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The Right to Education Act and Private Schools in Delhi, India: Experiences of Households from Scheduled Caste Groups

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Abstract

Section 12(1)(c) of the *Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009* (RTE Act) in India states that private schools are required to allocate 25% of seats for free to children aged 6-14 from weaker sections and disadvantaged groups until they complete elementary education. Scheduled Castes, who are amongst the most marginalized in India, are designated in the category of disadvantaged groups. There is a lack of research from the perspectives of Scheduled Castes households on education access and inclusion and on the RTE Act.

This study aims to understand the experiences of households from Scheduled Caste backgrounds. It examines issues of free seats provision awareness, schooling access patterns, and schooling experiences. This mixed methods study analyses survey and interview data from the larger, *Insights into Education*, research project. The survey data were gathered from 851 households in one catchment area in Delhi in 2015. The semi-structured interview data were collected in 2017 from 43 Scheduled Caste households who were successful in securing at least one private school under the free seats provision in 2015. The interview sample was drawn from the larger survey sample.

The study applies the Sen-Bourdieu analytical framework (Hart, 2019), which furthers the understanding of the developmental process of individual capabilities and the relevant role of education system. There was a significant relationship between caste and school management type, and income and school management type. There was also a significant relationship between income and freeship awareness, as well as between caste and freeship admission success of the households. There was not a significant relationship between income and freeship admission success of the households. Households reported financial strains, academic related challenges, and perceived social differences in interactions.

Keywords: Private schooling; inclusion; access; education policy; right to education; India

Summary for Lay Audience

India implemented the *Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009* (RTE Act), of which Section 12 (1) (c) states that private schools are required to reserve 25% of free seats for children of six to 14 years of age from weaker sections and disadvantaged backgrounds. There are many social groups under the disadvantage group category and one of which are the Schedule Castes, the most marginalized in Indian society. There is a gap in the literature as studies around the experiences of Scheduled Caste groups and free seats provision under the RTE Act are lacking.

This study aims to under Scheduled Caste experiences about the 25% reservation provision. The aim of the study is to examine issues related to freeship awareness, schooling access patterns, and schooling experiences. The study adopted a mixed methods approach, using survey and interview data from the larger *Insights into Education* research project. Survey data were gathered from 851 households in 2015 in one catchment area in Delhi. Interview data were gathered from 43 households from Schedule Caste groups in 2017. They were a sub-sample of the surveyed households successful in securing a freeship seat in 2015.

The analysis found that there was an association between income of the households and school management type as well as caste and school management type. It was also found that the reported household income and awareness about the free seats provision were related to each other. Also, caste and if the households were able to secure a freeship seat were related to each other. Households from Scheduled Caste backgrounds who were accessing private schools via freeships reported financial struggles, issues in helping their child with the academics, and perceived social differences in their interactions with parents and schools.

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List of Acronyms

AAY	*Antyodaya Anna Yojana*
APL	Above Poverty Line
CBSE	Central Board of Secondary Education
CORD	Collaborative Research and Dissemination
DAMC	District Admission Monitoring Committee
EWS	Economically Weaker Section
ICSE	Indian Certificate of Secondary Education
KV	*Kendriya Vidyalaya*
MHRD	Ministry of Human Resource Development
NCT	National Capital Territory
NPE	National Policy on Education
NSSO	National Sample Survey Organization
OBC	Other Backward Classes
PTM	Parent Teacher Meeting
RTE Act	Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009
SC	Scheduled Caste
SSA	*Sarva Sikhsha Abhiyan*
ST	Scheduled Tribe
SV	*Sarvodaya Schools*

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Historically, inequalities have been persistent in Indian society and in the Indian education system. Different policies, laws, and initiatives have been enacted by the Indian government, one of which is the *Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009* (RTE Act). The RTE Act is a law aiming to provide equitable access to elementary education and to achieve educational equality in India. According to the Act, children between the ages of six to 14 are entitled to free and compulsory education until they complete elementary education (up to class 8).

One of the provisions of the RTE Act is Section 12(1)(c), or what has been generally called, the 'the free seats provision'. All private unaided schools are required to reserve 25% of their seats for free for students from socially disadvantaged groups and 'economically weaker sections' (EWS) (Government of India, 2009). The 'disadvantaged group' category consists of many social groups, one of which are Scheduled Caste (SC) groups (Government of India, 2009). Private unaided schools are privately financed, owned, and managed independent schools. This MA study is interested in understanding the experiences of SC households regarding the free seats provision under the RTE Act. The study used data collected for the larger *Insights into Education* research project on the RTE Act, with the aim to inform the larger project.

The education system in India is part of the 'concurrent list', meaning that education is the responsibility of both the state and the central governments. The school system in India is heterogeneous. There are three main classifications, with a broad mix of schools within them – government, private aided, and private unaided. Government schools are owned and managed by different levels of government, i.e., central, state, and municipal (Anderson &

Lightfoot, 2019). Also, there are some special category schools run by different government departments. Table 1 lists definitions of the school types that are relevant to this study.

Table 1

Definitions of Relevant School Management Types

School Management Type	Definition
Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD)	Schools managed by local bodies, primarily until grade 5.
Delhi Administration (DA)	Delhi government schools which only have grades 6-8, 6-10, or 6-12.
Sarvodaya Schools (SV)	Composite DA schools comprised of grades 1-12.
Kendriya Vidyalaya (KV)	Aim to provide education to children of transferable central government employees amongst others and these schools are run by the central government.
Private unaided recognized	Schools owned and managed by private bodies and are recognized by the appropriate state or centrally-governed board.
Private aided schools	Schools owned by private bodies; however, they function according to state guidelines and receive 'grants in aid' from the state for the majority of their financing.
Private unaided unrecognized	Schools owned and managed by private bodies but are not recognized as they do not meet specified criteria.

Source: Insights into Education Household Survey (2015); Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan, (n.d).; Kingdon (2017).

The functioning of private schools in India is multi-layered. There are private aided and private unaided schools. Private aided schools are somewhat hybrid schools. They have private management but are governed by the state in terms of recruitment and salaries of teachers (Kingdon, 2017). Private unaided schools are independently managed and governed by private bodies that decide school operations, including teacher recruitment and salaries, and cover a broad range of fee levels. Not all private unaided schools are elite schools. There is a segment of 'low-fee' private schools that purportedly cater to less affluent groups (Srivastava, 2013).

In principle, private unaided schools should be officially recognized (introduced by the RTE Act), and once recognized must abide by the board of affiliation on curriculum. Each state has its own education board, which primarily sets the curriculum. Additionally, centrally governed boards such as the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and the Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE) are followed by several private schools across the country.[1]

1.1 Right to Education Act and freeship provision

The RTE Act is a law, and not a policy, aimed at providing equitable education. Section 12(1)(c) of the RTE Act is applicable to private unaided and KV schools (Delhi free seats order, 2011). However, in this study the focus has been on private unaided schools as Section 12 (1) (c) is one of the most prominent clauses with regards to private unaided schools in India. It states that private unaided schools:

> shall admit in class I, to the extent of at least twenty-five percent of the strength of that class, children belonging to weaker sections and disadvantaged groups in the neighbourhood and provide free and compulsory elementary education till its completion (Section 12(1)(c), Government of India, 2009).

According to Section 2 (e) of the RTE Act, the children belonging to weaker sections are defined as: 'a child belonging to such parent or guardian whose annual income is lower than the minimum limit specified by the appropriate Government, by notification' (Government of India, 2009). Each state government has set a limit for this annual income. In the case of Delhi, the research site for this MA study, it was INR 100,000 (Delhi Free Seats rder, 2011) in 2014 through to 2017, the period of data collection. A child from a 'disadvantaged group' is defined as:

> belonging to the Scheduled Caste, the Scheduled Tribe, the socially and educationally backward class or such other group having disadvantage owing to social, cultural,

[1] Of relevance here, CBSE affiliates private and some government school types, including KV schools.

> economical, geographical, linguistic, gender or such other factor, as may be specified by the appropriate Government, by notification (Government of India, 2009).

Children who can secure admission in the 25% reservation provision in private schools are subject to Section 3(2) of the RTE Act, which states that no child will be charged with any fees to ensure continuing education for all regardless of their background. The collection of capitation fees or screening procedures for admission purposes (Section 13) is not allowed. According to Section 12(2) of the RTE Act, schools are meant to receive reimbursement from the state based on the "per-child-expenditure incurred by the State, or the actual amount charged from the child, whichever is less" (Government of India, 2009). Seats reserved under the free seats provision are described as 'freeship' seats.

Section 8 of the RTE Act highlights the duties of the appropriate government and Section 9 highlights the duties of the local authority. One of the duties highlighted under Section 8 (c) and Section 9 (c) is that children belonging to disadvantaged backgrounds and weaker sections shall not be discriminated against and prevented from continuing their elementary education (Government of India, 2009). Furthermore, Section 17 prohibits the use of physical punishment and mental harassment of children (Government of India, 2009).

In the ideal sense, the free seats provision and the RTE Act have inclusionary aims. Lafleur & Srivastava (2019) presented a personal communication quote from a senior government official, according to whom:

> The larger objective is to provide a common place where children sit, eat and live together for at least eight years of their lives across caste, class and gender divides in order that it narrows down such divisions in our society. The other objective is that the 75% children who have been lucky to come from better endowed families, learn through their interaction with the children from families who haven't had similar opportunities, but are rich in knowledge systems allied to trade, craft, farming and other services, and that the pedagogic enrichment of the 75% children is provided by such intermingling (p. 8).

However, a study by Deb et al. (2017) showed a different picture. They conducted a study with students located in Puducherry, where 62% of students reported instances of

corporal punishment. These students belonged to private schools and government schools. Joshi (2020) conducted a study with 1500 children from four schools where friendship surveys were conducted along with short tests in mathematics and English. The friendship survey data analysis reveals that there were not separate groups for RTE and non-RTE students. However, "there is a stark difference in the share of RTE friends for RTE and non-RTE children" (Joshi, 2020, p. 10). Furthermore, they found that school administration may have a certain level of impact on social integration. One of the schools had higher interaction among freeship and non-freeship students owing to the schools' response to the Act. That study reflects that just setting an intention might not be enough. There needs to be great action and participation for the law to reap results.

1.2 Education Policies, Laws, and Initiatives

The RTE Act was passed in 2009, effective in 2010, making education a fundamental right across India. The RTE Act is the first universally applicable law by the central government to make education a fundamental across the country. However, there have been various policies and initiatives enacted by the central government, in addition to individual state laws. The National Policy on Education (NPE) was first created in 1968 to universalize education, with a major redraft in 1986, and a revision in 1990. In 2000, the Central government launched, *Sarva Sikhsha Abhiyan* (SSA) (Education for All), a centrally sponsored scheme to further the universalization of education goals in a time-bound manner. Most recently, India released the NPE (2020). As described in the NPE (2020) document, its vision is to provide high-quality education for all and transform India into an equitable society (Ministry of Human Resource Development [MHRD], 2020). The objective of the policy is to make students global citizens by working on their holistic development and ensuring experiential learning (MHRD, 2020).

The RTE Act came with its own legal battles. Private unaided schools challenged the constitutional validity of Section 12(1)(c) (Sarangapani et al., 2014). In 2012, the Supreme Court upheld the validity of the Act (Srivastava & Noronha, 2014). Adding to the complexity, there are differences in the implementation of the RTE Act across states in view of local contexts. Each state is free to develop its own rules for implementation in accordance with the RTE Act. For example, according to the *Delhi School Education (Free seats for students belonging to economically weaker sections and Disadvantage group) Order (2011)* (Delhi Free Seats Order, 2011) families with an annual income of INR 100,000 were considered as belonging to weaker sections (Government of NCT of Delhi, 2011), whereas, according to the Karnataka government notification, families with the annual income of INR 350,000 comprised weaker sections (Government of Karnataka, 2012).

Section 4(d) of the Delhi Free Seats Order (2011) highlights the manner of admission for free seats which signifies that in case the numbers of applications are higher than the number of available seats at a school, admission will be through a lottery system in the presence of the parents of the applicants and a nominee from the education department (Government of NCT of Delhi, 2011). According to Section 4(a) of the same order, schools were required to provide complete information about the seats, successful candidates, and waitlisted candidates to the applicants. Schools were required to provide common admission forms free of cost to parents (Section 4 (c), Government of NCT of Delhi, 2011).

