLUSION

Delhi government schools have experienced significant fluctuations in enrolment and dropout rates, driven by a complex interplay of factors. From 2013-14 to 2017-18, there was a notable rise in private school enrolments, driven by perceptions of better quality education and infrastructure. This trend highlighted growing inequalities and a decline in public confidence in government schools, as families from higher socio-economic backgrounds opted for the perceived advantages of private institutions. However, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 paradoxically led to a reduction in dropout rates despite the hardships and systemic failures faced by many students and families. This was largely due to policy changes, as well as policy loopholes and financial constraints affecting people from lower economic strata, which compelled them to transfer their children from private to government schools as a more affordable option. The Delhi government's initiatives, such as Mission Buniyaad and the Happiness Curriculum, have aimed to address the issues within government schools and enhance the curriculum to better align with private institutions. These programs have shown some positive impacts on literacy and holistic development.

Nonetheless, discrepancies in data reporting—exacerbated by pressures on schools to meet enrolment targets and the limitations of new policies—suggest that the true extent of the problem might be underreported. Moving forward, it will be crucial to address systemic barriers, improve infrastructure, and ensure equitable access to resources to sustain progress and effectively reduce dropout rates across all socio-economic groups.

Additionally, more comprehensive and longitudinal data collection, as well as robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, are needed to better understand the evolving dynamics and inform evidence-based policymaking. Targeting the root causes of educational inequities, such as socioeconomic disparities, gender biases, and lack of accessibility for students with disabilities, will be essential in designing truly inclusive and transformative reforms for Delhi's education system.

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CHAPTER

5

Educational Dilemmas: Public School Teachers' Choices Between Public and Private Schools for Their Children in Urban Chennai

Partha Amarendra Samal

ABSTRACT

This study examines the educational choices made by public school teachers in Chennai, India. Through interviews and surveys of teachers from a Kendriya Vidyalaya and a Government Higher Secondary School in urban Chennai, the findings indicate that more KV teachers prefer to enrol their children in government schools. In comparison, more GHSS teachers opt for private schools. Additional factors shaping these decisions include teacher demographics, perceptions of quality, language, and socioeconomic status. The research provides insight into the complex decision-making processes of teachers regarding their children's education. It also offers implications for policy measures aimed at enhancing public education and promoting educational equity for all students.

Keywords: School, School choice, Parents, Socio-demographics, public school teachers, India, private education.

KEY FINDINGS

- The findings suggest a notable divergence in the educational preferences of public school teachers in Chennai. While a substantial proportion (71.43%) of Kendriya Vidyalaya teachers chose to enroll their children in government-run schools, a contrasting pattern emerged among Government Higher Secondary School teachers, with 70% of them opting for private institutions. This disparity indicates varying perceptions of educational quality between the two cohorts of teachers.

- The study found that teachers' socioeconomic and demographic backgrounds influenced their school choices for their children. Younger Kendriya Vidyalaya teachers, many of whom were the first in their families to receive higher education, tended to choose government-run schools. In contrast, older teachers from the Government Higher Secondary Schools were more inclined to send their children to private institutions. This suggests that generational and socioeconomic factors played a role in shaping the school selection decisions of these public school teachers.

- The majority of Kendriya Vidyalaya teachers did not report that regional language influenced their own education and preferred to send their children to government schools. In contrast, Government Higher Secondary School teachers with regional language backgrounds were more inclined to choose private schools for their children. This suggests that perceptions of language and cultural capital shaped the school selection decisions of these public school teachers.

- The findings suggest that a greater proportion of Kendriya Vidyalaya teachers utilized private tuition or coaching for their children, compared to only 30% of Government Higher Secondary School teachers. This indicates a stronger tendency among KV teachers to seek supplementary educational support outside the school system, particularly for students enrolled in institutions following the Central Board of Secondary Education curriculum.

- Location and safety were important factors for Kendriya Vidyalaya teachers when selecting schools for their children, with 57.14% citing these considerations. In contrast, only 20% of Government Higher Secondary School teachers viewed location and safety as significant factors. This difference may be attributed to the centralized locations of KV schools compared to the more dispersed nature of GHSS institutions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Parents often find themselves stranded in an increasingly complex decision-making process regarding their children's schooling. This process is usually intricately personal and considerate of many variable factors. For teachers, however, these dynamics are of a different paradigm, offering a unique, multi-stakeholder, eagle-eyed perspective of an administrator, a tutor and a parent. Alongside utility-maximising decision-making, they also intend to find a suitable bridge between their professional and societal roles and their parental aspirations to provide the best for their children.

This conundrum is especially pronounced in the Indian context, wherein the growth of private education, alongside issues of quality and equity in the public system, have considerably altered the educational landscape (Kingdon, 2007). Public school teachers, who are exposed to both sectors, must navigate these complex trade-offs and often employ intricate strategies to ensure the optimum educational outcomes for their children.

The Indian education system has been characterized by a dichotomy. According to a 2017 Hindustan Times survey, 90% of government school teachers in Barnala District, Punjab, enroled their children in private schools. This suggests a lack of confidence in the very system they serve, as they appear to place more trust in private schools, which they perceive as offering superior facilities and better educational outcomes. Furthermore, in 2018, the Times of India reported that Yogi Adityanath, the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, urged government school teachers to send their children to public schools. This call by the political leadership reflects a concern about the disconnect between government officials and the general public, which was also reflected in a 2015 Allahabad High Court judgment directing the UP Chief Secretary to pressure government officials to enrol their children in government schools.

Although extensive research has examined how parents, as a singular stakeholder, make school choices for their children, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding how public school teachers rationalize their educational decisions for their own offspring. This study aims to investigate some of the key factors influencing these choices, with the goal of contributing to the growing body of scholarship on rational choice and utility maximization in educational decision-making. By drawing on insights from sources such as the Hindustan Times report, the research provides introspection into the perceived shortcomings of the public education system and the appeal of private institutions, ultimately informing potential policy interventions to address these issues.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aims to evaluate the educational choices made by public school teachers in government-run schools regarding their own children's schooling. While significant research has examined the educational decision-making of parents from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds across urban and rural India, there is a notable lack of literature focused specifically on this topic, necessitating the scope of this investigation.

The primary research questions outlined in this paper are:

a. What proportion of public school teachers enrol their children in private schools versus government schools? Does this vary between Tamil Nadu government-run schools and Union government-run schools? How does it compare to the overall Tamil Nadu and all-India averages of private school enrolment?

b. Do factors such as school location, subject specialization, curricula, pedagogy, and teacher experience play a role in the information domain, which is not as readily available to ordinary parents in Tamil Nadu and India?

c. If so, how are the specific reasons ranked in terms of preference by the public school teachers? What are the patterns observed among the three stakeholders with vastly different information domains and emerging profiles?

d. How do these teachers perceive the infrastructure, pedagogy, and curricula of public and private schools? Do they engage in substantial supplementary support, such as private tuitions, outside of the core infrastructure provided by the schools their children attend?

e. Is there an emergence of superior information and cultural capital that puts teachers in an advantageous position for decision-making and maximizes their rational choice-making compared to other parents? How do these patterns manifest in terms of class and caste?

f. What is the outside perception of these teachers' choices, and what are the perceived shortcomings of the public or private school systems that are deemed important for consideration? Does this align with the perspectives of the public school teachers themselves?

From this context-rich investigation, the study aims to derive the following:

a. Whether a chronic lack of trust in the public education system drives this 'elite' exodus, given that public school teachers are relatively well-paid, rigorously trained, and highly qualified.

b. Understanding how this trust is formulated and through which competing variables. The study seeks to evaluate the interplay between strategic calculations and social, cultural, and economic factors.

c. Whether negative experiences from the teachers' own childhood educational experiences play a role in their current decision-making. To what extent this

contributes to their self-perception as 'informed and empowered' consumers in the increasingly privatized education market?

3. CASE STUDIES

The existing literature on the educational choices of public school teachers regarding their own children's schooling is limited. However, there are several studies, both within India and internationally, that examine similar cases of parents and students exercising their educational agency in varying contexts and timeframes. I have provided a detailed discussion of these relevant studies below:

The studies conducted by Choudhury and Mousumi (2024) in rural Odisha reveal a national trend of the proliferation of private schools (from 2782 in 2005-06 to 7430 in 2016-17) as as well as the enrolment in them in the rural sector (0.22 million in 2005-06 to 0.64 million in 2016-17), particularly Low-Fee Private Schools (LFPS), in the post-liberalization period These LFPS are seen as providers of social mobility, freedom from teacher apathy and accountability, and better English-medium education compared to local government schools. Other factors driving the shift towards private schools include the growing bureaucracy, flexibility in curricula, and access to extracurricular activities, which parents view as worthwhile trade-offs despite the higher expenses.

Similarly, studies by Hill et al. (2011) and Kingdon (2020) have found a 10% increase in private school enrolment between 2006 and 2014, leading to an overall expansion of the school market. Comparing private school fees, Lahoti and Mukhopadhyay (2019) found the median values to be INR 275 in rural areas and INR 500 in urban areas. Kingdon (2020), in agreement with Lahoti et al. (2019), attributed the general preference for private schools, even among low-income families, to the perceived deficiencies in the government school system, such as teacher absenteeism, lack of accountability, and excessive bureaucracy.

Separate studies by Monsumi and Kusakabe (2019), and Dongre et al. (2018), have uncovered the need for LFPS among families from minority backgrounds, which often offer customized religious teachings as a trade-off with other aspects of school quality. The alignment of schools with cultural and religious values emerged as a key finding in these studies.

Consistent with the 1996 PROBE survey, in 2006, 79% of children aged 6-12 were enroled in government schools, while 21% were in private schools[Hill et al. 2011]. However, data shows stark contrasts in some rural areas, with more private school students than government school students [Lahoti & Mukhopadhyay 2019]. The cost of private schooling increased from Rs 940 to Rs 1,360 annually between 1996 and 2006, while government schooling decreased slightly. Private schooling at the upper primary level costs more than three times as much as government schooling [Hill et al. 2011].

The studies cited herein reveal persistent disparities in school choice based on socioeconomic status, caste, and gender. Enrolment data shows that 91% of Scheduled Caste (SC) children attended government schools, while only 9% were enrolled in private schools. In contrast, 67% of general caste students attended government schools, and 33% were in private schools. Boys were more likely (24%) to attend private schools compared to girls (18%) [Hill et al. 2011]. Household incomes ranged from Rs. 3,000 to Rs. 25,000 per month, with an average of Rs. 8,429. Families spent an average of Rs. 11,643 per month, with education being a significant expense [Mousumi & Kusakabe 2022]. This suggests a rational allocation of resources towards perceived productive members of the family and, by extension, Indian society, leading to the accumulation of educational, economic, and cultural capital.

The qualifications of teachers also varied significantly between government and private schools. In some low-fee private schools, only a few teachers had university degrees, and none had B.Ed. degrees, likely due to the higher salaries demanded by professionally trained teachers [Mousumi & Kusakabe 2022]. These private school teachers earned a meager Rs. 2,000 to Rs. 3,000 per month. Conversely, teachers in Kendriya Vidyalaya schools were highly qualified, with most holding Bachelor of Education degrees and passing the Central Teacher Eligibility Test (CTET) [Nambissan 2009].

In a study of 12(1)(c) admissions that reserved 25% of seats in private schools for economically weaker sections found that 92.19% of families with knowledge of the program applied, but only 54% of those applicants were allotted seats, and 75% of those allotted seats were ultimately admitted [Dongre, Sarin, & Singhal 2018].

The persistent preference for private schooling, even among lower-income families, reflects a deep-rooted perception that private schools offer

better-quality education compared to government schools [Lahoti & Mukhopadhyay 2019; Kingdon 2020]. Surveys suggest that parents recognize education as a pathway to upward social mobility and choose schools they believe will best serve their children's future success [Nambissan 2009]. Despite financial constraints, the ability of lower-income families to pay for private schooling demonstrates the importance they place on quality education. There is also evidence that private schools are perceived to offer a more comprehensive curriculum, extracurricular activities, moral education, and English language instruction, which are highly valued by parents [Lahoti & Mukhopadhyay 2019].

Ultimately, the choice between public and private schooling reflects a complex interplay of socioeconomic, cultural, and political factors that shape the educational landscape in India.

International research has also examined the educational choices of parents, particularly the nuanced decisions of middle-class families. A study by Crozier et al. (2008) explored the contradictions and complexities underlying the schooling preferences of white, middle-class parents in England, including cross-interviewing 125 households across 3. Despite having the financial means to opt for private education, these parents often chose to send their children to state-run urban schools, though they exhibited anxieties about this decision. To mitigate their concerns, they sought external support structures, such as gifted and talented programs, which research has shown tend to disproportionately benefit middle-class children. This highlights the tensions between the parents' purchasing power and their adherence to labor-oriented be beliefs as they sought interventions outside the private schooling system.

Scholarship has also examined the rationality underlying educational choices in different cultural contexts. For instance, a study by Alexander Evans (2008) challenged the perception of madrasa education in Pakistan as an irrational choice, emphasizing the diversity within this sector and the bounded rationality of parents, for whom madrasas may be the only accessible option. Evans found that such "rational choices" can lead to better outcomes, as parents seek to enhance job prospects and teacher accountability, which are often lacking in opaque government structures.

Theories of "habitus," developed by Pierre Bourdieu, [Bourdieu 1977] have been useful in understanding the interplay between individual agency and social context in shaping educational decisions. Habitus encompasses the feelings, perceptions, and behaviors shaped by one's social class and cultural background, which in turn influence how individuals conceive of and evaluate various educational opportunities. For example, students from working-class backgrounds may possess a habitus oriented towards practical, employment-focused programs rather than academic pathways, as they are conditioned by their social circumstances and perceived future prospects. Habitus thus elucidates how social class and cultural capital can profoundly impact decision-making in educational choices, especially in meritocratic societies.

Jæger's research on educational choices and meritocracy in Denmark has provided valuable insights into how different forms of cultural capital, passed down through various channels, influence students' educational decisions [Jæger 2009]. By incorporating the concepts of cultural capital, parental socialization, and investment, the authors have presented a comprehensive understanding of how cultural capital is embedded within the habitus of learners. This, in turn, helps explain educational expectations and academic achievement, even in a context like Denmark where economic capital and purchasing power are less restrictive. The study found that school-based cultural capital assets, such as the possession of fine arts, educational resources at home, and engagement in cultural activities, positively and directly shape students' intentions to pursue academically rigorous upper secondary education pathways. This suggests that the cultural capital inherent in students' habitus predisposes them to educational options aligned with the cultural norms and aspirations of their community.

The research reviewed here highlights the importance of understanding the multifaceted and context-specific nature of educational choices, particularly for parents and their children.

The concept of habitus, which encompasses the socially conditioned dispositions and perceptions that shape individual behavior, has significant implications for educational choices beyond the family context. Based on the research reviewed, it can be hypothesized that teachers' extensive socialization within the education system and their in-depth knowledge of its various facets may endow them with a unique habitus that can provide an advantage to parents when making school choices for their children. This is likely because teachers' habitus is shaped by their familiarity with diverse educational pathways, their experience with

different pedagogical approaches, and their ability to anticipate the potential consequences of various educational decisions.

The extant research on educational choices has spanned various countries, establishing that socioeconomic and cultural factors significantly shape parental decisions. For instance, a study in Chile by Farias demonstrated that economic status and cultural capital strongly predicted students' school track placements, wherein those from lower-income backgrounds were more likely to enrol in vocational programs, even when controlling for academic performance and competition. This suggests that parental choices are informed not only by their perceptions of their children's abilities but also by prevailing social and cultural norms. Similarly, research in Kazakhstan by Amankulova and Whitsel (2024) found that while parental education level had greater influence than wealth in determining school selection, geographic location remained the primary determinant, particularly for disadvantaged households. The practical limitations of distance and scheduling constraints often restrict lower-socioeconomic status parents' access to preferred, high-performing schools, as Gibbons and Machin (2008) observed in England, despite a general preference across socioeconomic groups for their children to excel academically.

The collapse of the Soviet Union enabled Eastern Europe and former Soviet states to undergo significant educational policy changes, characterized by decentralization and the introduction of school choice [Heyneman 1997]. Previously, the Soviet Union had contemplated a hypothetical voucher system, which, although never materialized, signaled a neoliberal influence in attempts to introduce parental control and market forces within the education sector, following a wave of social and political reforms [Heyneman 1997]. This proposed system would have given parents greater authority over the funding allocated to schools for each year their child attended. While such market-oriented reforms aimed to enhance the quality and efficiency of education, their implementation faced challenges, including legal-administrative complications, concerns over state control and inequity, as well as societal divisions.

While parents have the most to say in determining education choices, especially for the younger ones, the students, especially in the higher grades, exercise their agency in educational decision-making. The literature on student choice indicates that students engage in a rational process, just like parents, by weighing the costs and benefits of different ways of reaching the end in educational pathways. However, students' habits, wishes, and expectations of their abilities also guide their choices. In Sweden, JonsIn Sweden, Jonsson reported that while comparative advantages in certain subjects may partially explain sex segregation in educational choices, socialisation and gender norms also play a crucial role [Jonsson 1999]. at societal expectations and gender stereotypes, in addition to rational ability assessment, also influence students' choices. In Italy, Mocetti identifies early school failures and family background as critical in deciding post-compulsory educational choices [Mocetti 2007]. Early academic difficulties, therefore, make students more likely to drop out of school or join the less demanding accumulation of disadvantaged educational trajectories. Further, Trusty et al. (2000) conducted a study that explored how gender, socioeconomic status, and early academic performance influence post-secondary educational choices in the United States. They concluded that gender is the most influential factor, with females inclined to choose social majors and investigative and realistic ones for males. They concluded that the students' choices were based on their capabilities and what society expects from the genders.

Another interesting perspective is the one developed by Gabay-Egozi, Shavit, and Yaish (2009) on curricular choices within Tel Aviv-Jaffa high schools. Their research found that students' choices are influenced not only by a simple cost-benefit analysis, but also by factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, and perceptions of future risk and utility. More specifically, it was determined that a significant portion of students prepare a "hedging" portfolio, which is a mix of high-utility, high-risk disciplines like science and math, and lower-utility, low-risk disciplines like the humanities and social sciences [Gabay-Egozi, Shavit, and Yaish 2009].

The study by Doyle et al. (2004), conducted nearly two decades ago, is highly relevant to the current work. The researchers sought to examine the school enrolment patterns of public school teachers' children in the United States, utilizing data from the 2000 Census. They found that the incidence rate for urban public school teachers is greater (21.5%) than the urban population (17.5%) and all-US population (12.2%). This is even more apparent when teachers have a lower income ($42,000) and choose private schools (14.9%) at a higher rate than the lower-income population (10.3%). However, they denote that local trends might vary depending on place to place (for instance, Chicago saw a higher

incidence rate for teachers while Louisville saw the opposite). Despite this, a worrying trend of US public school teachers 'defecting' to private school systems, symbolic of class aspiration, persists. They draw the conclusion that this discovery could influence the evaluation of the public educational model's effectiveness, while also acknowledging the data's limitations due to the inadvertent inclusion of suburban homes.

4. SOCIOLOGICAL MODEL USED

Identifying an appropriate theoretical model to analyze public school teachers' educational choices for their children is crucial, given the unique circumstances and constraints they face. This section examines several potential frameworks and explains the rationale for adopting the Rational Choice Theory, which was originally proposed by economist-philosopher Adam Smith and further developed by Nobel laureate Milton Friedman.

The academic field of social science is currently experiencing a surge in positivist approaches, with Rational Choice Theory being increasingly cited in scholarly publications (0% in 1957 to nearly 40% in 1992; Hechter et al. 1997). As Ullah and Mukherjee (2023) have reasonably argued, there are several compelling reasons for the growing prominence of Rational Choice Theory, some of which will be drawn upon in this analysis.

a. People seek to maximise their utility and therefore rank their preferences, with the choice being with the one who is perceived to be of the highest rank (Hernstein 1990 and Krull 2016).
b. Throughout the studies mentioned above, Indian parents have made informed choices based on information. The weighted criteria for this process include factors such as distance, accessibility, cost-effectiveness, curricula and pedagogy, and the involvement of parents, all of which contribute to greater information reception. (Kelly, 2007)
c. With education being a marketplace, parents are buyers, whereas schools are sellers of services. The government acts as an intermediary by imposing the not-for-profit clause, as frequently directed by the Supreme Court (2022), distorting but not eliminating the market system.

