

Parents' Awareness about Provisions of Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act their Children with Special Needs in Inclusive Classroom

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ABSTRACT

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act- 2009 was a phenomenal legislation passed by the Indian Parliament and came into effect from 1st April, 2010. It is based on the 86th Amendment in the Constitution through which an Article 21 (A) was inserted after Article 21 of the Constitution. The Article 21 (A) stipulates that States shall provide free and compulsory education to all the children in the age group of six to fourteen years as their fundamental right. It states that the differently abled children must provide free and compulsory education in the age group of 6-18 years. This study, in particular, focuses on estimating the outreach of the benefits that RTE has instituted in the context of inclusive education for the children with special educational needs. A law can only be successfully implemented if the stakeholders and the functionaries that would gain from it are proactive participants in the process of execution. Towards this intent, this study maps the level of parents' awareness about different programmes and tenets in RTE to motivate special children's growth in the elementary schools in Lucknow district. For this purpose, the researcher of this endeavour conducted an intensive study of a randomly selected sample of 120 parents in the four Blocks of Lucknow district. The analysis of the empirical data clearly establishes that parents' awareness about provisions of the right of children to free and compulsory education is significantly low. The policymakers, school authorities, State and District Level Education officers along with parents have to make concerted efforts to achieve the mission of inclusive education. The study concludes with recommendations to facilitate inclusion both in letter and spirit.

Keywords: *RTE Acts, Awareness of Parents, Children with special needs, Elementary schools, Inclusive Classroom*

INTRODUCTION

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009 was framed to ensure that the Constitutional Right of being the beneficiary of education at the elementary level is not denied to any Indian. The Act is intended to eradicate the problems related to the elementary education system in India. The provisions of RTE Act cover all the actions necessary for improving the quality standards of the elementary education in India. Indubitably, great strides have been made but a lot of ground still needs to be covered. Even now, six years after the Act was introduced, the lack of awareness about such a well-conceived initiative is both intriguing and a wake-up call for the government to usher in change. The RTE Act enshrines in itself the Indian Constitution's spirit to shelter every child under the umbrella of education. Not only the society in general but principals and teachers also, who have a very significant role to play for the effective implementation of RTE Act, lack awareness about the same. The silver lining in the cloud is that in some of the schools, some provisions of RTE Act are being followed to a certain extent. Thus, it can be said that if the government and society make their earnest efforts towards the implementation of RTE Act, only then we can achieve the goal of *inclusive education* which may have a catalytic effect on the progress of an individual, society and nation as well.

The Constitution of India has declared 'Education' as a fundamental right for the citizen of India. Being educated and gaining access to quality education is every child's prerogative, irrespective of the potential levels or the physical abilities of the child. In an inclusive set up, education provides opportunities to all children with special abilities in regular schools along with their normal peers. Inclusive education enables a child with special needs to overcome disability and grow up to be a contributory member of the society. The first interaction of any child with the society and institute happens only through parents. Informed and aware parents can only seek better scaffolds to enable the

growth of their wards. As guardians of Children with Special Needs (CWSN), parents have an even more pressing responsibility. Not only do they need to reorient their parenting approaches but they are also desperate to ensure that their child's special needs are catered to while empowering them with quality education.

Attitude plays a significant role in the inclusive education system. Attitudes are developed only through extensive awareness. Hence, this study endeavours to gauge the levels of awareness of the parents of children with special needs. For a thorough analysis based on corroborative findings, the objectives of the present study are enumerated below.

OBJECTIVES

To study the sensitization of parents about the special needs of their children.

1. To study the parents' awareness/information levels about various provisions of RTE Act, 2009 that ensure that their children with special needs can avail of customized services in the elementary schools of Lucknow.
2. To study the parents as functionaries interacting with the school authorities and working with the school to develop an all inclusive environment for children with special needs.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

With the intent to frame a practical, precise and an all encompassive picture of the existing realities in the context of RTE for CWSN, the following queries were ideated upon:-

1. Are the parents sensitized enough about the special needs of their children?
2. Are the parents' privies to the various provisions of RTE Act, 2009 that ensure that their children with special needs can avail of customized services in the elementary schools of Lucknow?

- Are parents, as functionaries, interacting with the school authorities and working with the school to develop an all inclusive environment for children with special needs?

RESEARCH METHOD

By seeing the nature of data, the researcher used the *Survey Method* of research.