Furthermore, the District Admission Monitoring Committee (DAMC) was required to establish help desks in the district office to help with the admission process, supposed to function until the admission procedure is complete (Section 7 (f), Government of NCT of Delhi, 2011). While these admission mechanisms were supposed to be available, in reality, there were several issues with help desks such as parents being asked to pay for the services and issues regarding the number of help desks located in certain areas (Bhattacharjee, 2019).

Additionally, there are different policy layers related to historical aspects which might add to the contextual differences in the implementation of the RTE Act. As described by Sarin et al. (2017), in the context of Delhi, the state government legislated that private unaided schools that had secured land on concessional rates had to secure a certain percentage of seats for students from the EWS. This predated the RTE Act and is different from Section 12 (1)(c). Taking into consideration the overall education policy context of India, achieving equitable and universal education has been an idealised intention that is difficult to implement. The main issue for this study is how households experienced schooling and access, especially those who are most marginalized.

1.3 Research Purpose and Questions

Recent literature shows that studies on education should advance beyond physical access and understand if there are measures in place which would help the most marginalized to be included in the system (Sutherland, 2016). According to Lafleur and Srivastava (2019), 'The vision for inclusion rests on changing schooling practices and school environments and opening up school spaces to extend access to basic education beyond physical access, and to affect change in the experiences of that access, particularly for the most marginalized' (p. 4). This study aims to understand the schooling experiences of SC households regarding the freeship provision under the RTE Act. While there are provisions that aim at easing access to schools, it becomes imperative to question if households are aware of the provision in the first place. Therefore, this study also focuses on freeship awareness and access patterns in order to get a broader and more holistic understanding of the educational experiences of households.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic brought disruptions in various sectors including education. Various issues were being experienced such as the inability to buy

technological devices to attend online classes or the lack of internet data reducing the chances of accessing educational electronic resources (Bozkurt et al., 2020; Lai and Widmar, 2021). According to Bozkurt et al. (2020), the already existing social, cultural, and geopolitical inequalities are brought to the surface due to the pandemic. For example, those who belong to higher income groups could continue their education. In light of the arguments related to existing educational inequalities, it becomes essential to analyse educational experiences under the pre-pandemic policies and laws with the aim to unpack the educational inequities and make future suggestions accordingly.

SC and Scheduled Tribe (ST) groups are legally recognized as historically marginalized by the Constitution of India. These groups are heterogeneous and have experienced varying levels of discrimination due to their social status. Recognizing the injustices against SC and ST groups, the parliament passed *The Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989*. While different provisions were meant to aid inclusion in a number of areas, studies indicate the prevalence of discriminatory practices in educational spaces (Nambissan, 2009; Ramachandran & Naorem, 2013). This current study aims to add to the literature on the educational experiences of SC households, with specific reference to the free seats provision, for which studies are largely lacking.

Education is a fundamental right that every child should be able to enjoy regardless of their social, economic, political, and cultural background. According to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, parents and schools are part of the microsystem with which the child is in direct contact. Child development is not only in the hands of schools or parents, it is part of a collective ecosystem. Therefore, understanding parental experiences of the freeship provision under the RTE Act becomes imperative. Regarding experiences, the study intends to analyse freeship awareness, schooling access patterns, and social experiences post-freeship admission from the perspective of SC parents.

This study builds from a larger research project, *Insights into Education*, on the RTE Act and issues of inclusion. The *Insights into Education Household Survey* (2015) was conducted with 851 households in one catchment area in Delhi. The survey asked questions related to schooling experiences, household profiles, and school choice among various other facets related to the RTE Act and schooling processes. Two years later, the *Insights into Education Household Interview Schedule* (2017) was used to interview a sub-sample of households from SC backgrounds from amongst the original households surveyed. The main aim of the interview was to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences and perceptions of the households about the freeship provision.

Three associated analyses were conducted within the larger project on educational experiences. Sutherland (2016) conducted a preliminary analysis of a sub-sample of the survey data to develop a potential working model on silent exclusion. Lafleur and Srivastava (2019) conducted a micro-study that focused on exploring the lived schooling experiences of marginalised children in private schools. Rodrigo's (2020) study focused on parental involvement and school responsiveness through the analysis of the interview dataset. All the studies taken together, and individually, provide important insights into the schooling experiences of the households under the RTE Act. However, the current study aims to use both the survey and interview datasets to provide a more focused analysis of the experiences of the most marginalized. While Rodrigo's (2020) study provided important insights about the RTE Act, it focused primarily on parental involvement and school responsiveness. The current study aims to go further in-depth about aspects related to the social experiences of households, such as perceived social differences by parents and accommodation measures for parents.

The current MA study analysis uses a mixed methods approach and integrates data collected from the semi-structured interviews and the survey. The survey data provided a

broad overview of the access patterns, freeship awareness patterns, and schooling experiences regarding the challenges faced and inclusion/exclusion patterns in the classroom. The analysis of the interview data further added depth to the study as it focused on household experiences regarding parent-school interaction, the inclusion of parents and children, and perceived social differences. The research questions of interest to this study are:

1. What were the freeship access patterns at the household level with regards to income and caste?
2. What were the experiences of inclusion and interaction with the school under the freeship provision of SC households?
3. What were the challenges faced by SC households under the freeship provision?

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 1 provided the introduction and information about RTE Act with a focus on the freeship provision. Chapter 2 consists of the general literature related to educational experiences of the marginalized and specific literature related to RTE Act. Chapter 3 highlights the methodology and the process of data analysis. Chapter 4 includes findings and results from survey and interview data analysis. Further discussion of the data is presented in Chapter 5. Finally, Chapter 6 includes the conclusion, limitations, and future research recommendations.

Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

This chapter starts with a discussion of the Sen-Bourdieu analytical framework (Hart, 2019) which provided a lens for the study. Empirical studies related to private schooling, admission under the freeship provision of the RTE Act, and costs associated with education are discussed next. Literature about inclusion and exclusion in classrooms is discussed, in which some studies are directly related to the freeship provision and others are broader in nature. The literature illustrates the experiences of different groups regarding the RTE Act. However, the majority of existing studies do not focus specifically on the experience of SC households or students.

2.1 Conceptual Framework

The analysis uses Hart's (2019) Sen-Bourdieu framework, which was developed to shed light on how various forms of capital possessed by households influence their capability to make use of resources, such as schools. It was developed by Hart (2012) to understand social justice in the context of higher education in England, and it was further developed to understand social justice in the international educational context (Hart, 2019). The application of this analytical framework to this MA study helped examine data through the lens of exclusion and equity with the aim to advocate for social justice for the most marginalized community.

Hart (2019) argues that families transfer different forms of capital to their children, which then convert into capabilities and influence people's ability to utilize resources to their best advantage. Hart (2019) discusses the manifestation of inequalities in three educational spaces: inequality in access to education, inequality in experiences of education, and

inequality in outcomes of education. According to Hart (2019), Sen's capability approach discussed the real opportunity an individual has "to achieve a valued way of living as well as focusing on the kind of resources that are at their disposal" (p. 584).

Hart (2019) then applied Sen's thinking to the educational context by arguing that the presence of a school does not guarantee educational success. Success is dependent on multiple factors, such as, whether the school has resources and facilities which will advance the learning of an individual (Hart, 2019). Hart further explains Sen's capability approach by stating that "commodities may be converted into capabilities (well-being freedom) and then into functioning (well-being achievement)" (p. 584). In the context of education, commodities can be the presence of trained teachers, capabilities can be seen as the freedom to enrol in a school to learn from trained teachers, and functioning can be seen as students developing the ability to read and write, which can lead to other functioning (Hart, 2019). The process is not linear as there are 'conversion factors' that might influence capability and functioning processes which can be understood by using Bourdieu's forms of capital in this framework.

Bourdieu's discussion of capital helps in advancing the discussion about commodities and resources. According to Hart (2019), "his theoretical work complements Sen's capability approach by offering a more socially dynamic understanding of the conversion factors helping and hindering the development of capabilities." (p. 585). Hart explained Bourdieu's forms of capital by discussing social capital, cultural capital, and symbolic capital. Hart (2019) further exemplified the difference between inherited and acquired capital, and states that the transfer of capital can happen both ways, where some may gain wealth whereas others may gain debt. Both affect the education and resources which individuals can avail. Furthermore, Hart discusses habitus, a concept framed by Bourdieu, that might influence the

way learners are judged in the educational space, such as their dialect, clothing, and possession of expensive devices which might be different from the culture of the school.

Hart (2019) discusses Sen's capability approach which highlights that the conversion of capability-commodity to function depends upon several factors, and this is where Bourdieu's conceptualization of the field helps in advancing the understanding: "Individuals experience the interaction of diverse cultural norms, values, and power relations in the various fields they encounter" (Hart, 2019, p. 588). Hart (2019) conceptualizes the conversion of capital using both Sen's and Bourdieu's theory, where it was stated that there are variations in the way capabilities, in Sen's terms, and capitals, in Bourdieu's terms, are converted into functioning and other forms of capitals.

According to Hart (2019), Bourdieu's forms of capital can be seen as commodities that are then converted into capabilities. However, Sen's approach provides a link in this conceptualization as it is important to consider to what extent the individuals have the freedom to pursue their way of being. While people might be able to obtain capital, activation of the capital is a different matter: "Knowing when and how to deploy particular forms of capital, and being skillful and confident to do so, requires learning unwritten rules, and yet, is vital for maximizing the activation of capital" (Hart, 2019, p. 590).

Hart (2019) then applies the analytical framework to discuss the three spaces of educational inequality. Firstly, in the space of inequality of access to education, it was discussed that while there may be resources in terms of school availability, children might not be able to convert that resource into capability due to a myriad of reasons such as economic, cultural, social, and political factors (Hart, 2019). Secondly, in the space of inequality in experiences of education, students whose taste and preferences align with that of the educational site will fare better than those whose tastes and preferences differ and do not have the required cultural capital to thrive in the educational space (Hart, 2019). Thirdly, in

the space of inequality in outcomes of education, some individuals, despite their educational qualifications, might not be able to fulfil their capabilities due to the perception that they 'don't fit in' as they lack required cultural capital (Hart, 2019). Others may find it easier to secure a job through the social capital, cultural capital, and economic capital they have, and this helps in actualizing their capabilities (Hart, 2019).

To conclude, "the Sen-Bourdieu Analytical Framework deepens understanding of the dynamic social (and psychological) processes involved in the development of an individual's capabilities and the possible roles of educational systems and processes in helping as well as constraining human flourishing" (Hart, 2019, p. 594). Hart argues that the intergenerational transfer of capitals, becomes individual capitals which then become the capabilities of an individual (Das, 2020). Bourdieu's work helps in highlighting the structural restrictions that are in place which might influence Sen's concepts of individual capabilities.

There are deep-seated inequities in India. People from SC groups have been historically marginalized and oppressed. Those belonging to disadvantaged groups have faced various barriers to accessing resources, including education, due to historical and ideological oppression: "The exclusionary and highly differentiated nature of schooling implies an inverse relationship between access and quality, as the weaker sections find it increasingly difficult - for political, cultural, or economic reasons - to enter and cope in schools regarded as better-quality schools" (Sarin et al., 2017, p. 15). The possession of valued capital puts certain classes that are relatively advantaged in a better position as compared to those who are coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. Therefore, Hart's (2019) Sen-Bourdieu analytical framework provided a lens to explore the role of cultural, social, and economic capitals in the schooling experiences of SC households and how they are able to utilize resources and form capabilities.

2.2 Private school enrolment and access

Private schooling is quite prevalent in India. Lafleur and Srivastava (2019) raise concerns about private schooling, access, and the RTE Act: "localized expressions of private schooling and privatization in India are set against a backdrop of low public expenditure on education and serious concerns about quality and on the appropriateness and ability of private schools to meet the twin objectives of expanding access and qualitatively changing the experience of schooling as envisioned in the [RTE] Act" (p. 6).

It is estimated that across the different states and union territories, more than 3.3 million students successfully gained admission in private unaided schools under the freeship provision in 2018-19 (MHRD, 2019 as cited in Bhattacharjee, 2019). It is imperative to note that there are state-level variations in private school enrolment (Sarangapani et al., 2014). The eastern part of India has a relatively lower level of enrolments in private schools as compared to other regions of the country (Sarangapani et al., 2014). The states in the southern part of India show relatively higher levels of private school enrolments (Sarangapani et al., 2014). Lohati and Mukhopadhyay (2019) state that the growth in private schools is led by low-fee private schools in different regions of India including the rural areas.