Prior to selecting this model, I needed to evaluate the limitations of utilizing it, which Boudon (1998, 2003) has extensively critiqued. Boudon argues that Rational Choice Theory is unable to contextualize or account for actions rooted in value systems, beliefs, and other such factors. However, these criticisms have been addressed by scholars like Hechter et al., and I will outline some of their counterarguments below.

The primary justification for adopting the Rational Choice Theory in this study is its ability to capture the decision-making process of public school teachers as they weigh the costs, benefits, and constraints involved in selecting educational institutions for their children.

Boudon argues that Rational Choice Theory is limited in its ability to explain actions not solely driven by self-interest. He contends that the instrumental rationality underlying RCT, which assumes individuals make decisions to maximize their own utility, fails to account for the myriad other factors influencing human behavior, such as beliefs, values, and social norms. However, the work of sociologists like Hechter and Kanazawa (1997) has advanced RCT, presenting a more nuanced theory that may address some of Boudon's criticisms. For instance, according to Hechter and Kanazawa, individuals do not necessarily act solely to maximize their own utility, but may also act to maximize the utility of their social group or kinship network.

The sociological applications of Rational Choice Theory (RCT) have expanded beyond its purely economic conceptualization, adopting a multilevel perspective that considers individual actions and the social structures shaping them. This multilevel approach integrates non-instrumental motivations within the broader context of rational decision-making. For instance, the choice of school enrolment may be viewed as a rational decision, informed not only by factors like academic quality or proximity, but also by considerations of religious affiliation, social class, or institutional ethos.

The versatility of RCT is demonstrated across various sociological domains. Examples include Brewster's work on community influences on adolescent sexuality, Lee et al.'s research on neighborhood effects on mobility, Hoem's investigation of legal impacts on marriage and childbearing, Iannaccone's scholarship on religious pluralism and mobilization, Brinton's exploration of gender inequality in Japan, Petersen's analysis of salesperson earnings, Hedström's study of labor

union diffusion, Horney and Marshall's examination of criminal risk perception, and Pampel and Gartner's multilevel explanation of homicide rates. These examples illustrate the broad applicability of Rational Choice Theory within the sociological discipline.

This is where Boudon's call for alternative forms of rationality, including cognitive and axiological rationality, may not be essentially at odds with RCT. Indeed, Hechter and Kanazawa demonstrate that RCT in sociology has itself developed to accommodate a multilevel theory operating across the individual actions and social structures within which individuals act. This multilevel framework allows even non-instrumental motivations to fit into the broader pattern of rational decision-making.

The flexibility of Rational Choice Theory is exemplified in its application to religious behavior. While Boudon contends that RCT is limited in accounting for belief- and value-driven actions, Hechter and Kanazawa (1997) demonstrate that RCT can effectively analyze religious participation by considering the dynamics of individual agency and the religious market context. Religious attendance or practice can be understood as a rational choice influenced by factors such as perceived benefits of religious community membership, social norms of the religious affiliation, and availability of religious alternatives. Similarly, RCT has been applied to explain gendered behaviors, employing axiological rationality or rational choice within given social contexts to elucidate gender differences in educational attainment and career options. Although Boudon emphasizes axiological rationality, these value-based arguments can be incorporated within RCT by acknowledging that individuals' preferences and choices are shaped by, or filtered through, the social structures and cultural norms they inhabit.

A key concern raised by Boudon is that RCT does not adequately consider how social structures influence people's actions. However, as argued by Hechter et al. (1997), RCT in sociology recognizes the interactive nature of individual agency and social structure. RCT does not assume that individuals make decisions in a social vacuum; rather, it acknowledges that their choices are constrained and determined by the social environment in which they are embedded. Sociological RCT thus incorporates Boudon's emphasis on the role of social structures and cultural norms in shaping individual preferences and behaviors.

For instance, RCT studies of family dynamics show how opportunities and constraints shape individual choices about marriage, divorce, and fertility. The availability of alternative partners, legal and economic consequences of divorce, and social expectations of parenthood are some of the factors that determine choices individuals make even when self-interest may not be the sole choice.

The central element of Boudon's critique is the notion that Rational Choice Theory reduces all human actions to the sole motive of self-interest maximization. However, Hechter and Kanazawa (1997) have refuted this argument by demonstrating that RCT can readily incorporate actions motivated by broader social concerns and values. They point to studies in the realm of crime and deviance, where individuals' choices to engage in criminal behavior are determined not merely by the potential rewards, but also by the risks of punishment and the social stigma associated with criminality.

Further, the application of RCT to historical sociology underlines the power of RCT in explaining collective action or social change when the action is not only dictated by individual self-interest. They also refer to various studies examining changes in state autonomy and policy choice in absolutist societies, showing how power and resource dependence structures shape institutional emergence. These suggest that RCT can capture the subtle interplay between individual and collective motivations that influence social outcomes.

While the critique by Boudon raises some pertinent questions regarding the limitation of RCT, it must be realized that RCT, as applied in sociology, has undergone much refinement in most of the aspects mentioned above. The multi-level approach, addition of the social structures and consideration of non-instrumental motives mark the beginning of a sophisticated framework that can explain large social phenomena.

RCT's strength is that it systematically carves out the framework within which the analysis of social behaviour can take place in a testable manner. With due regard for the complicated interplay of human agency, structural features in society, and various motivations, RCT yields very important insights into the dynamics of action in people. While RCT is admittedly not a perfect theory, the theory is certainly adaptable and does explain much, and hence it is undeniably useful in sociological analysis. In fact, Hechter and Kanazawa conclude that "RCT is not a panacea for all of sociology's ills, but it is a powerful tool that can be used to shed light on a

wide range of social phenomena" (p. 193).

The concept of bounded rationality, as defined by Green (2008), further refines the understanding of rationality in the context of school choice decisions. It recognizes that, like other decision-makers, parents and students have access to limited information and cognitive resources, and their choices are not fully optimized but rather 'satisficing' - settling for an adequate rather than an optimal option, given the constraints they face. This aligns with Boudon's emphasis on the role of cognitive limitations and the influence of the social context in shaping individual decisions.

Applying RCT to school choice also highlights this theory's ability to capture how social structures and cultural capital influence educational choice. The literature review refers to Bourdieu and Jaeger, who note that social class, caste, and other sociocultural factors influence aspirations, access to information, and hence the educational choices made by parents. While Boudon blames RCT for completely omitting any social structural variables, its sociological applications prove quite the opposite and reveal its ability to include them within its explanatory framework.

Again, the study by Gabay-Egozi et al. (2009) depicts how vigorously rational choice theory interplays with social context in educational decision-making. It demonstrates well that student curricular choices depend not only on their perceived utility and risk assessments, but also on their social background and the structural realities they are facing. The current study exemplifies the effective integration of RCT with other theoretical frameworks to enhance comprehension of intricate social phenomena like school choice.

It follows, therefore, that while Boudon's critique of RCT raises crucial questions concerning its limitations, this application of RCT in school choice testifies to its flexibility and explanatory power. Using a multilevel approach, RCT brings in widely acknowledged social structure relations and the impact of non-instrumental motivations. It is not a static theory, but a dynamic instrument that can adapt and change to accommodate the diverse aspects of human behavior in school selection.

5. STRUCTURE OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN TAMIL NADU

Tamil Nadu's education system is similar in composition to the Delhi School Educational Model. There is a multitude of assessment mechanisms on offer, primarily ranging from Tamil Nadu State Board (TNSB) and CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education) to privately administered boards such as CISCE (Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations) that is further subdivided into ICSE (Indian Council of Secondary Education) and ISC (Indian School Certificate) for teaching and examining pupils up to Class 10 and Class 12, respectively.

6. METHODOLOGY

The research methodology utilized a mixed-method approach, primarily qualitative in nature, with n=22 interviews and a survey conducted between the period of August to September 2024. The interviews were open-ended and semi-structured, each lasting approximately 30-40 minutes. The study was carried out in urban Chennai, with a Government Higher Secondary School and a Kendriya Vidyalaya selected as the research sites. The exact locations have been kept confidential to protect the privacy of the participants. The number of interviewees was determined based on the criterion of saturation, with 7 participants from the KV, 10 from the GHSS, and an additional 5 individuals who had extensive experience working with teachers in public institutions.

The GHSS has traditionally followed the Tamil Nadu State Board and spans from Class 6 to Class 12. This GHSS, in particular, has received funds from the SSA (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan) since its inception in 2000. This scheme has been credited with increased enrolment and infrastructure, especially in rural areas (ASER 2018 and Oxford University Press 2017). The Samagra Shiksha Scheme has subsumed the SSA scheme, which has been developed to raise the quality of education from preschool to class 12. The interview consisted of teaching personnel from Class 6 to Class 10, all female. Class 11 and Class 12 teachers declined to take the survey and the interview. All the teachers had completed a minimum of post-graduation in various subjects ranging from the humanities to natural sciences. The ethnolinguistic makeup has been primarily Tamil with just one being a Hindi teacher.

The Kendriya Vidyalaya, located in urban Chennai, is among the most well-resourced schools in the region. The research involved interviews with four Bal Vatika (pre-primary) teachers, one teacher specializing in serving students with special needs, and two teachers who instruct students in other grade levels. The Kendriya Vidyalaya adheres to the CBSE curriculum, and its teaching staff have completed postgraduate degrees complemented by specialized Montessori training. The school's faculty reflects the diverse ethnolinguistic composition of India.

The study also included interviews with other participants who have experience collaborating with public school teachers or working in the public education sector. This group comprises full-time academics as well as fellows associated with non-governmental organizations that provide support to schools facing challenges related to infrastructure and teacher training. Additionally, they have assisted in addressing behavioral issues among students in the public school system.

7. FINDINGS

Table 26: Response Table

Parameter		Kendriya Vidyalaya	GHSS in Chennai
Choice in favour of Govt School		71.43%	30%
Choice in favour of Private School		28.57%	70%
Gender		All female	All female
Age Range		37 to 46 years old	48 to 58 years old
1 Kid		28.57%	20%
2 Kids		71.43%	80%
3 Kids		NA	10%
1st Gen Educated	Yes	57.14%	60%
	No	42.86%	40%
Regional Language in self-education	No	0.00%	10%
	Yes	71.43%	80%
	Mixed Education	28.57%	10%

English Preference for kids	Yes	14.29%	20%
	No	71.43%	80%
	No preference	14.29%	NA
Tuition/Coaching utilised for kids	Yes	57.14%	30%
	No	42.86%	70%
Distance/Safety considerations	Yes	57.14%	20%
	No	42.86%	80%

The educational preferences of teachers in Chennai, India, selected from Kendriya Vidyalayas and Government Higher Secondary Schools, are better reflected in the data presented in the table above. The analysis indicates that a greater proportion of KV teachers, at 71.43%, chose government schools for their children's education compared to only 30% of GHSS teachers. This disparity in school selection may be attributable to a combination of personal experiences, perceptions of educational quality, and socioeconomic factors that shape their decision-making processes. Additionally, the table highlights several other important issues worthy of further examination

This shows a high contrast in school choice between KV and GHSS teachers. While a majority of KV teachers preferred government schools, a majority of GHSS teachers preferred private schools. It may be due to a set of reasons that sets private and government schools apart regarding quality of education, school facilities' infrastructure, and teachers' competence. It can also be observed from the table that KV teachers were somewhat younger and more likely to have two children, whereas GHSS teachers were slightly older and more likely to have one or three children. These differences in demographics imply a disparity in preferences over school choice, with younger parents being more open to trying different school options, while for older parents, stability and familiarity could be ranked higher.

The data suggests that Kendriya Vidyalaya teachers were more likely to be first-generation educated, potentially indicating a stronger emphasis on the value of education compared to Government Higher Secondary School teachers, who came from families with longer educational legacies. Additionally, the findings show that no KV teachers reported regional language influences in their own educational backgrounds, while a few GHSS teachers did, implying that KV teachers may be more aligned with the English medium of instruction, which could be a factor in their educational choices for their children.

However, the results also reveal that most teachers across both groups did not express a notable preference for English-medium schooling for their offspring, challenging the common assumption that English language education is prioritized among India's educated professionals. Furthermore, the data indicates that a larger proportion of KV teachers utilized tutoring or coaching services for their children, potentially linked to perceptions of the CBSE curriculum's competitiveness in KVs, the availability of educational resources, and the academic aspirations of KV parents for their children's success.

The data in the table suggests that location and safety considerations play a more significant role in school selection for Kendriya Vidyalaya teachers compared to teachers from Government Higher Secondary Schools. This can be attributed to the centralized locations of KVs versus the more dispersed nature of GHSSes, resulting in greater importance placed on proximity and security by KV teachers. Additionally, the table implies that socioeconomic factors influence teachers' choices between public and private schools. The higher proportion of first-generation educated teachers in

KVs suggests that they may be more aspirational and willing to invest in their children's education, even if it means opting for private schooling options.

Furthermore, the findings from this table can be contextualized within the existing literature on parental school selection within and beyond the Indian context. The observation that KV teachers prefer government schools aligns with the hypotheses proposed by Crozier et al. (2008)'s, indicating that these choices are informed by factors beyond just financial considerations, such as the perceived quality of the school and the qualifications of the teaching staff.

Results from the following table can be contextualized against available literature on parental school choice within and outside India. This fact that KV teachers would instead go to governmental schools agrees with Crozier et al. (2008)'s hypotheses. Therefore, the choices are informed by considerations other than the parents' financial capability, such as the school's perceived quality and the teachers' qualifications.

Increased access to tuition or coaching among teachers is in good tandem with several studies, which note that the supplementary education industry plays an essential role in India, even for families who enrol their children in private schools. It follows that competition is very high within the Indian education system; it therefore further piles extra pressure on the parents to ensure academic success on the part of the children.

The data presented in this table illuminates the multifaceted nature of school selection decisions among teachers in India. These choices are influenced by a confluence of individual, social, and contextual factors, encompassing teacher demographics, perceptions of educational quality, language preferences, and socioeconomic considerations. Further in-depth research would be necessary to more thoroughly explore the underlying motivations behind the observed variations in school preferences across different regions and socioeconomic groups. The insights gained from this study have the potential to inform policy interventions aimed at strengthening the public education system, bridging the gaps between public and private schools, and ensuring that all students have access to a high-quality education that aligns with their needs and aspirations.

8. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitations of this study have been multifold since this was the first attempt to investigate teachers' choices in sending their children to public or private schools. Every GHSS, or KV for that matter, is not endowed with the same financial or human capital, thereby limiting this study to the categorical GHSS and KV explored herein. Additionally, I did not have the opportunity to conduct a linear examination of teachers teaching the same student grades.

However, my comparative examination of both central and state school teachers also reveals the desirability of continuing the comparison in a more breadth manner but instead in a more in-depth perspective. Simplifications that I made in my early research conducted in some places point toward new kinds of research that need to be done. First, the small sample size argued for a replication of this study with a large and representative sample of teachers so that the results could be generalised to the population of teachers.

Further to this, expanding the scope of the research to include more comprehensive contextual data would strengthen the explanatory power of the findings. Future studies should examine schools in greater depth, considering factors such as geographic location, institutional type, socioeconomic status, and diverse forms of school leadership. Incorporating these contextual variables would likely enhance the application and generalizability of the conclusions drawn about teachers' professional development and perceptions.

Third, future research should incorporate qualitative methods to provide additional insights. Qualitative approaches could offer more detailed information about teachers' perceptions, beliefs, intentions, and reasoning behind their educational choices. Understanding the 'why' behind these decisions is crucial for informing appropriate interventions and developing sound policies. Additionally, other factors worthy of examination include teachers' years of experience, professional development opportunities, and student performance, as these may influence teachers' experiences and perspectives. More specifically, pre- and post-treatment assessments of teacher attitudes and behaviours could shed light on the factors that predict teacher satisfaction, professional development, and retention. Addressing these limitations would strengthen the research and contribute to the development of better policies and practices in the field of education. Accordingly, I recommend this paper for further consideration and use.

Addressing the final point, controlling for the possibility of social desirability bias is crucial. This bias can encourage participants to provide responses they perceive as desirable, rather than expressing their true perspectives, especially when anonymity is assured. Employing indirect and mixed questioning strategies can help mitigate this issue. Therefore, the current study should be viewed as a starting point, but the identified shortcomings suggest the need for further research to better understand the teaching profession. Overcoming the limitations noted above in future studies will be vital to gaining a more comprehensive understanding and creating a foundation for programs aimed at enhancing teachers' job satisfaction and overall school performance.

9. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings presented in this study, I propose a set of transformative reforms inspired by the work of Nobel Prize-winner Milton Friedman. The key element of this proposal is the implementation of a robust school voucher system. Under this system, each parent would receive a government-funded voucher that can be used to enrol their child in any school of their choice, whether it is a public, private, parochial, or secular institution. This approach empowers parents to decide where their children will receive their education, allowing them to select the school that best aligns with their child's needs, learning abilities, and moral standards. Introducing such a voucher system would foster competition within the education sector, as schools would have to differentiate themselves, improve their standards, and work diligently to meet the diverse needs of learners in order to attract and retain students.

The government's primary role within the education system should be to ensure that all citizens are literate and have basic numeracy skills. The current structure, with its centralized curriculum, standardized teachers and professionals, and other bureaucratic requirements, stifles creativity, innovation, and flexibility in the education market. If the government were to reduce its control, schools would be free to experiment with their chosen curriculum, teaching approaches, and assessment formats.

The educational market should be liberalised, making it easier for new schools and other providers to enter. The doors will be opened for new and unique types of schools, teaching methodologies, and technology for teaching processes. New schools will be availed for gem focus, special concentrators, new methodologies and embracing technologies. People will have more options to select from in their classes and their learning styles. This means the opportunity and competition a labour of quality will make it even more inexpensive for the average consumer.

The privatization of schools is proposed as the primary reform strategy to enhance student performance. Government-run or traditional public schools are characterized as centralized, command-driven systems that promote complacency over creativity and productivity, unlike market-driven private schools which are accountable to parents. The paper suggests measures to facilitate the conversion of public schools to private schools and the expansion of the private school sector. It is argued that the creation of more private schools will foster a competitive environment, ultimately benefiting all students.

I believe that creating Education Savings Accounts would empower parents by providing them with more control over their children's education. These tax-advantaged accounts would allow parents to save and use funds for a variety of educational resources, such as tuition, tutors, books, and learning materials. ESAs would give parents a more comprehensive selection of educational options for their children and greater involvement in the educational process.

These recommendations are firmly grounded in the foundational principles of individual freedom, market-driven forces, limited government, and the empowerment of parents as key stakeholders in their children's education. Implementing such a transformative approach would help produce a more efficient, competitive, and responsive education system – one that is better equipped to address the evolving learning needs of students as they prepare to navigate the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.

By reducing the degree of government control and intervention, this paper champions the idea of cultivating an educational context that is more adaptable, innovative, and tailored to the unique requirements of each learner. Through increased competition and by empowering both parents and students, we can foster an education system that unlocks the full potential of young minds, equipping them with the knowledge, skills, and critical thinking abilities necessary to thrive in the rapidly changing world. This vision for reform holds the promise of a more dynamic, student-centric education system that ultimately benefits learners, families, and society as a whole.