POPULATION

Conducting a survey of research to encompass the whole population would not have been a feasible measure. Therefore, this research has enlisted a sample representative of the population. The population of the present research is a composite of parents selected from four blocks of Lucknow district of the Uttar Pradesh state.

SAMPLE

The study encapsulates those schools that have an enrollment of children with special educational needs. The data has been collated from *sixty schools* from the *four Blocks* (Bakshi Ka Talab Sarojnagar, Kakori, Chinhat) of Lucknow. Purposive sampling was used by the researcher through which 120 parents of children with special needs were selected.

TOOLS USED

In order to identify the areas to be covered, the researcher has reviewed the available literature related to the problem under study. Various standardized *awareness scale* were examined in the existing literature and none of them was found suitable for this study. Therefore, researcher used self-developed *awareness scale* to study the level of awareness about the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009.

STATISTICAL TECHNIQUES USED

Researcher employed the *percentage method* to analyze the data.

FINDINGS

Findings were essentially elicited by analyzing the responses of parents on various provision of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education, (RTE) Act, 2009 for children with special needs. The following enumerations were obtained through the survey:

- Parents of the CWSN were asked about the medium of instruction in the schools. *Response-* 83.3 parents were positive about the medium of instruction being used in the schools.
- Parents were asked whether the birth certificate should be mandatory at the time of admission in school. *Response-* 71.7% of the parents agreed.
- Parents were asked if there must be an office-cum-store-cum-head teacher room. *Response-* 41.7 % of the parents agreed with this clause.
- Parents were asked if all the schools must have barrier free access for the disabled children. *Response-* 20 % parents agreed, while 80% of parents disagreed with the statement.
- Parents were asked whether there should be a library in each school providing newspapers, magazines, books related to all the subjects including story books. *Response-* 56.7% parents agreed that this should be the case.
- Parents were asked if any child should be denied admission in a school for the lack of age proof. *Response-* 36.7% parents were in favor of the statement.
- Parents were asked if they knew about the minimum number of working hours per week for the teacher which is 45, including

- the preparation hours. *Response*-18.3% of parents agreed with the regulation.
8. Parents were asked if there should be the availability of learning equipments for each class as required. *Response*- 31.7 % of them agreed.
 9. Parents were asked if they knew about the mandatory clause for a playground in every school. *Response*- 58.3% of them accepted so.
 10. Parents were asked whether the representation of the female members should be 60% in the school management committee. *Response*- 40% parents agreed, while 60% of the parents disagreed.
 11. Parents were asked about the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act which required for every school to have adequate and safe drinking water. *Response*- 58.3% of them accepted this, while 41.7% of the parents disagreed.
 12. Parents were asked about the kitchen in the school. *Response*- 95% of the parents accepted that as per the RTE, every school must have a kitchen for cooking mid-day meal, only 5% of parents disagreed.
 13. Parents were asked about the teachers being given professional orientation. *Response*- Interestingly, 100% of the parents were disagreed on this point.
 14. Parents were asked whether as per the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, State Advisory Council gives directions and suggestions to all the schools. *Response*- 36.7% of the parents agreed with the clause.
 15. Parents were asked whether differently abled children should be given admission without any discrimination. *Response*- 86.7% of them said that differently abled children should be given admission without any discrimination, but 13.3% of the parents disagreed with the statement.
 16. Parents were asked if every student of class 1 to 8 should be provided mid-day meal. *Response*- All the parents agreed on this point.
 17. Parents were asked whether as per the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009, every school other than unaided private school, should constitute a school management committee. *Response*- 75% of the parents agreed and 25% of parents disagreed with this stipulation.
 18. Parents were asked whether the main challenge under the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act is to bring the drop out children back in the school by filling up the large vacancy of teacher's post and give training to the untrained teachers. *Response*- 61.7% of the parents consented, while 38.3% of the parents disagreed.
 19. Parents were asked if the teacher should follow the rules like banning capitation fees, corporal punishments, detention, expulsion and private tuitions. *Response*- 91.7% parents agreed, only 8.3% of parents disagreed.
 20. Parents were asked if any child should be physically punished or mentally harassed. *Response*- 83.3% parents agreed, and only 11.7% of the parents were not in favor.
 21. Parents were asked whether a school can be established or recognized without fulfilling the norms and standards specified by the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act. *Response*- 36.8% of the parents said that it can be so.
 22. Parents were asked about the minimum number of working days in an academic year for a primary teacher which is two hundred. *Response*- 36.7% parents

accepted this, but 63.3% of the parents did not.