According to Kingdon (2017), there is an increase in private schooling in India which reflects parental preferences for private over government schools. A study conducted by Mehendale et al. (2015) in Delhi and Bangalore found that parents preferred private schools because of perceived better-quality education. Bhattacharya (2022) discussed the analysis of National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) data from 2007-08 to 2017-18 which indicates that there has been an increase in private school attendance.[2] Furthermore, Bhattacharya also presented some specific reasons for increase in private school attendance: the presence of

[2] NSSO is a part of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India

private schools in the area, English as the medium of instruction, and dissatisfaction with the quality of government school education.

In their study including 75 Dalit parents in Telangana, Harinath and Gundemeda (2021) found that the parents were dissatisfied with the education provided at government schools. They would prefer sending their children to private schools because these schools have English as the medium of instruction, which is considered a mark of education quality. An earlier household-level analysis in Delhi found some nuance. While higher-fee private schools were preferred, households reported that some government schools were not considered to be dysfunctional and were appreciated for their teaching and security (Srivastava & Noronha, 2016). Furthermore, regarding private schools with relatively lower fees, the participants reported mixed experiences where some showed dissatisfaction with the infrastructure, and teachers' lack of qualificatio among other concerns (Srivastava & Noronha, 2016).

There are perceptions about private schooling being better. However, evidence of private schooling in India is mixed and there are equity concerns about affordability. Endow (2019) conducted a survey study in Delhi and discussed that families having lower income who have their children admitted to relatively lower fee private schools faced financial burdens, raising important questions about the affordability of private schooling. Srivastava and Noronha (2016) found that disadvantaged households in their sample in Delhi felt access to private schools was constrained. Those who secured a freeship seat incurred the second-highest school costs after the full fee-paying students in private schools.

While there are perceptions about the low quality of education provided at government schools, there is contrary evidence coming to the forefront. In 2020, the scores on the nationwide CBSE exams revealed that students attending Delhi state-run schools outperformed students attending private schools (Iftikhar, 2020). Arvind Kejriwal, Chief

Minister of Delhi, stated in a press conference: “private schools in Delhi have achieved 92.2% results, and government schools have received 97.92%, which is the highest among the government schools in the entire country. Examinations were conducted in a total of 916 schools of the Delhi government, out of which 396 schools have received 100% results” (Sahoo, 2020).

2.3 Admission under the freeship provision of the RTE Act

In principle, there are several provisions in the RTE Act that work towards easing the process of application. For example, schools are not meant to refuse an application if documents related to age are missing (Section 14). However, in practice, parents have faced various obstacles in obtaining the income certificate without giving a bribe (Srivastava & Noronha, 2016). Parents have also reported facing certain challenges during admission such as the admission process being cumbersome (Bhattacharjee, 2019; Srivastava & Noronha, 2016). Additionally, there is considerable heterogeneity in the rate of available freeship seats that are filled: “only Gujarat, Odisha, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal had filled up more than 50 percent of their available seats” (Bhattacharya, 2022, p. 22) in 2019-20. On the other hand, there were no freeship enrolments in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana in 2019-20 (Bhattacharya, 2022).

Regarding the admission process, Mehendale et al. (2015) conducted an exploratory study on the implementation of the RTE Act in Delhi and Bengaluru. Their research used multiple methods, i.e., surveys and semi-structured interviews with schools, teachers, parents, and other key informants. They found that the application process was cumbersome, but it fared well for those who had a better understanding of the system as they were able to negotiate the bureaucratization prevalent in the system. Furthermore, the documents which

were required for the admission process were not easily accessible and required a certain amount of capital in order to obtain them (Mehendale et al., 2015).

Srivastava and Noronha (2016) conducted a study with households and their perceptions and experiences of the RTE Act in Delhi. They found that parents were able to secure a private school seat either on their own, or through the help of non-governmental organizations. Children who could secure seats on their own had relatively better socio-economic status and their parents were relatively better educated. Dongre et al. (2018) conducted a study with 1500 relatively disadvantaged households living in Ahmedabad. Through a survey, they aimed to understand the impact of Section 12 (1) (c) on household school choices. They found that the households that applied for a freeship and who were successful in securing a seat had relatively better socio-economic positioning, parental education, and fluency in the local language. They further argued that the mandate enabled participants to access the schools they could not have earlier. However, access to schools was restrained along the lines of fees, meaning, those schools which charge higher fees were still out of reach. Both these studies reflect on how the socio-economic status and the capital possessed by the families influence the admission process putting certain households in an advantageous position in the competitive Indian education system.

During the inception of the freeship provision, most of the documentation was conducted offline. However, the admission process has moved online and there have been several issues faced by households. Wad et al. (2017) undertook a study of four states: Karnataka, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan. They highlighted that the admission process followed by the four states was marked by variations in required documents, how the schools were required to update the centralized online admission system, and the admission period, among other facets. They also found that as the system was online, parents from EWS and disadvantaged backgrounds found themselves in situations where they

were incurring costs of thousands of rupees per application due to a lack of understanding on the computerized systems. It was further highlighted that the schools denied the entry of successful applicants to the school premises who were then marked as ‘not approached in the admission system’ (Wad et al., 2017, p. 24).

2.4 Costs related to education under the RTE Act

According to Section 12 (1) (c), private schools are required to allocate 25% of free seats to EWS and disadvantaged groups. However, the following literature shows that the reality is far from ‘no cost’. Singhal et al. (2017) conducted an action research study on the implementation of the RTE Act in urban Ahmedabad. Based on the survey data collected from households eligible for freeships, the authors found that parents reported incurring an increased amount of financial strain where they had to arrange for internet facilities, transportation, books, and uniforms. A systematic review of literature conducted by Mondal and Islam (2021) discussed similar patterns that parents from EWS and disadvantaged groups had to pay extra fees for transportation, and books, among other expenditures.

Kumar et al. (2019) analysed NSSO data with the aim to examine exclusion patterns in the pre- and post-RTE periods. According to them, the survey data suggest that the out-of-pocket expenditure for elementary education borne by individuals increased in government and private schools. They report regarding government schools, the monthly per capita expenditure was INR 57 in 2007-2008 which increased to INR 141 by 2014. Regarding private schools, the expenditure increased from INR 346 to INR 992 in the same years. They also provided monthly per capital expenditure for SC households enrolled across school types, expenditure increased from INR 87 in 2007-2008 to INR 271 in 2014 (Kumar et al., 2019). The researchers argued that the predicted mean for the monthly per capita expenditure for ST and SC was lower during the pre-RTE period. They also state that ST and SC groups

they had the lowest discrete change in the post-RTE period as compared to other social groups that they identified as the 'Muslim upper-class' and 'non-Muslim other backward classes' (Kumar et al., 2019).[3] While Kumar et al.'s (2019) findings are essential to the discussion of costs incurred, the expenditure change for SC is unclear in relation to their school type, schooling status, and if they are registered through a quota for private schools.

Srivastava and Noronha (2016) asserted that there is a myth of free education as education is not free in reality: "Out-of-pocket costs negatively affect initial and sustained access" (p. 563). The out-of-pocket expenditure was at such a level that those who were accessing the freeship provision in their study in Delhi, incurred the second-highest costs after fee-paying students in private unaided schools (Srivastava & Noronha, 2016). They further found that as grade levels increased, students exited private schools and transitioned to government schools as it became difficult to sustain the rising fees and increased household expenditure.

Sarin and Gupta (2014) discussed the views of the teachers, principals, and parents from weaker section backgrounds about quotas. Some parents reported that their children were not able to participate in extra-curricular school activities because of the financial costs which are associated with private schools: "Estimates of annual-school related expenditure range from INR 12,000 to INR15,000, and we were told that this was despite not being able to participate in most extracurricular activities- such nonparticipation being a point of dissatisfaction with the children" (Sarin & Gupta, 2014, p. 68).

Extra-curricular activities included sports, excursions, and annual talent participation, which as reported by children, were not mandatory (Sarin & Gupta, 2014). They further discussed that differences in status given to students were evident in perceptions about extra-

[3] On the basis of the Schedule 25.2 of the NSSO, the study brings together religion and social groups to form six non overlapping socio-religious groups (Kumar et al., 2019). Muslim upper class and non-Muslim other backward classes are two socio-religious groups identified by Kumar et al. (2019).

curricular activities. Private schools viewed extra-curricular activities as important for holistic development, however, principals said these trips were not mandatory: “The activity or practices that lead to the exclusion are evaluated primarily by the extent to which they meet the needs and demands of fee-paying parents” (Sarin & Gupta, 2014, p. 71).

2.5 Inclusion and Exclusion in Classrooms

Several studies illustrate that student coming from marginalized backgrounds in India experience exclusion in education systems (Kumar et al., 2019, Nambissan, 2009). Govinda and Bandyopadhyay (2010) note that:

> exclusion from educational services is multidimensional; it results from a combination of factors. For example, when an individual or group is excluded, the main cause may appear to be poverty, but other kinds of disadvantages such as social norms, cultural biases, and social relations are often strong contributory factors. (p. 341)

Inequalities in India have been persistent where some groups have been valued over others. Groups that have experienced the burden of social stratification have been SC, among other disadvantaged groups. The oppression of people from SC groups is historical and continues. Nambissan’s (2009) study of two sites in Rajasthan found that while physical access to schools was provided to SC students, they continued to face social exclusion based on their caste. School spaces played a role in the (re)production of societal inequalities as they were excluded from extra-curricular activities and were often not given adequate attention by the teachers (Nambissan, 2009). Social exclusion and discrimination continue. There are examples of students being made to be in a separate queue for government-subscribed school meals (Mishra, 2021), among various overt and covert manifestations of prejudiced thoughts.

Teachers’ and schools’ behaviours may result in the reproduction of social inequalities. A qualitative study of six states of India commissioned by *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* was undertaken by Ramachandran and Naorem (2013). They explored inclusion and

exclusion in government schools. The data were gathered from parents of marginalized children, teachers, adolescent children, and 120 schools across six states. The findings showed that teachers usually belonged to upper castes and their impression of students coming from lower castes was that they are ‘different’, ‘ill-mannered’, and ‘impure’. Interviews with schools revealed that there was a misconception among teachers as they described children from disadvantaged backgrounds who were doing academically well as anomalies or exceptions. However, the researchers assert that “equally significant is the fact that a committed headmaster or headteacher can go against dominant population social practices and instill an egalitarian and equal environment in a school” (Ramachandran & Naorem, 2013, p. 46).

Kabeer (2000) helps in understanding social exclusion in educational spaces in a nuanced manner. She presents different mechanisms through which social exclusion is practiced, one of which is “unruly practices”: “these refer to the gap between rules and their implementation which occur in practice in all institutional domains” (Kabeer, 2000, p. 92). Kabeer (2000) discusses the hidden forms of discrimination and how higher caste teachers considered Dalit students as ‘uneducable’, made them do menial chores, and were ignorant about the students’ needs which can result in reproduction of societal inequalities.

Mehendale et al. (2015) conducted a study on the implementation of the RTE Act and whether it achieved its goal of social inclusion. They conducted an exploratory study of schools in Delhi and Bengaluru. The study used multiple methods such as surveys, semi-structured interviews, and made school visits. The researchers collected data from private unaided schools, teachers, parents, members of private school associations, and the government. They found that as the children were young, they may not have necessarily understood social differences, which made social integration mostly positive. However,

schools had their apprehensions about social integration as they were concerned about the problems which may arise as children start getting older and observe social differences.

The researchers further found that social integration was easier in schools that were serving lower-socio economic groups because social differences were relatively less visible, as compared to elite schools which were usually marked by students from higher socio-economic strata. According to Mehendale et al. (2015) “most schools considered that their mandate was complete once admissions were given and hence, they were not working towards bringing fundamental changes in attitudes or pedagogies that could foster inclusion” (p. 48).

According to Govinda and Bandyopadhyay (2010), “the degree and nature of exclusion depend largely on how social institutions like schools function and on the existing social relations among different groups” (p. 341). Sarangapani et al. (2014) conducted a study on the implementation of Section 12(1)(c) in Delhi and Bengaluru. The authors found a deficit thinking approach about freeship students. Teachers had perceptions that the home environment holds an important place in a child’s education: “Thus, the role of the school is to help the child to leave their bad habits, bad language and adjust in the new surroundings. This patronising model of providing goes against the rights of the children.” (Sarangapani et al., 2014, p. 41). The study discusses the implementation of the RTE Act from multiple perspectives such as teachers, schools, officials, and parental perspectives which helps in gaining a holistic understanding.