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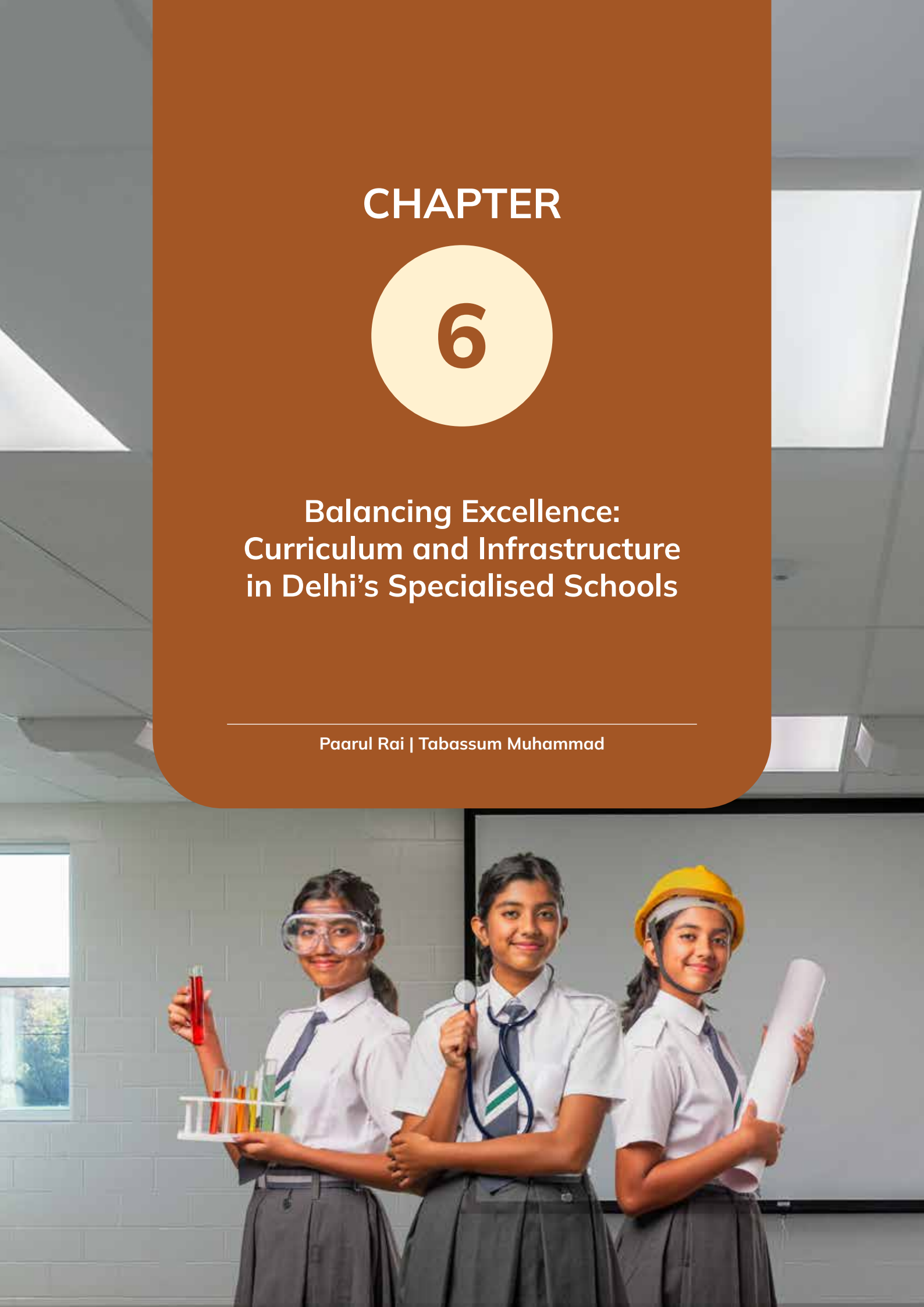
CHAPTER

6

Balancing Excellence: Curriculum and Infrastructure in Delhi's Specialised Schools

Paarul Rai | Tabassum Muhammad



ABSTRACT

This study examines the effectiveness of the curriculum in Delhi's Schools of Specialized Excellence, focusing on student experiences, learning outcomes, and infrastructure. The research seeks to evaluate the efficacy of the Delhi government's curriculum reform initiative, which involved establishing the Delhi Board of School Education and implementing its curriculum in the Schools of Specialised Excellence.

However, despite high student satisfaction, challenges persist. Key issues encompass inadequate sports facilities, insufficient infrastructure, and limited extracurricular engagement. While the curriculum promotes academic excellence, addressing these infrastructural deficits is essential for holistic student development. This study provides insights into how these specialized schools can enhance students' academic and non-academic experiences through targeted reforms.

Findings from this study suggest that these schools are performing well, and students find them very beneficial. Given its recent establishment, the school faces several infrastructural and other challenges that require attention.

Keywords: Delhi Board of School Education (DBSE), Schools of Specialised Excellence (SOSE), Curriculum Effectiveness, School Education, Learning Outcomes, Holistic Development Infrastructure

KEY FINDINGS

- Over half (58%) of the surveyed students believe that the new curriculum approach in the Schools of Specialised Excellence will improve their future employability.
- Most (72.5%) of the surveyed students think the SOSEs have well-trained and skilled teachers to effectively deliver the new curriculum, indicating successful capacity building in these schools.
- The majority (61%) of surveyed students would recommend the SOSEs to others, showing a positive attitude toward these institutions.
- While students expressed satisfaction with teaching methods, ongoing professional development for teachers is crucial to maintaining high standards of curriculum delivery.
- Student feedback indicates dissatisfaction with the current range of sports and extracurricular activities. To offer a more balanced educational experience, the SOSEs should invest in improved sports facilities and structured extracurricular programs.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Indian education landscape is undergoing significant transformation with the emergence of innovative models to address longstanding challenges. Among these, the Dr Ambedkar Schools of Specialised Excellence (SOSE) in Delhi represent a bold experiment in curriculum reform and specialised education. Established in 2021 by the Government of the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi, these schools aim to nurture students' unique interests and aptitudes, offering tailored learning experiences across different fields. The SOSE initiative is part of a broader reform agenda, which includes the creation of the Delhi Board of School Education (DBSE). This new board, developed in partnership with international organisations like the International Baccalaureate (IB), seeks to move away from rote memorisation towards a more holistic, skill-based approach to education. While existing research has largely focused on documenting the establishment and initial reception of these schools, there is a notable lack of critical analysis regarding their curriculum implementation, teaching methodologies, and student outcomes. This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative interviews and quantitative data analysis, to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the SOSE model and integrate relevant secondary research data.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Paulo Freire, in his book Pedagogy of the Oppressed, talks about the 'Banking Model of Education'. He equated teachers with bank clerks and saw them depositing information into students' minds, where students receive, repeat, and memorize it. He argues that this approach leads to a lack of intellectual development, critical skills, problem solving, and creative thinking skills. While critiquing conventional deep-rooted educational practices, he also proposed an alternative approach, known as problem-posing. In this transformed relationship, the teacher no longer merely imparts knowledge, but actively engages in dialogue with the students, who, in turn, also impart knowledge. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow." At its core, problem-posing education serves as a pathway to developing critical consciousness.

R.D. Anderson, a prominent scholar in the field of curriculum studies and education reforms, conceptualises the curriculum as a dynamic, ever-evolving guide that supports students in their academic pursuits. This perspective underscores the need for a critical examination of how these curriculum reforms influence student learning outcomes, which requires a sophisticated understanding of the nuances involved. Effectively implementing a redesigned curriculum is crucial for achieving positive educational results.

India's education landscape exhibits significant variations, resulting in uneven learning outcomes. National and international assessment bodies, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment and the Annual Status of Education Report, have identified shortcomings in the Indian education system. These include disparities in learning outcomes across different states, which are likely rooted in infrastructure disparities, teacher preparedness, and resource accessibility. Additionally, an excessive focus on rote memorisation has emerged as a major impediment, hindering the development of critical thinking and the application of knowledge in real-world contexts. These issues underscore the need for curriculum reform. Shazia Chaudhary, in her research article "Examining the Impact of Curriculum Reforms on Student Learning Outcomes," has proposed eight potential reforms to enhance learning outcomes. These include ensuring relevance to evolving global dynamics, fostering critical thinking and creativity, addressing skill gaps, promoting inclusivity and equality, embracing technology integration, enhancing global competitiveness, stimulating lifelong learning, and encouraging entrepreneurship and innovation.

In his work, Reforming the Indian School Education System, Karthik Muralidharan discusses the structural challenges in the education system. He states, "There are massive inequalities in the overall education system, which, on the one hand routinely produces students who go on to achieve global excellence in their fields, while on the other hand also produces the world's largest number of primary school-completing students who are not functionally literate and numerate at even a second- or third-grade level." He attributed this outcome to the lack of improvement in curriculum design and the absence of rewards for good performance among parents, teachers, and students. Secondly, he states, "An obsessive focus on exams and marks has led to an education system characterised by rote memorisation to pass exams (often through cramming of past exams) as opposed to conceptual understanding that can be applied and used in practical situations." Moreover, one of the major challenges is a low level of practical skills. Therefore, he articulated, "A fundamental objective for Indian education policy must be to transition the system from a'sorting' and'selection' paradigm to a 'human development' paradigm, enabling every citizen to acquire the necessary knowledge for a lifetime of ongoing learning in any skill they may pursue."

The research highlights the importance of reforming curriculum design to improve learning outcomes. In this context, Schools of Specialised Excellence represent an exciting new educational approach, offering tailored learning experiences that cater to students' unique interests and abilities. Existing studies have consistently demonstrated that incorporating cutting-edge learning technologies and aligning curricula with industry demands and technological advancements can significantly enhance academic achievement, knowledge retention, and critical thinking skills. Moreover, a shift from traditional, discipline-based teaching methods to more integrative, active, and student-centred approaches is necessary. The interplay between curriculum design and specialised education has become a central focus of educational research, with SOSEs serving as key case studies in the evolution of 21st-century learning models. The DBSE's curriculum framework is meticulously designed to equip students with essential skills for thriving in the 21st century, including critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, communication, and creativity.

According to reports issued by the Delhi government, as well as an analysis by the Indian Express, SOSEs have seen a steady increase in the number of applicants since their inception in 2021-22. This year for Class 9, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) has received the most applications — at 37,960 — while Humanities is the second most popular. In Class 11, the highest number of applications this time was for STEM — 28,135. One of the reasons for this influx is the assistance provided by these schools in preparing students for competitive examinations like NEET and JEE. SOSEs have partnered with various 'Knowledge Partners' who offer specialised guidance and sessions for competitive exam preparation.

Other Educational Boards

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) is a widely recognised education board in India, known for its standardised national curriculum. The board was formed and expanded between 1929 and 1962. CBSE-affiliated schools can be found across the country and even internationally. The CBSE's vision focuses on innovations in teaching-learning methods, including student-friendly and student-centred approaches, reforms in examinations and assessment, and regular updates to teachers' pedagogical skills. However, the board's curriculum has been criticised for its emphasis on theory-based learning, which limits students' exposure to practical learning and can encourage rote memorisation.

The Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE) is another prominent education board in India, renowned for its comprehensive curriculum that emphasises English language proficiency and practical learning approaches. This board positions itself as child-centric, offering a comprehensive and broad-based curriculum that caters to Indian ethos while maintaining a global perspective. The Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE), a private and non-governmental education board in India, administers two examinations: the Indian Certificate of Secondary Education and the Indian School Certificate.

However, the ICSE network is significantly smaller compared to the Central Board of Secondary Education, and it is often characterised by a rigorous grading system and extensive syllabi. Additionally, these ICSE schools tend to be relatively more expensive.

Apart from these, various state boards across India cater to region-specific educational needs, often incorporating local language and cultural elements. However, most state boards tend to use outdated learning methods, and their syllabi are rarely updated. Additionally, state board schools that follow state-mandated curriculums often lack skilled teachers.

Another prominent board is the International Baccalaureate (IB). The IB is known globally for its rigorous curriculum and emphasis on critical thinking. A hallmark of the IB program is its balanced curriculum, which includes traditional academic subjects, as well as arts, physical education, and community service. The program focuses on student well-being and offers a more pluralistic curriculum, allowing students to explore a broader range of subjects and interests, with components like CAS and ATL. By promoting inquiry-based learning, the IB program encourages students to question and research rather than simply memorise facts. However, schools affiliated with the IB are limited in India and tend to be highly expensive, making them less accessible.

DBSE has partnered with the IB to develop its curriculum, which is implemented in the SOSEs. This blends DBSE's focus on specialised education with the globally recognised IB curriculum.

The DBSE is a relatively new addition to India's educational landscape, which caters to the newly formed SOSEs in Delhi. The board aims to create an educational environment where students can delve deeply into their areas of interest, guided by expert faculty and industry professionals. This approach is designed to prepare students not just for higher education but also for potential careers in their chosen fields. While DBSE shares some common goals with other educational boards in India – such as providing quality education and preparing students for future success – its approach is uniquely tailored to nurture specialised talents. By focusing on specific areas of excellence and providing a more industry-aligned, skill-based curriculum, DBSE represents a new direction in Indian education, particularly suited to the diverse and dynamic needs of Delhi's educational landscape.

Initiatives In Other States

Many states have recognised issues such as rote memorisation and lack of practical skills, and, like the Delhi government's establishment of DBSE and SOSEs, they have also attempted educational reforms. One such initiative is 'MO Schools' in Odisha, a philanthropic platform that

invites alumni to collaborate in improving current government and government-aided schools. These schools receive operational and financial support from the government, with their everyday affairs run by an MO School Executive Body, supported by a Governing Council and Board of Advisors. These bodies comprise thought leaders, eminent educationists, social scientists, and notable individuals from various fields, including art, architecture, design, advertising, communication, film-making, literature, science, technology, sports, and public administration. They aim to nurture school children to become dreamers, doers, makers, growers, explorers, experimenters, and entrepreneurs. Although this initiative is not identical to DBSE, the intentions are similar.

Another similar initiative is the 'Eklavya Model Residential Schools' introduced by the Tamil Nadu government. This initiative was started by the National Education Society of Tribal Students (NESTS), established under the Ministry of Tribal Affairs to uplift marginalised communities. They aim to provide quality modern education, offer a common core-curriculum to ensure comparability in standards, facilitate an understanding of the common and composite heritage of tribal people, help students acquire employment-oriented skills, including self-employment, and strive to achieve the best academic standards, excellence in sports, and extra-curricular activities. While this initiative resembles DBSE, it is more localised and focused on uplifting the local tribal population.

The Gujarat government has implemented the Gyan Kunj Project as an educational initiative aimed at promoting digital inclusion within schools. Launched in 2017, this programme has transformed numerous primary school classrooms across the state into dynamic digital learning environments, furnished with smart boards, projectors, and tablets. However, the project's impact extends beyond the mere incorporation of advanced technological devices. Gyan Kunj has invigorated traditional academic subjects, rendering learning more interactive and engaging for students. The project's expansive reach, encompassing both urban and rural school settings, has been noteworthy. Furthermore, Gyan Kunj's influence stretches beyond merely altering the way students learn; it has also reshaped their relationship with education, rendering it more relevant and stimulating within our increasingly digital landscape.

Several other states have launched initiatives to improve education. For example, Rajasthan's Adarsh Vidyalaya focuses on holistic student development, while Utkarsh Bangla in West Bengal provides low-cost vocational training to school dropouts and unemployed youth. Uttar Pradesh in 2020 started Atal Residential Schools to offer quality education to marginalised communities. Although not all such initiatives have been successful, the high satisfaction levels among students at Delhi's Schools of Specialised Excellence suggest a positive outcome. Delhi has tried to tackle these issues by establishing a new education board and opening specialised schools. The remarkable performance of SOSE students in competitive exams has drawn widespread attention.

School Of Specialised Excellence (SOSE)

The Delhi government introduced the Schools of Specialised Excellence in 2021, which are affiliated with the Delhi Board of School Education (DBSE). The DBSE was established in 2021 as an alternative to the existing central and state education boards. In 2019, former Delhi Education Minister Manish Sisodia stated that the fee hikes of the Central Board of Secondary Education were financially burdening students, and as a result, Delhi decided to set up its own education board.

The DBSE and SOSEs aim to move away from rote memorisation and standardised assessment, instead focusing on skill development and practical learning. They advocate for the holistic development of students and preparing them for future challenges in a stress-free environment, which aligns with the vision of the National Education Policy, 2020. The DBSE is recognised by the Ministry of Education, Government of India, and is on par with the CBSE and other state boards.

The DBSE has partnered with the International Baccalaureate, a non-profit educational foundation that serves students aged 3-19 years. Additionally, the DBSE provides training for teachers to integrate global contexts into their everyday classroom teaching and learning. The board offers transdisciplinary, interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and skill-based curriculum frameworks, which can be adapted to suit the local context. The DBSE receives technical and managerial support from the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) and the Boston Consulting Group (BCG). Currently, the DBSE is only implemented in Delhi, and it is being introduced in phases, with only a few government schools currently affiliated with it. The DBSE has developed curriculum for foundational and specialisation-level education at the SOSEs,

the Delhi Model Virtual School (DMVS), and the Schools of Applied Learning (SoAL). The DBSE has aligned itself with the NEP 2020 by prioritising skill development and increasing curriculum flexibility for students.

The Government of NCT of Delhi established the Schools of Specialised Excellence to cater to students who demonstrate interest and aptitude in specific domains. Before establishing SOSE, the Directorate of Education GNCTD conducted a survey during 2020-2021, involving over 3200 students and parents. The findings suggested that 79% of students in grades 8-10 and 88% of students in grades 11-12 expressed an interest in the idea of early specialisation in their subjects of interest. SOSE are choice-based schools for grades 9 to 12, allowing students to specialise in their chosen fields of study. These schools claim to offer world-class infrastructure and top teachers to deliver a new-age curriculum and assessment in the specialised domains. They also have partnerships with reputed organisations, premier universities, and globally and locally acclaimed professionals. Additionally, they provide increased exposure to various career pathways through master classes, expert interactions, and field visits. As a result, students receive targeted preparation for relevant higher education pathways and career opportunities.

Prior to 2021, there were three main types of schools in Delhi: Sarvodaya Vidyalaya, which catered to students from nursery to senior secondary; Rajkiya Pratibha Vikas Vidyalaya, which admitted students through an entrance examination for grades 6-12; and School of Excellence, which were co-educational schools from nursery to grade 12. To align with the vision of the National Education Policy 2020, the Directorate of Education in Delhi phased out these "special category schools", including the popular Rajkiya Pratibha Vikas Vidyalaya and School of Excellence, which had been established in 2018. The government focused on converting these schools into specialised institutions. Initially, 20 schools were upgraded and renamed as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Schools of Specialized Excellence. Currently, there are 56 SOSE across Delhi, offering five different specialisations. Of these, 18 schools provide dual specialisation, while the remaining offer a single specialisation. The five specialisations available at SOSE are Armed Forces Preparatory School, High-end 21st Century Skills, Humanities, Performing and Visual Arts, and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics).

Humanities specialisation offers a progressive education in the Humanities and Social Sciences, aiming to develop students into future leaders, innovators, researchers, and top global professionals. Students receive training in contemporary skills such as research, collaboration, critical thinking, and analytical skills. They are also prepared for examinations like the Common University Entrance Test (CUET).

The curriculum for the Humanities specialisation includes foundational subjects in 9th and 10th grades, as well as specialised subjects. The foundational subjects are the same across all specialisations. The specialised subjects include Systems and Societies and World of Work.

The Systems and Societies course explores contemporary issues such as environmental challenges, global politics, recent historical events, and transportation systems, using a multidimensional approach. This practical approach aims to engage students and help them understand the complexities of societal systems and their interactions.

The World of Work subject introduces students to careers in the humanities and social sciences. Through expert teaching, field trips, and projects, students learn about fields like urban planning and law, gaining practical skills and real-world insights.

In 11th and 12th grades, the foundational and specialised subjects include English, Interdisciplinary Studies, and World of Work modules covering topics such as Legal Studies, Mass Media, Teaching Aptitude, Research and Critical Thinking, and Mapping and Visualisation. Students must also choose three specialised elective subjects from options like History, Geography, Psychology, Mathematics and Statistics, Economics, Political Science, Sociology, Computer Science, and Business Studies.

The "High-end 21st Century Skills" specialisation offered by these schools aims to equip students with the competencies required for emerging industry demands. The curriculum emphasises a hands-on, inquiry-based learning approach to develop new-age skills for enterprising 21st-century careers, opening up pathways for early employment. Students have access to immersive labs, industry visits, masterclasses, and employment-readiness programmes that extend beyond the classroom. The curriculum is developed by a stellar committee comprising industry professionals, academicians,

and global educators from institutions like IIT Delhi, NIFT Delhi, and LAHI.

In grades 9 and 10, the foundational subjects are the same across specialisations, but students also explore six "taster courses" under two subject areas: Advanced Technologies and Design and Commerce. In grades 11 and 12, the foundational subjects include English, Physics, Chemistry, and Mathematics, while students specialise in one of the taster subjects they studied previously. Graduates of this specialisation can pursue diverse career paths, such as Data Scientist, Front-end and Back-end Developer, Fashion Designer, Illustrator, Chartered Accountant, and Robotics Design Engineer.

The STEM specialisation aims to provide a cutting-edge education in the science disciplines and focuses on teaching a STEM-focused curriculum to help students prepare for competitive exams in engineering, medicine, and pure sciences. In terms of the curriculum, the foundational subjects for classes 9 and 10 remain the same, while the specialisation subjects include Advanced Science and Advanced Mathematics. In grades 11 and 12, the foundational subjects are English, Physical Education, and Computer Science, while the specialised subjects include Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, and Biology. This specialisation opens up a diverse range of career paths for students, including roles as Software Developers, Engineers, Architects, Doctors, Dentists, Nurses, Surgeons, Veterinarians, Data Analysts, Business Analysts, Data Scientists, Researchers, Professors, and Consultants. Some notable achievements of this specialisation include: 146 students from STEM-SOSEs cleared the JEE Mains-2023 exam, 187 students from STEM-SOSEs cleared the NEET-2023 exam, and 5 students from STEM-SOSEs participated in IIT Delhi's "STEM Mentorship Program for High School Girls".