23. Parents were asked about assistive devices and infrastructural aids that can be used and are being used to educate CWSN as per the RTE Act. *Response-* 89 % of parents were not aware of the assistive technology and devices for children with special need.

ANALYSIS

A thorough perusal of the Findings can be outlined in few core enumerations which are:

1. With reference to the response elicited for *Ques. No. 23*, nearly 89% of the parents do not know about the learning aids that can be used to educate their children. This means that there is a huge lack in the percolation of information regarding the education of children with special needs.
2. Most of the parents are aware of the basic needs of their children, like mid day meals in schools, sanitation, or the availability of playground.
3. Most of the parents are not aware of the rules, like working hours that have been instituted for the teachers who educate their children.
4. Most lack awareness about the School's Management Committee or the state's Advisory Council.
5. Most of the parents agree that the teachers are not being given professional trainings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The level of satisfaction towards the education of children with special needs in the elementary schools of the selected study area of Uttar Pradesh has been found *moderate* in all aspects. Hence, more initiatives must be undertaken and new milestones need to be crafted in this league at all levels, both

from the parents' participation to education providers. Much scope is there to improve the condition. Perhaps adapting *a four pronged strategy* based on- *policy to implementation and feedback to improvisations*, would be the most competitive approach to educate the children with special abilities and needs. The researcher proposes this in four well orchestrated steps:

1. *First Prong- Policy:* The policies must be conceptualized by garnering the feedback of all the stakeholders. This implies that a mechanism to address the requirements of the children, their parents', teachers and counselors working in this domain must be put in place.
2. *Second Prong- Implementation:* A system that specifically manages campaigns, inspections, training workshops and interactive forums to ensure successful implementation of the Provisions of RTE for differently abled children.
3. *Third Prong- Feedback:* An organised and sustained process in place for collating the feedback of the parents, teachers/trainers/ government officials, counselors to understand and identify the bottlenecks in the system.
4. *Fourth Prong- Improvisations:* A dedicated cell in every District that must become the nodal office of interaction between the policy makers and the stakeholders so that further improvisations can be introduced in the provisions that are underway in the context of educating the children with special needs.

There should be more involvement from the part of the government as well as the school authorities to implement the programs envisioned by the policy makers in a meaningful way. The government should be more conscious about the problems related to the implementation of inclusive education so that *Education for All* becomes possible throughout the state and across all districts in general schools.

Following initiatives are forwarded as suggestions for parents:-

- Parents must seek both the medical practitioners' as well as educators' counselling in the upbringing of their children with special needs.
- Parents must be regular attendees at the Parents-Teachers Association meets. This association will establish a direct relation between parents and teachers.
- Need based Counseling sessions to address the specific concerns of each differently abled student should be part of Parents, teachers/trainers and counselors 'meetings.
- Parents must be an active participant in aiding the school in logistics and provision of basic study aids for the children.
- Parents must be sensitized about providing study guidance to children with special needs at home along with formal school education.
- Parents must access information about various provisions through Non Governmental Organization's and Basic Shiksha Adhikari and other concerned authorities to facilitate their child's education.

CONCLUSION

The concept of inclusive education is based on the concept of education for all. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, (UNESCO), released a document in 2009 that enumerated the guidelines, rationale and explanations for models of inclusive education. As per the policy statement of UNESCO, the policy-makers, schools, educators, community leaders and learners must be proactive contributors in promoting the holistic model of education reform. This researcher would endorse that every educator and parent associated with children with special needs, in particular, to acclimatize themselves with this policy statement. The analysis done to address the present research query reveals that the parents

were positive in most of the cases about sending their children with disabilities to general schools. Education of Children with special needs is the collective responsibility of the society, community, educators besides the school, the government and the parents. An ecosystem of inclusivity wherein we don't pity our children with special needs but create ecosystems to enable them to enjoy their life in an empowered way, is a present day necessity. Decidedly, honing them through education at the elementary level is the promise of a progressive future for them. This would entail concerted efforts in providing them with the right study aids, infrastructural bases that would be facilitated by expert guidance. This is not just a transient phase; such changes would need consistent meticulousness in ensuring that RTE Act becomes a life enhancing force for differently abled children being educated at the elementary level. More so, the umbrella of inclusive education must be able to cloak the present lives of children with special needs and shape the future of the differently abled children.

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