Contrary to the experiences of exclusion in the classroom, a study of two private schools in Delhi by Sucharita and Sujatha (2019) found that the two schools were marked by the absence of differential treatment of the children on the basis of their freeship status. As reported in their study, the schools avoided celebrating teachers’ days or friendship days in order to minimize class differences. The pedagogical practices were more context-specific

and there was increased use of bilingual instructions (English and Hindi) to make the classroom conducive for everyone (Sucharita and Sujhata, 2019).

The researchers found that the parents of children from EWS and disadvantaged groups were often included in the discussions about the child's progress. As reported by the authors, almost all children were friends with each other regardless of their freeship status. While teachers expressed positive attitudes towards children from EWS and disadvantaged groups, some reported apprehensions about the sustainability of such a provision due to the social differences in classrooms and how that can affect children (Sucharita and Sujhata, 2019). The study discusses inclusion practices in school but in their study design, there is a limited focus on the heterogeneity of the social groups and their experiences.

2.6 Parent and School Relationship

"Building home-school partnerships is positioned as one way by which the potential of education might be better realised" (Graham et al., 2021, p. 1238). Studies show that the assumptions schools and teachers hold about the families influence teachers' interactions with parents (Graham et al., 2021; Sawhney, 2018). Gurney (2018) conducted a study with parents living in low-income communities in Delhi to examine parental perspectives on school quality and school choice. Gurney (2018) discussed that in order to understand the relationship between school choice and school quality, it is imperative to understand the ways parents make sense of constraints that limits their access to education. Through the data analysis, Gurney (2018) identified that a few parents exited or used their voices to raise their concerns about the home-school relationship.

Some parents reported having parent teacher meetings (PTMs) which were one-sided as parental concerns were not completely heard: "The response of parents to poor quality was not necessarily voice or exit" (Gurney, 2018, p. 273). The lack of voice or exit was not

because the parents were unaware of the problems or because of loyalty to the schools, but due to affordability concerns, and certain schools that were perceived as better-quality schools were not an option for them. Furthermore, parents considered it unlikely that parental complaints would bring about an effective change in their schools.

Sawhney (2018) conducted a case study of four KV schools in Hyderabad and collected data from students, parents, and teachers. The freeship provision is applicable in the KV schools as well where 25% of seats are to be reserved for EWS and disadvantaged group categories (Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan, 2022). Sawhney (2018) was interested in understanding "the influence of teachers' perception of students' socio-economic position (SEP) on the disciplinary practices they adopt in classrooms" (p.590). The teacher's perception about students' SEP depended on several factors such as parent's education, perceived family income, English speaking skills, parent's education, and residence (Sawhney, 2018).

Sawhney (2018) stated that the "perceived SEP of students and their educational performance are overpowering factors that influence their disciplinary experiences" (p. 604). The analysis showed that students who were academically weak and were perceived to belong to lower socio-economic backgrounds by teachers faced harsh forms of punishment along with rude comments. Sawhney (2018) found that in one of the schools, teachers behaved rudely (usually marked by the presence of students and other parents) with the parents perceived to be belonging to lower socio-economic status. The study focused on the perceived socio-economic positioning and did not explicitly mention that the experiences of parents were connected with the freeship provision. However, it provides important insights into how students who are perceived to be belonging to low or middle socio-economic positioning experience education.

In the context of Southern England, Ashraf (2019) conducted a case study with the aim to understand the parental involvement of Pakistani parents in their children's school in the Foundation Stage.[4] Although that study was conducted in a different setting, its focus was on the experiences of marginalized households which is of relevance to this study. Ashraf found that parents did not feel welcome in the school setting, as some felt ignored by the school staff. Furthermore, the parents experienced exclusion due to a lack of understanding of jargonized language used by teachers. Ashraf (2019) concluded that "most parents' lack of education and lack of English language and indifferent attitudes and lack of support from the staff had an adverse effect on home-school relationship" (p. 717).

[4] "A framework for educating three to four years old children" (Ashraf, 2019, p. 703)

Chapter 3
Methodology

3.1 Aims and Structure of Study

This chapter discusses the research design of the larger *Insights into Education* project, data used in this analysis, and process of data analysis for this MA study. This study aimed to understand experiences of SC households regarding the RTE Act freeship provision, including parental discussions on freeship access, awareness, and post-admission aspects such as parent-school interaction, challenges, and the social integration of parents and children. It uses a mixed methods approach. It analyses data collected from a household survey in one catchment area in Delhi in 2015, and data from semi-structured interviews in 2017 with a sub-sample of SC households from the survey to obtain a more fulsome understanding of their experiences. The research questions of interest to the analysis here are:

1. What were the freeship access patterns at the household level with regards to income and caste?
2. What were the experiences of inclusion and interaction of SC households with the school under the freeship provision?
3. What were the challenges faced by SC households under the freeship provision?

Descriptive statistical analysis on freeship access patterns, freeship awareness patterns, freeship schooling experiences, general schooling access patterns, and household profiles were conducted. Chi-square testing was conducted to analyse the relationships between categorical variables. Additionally, the themes garnered from the interview data helped in gaining in-depth information about SC household experiences regarding the freeship provision.

Mixed methods research builds on the strengths of qualitative and quantitative methods (Gay et al., 2012). The assumption at the core of mixed methods research is that

bringing together statistics with stories and personal experiences provides a more nuanced understanding of the research problem as compared to when data is collected from one approach (Creswell, 2015b). Using multiple methods for collecting data can help in increasing our confidence in interpretation and provide us with an opportunity to understand the influence of other factors (Stake, 1995). According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010), mixed methods research has a feature which is called "methodological eclecticism": "We are free to combine methods and that we do so by choosing what we believe to be the best tools for answering our questions" (p. 9).

The survey was administered with the aim to understand the household experiences of the RTE Act in terms of access, choice, and schooling experiences. The survey also helped in selecting households with whom interviews were conducted two years later to gain a more nuanced understanding of the freeship provision experiences. For this MA study, the survey data provided an overall understanding of different social groups regarding their freeship awareness, schooling access patterns, profiles, and schooling experiences. The interview data helped to gain a further in-depth understanding of the post-admission experiences from the perspective of the SC households, who were a sub-sample of the surveyed households.

3.2 Data Source

This MA study used data from the larger research project, *Insights into Education*, led by Prof. Prachi Srivastava, on the implementation of the RTE Act. The current study is analysed some of the survey and interview data from this larger project. It intends to contribute to emerging work on the larger project, by exploring different areas for further inquiry and should not be seen as final results of the larger project. The analysis here focused on data related to freeship access patterns and freeship schooling experiences from the

Insights into Education Household Survey (2015) and the *Insights into Education Household Interview Schedule (2017)*.

The survey and the interview schedule were created by Prof. Srivastava and senior researchers from the partner organisation, Collaborative Research and Dissemination (CORD), based in India. I was provided access to the de-identified data for the purposes of conducting data analysis for this MA study, a condition of the ethics protocol. The survey and interview data were used with the same intention as that of the larger research project.

3.2.1 Research Site

The study was conducted in one catchment area in East Delhi. The catchment area was decided by the research team to ensure a heterogenous mix of government schools from different administrative levels (municipal, state [Delhi], and central), private aided schools, and a range of private unaided schools. At the time of data collection, catchment areas in Delhi were set in 8 km radiuses according to National Capital Territory (NCT) Rules. The exact catchment area was not divulged to me to preserve the anonymity of the participants, which was a condition of ethics approval.

The research team collected data from two residential colonies in East Delhi within the catchment area. Administratively, colonies were assessed by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi using a range of criteria to determine the socio-economic status of the area (e.g., physical and social infrastructure, rental value of land, how well the local roads are connected to main roads, etc.). The research team used this classification as a proxy for the socio-economic status of colonies to select two colonies to provide a range of socio-economic backgrounds – one was relatively better off (Site A) and the other included a higher concentration of relatively disadvantaged households (Site B).

3.2.2 Survey Sample

The survey sample consisted of 851 households (n_{SiteA}= 411; n_{SiteB}= 440). Households that had at least one child between the ages of 4 and 14 years of age were included in the sample. Households were operationalized in the survey to include 'all adults and children who eat meals that have been cooked together/in the same kitchen'. This was adapted from a commonly used definition in household surveys by the NSSO.[5] There were different family compositions in the sample, e.g., nuclear families, single-parent families living with a grandparent, and traditional Indian extended families which included grandparents, parents, and children. Figures 1 and 2 (Section 4.1.1) provide the caste and income distribution of the household sample.

3.2.3 Interview Sample

The semi-structured interview data were collected from a sub-sample of survey households that identified as belonging to SC groups and were successful in securing a freeship seat for at least one of their children in 2015. Interview data were collected from 43 households and included 47 interviewees. In the majority of cases, household interviewees in 2017 were the same as survey respondents in 2015. The majority of interviewees were mothers, however, in some situations, both parents or another household member were part of the interview.

3.3 Data Collection

The survey and interview data were collected by field researchers who were trained at CORD by the lead researchers of the collaborative research project team. Data were collected

[5] The NSSO (2001) definition is: "a group of persons normally living together and taking food from a common kitchen constitutes a household" (p. 18).

at respondents' homes in teams of two field researchers. Survey and interview data collection procedures are described below.

3.3.1 Household Survey

Survey data were collected between April and June 2015. The survey was administered as a structured interview. Survey respondents were either the parent or guardian of a child in the household between the ages of four and 14. The majority of survey respondents were individuals identifying as women, usually, mothers.

The survey instrument was divided into four sections. Section 1 was on background household socio-economic characteristics, employment and education characteristics of all adults, and education backgrounds of all children in the household. Section 2 was on schooling choice, expenditure, and experiences and histories. Data were collected for ever-enrolled children aged 4-14 of the respondents or those under their guardianship. If more than two children were in this age range, respondents were asked to provide data on the youngest and eldest in the range. Section 3 was on the RTE freeship provision. It had questions on awareness, successful applications, unsuccessful applications, and experiences post-admission. Lastly, Section 4 was on household facilities, assets, and multi-dimensional poverty indicators (MPI).

The survey instrument was piloted in different wards and colonies in Delhi and underwent various revisions. It also underwent checks with other local scholars and researchers familiar with the field context and the topic. The tool was jointly developed in English and translated to Hindi following a process of back translation over several rounds.

3.3.2 Household Interviews

The interview data were collected with the aim to gain in-depth information about the experiences of SC households under the freeship provision, two years after the survey period. The interview schedule was jointly developed in English and translated to Hindi following a process of back translation over several rounds. Similar to the survey instrument, the interview schedule underwent various pilot phases. Field researchers administered one of three related interview schedules according to three different potential cases regarding continued freeship access, or not:

- Case A: No change. Focus child is attending the same school, and is still a freeship student.
- Case B: Focus child is no longer attending the same school, and is no longer a freeship student.
- Case C: Focus child is at a different school but is still a freeship student.

All interviews fell into Case A. The interview schedule had questions on how household and children's experiences evolved over time, including: financial issues and experienced costs on the household; social integration for the child and the family, experienced pressures and any accommodations made by the school; academic issues including child's progress and parents' ability to understand or communicate these issues to the school; school responsiveness to parents' concerns regarding financial, social, or academic issues; specific treatment of freeship children; accommodations made by the school and hurdles; school practices regarding freeship children and admission; and the general social climate for inclusion experienced.

Some questions were: How is your child doing academically? How has their progress changed over the last two years? How does the cost of/expenses related to accessing this school affect your family? Have the costs or the impact of those costs on your family changed

over time (better/worse)? How do you manage? Has the school taken any particular actions to help support your child (academically, socially, financially)?

Interviews were conducted by field researchers in teams of two at interviewees' homes. One field researcher was responsible for leading the interview. The second took notes. There were 33 interviews that were audio-recorded with consent. In cases where interviewees refused recording, notes were taken during the interview and written in detail following the interview and double-checked by both field researchers. The interviews were conducted and transcribed in Hindi to ensure the authenticity of the voices of the participants. They were not translated, as all researchers and the PI are fluent in Hindi. They were not translated for this MA study. I am well-versed in Hindi, and this further helped in maintaining the authenticity of the voices.

3.4 Analysis of Survey Data

3.4.1. Survey Data Entry, Verification, Cleaning

Survey data were entered in SPSS by CORD data analysts following a coding master that was jointly developed. This followed an internal process of data verification and initial data cleaning and feedback rounds between the lead researchers of the project and research assistants. I was provided the most updated version of de-identified data files for my study.