The Performing and Visual Arts specialisation caters to students interested in pursuing careers in fields like music, theatre, painting, and filmmaking. It offers instruction from industry professionals, providing students access to studios, art exhibitions, and music studios. Competitions are held to showcase student talents. The curriculum features foundational subjects in grades 9-10, while grades 11-12 offer three specialised tracks: Music, Filmmaking, and Visual Arts. The Music track covers core music and applied music/instrument studies; the Filmmaking track includes Film and Cinematic Arts and Media and Communications; and the Visual Arts track focuses on Visual Arts and Creative Expressions/ Analytical Thinking. Students in grades 11-12 study English, Mathematics/Humanities electives, and Business Strategy as foundational subjects, along with one specialised subject. The specialisation has partnered with premier institutes like Global Music Institute, Srishti Manipal Institute, and Whistling Woods. Currently, there are only 5 such specialised schools in Delhi, which limits their accessibility to students.

The Shaheed Bhagat Singh Armed Forces Preparatory School (SBS-AFPS), is a flagship project of the Delhi government, dedicated to training and preparing students from grades 9-12 for admission to the National Defence Academy, Indian Navy, Army, Air Force, and other uniformed services. It is a co-educational school with separate residential facilities for girls and boys.

The curriculum is divided into foundational and specialised subjects. For grades 9 and 10, the foundational subjects include Mathematics, English, Hindi, Science, Individual and Societies, and Entrepreneurial and Digital Skills. The specialised subjects focus on developing general awareness, exam techniques, time management, exam preparation, psychological assessments, personality development, individual and group activities, and mock interviews and public speaking sessions. These specialised subjects typically occupy 2-3 hours per day.

For grades 11 and 12, the foundational subjects shift to Mathematics, English, Chemistry, Physics, and either Computer Science, Biology, or Physical and Health Education. The specialised subjects continue to cover areas such as general awareness, exam skills, psychological assessments, personality development, and practical sessions. However, there is currently only one such specialised school located in the Jharoda Kalan area of Delhi, which may limit its accessibility for students.

The assessment practices employed in the curriculum are carefully aligned with the specified learning objectives and outcomes. This ensures that the assessments are relevant to the expected student learning. A key emphasis of the assessment policies is on ensuring inclusive and equitable access to assessment opportunities for all students, regardless of their backgrounds or abilities.

The assessment approach combines the use of formative and summative assessments, which collectively facilitate the monitoring of student progress. A fundamental principle is the provision of timely and constructive feedback to learners,

intended to guide them through the learning process and encourage them to become better performers.

The assessment strategies encompass a variety of methods, such as written examinations, practical evaluations, projects, and presentations. These diverse approaches address individual preferences in terms of studying modes and contribute to more comprehensive evaluations of student comprehension. This enables the assessment practices to be meaningful and effective.

Collectively, these assessment principles aim to establish a fair, transparent, and effective system that promotes student learning and development. The structure and calendar of assessments used by DBSE are designed to ensure a comprehensive approach to evaluating student learning. DBSE utilises a multi-faceted assessment structure, involving various types of assessments administered throughout the learning period. This approach allows students to be assessed in different ways at different times, thereby enhancing the overall evaluation process.

3. METHODOLOGY

The research adopted an integrated approach combining qualitative and quantitative methods. This dual-pronged data collection and analysis strategy enabled a comprehensive examination of patterns in the data, enhancing its validity and reliability. The integration of findings from both data sources facilitated the derivation of comprehensive conclusions. Students from grades 9 to 12 served as key informants in the research methodology. Three schools were covered for each specialisation to maintain consistency in the data (8 in total, 4 of them offering dual specialisation). The research was conducted transparently, with students informed about the purpose of the study. Data was collected after obtaining informed consent and ensuring confidentiality of personal details. Some students were hesitant to reveal their names, so anonymity was ensured.

Additionally, secondary research was undertaken to gather in-depth knowledge about DBSE and SOSEs, involving the analysis of circulars, framework drafts, news articles, reports, online video documentations, and other reliable sources.

1. Limitations

The study was limited to four of the five specialisations offered at the Schools of Specialised Excellence - STEM, Humanities, HE 21, and PVA. The fifth specialisation, AFPS, is a residential Sainik School with its own unique constraints and regulations, which precluded the researchers from engaging with its students. While the researchers endeavoured to obtain authentic responses from students in the remaining four specialisations, the demographic and attitudinal diversities among the student population may have introduced a degree of potential bias in the data collected.

2. Qualitative Data

2.1 Data Collection

Sampling Method:

A purposive sampling approach was employed, targeting 20 students, with 5 participants selected from each specialisation, for semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted through in-person conversations after school hours, which also yielded some anecdotal insights. The open-ended interview questions further led to focus group discussions involving additional students, enhancing the richness and reliability of the collected data. Notably, most students felt more comfortable communicating in Hindi, necessitating the manual translation of interview responses into English.

2.2 Data Analysis:

The qualitative data from the interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed and analysed thematically to identify key patterns, trends, and insights.

The interview transcripts were carefully documented. The transcripts were manually coded and collated into an Excel spreadsheet, with relevant excerpts assigned to appropriate categories. Thematic analysis was applied to the collected data to identify and report patterns aligned with the research topic. Additionally, general feedback insights about the school were noted separately in the 'Anecdotal Insights' section of the paper (refer sub-heading 4.3).

3. Quantitative Data

3.1 Data Collection

The researchers collected data through a structured survey, where respondents were asked to indicate their preferences based on their learning experiences in the SOSEs up to that point. The survey was designed to quantify insights and demographics relevant to the research topic. This survey provided an initial basis for the interviews, establishing a structured framework for the interviewees regarding the key themes the researchers sought to explore further. The survey responses enabled the researchers to gather preliminary information, serving as a reference point for additional investigation during the interviews.

Survey Design:

The survey comprised close-ended questions using Yes/No responses and Likert-type scales of 3 and 5 points. These questions were aligned with the thematic areas of the curriculum, providing a baseline for understanding participants' perspectives and experiences relevant to the research topic. Additionally, the survey included a feedback section that facilitated a deeper comprehension of students' personal experiences at the Schools of Specialised Excellence (Appendix-II).

Sampling Method:

The researchers employed a targeted sampling approach, utilising both purposive and snowball techniques, to engage a total of 120 student respondents. This ensured that the responses received were proportionately representative of the four targeted classes and specialisations. The online administration of the survey through a Google Forms link enabled the researchers to reach a broader participant pool.

3.3.2 Data Analysis:

The survey data was systematically analysed by referring to the automated data visualisations generated by the Google Forms platform. Furthermore, the researchers conducted a detailed examination of the open-ended feedback provided by participants, identifying consistent patterns that aligned with the insights gathered through the interview process.

4. FINDINGS

This section presents a thematic analysis and documentation of the data collected through interviews and surveys. Here, we have broken down the curriculum into four key themes, often referred to as the "four pillars" of curriculum design:

Table 27: Themes of Curriculum Design

CURRICULUM DESIGN	
Theme-1	Learning Outcomes
Theme-2	Content or Subject Matter
Theme-3	Teaching Methodologies
Theme-4	Assessments

Learning outcomes are clear statements detailing what students should know, understand, and be able to do upon completing a course or programme. These predetermined, specific and measurable outcomes align with broader educational objectives.

The content or subject matter comprises the knowledge, skills, and concepts to be taught and learned. It is organised logically and sequentially, is age-appropriate and relevant, and is aligned with educational standards and objectives. Its key components include facts, concepts, and principles, as well as skills, processes, attitudes, and values.

Teaching methodologies are also known as instructional strategies, which are the approaches and techniques used to deliver the content and facilitate learning. These strategies can be varied in characteristics to accommodate different learning styles and should be age-appropriate for the content and learners.

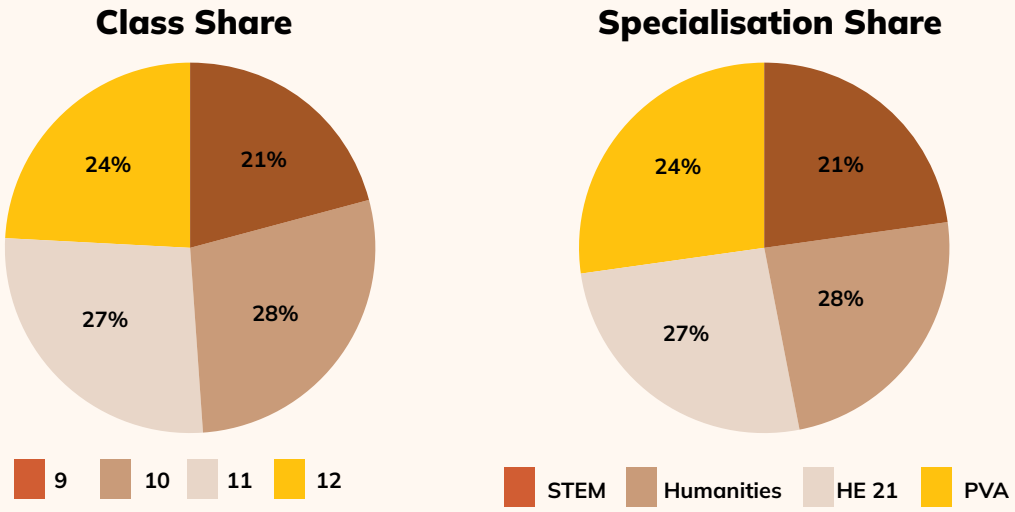
Assessment methods are the tools used to measure student progress, provide feedback for improvement, and evaluate the curriculum's effectiveness on student learning outcomes. They can vary in format and approach to accommodate learners' needs.

Furthermore, the learning environment and resources, including digital media, sports equipment, washrooms, and comfortable spaces, are also integral components of the curriculum. The researchers analysed the improvements in learning outcomes aligned with these themes and sought to understand the participants' perceptions towards the newly proposed curriculum implemented in these schools.

1. Quantitative:

The charts above depict the percentage voting share of classes and specialisations in survey.

Figure 7: Percentage voting share of classes and specialisations



Overall Implication:

The survey results indicate a positive inclination among students regarding the curriculum at the Schools of Specialised Excellence. A significant proportion, 31% of students, rated the curriculum at 4, while 36% rated it at 5, collectively accounting for 67% of the total responses. Furthermore, 26% of students maintained a neutral stance, rating the curriculum as 3. Meanwhile, a smaller percentage, totalling 7%, rated the curriculum at 2 or 1. Other factors were also assessed, which are documented in the table format below for a better understanding of the survey outputs:

Table 28: Survey Outputs

Factors	Student Voting Pattern (Percentage Share)
Whether the curriculum followed at SOSEs will help improve future employability prospects.	Yes – (58.3%) Maybe – (35%) No – (6.7%)
The SOSEs' teaching methods effectively enhance learning outcomes.	5- Very Satisfied (26.7%) 4- Satisfied (36.7%) 3- Neutral (25.8%) 2- Dissatisfied (9.2%) 1- Very Dissatisfied (2.5%)
The curriculum effectively enhances English language and communication skills.	5- Very Satisfied (27.5%) 4- Satisfied (33.3%) 3- Neutral (30.8%) 2- Dissatisfied (7.5%) 1- Very Dissatisfied (2.5%)

The curriculum effectively enhances teamwork and collaboration abilities.	5- Very Satisfied (35.8%) 4- Satisfied (45%) 3- Neutral (14.2%) 2- Dissatisfied (3.3%) 1- Very Dissatisfied (2.5%)
The curriculum effectively enhances critical thinking and problem-solving abilities.	5- Very Satisfied (40%) 4- Satisfied (42.5%) 3- Neutral (12%) 2- Dissatisfied (3%) 1- Very Dissatisfied (2.5%)
An experiential learning approach at SOSEs.	5- Very Satisfied (20.8%) 4- Satisfied (40.8%) 3- Neutral (25%) 2- Dissatisfied (10.8%) 1- Very Dissatisfied (5%)
Focus and participation in extracurricular activities.	5- Very Satisfied (25.8%) 4- Satisfied (39.2%) 3- Neutral (24.2%) 2- Dissatisfied (9.2%) 1- Very Dissatisfied (3.3%)
Focus and participation in sporting activities.	5- Very Satisfied (25%) 4- Satisfied (26%) 3- Neutral (18%) 2- Dissatisfied (21%) 1- Very Dissatisfied (10%)
The staff is skilled and well-trained, ready to implement the new curriculum.	Agree- (72.5%) Neutral- (2.5%) Disagree- (25%)
The level of the new curriculum differs from the one followed at previous schools.	Not Challenging- (18.3%) Neutral – (32.5%) Challenging- (51.7%)
Recommend SOSE to others.	Yes (60.8%) Not Sure Yet (30%) No (10.8%)

The survey provides insights into student perceptions at the Schools of Specialised Excellence. While most students believe the curriculum will enhance their employability prospects, 35% remain undecided. Satisfaction with teaching methods is high, with 63.4% of students satisfied or very satisfied. Notably, 60.8% of students feel the curriculum has improved their English and communication skills. Teamwork, collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills were also highly ranked, with 82.5% of students expressing positive feedback. The experiential learning approach is appreciated by 61.6% of students, and 65% have a positive outlook on the involvement in co-curricular activities. The sports programme, however, elicits a more mixed response, with 51% content or very content, but 31% discontent or contemptuous. The survey also assessed the competency and curriculum of the staff, with a high proportion agreeing that there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are skilled and well-trained personnel to implement the new curriculum, although 25% disagree. Compared to their previous schooling, 51.7% of students find the new curriculum challenging, while 32.5% are neutral and 18.3% find it not difficult at all. Ultimately, 60.8% would recommend SOSE to others, while 30% remain unsure. The data presents an encouraging picture of student satisfaction with high levels of learning and skill development, while also highlighting areas, such as sports engagement, that may warrant further attention.

The survey results indicate that a majority of factors garnered positive and neutral ratings from students, suggesting that the Schools of Specialised Excellence have a curriculum with commendable offerings. Nonetheless, the significant minority of negative responses highlights areas of concern that educators and administrators should investigate further to identify opportunities for improvement. Despite the challenging nature of the curriculum, the data implies that students tend to have a favourable perception of it, with approximately 61% expressing a willingness to recommend the SOSEs to others, which is a promising outcome. However, the underlying reasons behind both the satisfaction and dissatisfaction rates warrant deeper exploration through personal interviews, as indicated by the researchers.

2. Qualitative:

Overall Implication:

In a survey of 20 students, 18 expressed their agreement that the newly implemented curriculum at the Schools of Specialised Excellence has proven effective in improving and enhancing their skill sets. To conduct a more comprehensive and nuanced analysis, the researchers asked additional related questions, and the findings suggest the overall effectiveness of the curriculum followed at the SOSEs.

2.1 Content/Subject Matter

The majority of the students surveyed, 15 out of 20, expressed that they found the subject matter of the foundational and specialised courses offered at the Schools of Specialised Excellence to be beneficial. Conversely, 3 students maintained a neutral stance, while 2 students conveyed dissatisfaction.

According to the subject combination schema provided by the Delhi Board of School Education, students at the Schools of Specialised Excellence undertake a balanced programme of foundational and specialised subjects. Table 4.3 outlines the schema of subject-combinations for grades 9 through 12.

Table 28: Subject Combinations for Grades 9,10,11,12

	Category	Subject List	Name of Subject		Category	Subject List	Name of Subject
For Grades 9 and 10	Compulsory	A	English	For Grades 11 and 12	Compulsory	A	English
	Compulsory	A	Hindi		Compulsory	B	Academic Subject 1
	Compulsory	B	Mathematics		Compulsory	B	Academic Subject 2
	Compulsory	B	Science		Optional	B	Academic Subject 3
	Compulsory	B	Individual and Societies		Compulsory	C	Specialised Subject 1
	Compulsory	C	Entrepreneurial Mindset and Digital Design (EMDD)		Compulsory	C	Specialised Subject 2
	Compulsory	C	Based on chosen specialisation		Optional	C	Specialised Subject 3

The subject combination schema outlines how the subjects offered by the Delhi Board of School Education at the Schools of Specialised Excellence are categorised. Language subjects are denoted as 'A', other academic subjects as 'B', and specialised subjects as 'C'. This comprehensive list of subjects is specified for the different grades and specialisations.

The majority of students indicated a preference for the specialised subjects over the foundational ones, citing the freshness and relevance of the subject matter. Students expressed that the content across all subjects incorporates elements that cultivate strong human values, whether through chapters, concepts, or competencies. At the Schools of Specialised Excellence, students primarily refer to NCERT textbooks for foundational subjects, but they are not required to cover the textbooks comprehensively. Instead, they are provided with supplementary reading materials, known as 'student companions', in the form of PDFs. Students can access these materials on screens or take printouts for convenience. However, the issue of printing these companions was raised, as it is not always feasible and can pose a financial burden on parents.

The curriculum at SOSEs follows a flexible approach, rather than a rigid syllabus. For instance, in the case of internal assessments for English, the exam may focus on aspects such as grammar, vocabulary, or comprehension from the specified units, rather than requiring students to reproduce in-text question answers or word meanings. While this flexibility is appreciated, it can sometimes lead to challenges in the timely completion of the syllabus for term-end assessments, which is seen as a drawback by students, as it increases the workload for both teachers and students.

The specialised subjects are allocated 2-3 hours of daily instruction, which is primarily based on an experiential learning approach. Students in STEM specialisations regularly visit laboratories to conduct experiments, while those in other specialisations engage in activities in specially curated spaces, such as auditoriums or common halls, relevant to their respective fields of study.

The curriculum at the Schools of Specialised Excellence is designed to foster a diverse range of academic and non-academic competencies, including analytical, writing, verbal, communication, decision-making, collaborative, and creative thinking skills, as well as the development of moral values. One of the compulsory subjects, previously known as 'Social Science', has been renamed 'Individual and Societies' to instil a sense of belonging and global citizenship within the students. Subjects such as EMDD aim to cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset and life skills. Furthermore, in response to emerging global trends, the SOSEs offer students the opportunity to learn foreign languages, such as German, Spanish, Japanese, or French, which have garnered significant student interest.

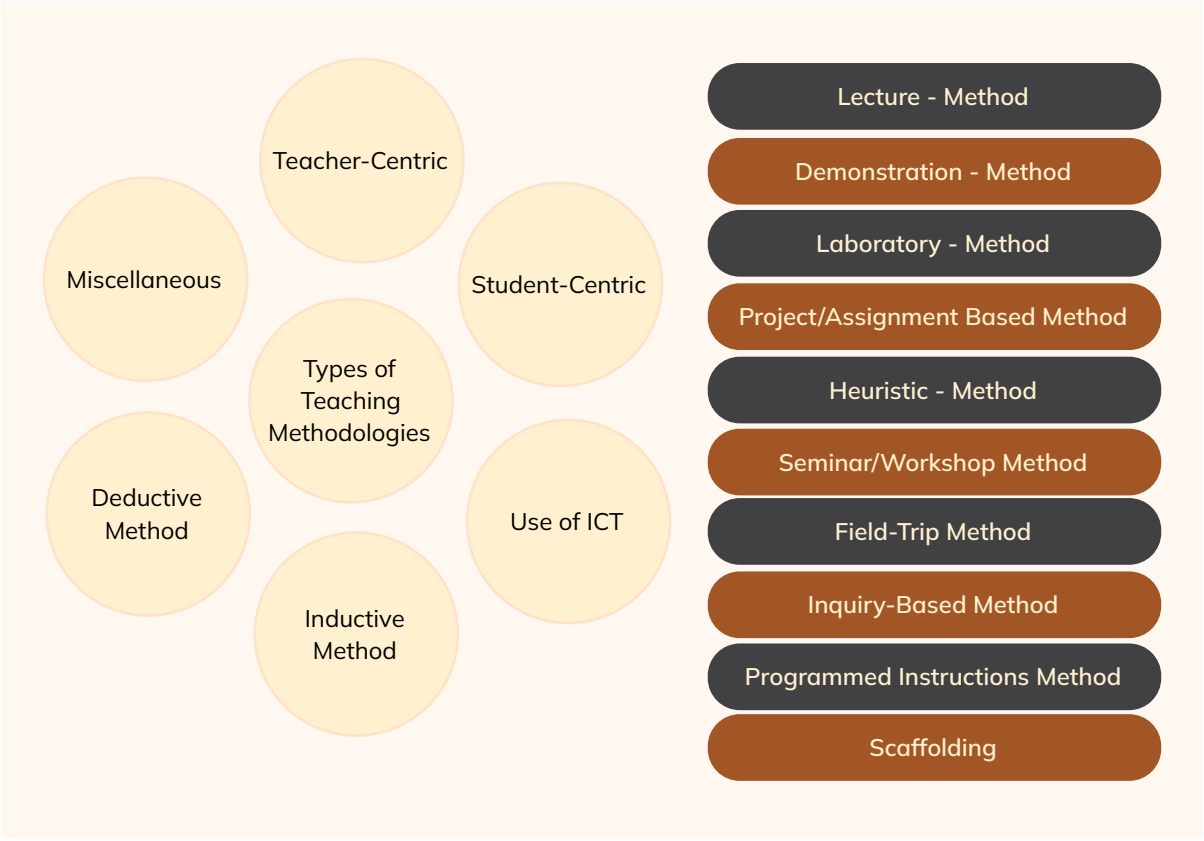
The interviews revealed that students expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the co-curricular activities offered at the Schools of Specialised Excellence. They reported that the schools regularly organise competitions which provide fair and equal opportunities for student participation. These competitive and co-curricular activities were seen as beneficial in enhancing the students' confidence, communication skills, and ability to express and articulate themselves more effectively. Furthermore, the students' involvement in school-level, zonal-level, and state-level competitions was viewed as broadening their perspectives and exposure to the wider world.