According to Creswell (2015a), after data entry, one has to look for any errors which might arise due to missing data or information incorrectly inserted by the researcher. Therefore, before beginning data analysis, I verified the data entered against the master, checked labels, and cleaned the data. Creswell (2015a) further suggests that cleaning can be done either by computing frequencies or by sorting the data and looking for a score that has been added incorrectly. I followed the frequencies procedure, which helped identify some of data which were incorrectly added. After discussion with my supervisor, they were corrected

and/or interpreted to carry out the data analysis. I also used SPSS for cleaning and data analysis.

3.4.2 Survey Data Analysis: Items and Variables

Generally, the literature states that government schools serve as the main education provider for marginalized groups (Bhattacharya et al., 2021; Lohati & Mukhopadhyay, 2019). Also, there are affordability concerns regarding private schools (Endow, 2019; Juneja, 2014; Srivastava & Noronha, 2016). Therefore, for the purposes of analysis, caste and income level were identified as predictor variables. Access to freeship seats, freeship awareness, and general schooling access were identified as an outcome variable. The analysis was conducted at the household level.

Sections 1 and 4 of the survey provided information about caste and household income levels, respectively. Data from Section 3 of the survey, 'EWS Free Seats Provision', were analysed for the outcome variables. The survey items of interest have been presented in Table 2: If the households had ever applied for the freeship provision (from Section 3B), 2. Help with the freeship admission process (Section 3B), 3. Applicants who were successful (Section 3D) and unsuccessful (Section 3C) were identified as it helped in gaining an understanding of their household income and caste identification for the purposes of further analysis. 4. Freeship awareness (Section 3A). Outside of the freeship, general access patterns were also considered as it helped in providing a broader understanding about the educational access patterns.

The analysis focused on gaining an understanding of household profiles, identifying freeship access patterns, general access patterns, and obtaining an overview of the schooling experiences. In addition to the survey items mentioned in Table 1 which were used for Chi-Square testing, percentages and frequencies for other survey items were also computed: 1.

Awareness about the freeship, source of information, number of people self-reported themselves as eligible, and self-reported criteria for eligibility (Section 3A). 2. Ever applied for freeship provision and reasons for not applying, and aspects of the freeship admission process (admission test, public lottery, etc.), and admission related help (Section 3B). 3. Parental reported reasons for non-selection (Section 3C). 4. Different challenges faced by households, discriminatory experiences if any, and positive aspects related to freeship provision (Section 3D). This focus provided an understanding of the freeship provision from the perspectives of the households belonging to different social groups.

Table 2

Operationalization of Outcome Variables Using Survey Items

Variable	Survey Items
Freeship Access	Have you ever applied for an EWS freeship in a private school or in a KV? Did anyone help you with the freeship process?
Freeship Awareness	Are you aware of the free seat reservation under RTE?
General Access Patterns	Class currently enrolled (highest grade completed for dropouts) School (school last attended for dropouts) School management of current school (school last attended for dropouts)

Note. The variables were utilized for the chi-square testing.

3.4.2.1 Variable specification. For the purposes of the analysis, household income levels were combined into groups (Levels 1 through 3) and defined as follows: Income Level 1: less than INR, 7,000/month (those who fall under the EWS criteria); Income Level 2: INR 8,000-11,000/month (on the cusp of freeship eligibility); Income Level 3: INR 12,000 and above (above freeship income eligibility).[6] I am aware of the challenges in using self-reported income as a variable, but it was used for this analysis because income is one of the two main criteria for EWS freeship eligibility.

[6] At the time of data collection, income eligibility for EWS freeships in Delhi was a maximum household income of INR 100,000 yearly from all sources. This did not apply to SC groups. For OBC groups, the maximum household income was INR 600,000.

According to Hobbs and Vignoles (2010), “there are many possible reasons for inaccurate reporting of income in surveys, including issues of data sensitivity, lack of knowledge, misunderstanding and other definitional issues, recall problems and confusion” (p. 678). Regarding the current MA study, the households might not have revealed their actual income as they might have believed that it can affect their freeship status. Additionally, they may not be sure of their monthly income, or the respondent may not have complete information about their household income.

Field researchers reported if they assessed households had under-reported their income by examining and confirming household assets, which was a special emphasis of a series of items in Section 4 of the survey. Section 4 also included MPI indicators for more comprehensive assessment of household economic status, that refer to those aspects which help identify if the households are experiencing multi-dimensional poverty: “The MPI reveals the combination of deprivations that batter a household at the same time” (Alkire & Santos, 2013, p. 7). The dimensions that have been established are health, education, and standard of living (Alkire & Santos, 2014). There are different indicators under each dimension such as sanitation for the standard of living, years of schooling for the education dimension, and nutrition for the health dimension (Alkire & Santos, 2014). The analysis presented in this thesis is a preliminary analysis of the data and should not be taken as a full account that is projected in future publications to be prepared by the larger project team.

In order to enhance validity, Sutherland (2016) who conducted a preliminary analysis using the Insights survey dataset, used two groups, i.e., the complete group and a sub-group of households excluding those who were thought to have under-reported their income.[7] For this MA study, in the income analysis, I have used only those households who were assessed

[7] Sutherland had access to only a sub-sample of the survey for analysis that she used to construct a preliminary model. I had access to the full survey dataset.

as not having under-reported their income according to field researchers. Of the 851 households, 17.2% (n= 146) were determined to have under-reported income. This was an assessment by field researchers using the method above. Of those who did not under-report their income, 35 households did not report their income or did not remember, and these households were also excluded from the income analysis.

3.4.3 Statistical Analysis Techniques

The use of survey data in this study was primarily to obtain a broader picture of the household profiles, schooling access patterns, freeship awareness patterns, and schooling experiences. According to Cresswell (2015a), descriptive frequencies help us understand general trends in the data, variation in the data, and range of the data. Therefore, descriptive statistics were used. Additionally, I used chi-square to analyse whether there was an association between income or caste and freeship access, schooling access, or freeship awareness.

Income level, caste, general access, freeship access, and awareness were treated as categorical variables. Non-parametric tests help in analysing the data which are in frequencies and are categorical in nature (Salkind, 2017). Therefore, chi-square was used to help identify if any relationship exists between two categorical variables (Field, 2013). For example, in order to identify the relationship between freeship awareness and caste or income, chi-square was used. The 0.05 and 0.01 alpha levels were used for significance level, it is “the probability value that is used as a criterion to decide that an obtained sample statistic has a low probability of occurring by chance if the null hypothesis is true (resulting in rejection of the null hypothesis)” (Kings et al., 2018, p. 178).

However, chi-square on its own tells us if the two variables are independent or not. It does not give much information about the effect (King et al., 2018). Therefore, Cramer’s V

was used to understand the effect size i.e., the degree of association between the two variables (King et al., 2018). The frequencies, percentages, and chi-square analysis may help in understanding the data trends and further aid in the creation of a complex variable or other more advanced analyses for the larger research project.

3.5 Analysis of Interview Data

Thematic analysis and pattern matching were used. “Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data (i.e., text data as in transcripts, or image data as in photographs) for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion” (Creswell, 2007, p. 148). The study aimed at identifying different patterns and codes and further developing themes through the process of thematic analysis. “Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data.” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79). The study followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) process of thematic analysis (Table 3) as it helped in gaining in-depth understanding of the parental perceptions about the freeship provision by analysing the social experiences of parents, parental perceptions about child’s participation, and parent-school interaction. Taguette, an online and open-source application for researchers to code and organize data was used.

I familiarized myself with the data by listening to audio recordings and reading the interview transcripts, information about the interview setting, interviewer’s reflection, and process of the interview. In the process of familiarization, I cleaned the transcriptions as well. I listened to all audio-recordings and verified existing transcripts. I corrected transcripts if any inconsistencies were found. I also reviewed all field researcher notes for interviews that

were not recorded due to consent issues. I paid relatively closer attention to the reflections, interview process, and household setting.

Table 3

Procedure for Thematic Analysis

Phase	Description of the process
Familiarization with the data	Creating transcripts of the data, reading it multiple times and noting ideas.
Generating initial codes	Creating codes based on the features and trends of the data and collating data relevant to each code.
Identifying themes	Developing themes by collating the codes and gathering the data pertinent to each theme.
Reviewing themes	Check if the developed themes are connected to the coded extract and the dataset.
Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysing to refine and improve the themes. Creating definitions and names for themes.
Producing the report	Final review of the analysis which involves selection of extracts, review of the connection between the literature, research question and coding. Producing a report.

Note. Adapted from "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," by V. Braun and V. Clarke, 2006. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), p. 87 (DOI: 10.1191/1478088706qp063oa)

While analysing data, the questions which were guiding my analysis were: what is the nature of parent-school interaction? What are parental perceptions about the inclusion of their children? What are the challenges faced by the household's post-admission? Are there parental inclusion measures established by schools? Are there any perceived social differences? I started looking for relevant features of the data with the aim to identify codes. For example, across various interview transcripts, there was an interesting data trend related to the child's participation in extra-curricular activities, teacher behaviour towards students, and differential treatment of children which helped form the larger theme related to social inclusion of children. During this process, I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) suggestion to code for different potential themes, therefore, I was open in my process of coding and highlighted interesting patterns which were emerging in the data.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), inductive analysis refers to "a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher's analytic preconceptions" (p. 83). After coding the data, I followed inductive approach i.e., a data-driven approach (Boyatzis, 1998) to develop themes whereby I started combining different codes into themes. Once the themes were formulated, I checked if the themes were related to the coding and the entire dataset by going back to the data and looking at the coded extracts. In short, thematic analysis was an ongoing process where I was refining the themes to ensure that they are representative of the codes and dataset. Table 4 highlights the definition of the themes which I found.

Table 4

Themes identified for the MA study

Themes	Definition
Parent-school Interaction	The medium of communication and the nature of parent-school interaction such as if it was positive and/or negative.
Social inclusion of children	The social experiences of the children in school such as experiences of differential treatment, teacher's support, participation in the classroom (academic and non-academic), and accommodation measures for learners. These aspects have been reported by the parents.
Inclusion measures for parents	The assistance measures, supports, and resources provided by schools to the parents for any challenges such as cost assistance and technology related assistance.
Social differences as perceived by the parents	The perceived and internalized social differences reported in the form of pressures, anxieties, and fears parents felt due to their educational status, socio-economic status, and English language fluency.

3.6 Combining Data Analysis Insights

The datasets were brought together depending on the connections between the survey and interview data, research questions, and the literature. The intent of the larger study was to bring the interview and survey data together with the aim to gain insights into education. This MA study aimed at providing an analysis of both datasets with the aim to add to the intention of the larger study. Accordingly, the data obtained from the survey were analysed using descriptive statistics first. It provided a broad overview of the household profiles, freeship access patterns, and schooling experiences under the freeship provision. Further in-depth

information about the SC households' schooling experiences was obtained by analysing the semi-structured interviews.

"Extensive and careful description of the time, place, context and culture is known as 'thick description'" (Mertens, 2010, p. 259). Such descriptions help the readers make judgments about whether the findings are suitable for their context and help in enhancing transferability (Mertens et al., 2010). Interviews and field researcher notes were the main sources for this. The results and findings from both the datasets were first analysed and presented separately in order to provide clarity about which findings have emerged from which method. The separate presentation helped in ensuring interpretive transparency conceptualized by O'Cathain (Tashakkori et al., 2021). Then, an effort was made to bring the two datasets together. This is presented in Chapter 5 of the thesis and analysed through Hart's (2019) Sen-Bourdieu analytical framework.

3.7 Ethics Review

The larger research project had been approved by the Western University Research Ethics Board. I obtained ethics approval for this analysis by submitting an amendment to the approved protocol. The data were used in the same format and with the same intention as of the original study.

Chapter 4
Findings

This MA study aimed at understanding the experiences of SC households regarding the freeship provision under the RTE Act. The chapter reports data on household profiles, analysis of freeship access patterns, freeship awareness, and an overview of the social experiences of households obtained through survey data analysis. General schooling access patterns are also presented in the survey data analysis. Interview data analysis focused on post-admission schooling experiences.

The data analysis was conducted using Sen-Bourdieu's analytical framework (Hart, 2019). The framework helped analyse Section 12 (1) (c) and how it was experienced by the households in this study. The framework helped identify data patterns related to equity, marginalization (in terms of access to space and resources), and inclusion (in terms of inclusion of SC households in schools and the role played by teachers; and school biases in the schooling experiences of SC households).

4.1 Household Profiles

The profiles help in gaining an understanding about the households and their demographics. This section has been divided into two sub-sections. Section 4.1.1. provides data about the surveyed household profiles. Section 4.1.2 will provide data about the interviewed parents' profiles.

4.1.1 Survey Household Profiles

Table 5 presents the background characteristics of the households surveyed. The table provides characteristics on reported religion, caste, household monthly income, and ration card details.

Table 5

Household Background Characteristics

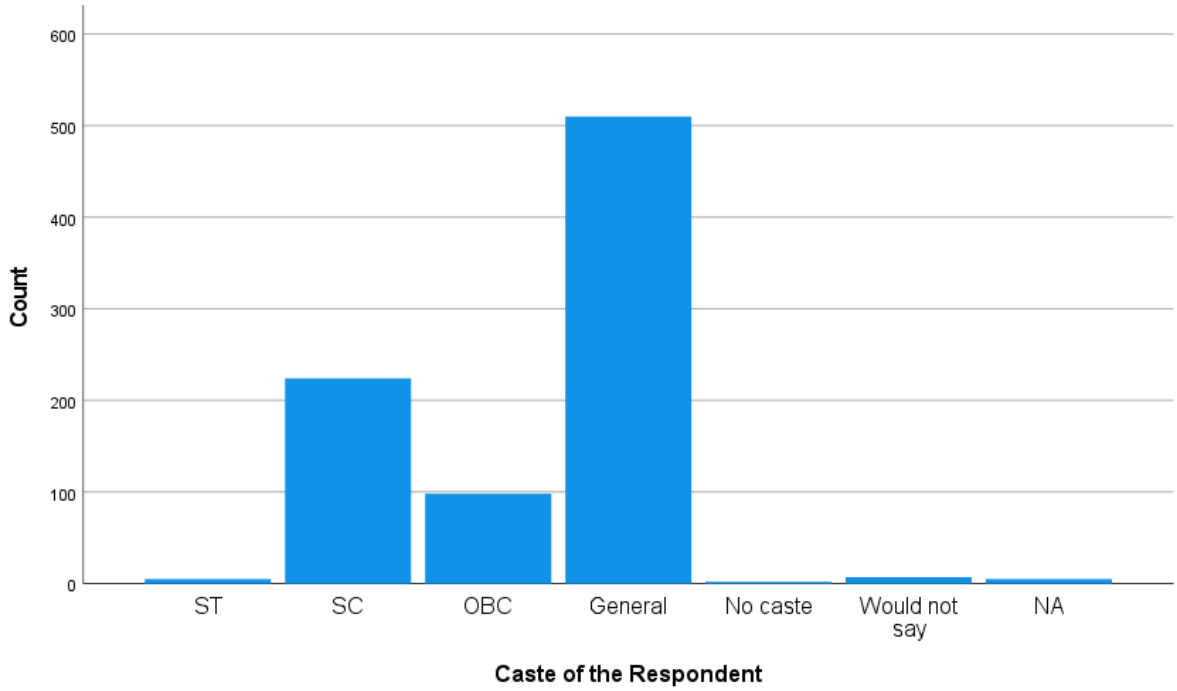
Characteristics	n	%
Religion		
Christian	4	0.5
Hindu	788	92.6
Muslim	18	2.1
Other	7	0.8
Sikh	34	4
Caste		
General	510	59.9
NA	5	0.6
No Caste	2	0.2
OBC	98	11.5
SC	224	26.3
ST	5	0.6
Would not say	7	0.8
[a] **Monthly household income**		
Less than INR 4,000	8	1.1
INR 4,000 – 7,000	140	19.9
INR 8,000 – 11,000	184	26.1
INR 12,000 – 15,000	104	14.8
INR 16,000 – 24,000	79	11.2
INR 25,000 – 34,000	50	7.1
INR 35,000 and above	105	14.9
Don't know/wouldn't tell	35	5
Ration Card		
AAY Card (for very vulnerable groups) – Pink	10	1.2
APL Ration Card (White)	227	26.7
BPL Ration Card – Yellow	56	6.6
Card for Kerosene – Blue	33	3.9
No Ration Card	293	34.4
Ration Card for women - Green	232	27.3

Note. The caste and religion of the respondent was taken as representative of the household. NA = Nepali citizens. Source: Insights into Education Household Survey (2015)
[a] Monthly household income does not include households that were assessed to have under-reported their income.

Caste-wise, the majority (59.9%) of households reported as belonging to the general category; followed by 26.3% as SC; 11.5% as other backward classes (OBC), 0.8% did not declare, 0.6% as ST; 0.6% as Nepali citizens; and 0.2% as no caste (see Figure 1). Regarding religion, the vast majority of households identified as Hindu (92.6%), followed by Sikh (4%). Very few households identified as Muslim (2.1%) or Christian (0.5%).

Figure 1

Household Caste Distribution



Note. n=851. The caste of the respondent was taken to be representative of the caste of the household. NA= Not Applicable/ Nepali Citizens, OBC= Other Backward Classes, SC= Scheduled Caste, ST= Scheduled Tribe. Source: Insights into Education Household Survey (2015).

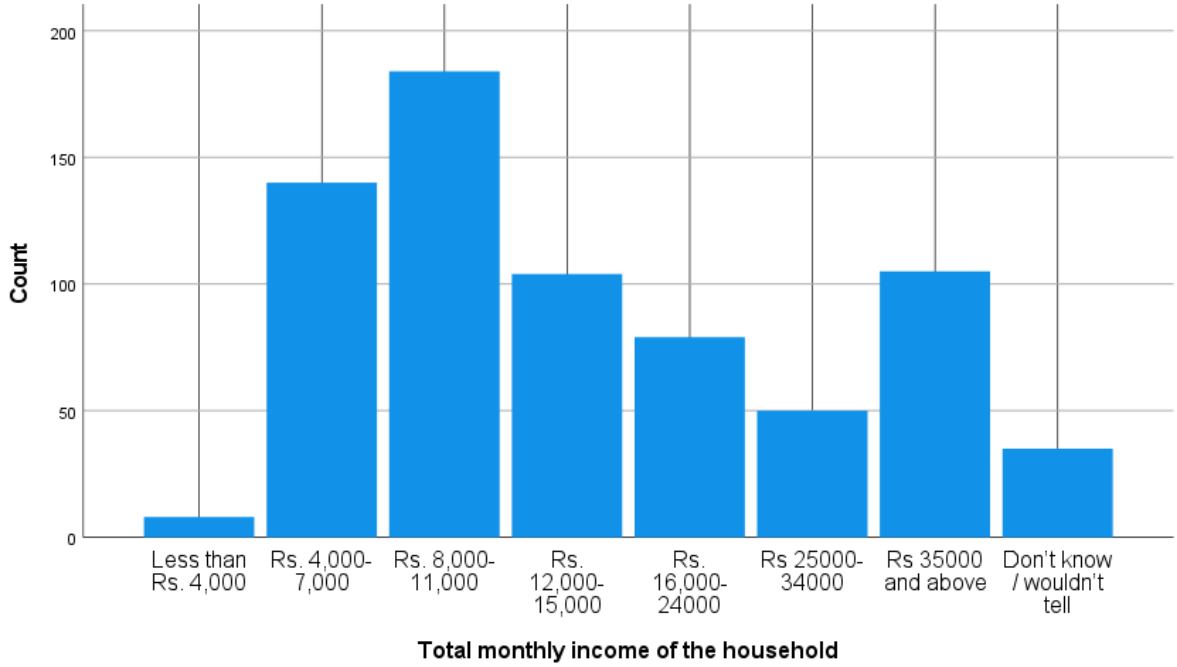
In order to provide a greater understanding of the socio-economic situation of households, data about ration cards has been provided. Ration cards are government authorized cards for households to obtain food and other supplies at subsidized rates. In the sample, 34.4% of the households reported having no ration card; 27.3% had the Ration Card for Women- Green; 26.7% had the Above Poverty Line (APL) Ration Card; 6.6% had the Below Poverty Line (BPL) Ration Card- Yellow; 3.9% had a card for kerosene; 1.2% reported having the *Antyodaya Anna Yojana* (AAY) Card, which is for very vulnerable groups.

As mentioned above in Section 3.4.2.1 on variable specification, I excluded households from the income analysis who were assessed by field researchers to have under-reported their income. Accordingly, Table 5 above and Figure 2 below, present the monthly

household income distribution for 705 households who were assessed as not having under-reported their income. Of these households, 1.1% reported income as less than INR 4,000, 19.9% reported their income as INR 4,000 - 7,000, 26.1% reported it as INR 8,000 - 11,000; 14.8% reported their income as INR 12,000 - 15,000; 11.2 % as INR 16,000 – 24,000; 7.1% as INR 25,000 – 34,000; 14.9 % as INR 35,000 and above, and 5% did not declare. I note the potential discrepancy in reported income above in Section 3.4.2.1, and thus income analysis does not include households who may have under-reported their income.

Figure 2

Reported Household Monthly Income Distribution



Note. n=705. Excludes households that were assessed as under-reporting their income. Source: Insights into Education Household Survey (2015).

Due to the paucity of respondents from different religions, the focus of the analysis is on caste and income level. As explained in Chapter 3, the current income analysis excludes households that may have under-reported their income. Additionally, 5% of households reported they did not know their income or would not tell (see Table 5). Therefore, they were also excluded from income analysis. For caste analysis, households identifying as ST, would

not say, no caste, and Nepali citizens have been excluded due to paucity of data. Tables 6 and 7 provide the caste and income composition of the households that were included in the descriptive statistical analysis.

Table 6

Caste-wise Breakdown of Households Included in Analysis

Caste	n	%
General	510	61.3%
OBC	98	11.8%
SC	224	26.9%
Total	*832*	*100%*

Note. n = 832. The table does not include ST, households who did not declare their caste, declared no caste, and Nepali citizens. Source: Insights into Education Household Survey (2015).

Table 7

Monthly Income Bands of Households Included in Analysis

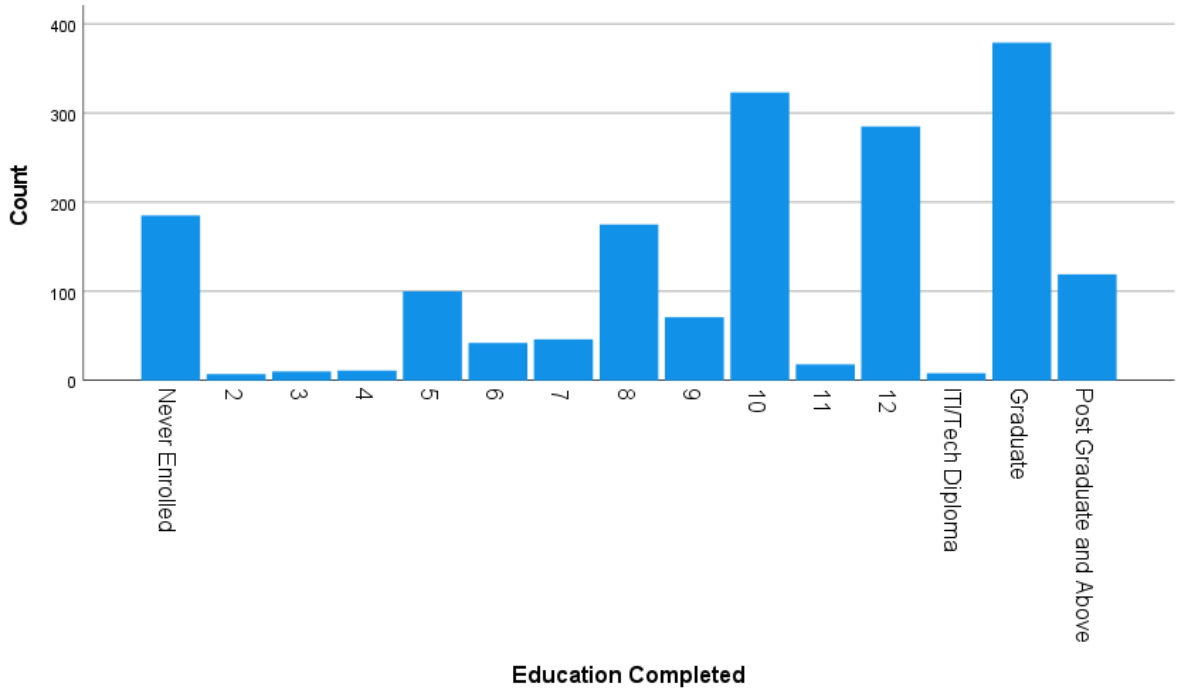
Income Level	Frequency	Percent
Less than INR 7,000	148	22.1%
INR 8,000-11,000	184	27.5%
INR 12,000 and above	338	50.4%
Total	*670*	*100%*

Note. n = 670. Excludes households that were assessed as having under-reported their income or who did not declare income. Source: Insights into Education Household Survey (2015)

Finally, Figure 3 reports the distribution of the class level completed by parents. For simplification of analysis, I have combined the different education levels into the following groups: never enrolled, elementary (class 1-8), secondary (class 9-12), and post-secondary (diploma, graduate, and postgraduate).