The study findings indicate that sports and games constitute a vital component of the curriculum at the Schools of Specialised Excellence. Students expressed a high level of satisfaction with their engagement in both indoor and outdoor sporting activities. They actively participate in a range of competitive events, including football, volleyball, and various other disciplines, at the school and zonal levels. However, the research revealed certain infrastructure-related challenges. Three out of the eight institutions visited lacked a dedicated sports playground, while one school faced a shortage of adequate sports equipment. These infrastructure deficits were predominantly observed in schools that were previously regular government institutions and have since been converted into SOSEs. Students highlighted the need for infrastructure upgrades as a significant issue during the interviews. Additionally, some students reported receiving only one sports period per week, a concern they wished to address by advocating for increased time allocation. Considering the growing popularity of sports and games, the management of SOSEs should re-evaluate and enhance their approach to this domain.

2.2 Teaching Methodologies

According to the findings, the majority of students, comprising 17 out of 20 respondents, agreed that the teaching methodologies employed at the Schools of Specialised Excellence are effective in improving their learning outcomes.

Typically, the conventional approach observed involves the teacher delivering a lesson by reading out and explaining a chapter, and then assigning students to complete the in-text questions as homework. This traditional, teacher-centric lecture method has been found to contribute to a decline in students' long-term interest in the subject and have a limited impact on their learning. In contrast, the Schools of Specialised Excellence have moved away from this traditional approach and have adopted more innovative teaching methods, which have been observed to increase students' engagement and improve their conceptual understanding of the subject matter. The various teaching approaches utilised are illustrated in the following smart charts:



The teaching practices at the Schools of Specialised Excellence demonstrate a comprehensive utilisation of technology and innovative pedagogical approaches. Teachers make extensive use of smart screens and 3D visualisation videos to enhance the clarity of concepts presented, which research has shown can contribute to improved long-term retention of the subject matter. Additionally, a diverse range of engaging instructional methods, such as role-play, brainstorming sessions, creative writing, group discussions, peer interviews, and presentations, are regularly implemented. These activities are employed across both foundational and specialised subjects, and the majority of students have expressed their appreciation for the teaching methodologies used in all areas of the curriculum.

However, it has been noted that there may be some imbalance in the access to smart screen resources, with teachers of foundational subjects occasionally having fewer opportunities to utilise this technology compared to those teaching specialised subjects. This issue can be addressed through the effective management of screen-sharing time and space.

The SOSEs also maintain a flexible seating arrangement, allowing students to work in small groups of 4-6 members. This approach encourages teamwork, social interaction, and a sense of comfort in the classroom environment. Furthermore, the schools have adopted a bilingual approach to language and communication, which provides a more supportive setting for students to express themselves, rather than rigidly insisting on English. Students are also exposed to new concepts in language and literature and are encouraged to appreciate a diverse range of literary works.

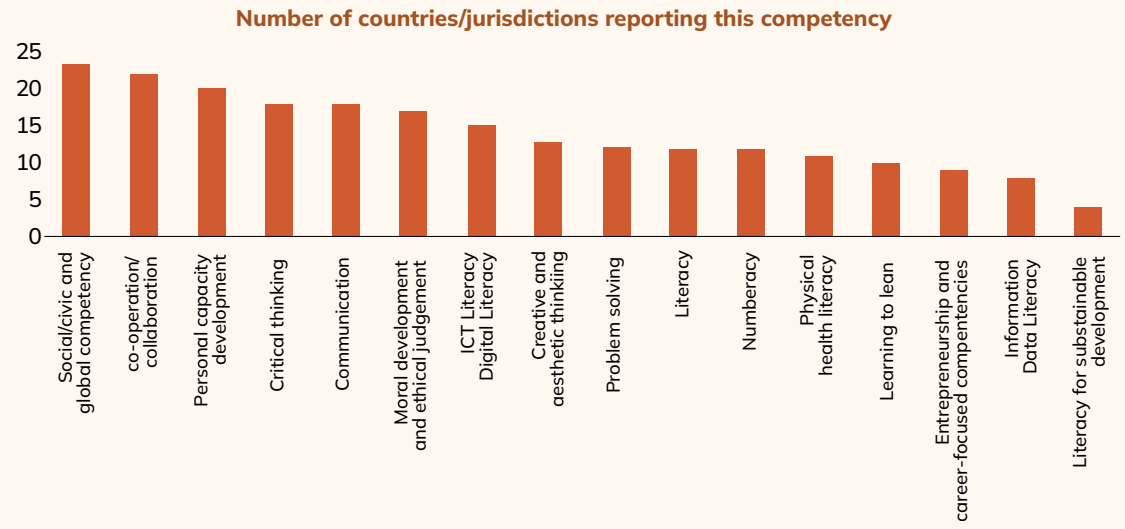
Teachers at SOSEs encourage students to speak during school assemblies, which boosts their confidence. Teachers often use the Scaffolding method to guide students better when they are performing a new activity or learning new concepts. They employ both Inductive and Deductive teaching methods, as appropriate for specific subjects and concepts. Teachers also provide remedial classes for average and weak students, which start after school at 2pm and end at 3pm. This additional support helps these students. During interviews, students expressed that teachers are very supportive and encouraging. Teachers recognise when a student is feeling low and try to provide emotional support in such situations.

Students at SOSEs revealed that their teachers are aptly skilled in deploying the new curriculum, and they are also sent to other countries for attending international training sessions and workshops. Furthermore, knowledge partners sometimes send their staff as guest teachers to SOSEs to provide instruction in particular subject areas. However, students occasionally face difficulties in studying certain concepts, as the curriculum is new and little guidance is available outside the school. Consequently, they have requested a mandatory doubt-clearing session to address their queries.

2.3 Assessments

The term "assessment" is derived from the Latin verb 'assidere,' meaning 'to sit with.' This etymology suggests that assessments should be a collaborative process undertaken with and for students, rather than something imposed upon them. However, it is often observed that children's academic performance is evaluated primarily and exclusively based on the marks or grades they obtain in examinations. This approach conditions the child's mindset to focus on attaining marks, rather than developing genuine knowledge. Such an assessment methodology is a significant factor that promotes rote learning, shaping a child's attitude towards learning for an extended period. By the time the child recognises the limitations of this method in addressing real-world issues, a considerable amount of valuable time has already passed. The DBSE identified this issue and attempted to resolve it by referring to assessment structures employed in global standards. The figure below illustrates the number of OECD countries adopting different competencies in their curricula for the new generation of learners.

Figure 8: Number of Countries/jurisdictions reporting this competency

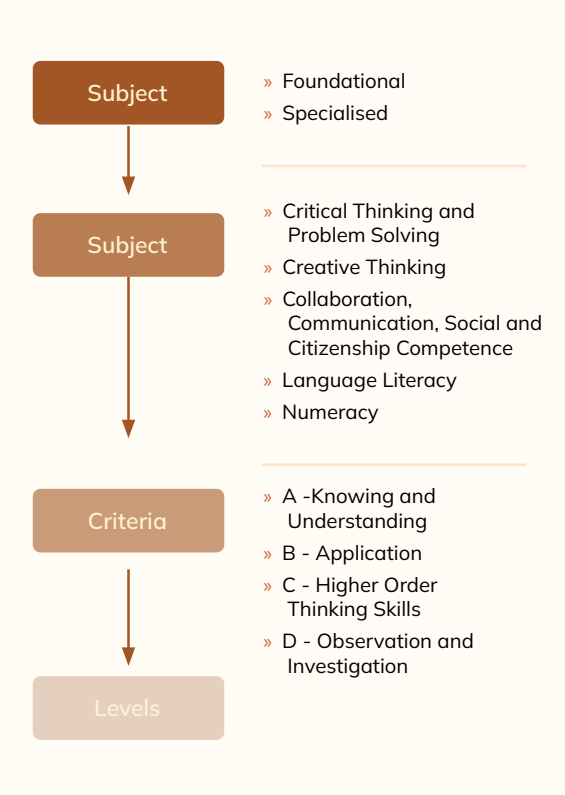


Source: OECD

Following a comprehensive examination and analysis of the competencies embraced by diverse educational systems, the DBSE incorporated the ensuing competencies into its assessment techniques:

1. Critical thinking and problem-solving
2. Creative thinking
3. Collaboration, communication and social and citizenship competence
4. Language literacy and
5. Numeracy

The assessment approach adopted by the SOSEs aligns with the framework established by the DBSE's, prioritising a competence-based evaluation over a traditional marks or grade-based system. These broad competencies are further subdivided into distinct criteria to facilitate a more comprehensive assessment of students' learning outcomes. The DBSE has also delineated these criteria across four different levels, which serve as indicators of attainment. This approach is premised on the belief that by breaking down each criterion into a detailed, fine-grained description of the various levels, the DBSE can provide students with more precise and constructive feedback to guide their ongoing development and improvement.



The levels are labelled as follows:

Level-1 Emerging
Level-2 Developing
Level-3 Proficient
Level-4 Exemplary

The vocabulary employed to denote different levels of achievement is noteworthy. Many have encountered report cards or notebooks bearing labels such as "poor", "very poor performance", "fair", "good", "very good", or "excellent" - a lexicon that can appear demoralising for a child, potentially fostering a culture of comparison and even engendering emotions like envy. In contrast, the DBSE's approach utilises more encouraging terminology, with "emerging" denoting the first level. This mindful choice of vocabulary ensures that children do not feel diminished when their performance does not match that of their peers. For a more detailed and nuanced understanding of the DBSE's grade assignment criteria, refer to their Assessment Framework Draft.

Based on the perspectives and opinions expressed by students during personal interviews, it can be concluded that the board conceptualises assessments as an integral component of the learning process, rather than a distinct activity solely focused on evaluating and categorising students based on the marks or grades they obtain. Students indicate a positive perception of the assessment approaches employed in the Schools of Specialised Excellence, as these offer techniques that enable them to monitor their own progress, rather than relying entirely on the teacher's evaluation. During classroom activities, students engage in a variety of tasks, including peer-assessment exercises, tests, quizzes, on-the-spot writing, extempore presentations, group or individual presentations, and other assessments. These assessments are evaluated against defined criteria and attainment levels, with an equal emphasis on written and verbal skills. Students specifically highlighted their appreciation for the peer-assessment activities, such as conducting interviews, participating in role-play, and presenting ideas in teams, which they found to be the most beneficial.

While most schools rely on traditional assessment methods like written assignments, regular homework, and holiday homework, the Schools of Specialised Excellence adopt a more holistic

approach that aligns with the vision of the National Education Policy 2020. Students revealed that in teamwork activities, they are given engaging tasks with a central issue to resolve, and they work together to provide solutions. For these teamwork tasks, students are assessed individually, even if the team's overall performance was not entirely successful. This ensures that individual efforts are recognised. These factors encourage students at SOSEs to strive for excellence.

Aligned with international best practices, the board has implemented a comprehensive assessment framework wherein students undergo evaluation through diverse modalities and at multiple junctures, without disproportionately increasing the workload for teachers or students. The regular, multi-phased assessment process is intended to foster a reflective mindset among learners. The schematic representation below outlines the DBSE's assessment timelines:

Figure 9:

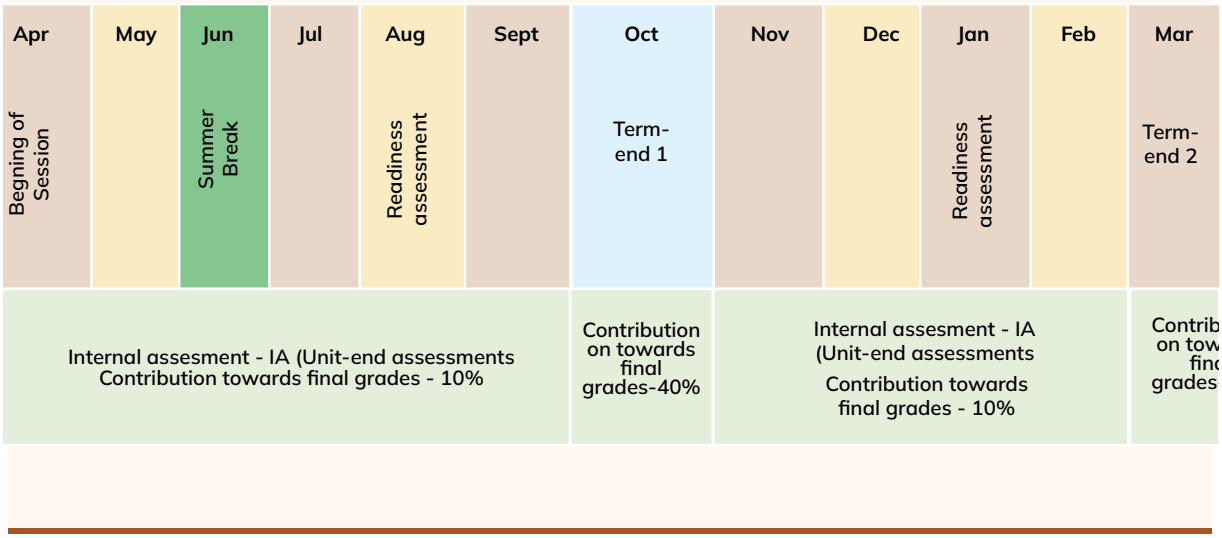
	Aptitude Test	Classroom Formative Assessment	Formative Assessment as per Unit Plan	Readiness Assessment	Summative Assessment (Internal Assessment)	End of Term Assessment
Purpose	Selection for ASOSE	Improvement in the learning process for teachers	Feedback for improvement to students	Preparedness for term-end assessment	Feedback to teacher/schools on unit learning (contributes towards final grades)	Assessment of DBSE learning goals/ criteria achievement (contributes towards final grades)
Frequency	Done at the beginning of the course	Done as per student requirement	Done as per unit plan	Done half-yearly	Done as per unit plan	Done at the end of term
		Aptitude Test	**Teacher Led**	**Teacher Led/ Board Supplied**	**Teacher Led/ Board Supplied**	**Board Led**

Source: Assessment Framework Draft version_280622_F PDF (www.edudel.nic.in)

Students preparing for high-stakes competitive examinations, including NEET, JEE, and CUET, are evaluated separately and on a regular basis through monthly mock tests. Their academic progress is closely monitored, and skilled professionals provide them with ongoing, constructive feedback.

An academic year at DBSE comprises two semesters. The diagram below outlines the frequency and suggested timeline for preparatory assessments, formative assessments, and summative term-end assessments conducted throughout the academic year, along with the respective weightage assigned in reporting student achievement. The Formative Assessments account for 20% of the total weightage, while the Term-end Assessments contribute 80% to the overall score.

Figure 10:



Source: Assessment Framework Draft version_280622_F PDF (www.edudel.nic.in)

The assessment approaches adopted by the SOSEs are not rigid; rather, they follow an integrated and flexible methodology. There are multiple ways to assess students' learning. A task used for internal assessment may be evaluated against a single criterion or multiple criteria, with distinct score points assigned to each. The score points a student earns for a particular criterion, across different tasks, are then amalgamated and presented as a holistic evaluation reference point. For written examinations, the DBSE employs diverse assessment methods, which are subsequently implemented by the SOSEs. These may include task-wise evaluation, whole script evaluation, or the assessment of script sections by individual examiners. The evaluation process is carried out by appropriately qualified experts who possess the requisite language proficiency to review student scripts, adequate technological skills, and access to the necessary resources for on-screen assessment, where applicable. Students' testimonies indicate that teachers and evaluators at the SOSEs consistently strive to maintain an unbiased stance while assessing students against the established criteria, thereby fostering a positive learning environment and a healthy competitive spirit within the schools.

2.4 Additional (Learning Environment)

The school's physical environment is a crucial determinant in shaping students' attitudes and experiences. Providing a healthy and comfortable environment for learners is of paramount importance. According to the survey data, a majority of students (16 out of 20) agreed that the SOSEs have successfully created a positive learning environment, offering ample space and adequate resources to support their educational needs. The maintenance of a favourable student-to-teacher ratio, set at 30:1, ensures that classes are not overcrowded, thereby enhancing the overall quality of the learning experience. The newly constructed SOSE buildings feature well-ventilated designs with large windows, facilitating proper airflow. These modern facilities also offer high-quality infrastructure, including laboratories, smart screens, libraries, and washrooms. However, some of the older SOSE buildings require maintenance and repairs, which led a minority of students (4 out of 20) to express negative perceptions about the school's physical environment.

The SOSEs have implemented a gender-neutral uniform policy, with students of all genders wearing the same standardised attire of shirts and pants. Additionally, the interviewed students unanimously attested to the fairness and objectivity demonstrated by the teachers in their opinions, perceptions, and evaluations. This is a significant factor that fosters a positive and supportive environment, enabling learners to express themselves freely without any apprehension.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The survey and interview data suggest that approximately half of the students find the curriculum of these schools to be somewhat challenging. Consequently, there is a need to ensure the curriculum remains engaging, despite its demanding nature. This would help students adapt to the curriculum more gradually and comfortably. Furthermore, students reported difficulties stemming from the heavy reliance on online content and PDFs, indicating that providing physical textbooks could alleviate this issue. While the diverse supplementary materials aid students in acquiring additional knowledge, the DBSE should also develop comprehensive booklets. Given the mixed responses regarding sports activities, the government should invest in enhancing sports facilities and programmes to promote higher student satisfaction. A potential solution could be introducing a dedicated sports specialisation where athletically inclined students receive free training during school hours. As these schools are relatively new to the educational landscape, infrastructure is a critical factor. Some of the schools were upgraded from pre-existing institutions, so the government should focus on maintaining and repairing these buildings to meet the expectations of SOSE students. Organising timely and effective career counselling sessions is equally important to help students clearly envision their respective career pathways, thereby enabling them to make informed decisions about their higher education pursuits.

6. CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

The initiative shows promising results in its early stages of implementation. The survey data indicates that a majority of students perceive the curriculum positively, particularly in its ability to enhance employability and develop critical skills such as teamwork, collaboration, and problem-solving. The schools' focus on experiential learning and co-curricular activities is well-received by most students. However, there are areas that require attention, such as sports engagement and the varying perceptions of curriculum difficulty.

As these schools of specialized excellence continue to evolve, the government of Delhi should consider the recommendations outlined in this report to further refine and strengthen the program.

Expanding the implementation of this model to other schools and states nationwide could potentially enhance the opportunities for students nationwide. The recommendations provided, such as enhancing sports facilities, maintaining infrastructure, and improving access to physical textbooks, offer a roadmap for the continued refinement and expansion of this curriculum model. By addressing the areas identified for improvement, the Schools of Specialized Excellence can further strengthen their position as centers of academic excellence, empowering students across the country.