Figure 3

Parents' level of education



Note. Highest grade completed by parents, n= 1779. 'Graduate' in the Indian system refers to 'undergraduate' level (bachelor's). As mentioned in Section 3.2.2, there were some traditional extended families comprising related families in one household. They were included separately for this analysis. Source: Insights into Education Household Survey (2015)

4.1.1.2 Caste and parental education and income and parental education.

Regarding the relationship between caste and parents' level of education, a significant relationship was found at the .001 confidence level, $X^2(6, n = 1742) = 222.247$, $p < 0.001$. The resulting Cramer's V is 0.253 which signifies a small effect. Of interest, as shown in Table 8, parents who reported to have completed or have some secondary schooling, 26.8% of parents identified as SC, 59.5% of the parents identified as general, and 13.7% as OBC. Comparatively, of the parents who reported some or completed post-secondary education, 85% were from the general category, 6.5% from SC, and 8.5% from OBC backgrounds. These findings are similar to Harinath and Gundemeda (2021) as they found that in Telangana most of the Dalit households had completed some primary or secondary schooling and very few had completed post-graduation.

Table 8

CrossTabs for caste category and parents' level of education

Caste	Never Enrolled		Elementary School		Secondary School		Post-Secondary		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
General	72	42.4	166	43.7	409	59.5	429	85	1076	61.8
OBC	28	16.5	45	11.8	94	13.7	43	8.5	210	12.1
SC	70	41.2	169	44.5	184	26.8	33	6.5	456	26.2
Total	170	100	380	100	687	100	505	100	1742	100

Note. n = 1742. Source: Insights into Education Household Survey (2015)

There was also a significant relationship between income and parents' education level, X^2 (6, n = 1387) = 273.930, p <.001. The resulting Cramer's V is .314 indicating a medium effect. In this analysis (Table 9), of parents who reported some or completed secondary schooling, 19.6% reported belonging to the income band of less than INR 7,000, 29.1% reported their income band as INR 8,000-11,000, and 51.2% reported their income to be above INR 12,000 and above. Of the parents who reported some or completed post-secondary education, 3.2% reported their income as less than INR 7,000, 8.4% as between INR 8,000 - 11,000, and 88.4% as INR 12,000 and above.

Table 9

CrossTabs for monthly income and parents' level of education

Income Band	Never Enrolled		Elementary School		Secondary School		Post-Secondary		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Less than INR 7,000	62	35.4	111	32.4	103	19.6	11	3.2	287	20.7
INR 8,000-11,000	67	38.3	110	32.1	153	29.1	29	8.4	359	25.9
INR 12,000 and above	46	26.3	122	35.6	269	51.2	304	88.4	741	53.4
Total	175	100	343	100	525	100	344	100	1387	100

Note. n = 1387. Source: Insights into Education Household Survey (2015)

4.1.2 Interview Household Profiles

Tables 10 and 11 describe profiles of the SC household interviewees on parents' education (Table 10) and monthly income (Table 11). These data were taken from the survey. Of interviewed households, 34.9% (highest percentage) reported their monthly income to be in the second income band (INR 8,000-11,000). The highest number of parents reported completing Class 10 (31.8%). Regarding employment, the majority of fathers reported having private jobs, and mothers were engaged in household work. Figure 4 illustrates the focus child's grades as reported in 2017. As evident, most of the children were enrolled in Grades 2 and 3 at the time of the interview. These children were attending private schools on a freeship basis in 2015. All focus children remained in the same private schools in 2017 on a freeship basis. Table 12 presents the expenses incurred by the households in the 2014-15 who were then interviewed in 2017.

Table 10

Education level of the interviewed parents

Education	Frequency	%
Never Enrolled	1	1.2
Grade 5	3	3.5
Grade 6	1	1.2
Grade 7	5	5.9
Grade 8	13	15.3
Grade 9	10	11.8
Grade 10	27	31.8
Grade 11	3	3.5
Grade 12	13	15.3
Graduate	9	10.6
Total	85	100

Note. n = 85. Source: Insights into Education Household Survey (2015)

Table 11

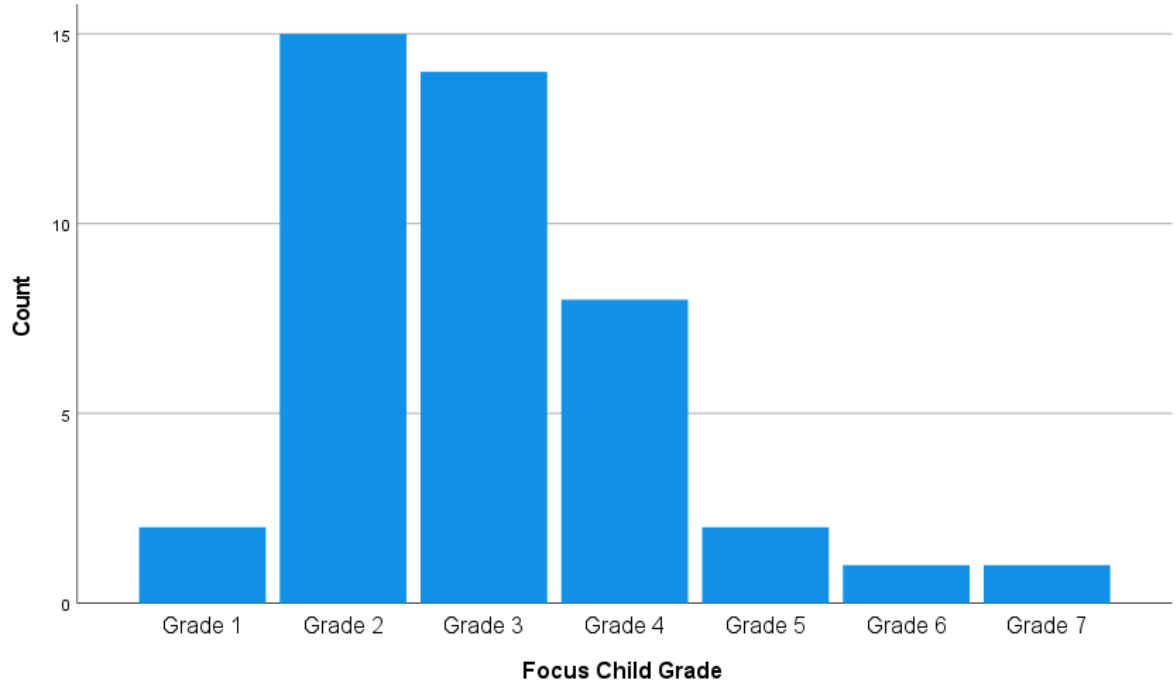
Interviewed households reported monthly income

Monthly Income	Frequency	%
Less than 4,000	0	0
4,000-7,000	11	25.6
8,000-11,000	15	34.9
12,000-15,000	8	18.6
16,000-24,000	4	9.3
25,000-34,000	2	4.7
35,000 and above	1	2.3
Don’t know / wouldn’t tell	2	4.7
Total	43	100

Note. n = 43. Source: Insights into Education Household Survey (2015)

Figure 4

Focus Child's Grade (2017)



Note. n= 43. The graph represents the grade of the focus child as reported at the time of the interview in 2017.

Source: Insights into Education Household Interview Schedule (2017).

Table 12 shows household expenditure as reported in the survey for 2014-15 by the SC households that were later interviewed. There may have been an increase in the expenses and by extension further affecting families. Figures are computed for the 39 interviewed households that reported data. Not all households incurred costs on every item. The interviewed households incurred a total reported cost of INR 456,135 (Mean = INR 11,695.77 and Median = INR 10,900) on total fees, transportation, books and stationery, donation, uniforms, and private tuition. There were 23 households who spent over INR 10,000 in a year on total school fees, transportation, books and stationery, donation, uniforms, and private tuition, and 16 households that spent less than INR 10,000. Most of the households reported incurring costs on uniforms, books, and stationery and then on private

tuitions. It is important to note that a number of these households reported their monthly income to between INR 8,000-11,000, and 33 households had more than one child.

Table 12

Reported school expenditure by SC household interviewees, 2014-15 (n=39)

Expenses (INR)	n	$\bar{x}$ (INR)	Total (INR)
Total school fees [a]	17	929.51	36,251
Transportation	10	1642.31	64,050
Books and stationery	38	2596.15	101,250
Donation	1	60.26	2350
Uniform, shoes, belt	37	2890.13	109,384
Private tuition	28	3651.28	142,400

Note: Missing data = 4 households. Cumulative totals for the SC households interviewed in 2017. Amounts as reported for 2014-15 school year expenditure. Not all households incurred costs for every expenditure type as indicated in the label. Source: Insights into Education Household Survey (2015).
[a] Total school fees refers to monthly tuition fees, annual school fees, and all other fees.

4.2 Analysis of Survey Data

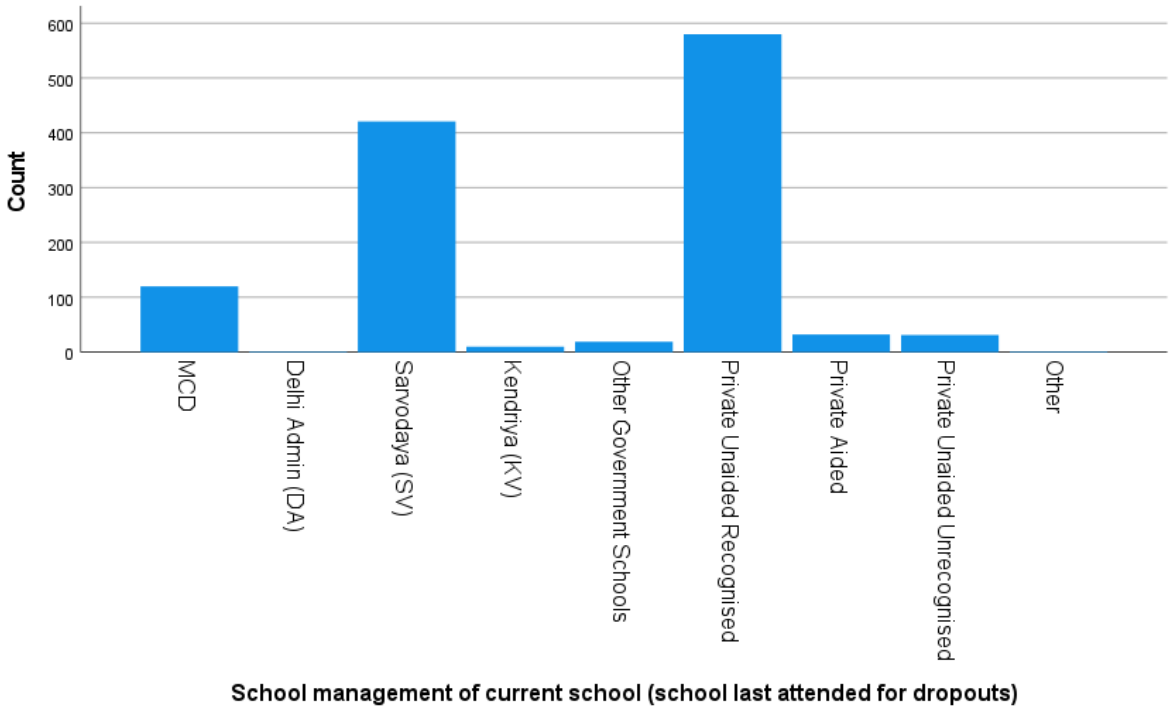
Subsections 4.2.1 through to 4.2.4 below present results obtained from the survey data analysis. The data analysis focused on general school access patterns, freeship provision awareness, freeship application status, and whether households were successful. The analysis has been conducted at the household level. Only the analysis for general school access patterns has been computed at the child level. Descriptive statistics have been presented for different aspects of the freeship admission process such as the source of information regarding freeship provision, challenges faced by the households, reasons behind unsuccessful applications, and reasons behind not applying for the freeship provision. Additionally, classroom experiences of the children, post-admission challenges faced by the households, and data about positive aspects related to the freeship provision have been presented. Chi-Square testing has been computed for general access patterns, freeship awareness, admission related help, if the households had applied, and if the households were successful in securing a freeship seat.