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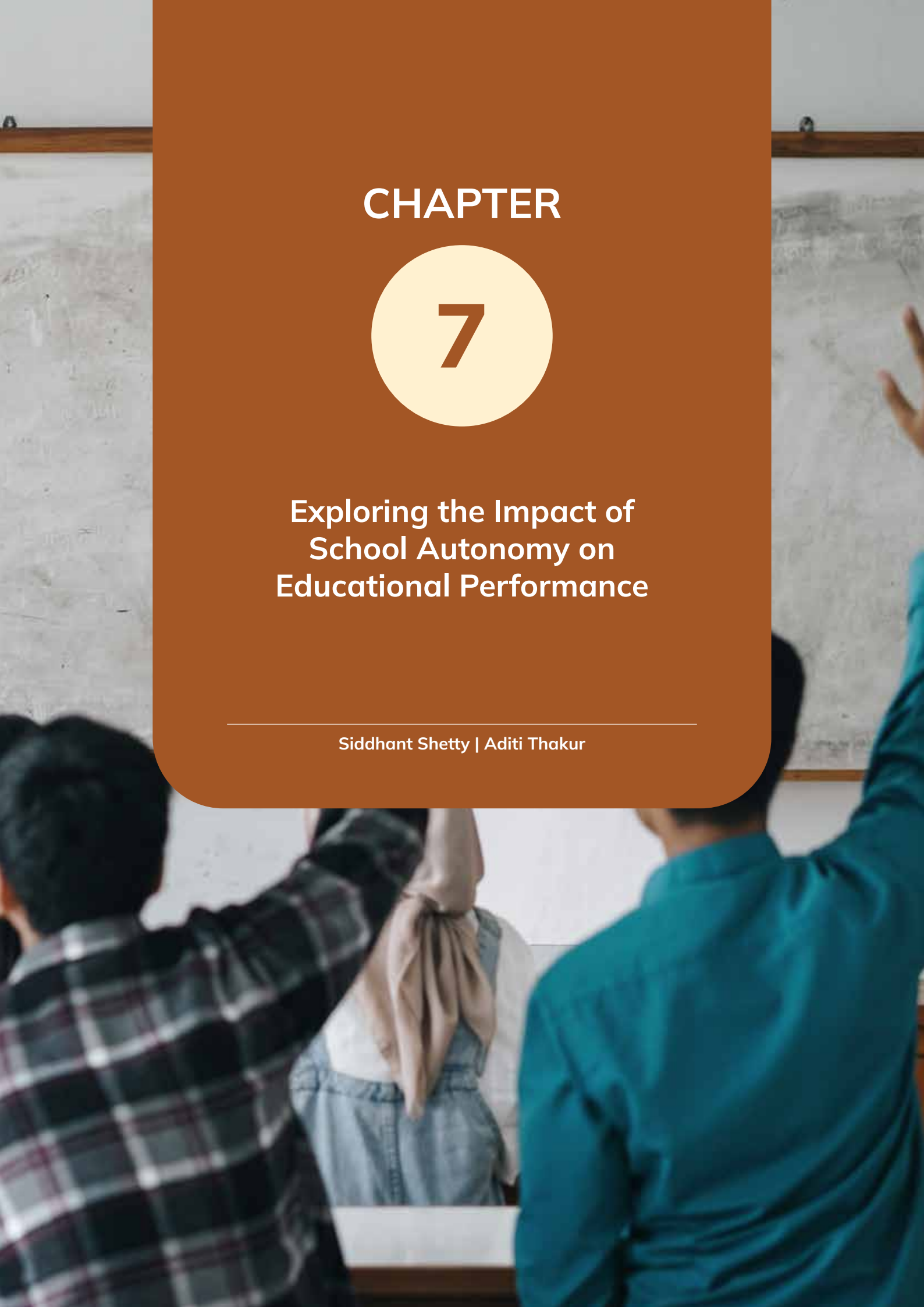


CHAPTER 7

Exploring the Impact of School Autonomy on Educational Performance

Siddhant Shetty | Aditi Thakur

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the impact of granting autonomy to schools, focusing on financial, administrative, and curricular autonomy, and its influence on educational outcomes. Using qualitative interviews with stakeholders from various schools in Delhi, the study investigates how autonomy affects school performance, student achievement, and teacher satisfaction. The paper highlights the successes of decentralized models like the Namma Shale initiative, while also addressing the challenges related to equitable resource distribution. The findings suggest that while autonomy allows schools to be more responsive and innovative, it must be balanced with appropriate oversight to prevent inequities. The results indicate that when coupled with strong leadership, autonomy can enhance accountability and student performance, but without careful management, it risks widening the education quality gap.

Keywords: School Autonomy; Educational Outcomes; Resource Allocation; Pedagogic Flexibility; Financial Management; Teacher Recruitment

KEY FINDINGS

- Schools with more autonomy can tailor their decisions to local needs, leading to better resource use and student engagement, as seen in the Namma Shale program.
- Autonomy could increase the gap between well-funded urban schools and under-resourced rural schools, highlighting the need for fair support and oversight to prevent disparities.
- Private schools benefit from autonomy in teaching methods, allowing teachers to adapt to student needs. Government schools face challenges balancing innovation and maintaining standards.
- Private school owners want financial autonomy to improve management, but government administrators warn of mismanagement and unequal resources without proper oversight.

Schools with hiring autonomy can maintain a more stable and skilled teaching staff, but government-regulated schools face constraints leading to skill mismatches and inefficiencies.
The paper concludes that while autonomy holds promise for educational improvement, it must be implemented selectively and combined with effective support and accountability measures to ensure equitable and high-quality outcomes across the system.

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly evolving educational landscape, granting schools greater independence is becoming increasingly popular worldwide (UNESCO 2024). Governments and education authorities have been empowering schools with enhanced decision-making authority, allowing them more control over financial resources and teacher hiring (LSE Business Review, 2024). In India, where challenges such as resource disparities and regional differences are prominent, autonomy offers a potential solution to improving educational outcomes. School autonomy offers a promising solution, where the education system faces challenges such as resource scarcity, regional disparities, and a diverse student population (India's School Education Is in Grave Crisis, The Diplomat, 2022). By giving individual schools more control over their decisions, the Government of India can make its schools more responsive, innovative, and effective. This approach aims to not only improve educational outcomes but also cater to local needs, creating an environment where students, teachers, and communities can thrive. The benefits of school autonomy in India extend beyond better administration; it can foster greater accountability, more efficient resource utilisation, and a more personalised educational experience for every child. School autonomy refers to giving schools the freedom to make important decisions independently, without relying solely on central authorities.

In recent years, several Indian states have taken steps to give schools more independence to improve education and meet local needs better. For example, Karnataka launched the Namma Shale initiative, allowing schools to manage their budgets and make decisions, which has led to better resource use and more community involvement (Ramavath & Ravindraprakash, 2011). The Namma Shale program was implemented in four regions of the state and, ever since then, has been showing fruitful and positive results in terms of learning outcomes and effective administration. It stressed the importance of community engagement and the role the entire community plays along with the stakeholders of schools in effectively running schools.

The Government of Delhi has introduced School Management Committees (SMCs) comprising parents, teachers, and local officials to oversee school operations, thereby enhancing accountability and stakeholder engagement. These initiatives have yielded positive outcomes, including improved student performance, elevated teacher motivation, and enhanced school facilities (Rani, 2022). Furthermore, the National Knowledge Commission of India (2009) has advocated for the promotion of decentralisation and local autonomy in school management. This would enable greater flexibility in fund allocation, thereby enhancing quality and accountability. Additionally, the Commission has emphasised the need to upgrade school infrastructure and revamp the school inspection process, granting a more significant role to local stakeholders.

Traditionally, central control over India's education system has led to bureaucratic inefficiencies and a standardised approach (Nandamuri and Rao, 2012). Recently, there has been a shift toward giving schools more autonomy to address these challenges. This involves managing their budgets, hiring and training staff, designing curricula, and deciding on teaching methods (Nandamuri and Rao, 2012). Schools can customise their programs to better serve their students and communities, adapt quickly to changes, and introduce new educational practices (Khaparde, Srivastava, and Meganathan, 2005). It also allows for greater involvement from local stakeholders, such as parents and community members, in school governance. In essence, autonomy transfers decision-making power from higher authorities to individual schools, enabling them to function more effectively and responsively. This approach considers a government-established superstructure that grants limited autonomy rather than complete freedom, potentially causing chaos within schools.

While the devolution of autonomy to schools in India holds significant potential, it also presents several challenges requiring careful consideration. Not all educational institutions may possess the requisite resources or expertise to manage themselves effectively, potentially leading to suboptimal decision-making and operational mismanagement. Furthermore, there is a risk of exacerbating existing disparities between well-resourced urban schools and their under-funded rural counterparts, thereby creating inequities in educational quality. Additionally, without robust oversight mechanisms, issues of accountability and transparency could arise, potentially giving rise to concerns around corruption or favouritism. Ensuring that all schools are adequately supported and empowered through appropriate training and capacity-building measures is crucial to mitigate these adverse consequences.

The National Knowledge Commission's characterisation of the Indian education sector's governance structure as 'over-regulated and under-governed' highlights the need for a more balanced approach (NKC, 2006). This research aims to evaluate whether granting schools greater autonomy can, in fact, improve student learning outcomes. The study seeks to ascertain whether schools with increased independence from centralised management are able to produce superior academic results by examining the impact of enhanced decision-making authority in areas such as curriculum design, instructional methods, and resource allocation. By assessing a range of student achievement and engagement metrics across schools with varying degrees of autonomy, the study endeavours to provide insights that can inform policy decisions and contribute to the development of more effective instructional practices.

Defining School Autonomy

Autonomy according to Cambridge dictionary means - the right of an organization, country, or region to be independent and govern itself or the ability to make your own decisions without being controlled by anyone else. Now that one talks about school autonomy, it refers to the degree of freedom a school has/ can have in making decisions without needing approval from higher authorities. This study looks at the definition of school autonomy from three different dimensions/perspectives keeping in mind three key areas: Financial autonomy, Administrative autonomy, and Curriculum and Assessment autonomy.

Financial autonomy grants schools' control over their budgets, including the allocation and expenditure of funds. This allows them to prioritize spending based on their specific needs and goals. Additionally, schools may have the ability to generate supplementary resources through fundraising or partnerships, further enhancing their financial flexibility and capacity to cater to their unique circumstances. With this financial independence, schools can make informed decisions about resource utilization, tailoring expenditure to address their most pressing requirements and emerging priorities more effectively.

Administrative autonomy grants schools the freedom to manage their internal operations with greater independence. This includes the power to make decisions regarding the hiring, training, and organisation of staff, as well as the development of school policies and the overall structural framework of the institution. With this enhanced administrative autonomy, schools can tailor the learning environment to better suit their unique contexts, needs, and objectives. This allows them to cultivate an educational setting that is responsive to the specific requirements and characteristics of their student population and the local community they serve.

Curriculum and Assessment autonomy grants schools the freedom and flexibility to design and implement their own customised educational programs, choose teaching methods and instructional approaches that best cater to the unique learning needs, abilities and preferences of their student population, and establish assessment practices that are closely aligned with the specific educational objectives and desired learning outcomes of the institution. This level of autonomy over the curriculum, teaching strategies, and evaluation methods empowers schools to move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach and instead cultivate a learning environment that is tailored to the unique characteristics, requirements and goals of their students and the local community they serve. With this autonomy, schools can develop educational experiences that are more engaging, effective and relevant, allowing them to better support the academic and personal growth of their students.

Rationale of the Study

This study seeks to examine whether empowering schools with greater decision-making autonomy can contribute to enhanced educational outcomes, with a particular focus on the context of Delhi, India. The Indian capital has been at the forefront of educational reform, implementing initiatives such as the "Chunauti" program and establishing School Management Committees (Government of NCT of Delhi, 2016). These reforms reflect a broader trend towards decentralisation, where local schools are granted increased control over decision-making processes, enabling them to better address the specific needs of their student populations. The premise underpinning school autonomy is that when institutions are afforded the freedom to make decisions regarding curriculum design, instructional approaches, and resource allocation, they can cultivate learning environments that more effectively support student academic achievement. International examples, such as the acclaimed education system of Finland, provide empirical evidence suggesting that school autonomy can indeed contribute to enhanced educational performance (Sahlberg, 2015).

Despite the increased interest in school autonomy in India, especially in Delhi, there is limited research on how it affects educational outcomes. Most studies have focused on broader education reforms without examining the specific impact of school-level autonomy (Muralidharan and Sundaraman, 2011). This research aims to address this gap, providing evidence that could inform future education policies and practices. The findings will be particularly relevant for policymakers in Delhi and across India as they seek ways to improve education quality. Understanding the influence of school autonomy on educational outcomes could offer valuable insights to drive more effective reforms, benefiting students not only in Delhi but potentially across India.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The existing body of literature on the topic of school autonomy and its impact on educational outcomes highlights several key perspectives.

The existing research suggests that financial autonomy can facilitate more efficient resource utilisation and enhance school infrastructure (Goyal, 2009). Similarly, autonomy in curriculum design is associated with increased student engagement and academic performance (Anand & Sharma, 2015). Schools granted administrative autonomy often report higher teacher motivation and accountability (Rani & Sharma, 2017), as educators can tailor instructional methods to better meet student needs. This flexibility is linked to innovative teaching practices and improved learning outcomes (Chaudhary, 2018). Studies indicate that autonomy can enhance student achievement, particularly in schools with strong and capable leadership (Kingdon and Banerji, 2009). Greater autonomy also fosters a culture of accountability among school leaders and staff (Narayan, 2016), although effective autonomy requires skilled management, which may be lacking in some institutions (Sahni, 2013). There is a risk that autonomy could exacerbate disparities between well-resourced and under-resourced schools (Rao, 2014). Crucially, both school administration and teachers must have the incentive to drive change even after the granting of autonomy; without

such motivation, the purpose of autonomy may be undermined.

Nandamuri and Rao (2012) conducted a comparative study on the condition of school autonomy in countries like the USA, UK, Sweden, Canada, and the Netherlands, comparing it to that of India. Boards or committees, comprising teachers, headmasters, community members, parents, and sometimes former students from local schools, now take on decisions previously made by ministries or other school authorities. These groups are directly involved in decisions related to academic, administrative, and financial matters. It concludes by saying that there is a strong demand for autonomy in school management, particularly in private, unaided schools, which already enjoy some independence. Policymakers should decentralise authority to strengthen public schools and help them compete with private institutions.

A study of high-performing schools in seven Latin American countries found their success was mainly due to excellent school management and effective teaching practices. The study also showed these schools' success was strongly linked to their autonomy, which matched administrative trends towards more decentralised management and teaching approaches (LLECE, 2002).

According to the Ramamurti Committee Report of 1990, the administration of education should involve more non-governmental agencies, thereby reducing government control. If voluntary efforts are lacking, the government should establish autonomous organisations to manage educational institutions instead of direct oversight. The report also recommended transferring existing government-run institutions to these autonomous bodies (GOI, 1990). Furthermore, a 2005 (Singh, 2006), study by the Centre for Civil Society, New Delhi, emphasised that the major issue lay not in the level of financial allocations, but rather in organisational inefficiencies, lack of accountability and misuse of funds.

Karpade, Ashok, and Meghanathan's in-depth study (2004) on successful school management in India, focusing on Navodaya Vidyalayas, discovered that these schools had effectively implemented systematic and participatory management practices. The study highlighted that managers were granted autonomy, along with the responsibility for ensuring task completion. Additionally, research by Terry and Chubb (1990) found that private schools often outperform public schools primarily due to their organisational structure, which benefits from greater autonomy. The academic literature widely recognises that school organisation, management, and the overall school ethos play crucial roles in promoting school effectiveness (Mortimore, 1998; Thrupp, 1999).

Hanushek's (1996) research suggests that if decentralisation is not explicitly aimed at improving educational performance, it may encourage schools to prioritise their own distinct objectives over enhancing student outcomes, potentially exacerbating rather than improving the quality of education. Similarly, Townsend's (1996) work indicates that less advantaged schools encountered difficulties in benefiting from school-based management approaches due to their limited capacity to generate additional funding. Furthermore, Malen et al. (1990) observed that school-based management does not typically result in substantial changes or innovations within the core instructional aspects of schools, noting that the more closely an activity is tied to a school's "instructional core", the less impact school-based management appears to have on it.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design, utilizing semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method. This approach facilitated a deep exploration of the perceptions and experiences of key stakeholders, including educators, administrators, and policymakers, involved in the educational sector. The researchers meticulously designed the interview questions to investigate various aspects of school autonomy and gain insights into its perceived influence on educational outcomes. Through purposive sampling, the study engaged with school owners and heads, both from private and government institutions, with varying degrees of autonomy. This ensured that a diverse range of perspectives were captured and considered in the analysis. The data gathered from these interviews was then subjected to thematic analysis, focusing on identifying recurring themes and patterns related to how autonomy shapes educational practices, student engagement, and academic achievement. By adopting this qualitative approach, the study contributes to a nuanced understanding that can inform educational policies and practices aimed at enhancing educational outcomes through increased school autonomy

4. FINDINGS

Stakeholders' viewpoint

The interviewed stakeholders, representing diverse roles within the education sector, expressed a range of perspectives on school autonomy. The discussion primarily involved private school owners and administrators, particularly from low-budget institutions. They highlighted how autonomy enables them to make swift, context-specific decisions, which is crucial for effectively managing their schools and responding to unique challenges. One aspect they unanimously agreed upon was the need to transform educational institutions into 'for-profit' entities. This, they believed, would encourage private players to enter the market, fostering competition and providing better education, as investors would have the incentive to invest in the sector, ultimately leading to improved facilities and outcomes. In contrast, principals and teachers from government schools shared insights centred on the necessity for equitable access to resources. Their concerns regarding increased autonomy extended beyond financial considerations, focusing on the potential risks it could pose to school governance and educational equity, especially if not implemented with appropriate safeguards.

Pedagogic Practices

In the field of education, the notion of pedagogical autonomy, defined as the freedom for educators to design and implement their teaching methods and curricula, has emerged as a contentious issue among various stakeholders. The perspectives on this autonomy are significantly shaped by the contextual factors in which different educational professionals operate, reflecting both their unique challenges and aspirations.

Administrators and owners of low-budget private schools and other private institutions often advocate vigorously for pedagogical autonomy. For these stakeholders, the ability to tailor educational approaches to the specific needs of their students is not merely a matter of preference, but a necessity driven by the distinct constraints and opportunities inherent to their settings.

Many low-budget private schools contend with limited resources and highly diverse student populations. These schools frequently serve communities with varying levels of prior educational experience, socioeconomic backgrounds, and individual learning needs. Consequently, the capacity to adapt teaching methods and curricula to address these diverse needs can be crucial for fostering student engagement and academic success. Pedagogical autonomy allows educators in these settings to innovate and create customized learning experiences that resonate more deeply with their students, potentially leading to improved learning outcomes.

Private school owners and administrators often see pedagogic autonomy as a way to try new teaching methods. Without strict national or regional standards, they can experiment with different approaches, incorporate local culture, and respond quickly to their students' needs. This flexibility can be very useful where traditional education models are not effective or where the community's needs differ from broader policies.

Government school principals and teachers tend to be more cautious regarding pedagogical autonomy. Their primary concern is maintaining consistent educational standards across their school network. Operating within a structured framework of established curriculum goals and standardised assessments, these educators view pedagogical autonomy as requiring a balanced approach. While they acknowledge the potential benefits of flexibility in teaching methods and curricula to cater to diverse student needs, they express apprehension that unrestrained autonomy could lead to significant variations in educational quality, potentially disadvantaging learners in schools with less effective or inconsistent teaching practices.

The central fear is that increased pedagogical autonomy without sufficient guidelines and oversight may result in divergent educational experiences, undermining the objective of providing a uniform standard of education. For instance, if one school adopts an innovative teaching approach while another relies on more traditional methods, the disparity in student outcomes could become pronounced, resulting in an inequitable educational landscape.

Both the private and government school perspectives highlight the need for a balanced approach to pedagogical autonomy. The flexibility to adapt teaching and curricula can foster innovation and address specific student needs, but it must be tempered by measures that ensure educational standards are upheld and quality remains consistent across different school settings.

The flexibility for educators to adapt teaching methods and approaches can positively impact student achievement by enabling them to cater to the diverse needs, abilities, backgrounds, and learning styles of their students. This customisation of instructional practices can lead to more personalised and effective learning experiences. However, unrestricted pedagogical autonomy may pose challenges, as the absence of a guiding framework could result in inconsistent standards and expectations, potentially affecting student performance and the equity of educational outcomes. To address this, a balanced approach to pedagogical autonomy, incorporating both flexibility and moderation, is recommended. Moderation involves establishing clear guidelines, structures, and mechanisms, such as regular assessments, collaborative planning among educators, and targeted teacher training, to ensure that teaching methods remain aligned with broader educational goals while still allowing for individualised adjustments to meet the unique needs of each classroom. By judiciously combining autonomy and moderation, schools can maintain high teaching standards and consistency while accommodating the diverse requirements of their student populations, thereby fostering success and fairness in the educational experience

Autonomy benefits school administrators. It allows them to support diverse teaching approaches and encourage creativity. Administrators can help teachers try new methods and find what works best for their students, making the school more adaptable and innovative. When teachers have autonomy, administrators can better understand and address the needs of different classrooms, providing targeted support, infrastructure and resources without lengthy bureaucratic processes. By balancing autonomy with effective oversight, administrators can ensure that varied approaches contribute to the school's goals and maintain a consistent, fair learning environment.

School owners and administrators in India have differing views on financial autonomy and the role of profit in education. Private school owners see financial autonomy as crucial for their survival and growth, as it allows them to make quick decisions and bypass bureaucracy. However, government school administrators are concerned that greater financial autonomy could lead to unequal resource distribution and potential mismanagement, emphasizing the need for equitable access and strict oversight.

The perspectives of government schools on financial autonomy vary based on their needs and capabilities. Some favour autonomy as it enables them to address local challenges and prioritise essential needs, leading to better outcomes. But others are hesitant to embrace autonomy due to concerns about their ability to manage funds effectively. Without proper financial expertise, there is a risk of mismanagement, making these schools prefer the stability of centralized funding, where resources are managed by higher authorities to ensure consistent support.

The perspectives on incorporating profit motives in the education sector are diverse. Proprietors of low-budget private schools acknowledge the potential for utilising financial surpluses to enhance educational quality and promote innovation. However, they also recognise the risk that increased tuition fees could restrict access for economically disadvantaged students. Conversely, administrators from mainstream government schools express caution, warning that a for-profit approach could exacerbate existing educational inequities within the Indian context. These administrators advocate for a balanced approach that combines financial autonomy with robust safeguards to ensure that education remains accessible and equitable for all learners.

Feedback System

In the ongoing dialogue about improving educational systems, stakeholder perspectives on the role of feedback from teachers and parents reveal a complex landscape of priorities and challenges. School owners and administrators from low-budget private schools and other private institutions generally advocate for a proactive approach to incorporating feedback, emphasizing its critical role in refining educational practices and achieving better outcomes. Conversely, principals and teachers from government schools often face a more nuanced set of challenges when integrating feedback, balancing it with the need to maintain consistency and uphold educational standards.

Private schools, particularly those with limited budgets, often view feedback from teachers and parents as a crucial tool for ongoing improvement. These institutions, which may lack the extensive resources available to larger or more affluent schools, rely heavily on feedback to navigate the dynamic demands of the education sector. School owners and administrators in such settings frequently underscore the importance of being

agile and responsive to input from stakeholders. In practice, feedback allows these schools to adapt quickly to changing educational needs and preferences. For instance, if teachers report that certain instructional methods are not effective or if parents express concerns about the curriculum, private schools can swiftly implement adjustments to address these issues. This flexibility helps them stay competitive and relevant, particularly in an environment where educational quality can be a significant differentiator. Moreover, private schools often view feedback as a means to foster stronger relationships with their communities. By actively engaging with parents and teachers, but schools not only enhance their educational practices but also build trust and support within their school communities. This relational aspect is crucial for private institutions, where community perception and satisfaction can directly impact enrolment and overall success.

In contrast, principals and teachers from government schools face a different set of challenges when it comes to integrating feedback. Government schools, which are typically larger and more bureaucratically structured, operate under stringent regulations and standardised guidelines that aim to ensure consistency and equity across the education system. This can create tension when attempting to incorporate diverse feedback from teachers and parents. One significant challenge is the potential for conflicting opinions. In a large, diverse school setting, feedback can vary widely, and reconciling these differing perspectives can be complex. For instance, while some parents may advocate for more individualised attention for students, others might prioritise rigorous academic standards. Teachers might have differing views on instructional strategies or curriculum content. Balancing these often conflicting inputs while striving to maintain a cohesive educational approach can be daunting.

Additionally, there is the risk of implementing changes based on feedback that may not align with broader educational goals or standards. Government schools are required to adhere to specific curricula and performance benchmarks set by educational authorities. This framework ensures that all students receive a consistent and equitable education, but it can also limit the scope for making changes based on individual feedback. For example, if feedback suggests a shift towards a more innovative teaching method, this may conflict with established standards or the need for uniformity across schools.

Given these challenges, principals and teachers in government schools often advocate for a structured approach to incorporating feedback. This approach entails establishing precise guidelines for the collection, review, and implementation of feedback. This ensures the alignment of changes with the school's broader objectives and regulatory requirements. This integration of feedback from teachers and parents within educational systems reveals a spectrum of perspectives shaped by institutional context. Private schools often leverage feedback as a means to enhance adaptability and foster community engagement, while government schools navigate the complexities of balancing feedback with the need for consistency and adherence to standards. A structured approach to feedback incorporation can bridge these differences, providing a framework that allows schools to benefit from stakeholder input while maintaining a high standard of education. Understanding and addressing these diverse perspectives is crucial for developing effective educational practices that meet the needs of all students and stakeholders.

Hiring of Teachers

The educational institutions and the processes governing teacher recruitment and hiring exhibit significant variations across different types of schools. Institutions like Sarvodaya and those managed by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi operate within a centralised system, where external agencies determine the recruitment process. This structure contrasts sharply with the more autonomous practices observed in Kendriya Vidyalayas and private schools.

Sarvodaya schools and MCD-managed institutions face substantial constraints regarding teacher hiring. These schools lack the discretion to select their own teaching staff. Instead, they are required to employ teachers assigned to them by external bodies such as the Delhi Subordinate Services Selection Board or through examinations conducted by the District Institute of Education and Training and the Central Teacher Eligibility Test. This external control means that these institutions must accept the teachers designated to them, regardless of the specific needs or preferences of the school. The centralised nature of this recruitment process can be viewed as both a strength and a limitation. On one hand, it ensures a standardised and uniform process across multiple schools, potentially maintaining consistency in teacher qualifications and performance. On the other hand, it removes the ability of individual schools to tailor their hiring practices to better fit their unique

educational environments or address specific local needs. This lack of control can lead to challenges in aligning the teachers' skills and teaching styles with the particular needs of the student body, potentially impacting the overall effectiveness of education.

The Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS), which centrally funds and manages Kendriya Vidyalayas (KVs), takes a more flexible approach to teacher recruitment. For primary teachers, KVs rely on a recruitment process that involves interviews conducted by the Regional Institute of Education (RIE). This system allows for a more localised and tailored selection process, as interviews can assess candidates' suitability for specific teaching contexts and school environments.

The appointment of post-graduate teachers in Kendriya Vidyalayas follows a nuanced process. Half of the positions are filled through direct recruitment, involving interviews to assess the candidates' domain expertise and teaching capabilities. The remaining half are appointed through a promotion-based mechanism, where selection is determined by performance in interdepartmental examinations. This dual approach allows KVs to maintain a balance between integrating fresh talent and retaining experienced educators, thereby cultivating a teaching staff that combines new perspectives and institutional knowledge.

In contrast, private schools exhibit the highest degree of autonomy in their hiring practices. Unlike government-run institutions, such as Sarvodaya and MCD schools, or even the centrally managed KVs, private schools possess the flexibility to manage their recruitment processes internally. The school management or the principal typically oversees the hiring of teachers and principals. This autonomy enables private schools to align their staffing decisions with their specific educational philosophies, strategic objectives, and the unique requirements of their student populations. The ability to make independent hiring choices allows private schools to customise their recruitment processes to attract candidates who are the best fit for their educational model and school culture. This can contribute to the development of a more responsive and adaptable educational environment, where staffing decisions are closely aligned with the school's vision and the evolving needs of its students.

Net Autonomy

The structure of Sarvodaya Vidyalayas is notably complex and bureaucratic. An ex-teacher of a Sarvodaya Vidyalaya revealed that if a school needs additional grants for infrastructural improvements, the head must send an approval letter detailing the need to the Education Officer. This officer forwards the letter to the Deputy Director, who then passes it on to the Regional Director and finally the Director of Education. Only when each member of this chain endorses the letter does the grant receive approval. The grant halts if it stalls at any point. In contrast, MCD primary schools, which fall under the Municipal Corporation of Delhi's development, receive their funds from the Government of India through several channels. In addition to MCD's own funds, there is the Directorate of Education, the Department of Urban Development and PWD, and the Department of Social Welfare.

Kendriya Vidyalayas, managed by the Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS), a society registered under the Societies Registration Act (XXI of 1860), have a more intricate structure. Although not directly controlled by the government, KVS operates under a three-tier management system with its headquarters in New Delhi, regional offices overseeing clusters of schools, and Kendriya Vidyalayas located across the country and abroad. Despite the lack of direct government control, KVS implements an Education Code that regulates all aspects of the schools, limiting their autonomy. In terms of budget allocation, the Board of Governors and the Management Committee, supported by the Executive Committee, oversee the expenditure of funds released by KVS according to their general rules. The Management Committee prepares the budget for the next session, which the Board of Governors must approve, while schools retain some autonomy in allocating a portion of their funds. Thus, although schools can decide on some budget allocations, these decisions must align with KVS regulations and receive Board approval.

In the landscape of school autonomy, a clear hierarchy emerges when analysing various types of educational institutions. At the top of this hierarchy are private, unrecognised schools, which enjoy the highest degree of autonomy due to their lack of government oversight. These schools operate independently of government regulations, which affords them significant freedom in managing their affairs. They can set their own policies regarding fees, teacher salaries, and overall administrative decisions without needing to adhere to external guidelines or seek approval from educational authorities.

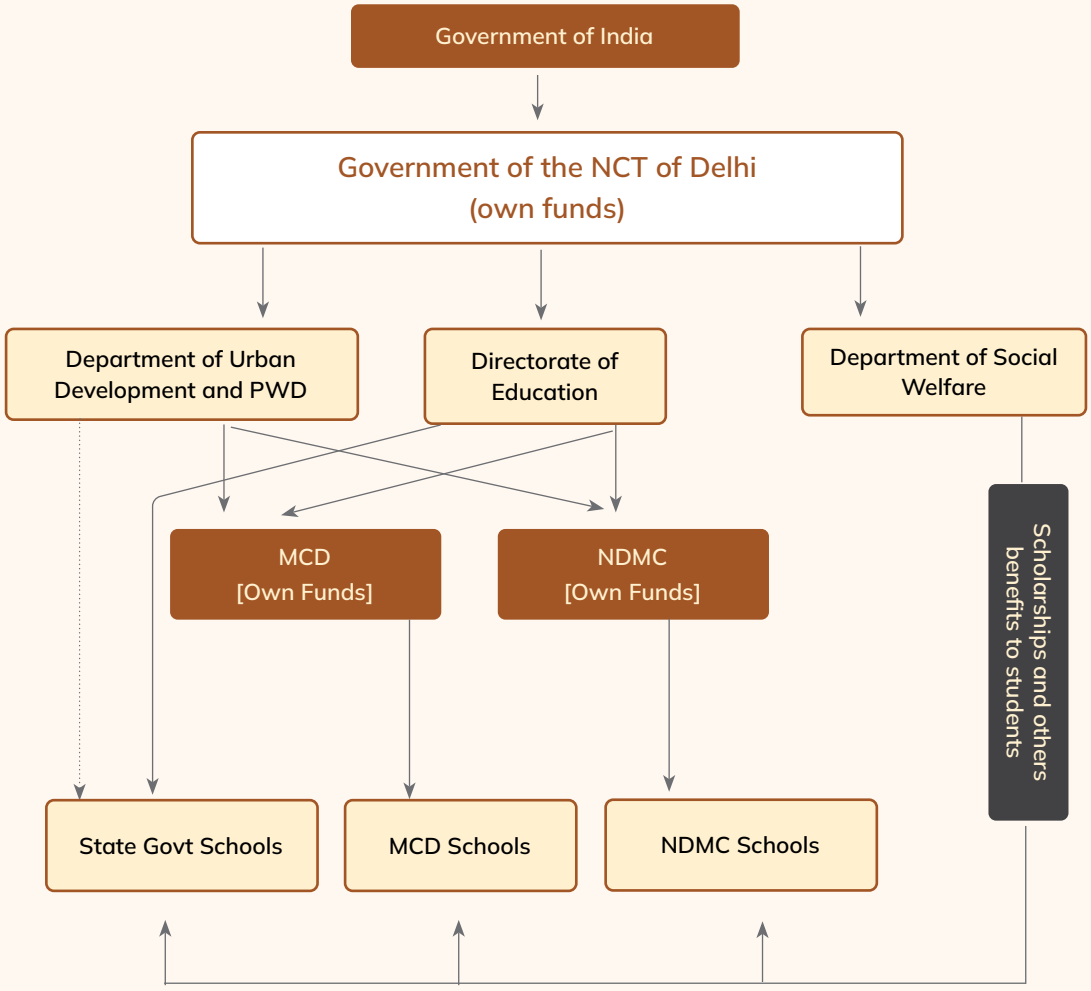
Next in the hierarchy are private, recognised, unaided schools. The Delhi School Education Act of 1973 outlines certain regulations for these institutions, despite their official government recognition. This Act mandates that these schools adhere to specific salary structures as per the Seventh Pay Commission, which imposes constraints on how they can manage teacher compensation. Despite this, these schools retain the authority to set their own student fees, though the Directorate of Education (DoE) holds the power to intervene if the fees are considered excessive or unfair. Additionally, private recognised unaided schools have the autonomy to determine increments in teacher salaries, giving them a degree of flexibility in how they reward their staff. This form of autonomy, while still regulated, allows these schools to operate with a measure of independence compared to those bound by more stringent rules.

Kendriya Vidyalayas (KVs), which hold a notable position in terms of autonomy. KVs benefit from a considerable degree of operational freedom, particularly in how they manage teacher salaries. KV principals have the authority to decide on salary increments for teachers, a level of control that private-aided schools do not possess. The DoE's requirements constrain the managing committee's autonomy over teacher salaries in private-aided schools. The DoE elects the members of a selection committee in these schools, and the DoE must approve the final appointment of teachers. This system introduces a layer of bureaucracy and limits the degree of control that private-aided schools have over their staffing decisions. Consequently, KVs have a significant advantage over private-aided schools in terms of autonomy over teacher salary management.

Despite their relative autonomy in teacher salary decisions, both Kendriya Vidyalayas and private-aided schools face similar limitations when it comes to budget formulation and allocation. Both types of schools must adhere to the financial regulations imposed by the DoE and the Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS). These regulations stipulate how budgets should be formulated and allocated, requiring approval from higher authorities before any financial decisions can be finalized. This ensures that both KVs and private-aided schools operate within a framework of budgetary constraints, limiting their flexibility in financial matters and reinforcing the role of higher authorities in overseeing their fiscal management.

At the bottom of the autonomy hierarchy are Sarvodaya Vidyalayas and Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) schools. These institutions represent the least autonomous category due to the extensive government oversight they experience. Sarvodaya Vidyalayas and MCD schools lack control over critical aspects such as setting school fees, determining teacher salaries, and hiring staff. Government authorities heavily regulate their financial operations, requiring approval for all decisions. The process for accessing additional funds or terminating teachers is complex and cumbersome. For example, the process of terminating a teacher necessitates the filing of a criminal report if necessary, and the documentation of poor performance through annual performance reports takes precedence over straightforward dismissal. This rigid framework significantly reduces the flexibility of Sarvodaya Vidyalayas and MCD schools, making them highly regulated and less adaptable compared to their more autonomous counterparts.

Figure 11:



Source: CCS Report, 2013

The degree of school autonomy is markedly contingent on institutional classification. At the apex of the hierarchy are private unrecognised schools, which enjoy the highest level of operational freedom. Privately recognised unaided schools occupy the next tier, functioning under some governmental constraints. Kendriya Vidyalayas, exhibiting unique autonomy in managing teacher salaries, occupy a middle position. In contrast, privately aided schools face limitations in staffing and budgeting decisions. At the bottom of the hierarchy are Sarvodaya Vidyalayas and MCD schools, characterised by extensive governmental regulation and consequently the least autonomy. This nuanced hierarchy underscores the varied ways in which schools navigate and are impacted by regulatory frameworks, ultimately shaping their organisational independence and administrative flexibility.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Structured Feedback System: Introduce a clear system for gathering feedback from teachers, students, and parents. This system should include surveys or advisory committees, allowing schools to prioritize and incorporate relevant suggestions into their operations. Professional development for staff can help implement these changes effectively.
2. Flexible but Structured Guidelines for Pedagogic Innovation: Develop flexible guidelines that allow teachers to innovate while maintaining core educational standards. Schools should have autonomy to tailor their curricula, but this must align with key educational goals and assessment criteria to ensure accountability.
3. Professional Development for Teachers: Invest in ongoing training for teachers and administrators to ensure they can innovate within structured guidelines. This will help schools maintain educational quality while allowing room for creativity and adaptation to students' needs.
4. Reevaluation of the Right to Education (RTE) Act: The RTE Act, especially its provisions regulating aspects like infrastructure and salaries, should be reconsidered. Schools should be held accountable for their results, not the means by which they achieve them. Greater autonomy in operations can help improve student outcomes.
5. Legal Frameworks for Profit-making Schools: Regulations preventing schools from operating for profit should be reviewed. While maintaining accountability, schools should be allowed to generate profit to improve education quality and attract investment. However, safeguards must be in place to ensure this doesn't lead to educational inequities.
6. Streamlining Regulations: The overall regulatory framework should be simplified to allow schools more operational flexibility. Rules should focus on outcomes rather than dictating school processes, enabling schools to innovate and improve while being held accountable for results.

The evidence suggests that granting greater autonomy to schools can lead to improved educational outcomes, particularly in terms of enhanced student performance and the development of innovative teaching practices.

6. CONCLUSION

The debate on autonomy in schools highlights the need to balance flexibility and consistency. While teachers can adapt their methods to meet diverse student needs, this freedom must be controlled to ensure standards are met. For example, different types of schools have varying levels of autonomy and control over hiring practices. Centralised institutions like Sarvodaya and MCD schools prioritise consistency but may restrict flexibility. Kendriya Vidyalayas use a hybrid recruitment model, blending direct hiring and promotions. Private schools have greater autonomy to customise their approaches to better meet their objectives. Each system has strengths and challenges, reflecting the broader debate between standardisation and flexibility in education. Stakeholders' perspectives differ based on context; private schools often see autonomy as a way to innovate, while government schools emphasise maintaining fairness. The key is integrating autonomy with effective oversight to ensure dynamic teaching aligned with educational goals. Achieving this balance is crucial for creating an environment where teachers and students can thrive, leading to a more effective and equitable education system. It's about the 'right to education' and the 'right to choose in education.'

7. APPENDIX

Interview checklist

1. How do you think autonomy impacts the overall functioning of a school?
2. What all sectors, in your opinion, need autonomy for the betterment of overall educational outcomes?
3. How do you get your funds to improve the infrastructure—washrooms, benches, desks, etc.?
4. How is the budget allocated? What is the process of its allocation?
5. Who are the main stakeholders involved in hiring teachers and faculty?
6. What are the requirements a teacher is supposed to have?
7. How much control do you have over the curriculum, and if at all you make changes to the teaching style?
8. Is it mandatory for schools to use textbooks for teaching, and who determines the selection of these textbooks?
9. Are course contents flexible, and who are the key stakeholders involved in deciding them or who do think should be involved in deciding them?
10. Who designs the assessment for the students, and are there any parameters that need to be followed in this process?
11. Who can dismiss teachers, and what criteria are considered while dismissing them?
12. The feedback by teachers and students, are they being taken into account?
13. If yes, how are they being incorporated into the curriculum decisions?
14. How is student grade progression determined, and who oversees this process?

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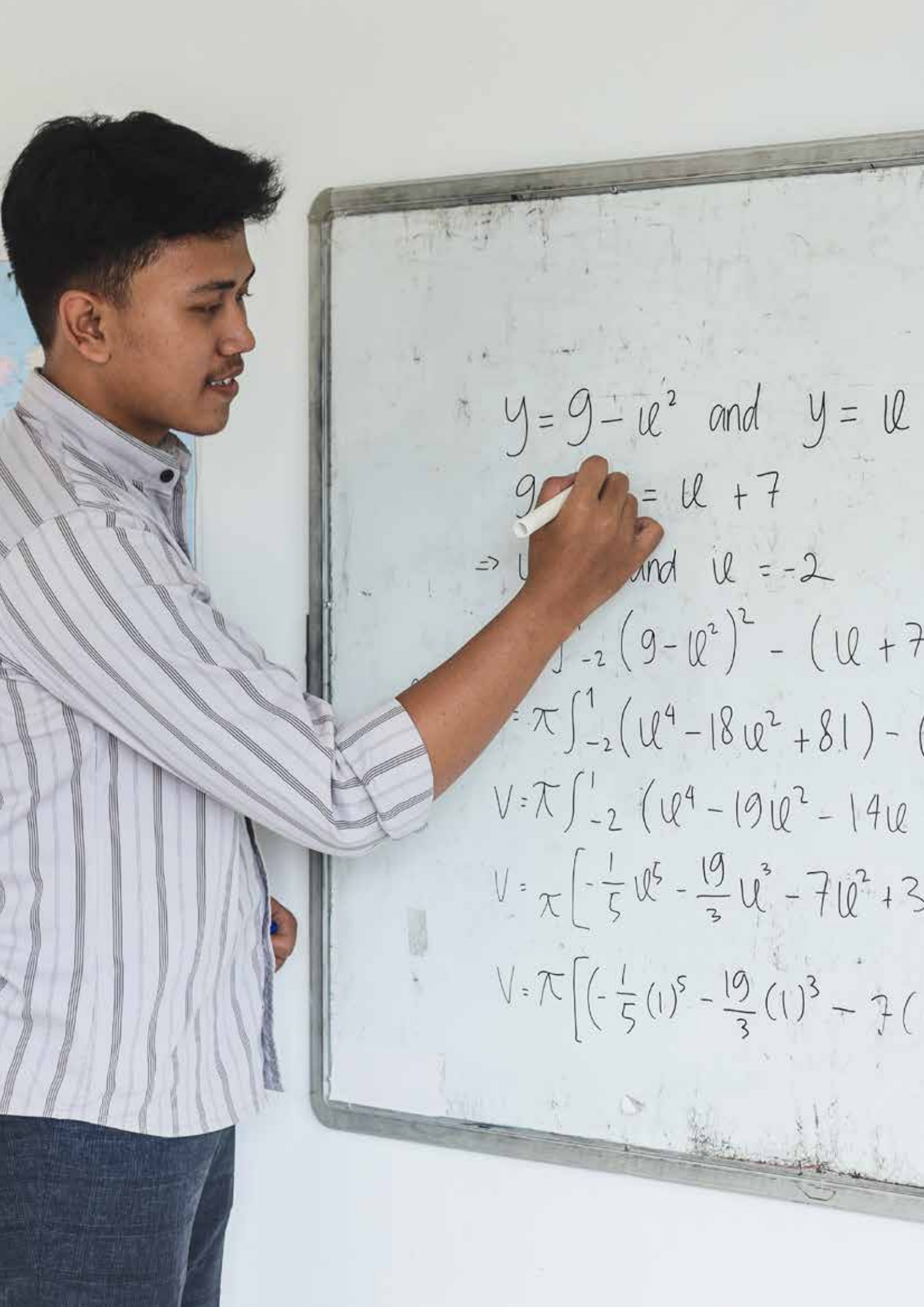
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CONCLUSION: NAVIGATING THE PATH FORWARD IN EDUCATION REFORM

This compendium underscores the multifaceted and interconnected challenges confronting India's education system, with a particular emphasis on urban contexts like Delhi and Chennai. Whilst legislative measures, such as the Right to Education Act, have made strides in expanding educational access, the research indicates that access alone is insufficient to address the deeper, systemic issues plaguing the system. The focus must now shift towards cultivating a more equitable, accountable, and innovative educational framework that can cater to the diverse needs of all learners, especially those from marginalised and economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

EQUITY: BEYOND ACCESS

One of the most prominent themes across the research is the ongoing struggle for equity in education. Despite policy initiatives designed to bring disadvantaged students into the fold, such as the RTE's 25% seat reservation in private schools, significant barriers remain. These include bureaucratic inefficiencies, document discrepancies, and a lack of support for first-generation learners, all of which disproportionately impact economically weaker sections and marginalised communities.

However, equity is not just about bringing students into the classroom; it's about ensuring that once they are there, they can thrive. The research highlights persistent inequalities within the system, where students from disadvantaged backgrounds often struggle to keep up with their more privileged peers due to a lack of resources and support at home. This highlights the need for more targeted interventions that address the socio-economic barriers to learning, ensuring that equity is not just a matter of access, but of sustained support and opportunity.

GOVERNANCE: THE BACKBONE OF EFFECTIVE EDUCATION

Governance emerges as a critical issue underpinning many of the challenges identified in this compendium. The efficacy of educational policy is contingent on its implementation, and weak governance often hinders well-intentioned policies from reaching their full potential. The research highlights issues such as teacher absenteeism, suboptimal accountability structures, and bureaucratic inefficiencies that impede the delivery of quality education.

However, the research also indicates that governance reform holds substantial promise for enhancing educational outcomes. Decentralisation, as explored in the context of school autonomy, offers a viable pathway for granting schools greater control over their resources and decision-making processes. This, in turn, can foster more responsive and innovative approaches to teaching and learning, as schools are better positioned to adapt to the unique needs of their student populations. Nonetheless, decentralisation should be accompanied by robust oversight mechanisms to prevent autonomy from exacerbating inequalities between well-resourced urban schools and underfunded rural institutions.

INNOVATION: BUILDING SCHOOLS FOR THE FUTURE

The research emphasises the critical importance of innovation in curriculum and pedagogical practices for enhancing educational outcomes. The rigid, examination-focused approach that has long been the hallmark of the Indian education system is increasingly seen as inadequate in equipping students for the demands of the 21st century. Instead, there is a pressing need to adopt more holistic, student-centred learning approaches that nurture critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving abilities.

The Schools of Specialised Excellence, as examined in this compendium, represent an innovative model for addressing this gap. By concentrating on the specific talents and interests of students and offering a more skills-oriented curriculum, these institutions provide a blueprint for moving beyond rote learning and standardised testing. However, the research also underscores that innovation in curriculum must be accompanied by investment in infrastructure and extracurricular opportunities to foster a truly enriching learning environment. Failing to do so may undermine the potential of even the most forward-thinking curricula to fully engage students and prepare them for the complexities of the real world.

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The theme of this year's internship, "Policy Challenges in School Education", brought together a diverse group of scholars, educators, and policy experts. We extend our thanks to all the participants for their valuable contributions, hard work, and dedication in shaping this compendium. Their research and insights reflect a deep commitment to improving education in India and addressing the complex challenges within the sector.

Sadaf Hussain, the Project Lead, led this initiative from end to end. His meticulous attention to detail, from editing to overseeing the design, alongside his leadership in topic selection and the recruitment of guides, ensured the successful completion of this project.

Dr Heena Choudhary, Senior Associate (Research & Trainning Programs) worked closely with the scholars, ensuring the high quality of the papers and helping to refine the logical flow of the research. Snehal Thakre, Associate (Research & Trainning Programs) played a vital role in managing the logistics, ensuring the smooth operation of sessions, and supporting the scholars with their needs. She was also active in the selection of scholars. Ravi Kumar Yadav, Design Consultant (Policy Impact & Outreach) designed the compendium, giving it a creative and professional look.

We acknowledge Dr. Amit Chandra, CEO of the Centre for Civil Society, for his support in the successful implementation of the workshop. Thanks to the mentors who provided invaluable guidance throughout the process: Abhishek Ranjan, Innovation Officer at the Ministry of Education, Government of India; Mansi Middha, CEO of Indus Action; Mehek Rastogi, Senior Program Manager at Anudip Foundation; Rohan Joshi, CEO of Ahvaan Trust; and Vikas Jhunjhunwala, Founder and CEO of Sunshine Schools. Their expertise, feedback, and encouragement enriched the quality of the research presented in this compendium.

The entire team at the Centre for Civil Society provided support, coordination, and vision in making this workshop a success. Thanks also to the reviewers and advisors, whose guidance helped shape the final output of this compendium.

Finally, we extend our gratitude to the readers of this compendium. We hope the ideas and solutions presented within these pages inspire further dialogue and actionable change in the realm of school education policy.

ABOUT THE SCHOLARS

Aditi Thakur

Aditi Thakur is pursuing an M.A. in Education at Ambedkar University. She graduated from Jesus and Mary College at Delhi University with a first-class bachelor's degree in elementary education. Aditi is passionate about innovative teaching and inclusive learning, and she wants to integrate critical thinking into educational methods and curricula to improve student engagement and growth.

Aman Chauhan

Aman Chauhan is a post-graduate in Development Studies from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) with a strong passion for research. He enjoys exploring the intersectionalities within social science disciplines. Aman believes that learning is an ongoing process, where one must continuously evolve through both learning and unlearning at various phases of life, shaping his academic and intellectual journey.

Anshika Priyamvada

Anshika Priyamvada is a Psychology graduate from Lucknow with a passion for applying psychological principles to real-world policy. She is particularly interested in the intersections of gender, education, and international relations.

Durgesh Jha

Durgesh Jha is a 2024 Researching Reality Scholar. Currently a post-graduate student of Political Science at the University of Delhi, his areas of interest include public policy, governance, political economy, international relations and sustainable development. He has experience working with organisations like the National Human Rights Commission, Global Youth India and Project Statecraft within these domains and disciplines.

Lazana Deshar

Lazana Deshar is a researcher with a Master's in Sociology and a Bachelor's in Computer Science and Information Technology. Her work focuses on the intersection of technology, child protection, gender, and social inclusion, advocating for marginalized communities. Lazana actively promotes IT literacy within these communities and has received recognition for her work, including the Ageing Nepal 2021 Fellowship. Her research has been presented at national and international conferences.

Meena Kumari

Meena Kumari is an Assistant Professor at Law Centre-1, Faculty of Law, University of Delhi. She earned her LL.B. and LL.M. from the same institution and recently completed her Ph.D. in Law. Meena also holds a Junior Research Fellowship from UGC and was selected by the Rajasthan Public Service Commission in 2018. Her research focuses on personal laws, women's rights, and property rights. She was awarded the Best Early Career Paper in Law at an international conference organized by Northumbria University, UK.

Naorem Nitish

Naorem Nitish is an Economics student minoring in Mathematics. He possesses strong analytical and communication skills, with experience in policy analysis, data visualization, and corporate communications. Driven by a passion for public policy, he seeks to contribute his skills to roles that promote social equity and economic sustainability.

Ojaswi Anand

Ojaswi Anand is a graduate of Lady Shri Ram College for Women, University of Delhi, with a degree in Economics. Her academic interests include development economics, international relations, and behavioral economics. She is passionate about understanding complex societal dynamics. In her free time, Ojaswi enjoys analyzing characters in movies and books, exploring their perspectives and motivations.

Paarul Rai

Paarul Rai has taught elementary and middle school and written about education for a living. Paarul is currently working on her Master's in English Literature and has a B.Tech., a B.Ed., and a CTET qualification. She likes how education and public policy affect each other and has taken part in events at the Centre for Civil Society.

Roselin Indani Losan

Roselin Indani Losan graduated from Ambedkar University Delhi with an M.A. in Development Studies. Her internships at NITI Aayog and the Indian Social Institute have equipped her with valuable research and policy analysis skills. Driven by a desire to make a positive impact, Roselin is eager to contribute to the field of development and beyond.

Samal Partha Amarendra

Partha Amarendra is pursuing an Integrated Master's in Development Studies at IIT Madras. His research interests include migrant and refugee experiences, poverty, environmental challenges, and their global political implications. Beyond academics, Partha enjoys reading, table tennis, and expressing himself through poetry.

Sanyam Mahajan

Sanyam Mahajan is a Political Science undergraduate at Ramjas College, University of Delhi. He focuses on digital and education policy, particularly inclusion. Sanyam has presented a policy brief on fiscal federalism to a Member of Parliament and is researching K-12 education laws impacting private-unaided schools. He has worked with organizations like the World Mediation Organization, YLAC, and Centre for Civil Society. He also founded Internet on Trust (IoT) to express his views on digital policy.

Shashwat Kotiyal

Shashwat Kotiyal is a law student at O.P. Jindal Global University, driven by a strong commitment to justice and a desire to make a positive impact. He is dedicated to continuous learning and seeks opportunities to engage with mentors and professionals in the legal field. Shashwat aims to leverage his legal knowledge to contribute meaningfully to society.

Siddhant Shetty

Siddhant Shetty holds a degree in Economics and International Relations from Ashoka University. With a strong focus on diplomacy, macroeconomic trends, and Indian politics, he is passionate about contributing to these fields. Siddhant, based in Bangalore, is also an avid sports enthusiast, with a particular love for cricket and football. Outside his academic interests, he enjoys classic films and has a background in painting.

Swati Phogat

Swati Phogat is a second-year Political Science student at the University of Delhi. She is currently interning with the Centre for Civil Society to gain practical experience in policy analysis and development.

Tabassum

Tabassum graduated with a degree in History from Lady Shri Ram College for Women and is currently pursuing a Master's in International Relations from Jamia Millia Islamia. She combines her love for historical analysis with a keen interest in global affairs and diplomacy. Through her interdisciplinary approach and passion for cross-cultural dynamics, Tabassum aims to make a meaningful impact in an increasingly interconnected world.

ABOUT THE MENTORS/GUIDES

Abhishek Ranjan | Ministry of Education, Government of India

Abhishek Ranjan is an educationist with a keen interest in public policy, particularly in the education sector. He currently serves as an Innovation Officer at the Ministry of Education's Innovation Cell and is a Zonal Coordinator for the Institution Innovation Council in five states. Abhishek has worked on leadership and system transformation projects in government schools across India and contributed to NITI Aayog's Aspirational District Program. He holds degrees in Economics, Sociology, and Law from the University of Delhi.

Supported paper:

- Delhi's Education System: Examining Shifting Enrolment and Dropout Patterns

Dr. Amit Chandra | Centre for Civil Society

Dr. Amit Chandra is the CEO of the Centre for Civil Society, where he passionately advocates for liberal values and focuses on improving governance in school education and livelihoods. He has significantly influenced public policy in India, contributing to the National Urban Street Vending Act, amendments to the India Forest Act, and the Micro Small and Medium Enterprises Development Act. Dr. Chandra's insights are widely cited in media and academic publications. He mentors various organisations and serves on several government committees; he has previously worked with the Asia Foundation in Kabul and the Central Square Foundation in Delhi.

Supported papers:

- Money Matters: A Study of Financial Investments and Educational Equity in Delhi Government Schools
- Educational Dilemmas: Public School Teachers' Choices Between Public and Private Schools for Their Children in Urban Chennai

Mansi Middha | Indus Action

Mansi Middha is the National RTE Lead at Indus Action, focusing on the implementation of educational projects related to the Right to Education Act, particularly Section 12(1)(c). With a background in planning and evaluation from University College London, she leads advocacy efforts to enhance educational access and quality across multiple states. Her expertise includes stakeholder management and program design. A former Teach for India fellow, Mansi is dedicated to leveraging education as a tool for development.

Supported paper:

Lost in the System: Document Discrepancies and Other Barriers to RTE Admissions in Delhi

Mehek Rastogi | Anudip Foundation

Mehek Rastogi is a Senior Program Manager at the Anudip Foundation, with extensive experience in education, social development, and program management. Previously, at Seeking Modern Applications for Real Transformation, she led initiatives on ending child marriage and promoting financial literacy among women. Mehek has also worked on education-focused projects, conducting research on gender inclusion and developing monitoring tools for community radio stations. Dedicated to driving impactful education and gender equity initiatives, she actively manages projects across multiple regions in India.

Supported paper:

- Balancing Excellence: Curriculum and Infrastructure in Delhi's Specialised Schools

Rohan (Ruhaan) Joshi | Ahvaan Trust

Rohan (Ruhaan) Joshi has built a distinguished career in education, social development, and public policy. With degrees from Savitribai Phule Pune University and Tata Institute of Social Sciences, he has held leadership roles across both public and private sectors. His experience includes working as a Programme Director with the Maharashtra government, Senior Fellow at the Centre for Civil Society, and Head of Teaching Professionals' Olympiad at CENTA. Currently, he serves as CEO of Ahvaan Trust, driving educational change across India.

Supported paper:

- Delhi's Education System: Examining Shifting Enrolment and Dropout Patterns

Vikas Jhunjhunwala | Sunshine Schools

Vikas Jhunjhunwala is the Founder and CEO of Sunshine Schools, with experience across education, financial inclusion, consulting, and the not-for-profit sector. He has held roles such as Practice Head, Consultant, and Project Manager, excelling in leading strategic initiatives and managing complex projects. Vikas is skilled in partnering with business leaders and collaborating in multicultural environments, making him a valuable figure in the education sector.

Supported paper:

- Exploring the Impact of School Autonomy on Educational Performance

ABOUT THE TEAM

Dr. Heena Choudhary | Senior Associate; Research and Training Programs | Centre for Civil Society

Dr. Heena Choudhary is a Senior Associate for Research and Training Programs at the Centre for Civil Society (CCS), New Delhi. She holds a Doctorate from Malaviya National Institute of Technology Jaipur. At CCS, she leads education-focused projects, analyzing regulatory frameworks, evaluating their ground-level implementation, and providing strategic recommendations. Her research interests include digital inclusion, exploring how globalization and technological advancements impact social inequality, with a focus on mitigating the digital divide in India, aligning with the Digital India initiative.

Ravi Kumar Yadav | Design Consultant; Policy Impact and Outreach | Centre for Civil Society

Ravi Kumar Yadav is a Graphic and Web Designer with over six years of experience in the design industry. He is proficient in CorelDRAW, Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator, and InDesign. With a Bachelor of Science in Animation, Ravi has a strong grasp of multimedia graphics and animation, making him a versatile and skilled professional in the field of visual design.

Sadaf Hussain | Consultant, Project Lead | Centre for Civil Society

Sadaf Hussain is an experienced professional with a background in strategic planning, project management, and branding communication. He has worked with organizations like the Centre for Civil Society, Genpact, Sattva, Language of Liberty and the Indian School of Public Policy, managing high-impact projects in public policy, talent management, and organizational strategy across the corporate, non-profit, and academic sectors. Sadaf is also an author and writer, known for his insightful articles exploring the intersection of food, culture, and history.

Snehal Thakre | Assoiciate Research, Program & Trainging | Centre for Civil Society

Snehal Thakre is an experienced researcher and educator with a background in public policy, telecommunications engineering, and community service. She is a Research Fellow at the Centre for Civil Society and has served as a consultant at the Indian School of Public Policy. Snehal holds a Master's in Electronics and Telecommunications and a postgraduate qualification in Public Policy, Design, and Management. She is committed to enhancing literacy for underprivileged children and leading environmental initiatives, reflecting her dedication to social equity and sustainable development.

ABOUT THE RESEARCHING REALITY TRAINING PROGRAMME

The Researching Reality Training Programme, offered by the Centre for Civil Society in New Delhi, is a premier research training initiative for students and has been operating for over two decades.

The programme aims to attract participants from diverse backgrounds, who contribute their unique perspectives and problem-solving abilities. Scholars engage in collaborative brainstorming sessions, generating novel insights and potential solutions to address current policy challenges. These training programmes cover a range of topics, from education to the livelihood sector, with a focus on exploring diversity-related issues.

Theme for 2024 | Policy Challenges in School Education

The 2024 programme explored the thematic focus of 'Policy Challenges in School Education', with a particular emphasis on issues of Equity, Governance, and Innovation. This emphasis responded to the pressing concern over stagnating learning outcomes in India's school education system. Despite growing student enrolment figures, these gains had not translated into tangible improvements in learning achievements. This stagnation posed a significant threat to the emotional and economic welfare of children, while also carrying adverse long-term ramifications for the nation. Consequently, programme participants were tasked with examining these current challenges and formulating potential solutions.

CENTRE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Founded in August 1997 on the 50th Anniversary of India's independence, Centre for Civil Society (CCS) is a leading public policy think tank today, ranked 5th in India and 83rd in the world by the TTCSP 2021 report.

CCS champions individual choice and institutional accountability by shaping India's public policy, using evidence-based research, outreach programs and policy training. Our areas of work include education, livelihoods, governance, environment, agriculture and science & technology policy.

Since its founding in 1997, CCS has stayed non-partisan and independent, providing objective analysis and inputs on public policy. Our work in education, livelihood, policy training, property rights and competitive markets are secured by the rule of law and promotes choice and accountability across private and public sectors.

FRIEDRICH NAUMANN FOUNDATION

The Foundation was established in Germany in 1958. It aims to promote the goal of making the principle of freedom valid for the dignity of all people and in all areas of society, both in Germany and abroad. The Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom works in over 65 countries worldwide. In South Asia we have offices in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Additionally we work with partners in Nepal. We promote civic education, trainings and the exchange of ideas in the region in four focal areas. These are economic freedom, human rights, urban governance and digital transformation. In addition to the country projects, the Foundation supports regional programs.

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South Asia

A-69 Hauz Khas, New Delhi 110 016
Email: ccs@ccs.in | Website: ccs.in

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