4.2.1Access Patterns

In order to identify access patterns, the focus of the analysis was on students who were enrolled in elementary education (classes 1-8) in different school management types. As described in Chapter 1, there are a variety of schools by management type in India and in Delhi (see Table 1). The data presented below are for children enrolled in Delhi schools. Children enrolled outside of Delhi were excluded from the analysis. Of the remaining 1215 students, the highest number were admitted to private unaided recognized schools (47.7%); followed by 34.7% in SV, and only 9.9% in MCD government schools (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

Enrolment by School Management Type



Note. n= 1215. Source: Insights into Education Household Survey (2015).

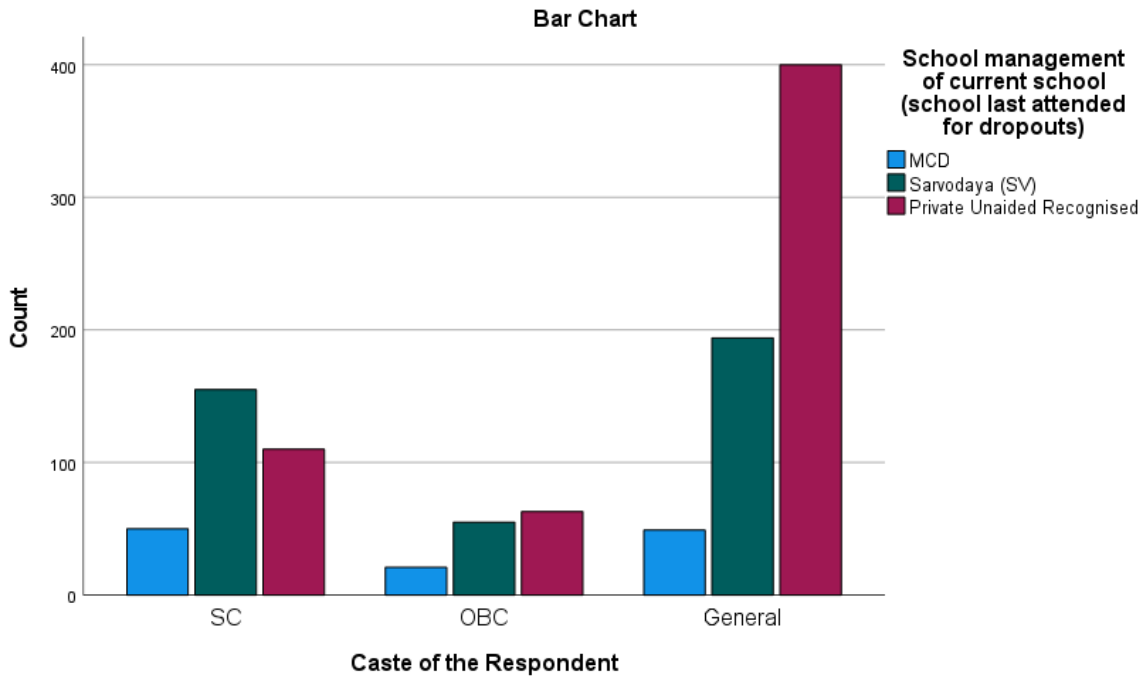
Figure 6 and 7 show enrolment in elementary education on the basis of income and caste. It is evident that there is a relationship between income and school management type, and caste and school management type, indicating the potential of family capital conversion to individual capital. Figure 6 shows enrolment in elementary education (Classes 1-8) by

school management type and caste. There was a significant relationship between caste and school management type, X^2 (4, n= 1097) = 68.413, p <0.001. The Cramer's V was calculated to identify the effect size. It was .177, a small effect .

The focus was on MCD schools, private unaided recognized schools, and SV schools as the sample for the other school management types was too small. The children of interest (enrolled in grades 1 -8) who were reportedly enrolled in private unaided school, 19.2% identified as SC, 11% identified as OBC, and 69.8% identified as general. Of interest, the children who were enrolled in SV schools, 38.4% identified as SC, 13.6% identified as OBC, and 48% identified as general. Of the children who were enrolled in MCD schools, 41.7% identified as SC; 17.5% as OBC, and 40.8% as general.

Figure 6

Elementary school enrolment (classes 1 to 8) by school management and caste



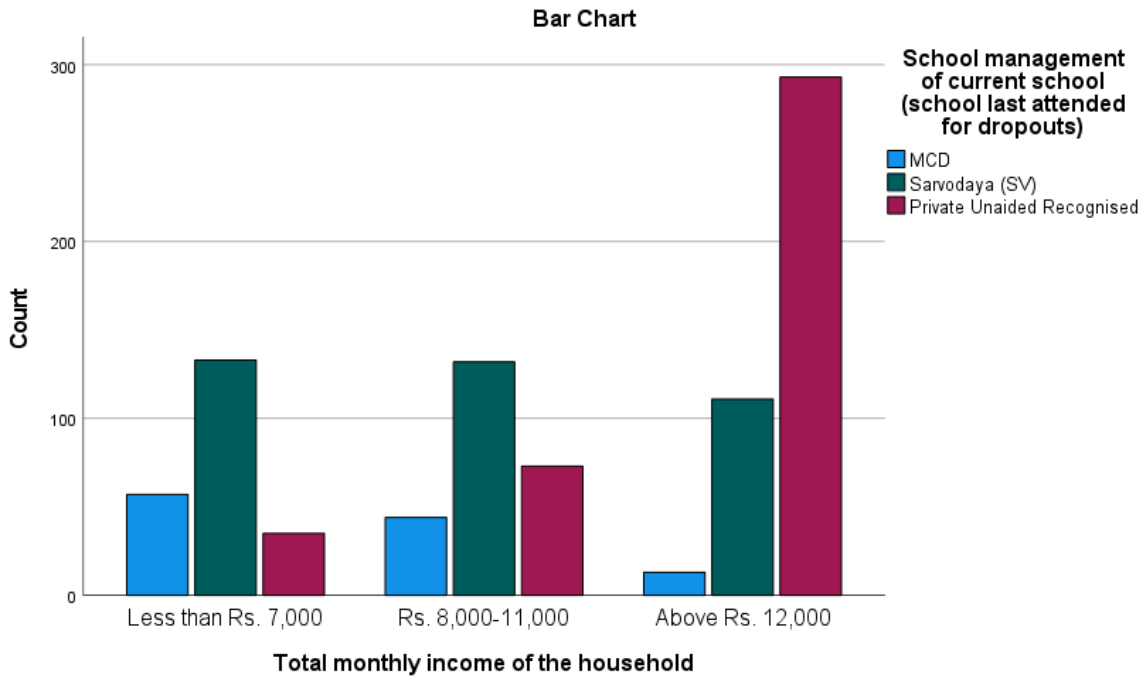
Note. n=1097. Source: Insights into Education Household Survey (2015)

Chi-square was conducted to see if there was a relationship between household income and enrolment by school management type (Figure 7). It was found that the two are

not independent of each other, X^2 (4, n= 891) = 225.021, p <0.001. The resulting associations were moderate with Cramer's V as .355, which indicates a medium effect. Of children enrolled in private unaided recognized schools, only 8.7% were from the lowest household income band of INR 7,000, 18.2% from INR 8,000-11,000 income band, and the big majority, 73.1%, from the INR 12,000 and above income band. Interestingly, 35.4% of those enrolled in SV schools were from households in the lowest income band of less than INR 7,000, 35.1% to the INR 8,000-11,000, and 29.5% to the income band of INR 12,000 and above. Of the children enrolled in MCD schools, 50% were from the lowest income band, 38.6% from INR 8,000 – 11,000, and 11.4% from the highest income band.

Figure 7

Elementary school enrolment (classes 1 to 8) by school management type and income level



Note. Excludes children from households that did not report income and under-reported their income. n= 891.
Source: Insights into Education Household Survey (2015)

4.2.2 Awareness of the freeship provision

As the current study focused on the freeship provision, it becomes imperative to analyse how many parents were aware of it. The freeship provision was applicable to private schools and central schools, or KV schools[8]. Therefore, an analysis for freeship awareness has been conducted for both school types.

As mentioned in the thesis above in Sub-section 3.4.2 on survey items and variables, Section 3 of the survey was the focus of the analysis. Certain households were not applicable for this section as they did not have children aged four to 10.[9] Therefore, they have been excluded from the analysis. The resulting number of households was n = 724. Of this total number of households, 44.3% were aware of the freeship provision in private schools, and 15.7% were aware of the freeship provision in KV schools. Regarding those who were aware of the freeship provision in either school type (private or KV schools), the majority reported receiving information from their neighbours, friends, or families (70.1%). Some reported obtaining information from newspapers or TV (17.1%) and school authorities (15%).

A chi-square analysis was conducted to see if there was a relationship between caste and freeship awareness, and income and freeship awareness for private unaided recognized schools. KV schools were not analysed due to a low level of awareness for those schools. There was a significant relationship between reported household income and freeship awareness in private schools. The resulting chi-square is X^2 (2, n= 568) = 18.290, p <0.001. The Cramer's V of .179 showed a small level of association. Table 13 shows that 15.8% of

[8] According to Section 12 (1) (c) – the 25% reservation of free seats is applicable to specified category schools as well which means "a school known as Kendriya Vidyalaya, Navodaya Vidyalaya, Sainik School or any other school having a distinct character which may be specified, by notification, by the appropriate Government. "(Section 2 (p), Government of India, 2009)

[9] Households that had no children aged 10 or under were ineligible to answer Section 3 of the *Insights into Education Survey, 2015* because it was deemed this would be the widest age band to which the freeship provision would have been eligible in 2015.

the households who were eligible for this analysis and were aware (n = 240) reported their income as less than INR 7,000, 26.7% reported their income as between INR 8,000-11,000, and 57.5% reported their income as above INR 12,000. The results show that caste and awareness were unrelated, X^2 (2, n=710) = 0.088, p= .957.

Table 13

CrossTabs for freeship awareness and monthly reported income

Income Band	Aware		Not Aware		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Less than INR 7,000	38	15.8	97	29.6	135	23.8
INR 8,000 – 11,000	64	26.7	94	28.7	158	27.8
INR 12,000 and above	138	57.5	137	41.8	275	48.4
Total	240	100	328	100	568	100

Note. n=568. The households who may have under-reported their income is excluded. Source: Insights into Education Household Survey (2015).

4.2.3 Eligibility under the Freeship Provision

The survey helped identify various households that were eligible to apply. Of the households eligible to respond to Section 3 of the survey, and who were aware of the freeship provision, 66.4% reported that they were eligible for the freeship according to some criteria. This computation includes households who may have under-reported their income. Table 14 presents data on the households who reported themselves as eligible and the self-reported criteria of eligibility. Of these, 77.9% of households reported that they were eligible to apply under the EWS income criteria, and 22.1% reported they were eligible under the disadvantaged group category as SC/ST. This proportion only includes those households that were aware and thought they were eligible.

Table 14

Criteria under which the respondents reported themselves as eligible

Criteria	n	%
EWS	166	77.9%
SC/ST	47	22.1%
Total	213	100%

Note. The table represents the households who reported themselves as eligible. n= 213. Source: Insights into Education Household Survey (2015).

I further analysed how many of the households who were aware, were actually eligible. According to the income and caste reported by the households, of those households who were aware, 51.2% were actually eligible. Table 16 presents the contingency table for the households who were actually eligible. The eligibility computation excludes households that did not declare their caste, were Nepali citizens, and reported no caste. Also, households that did not report their income were excluded. The exception was households that did not report their income but belonged to the SC group. They were included as according to the RTE rules, they were eligible for the freeship provision regardless of their income (Delhi Free Seats Order, 2011). Furthermore, according to the Delhi Free Seats Order, 2011, Section 2(d) stated that the category of "disadvantaged group" comprises SC, ST, OBC not falling in the creamy layer (in 2013, to eligible for the OBC, income should be below INR 600,000),[10] and child with special needs. Section 2(c) defined children belonging to weaker sections as those children whose parents have income less than INR 100,000 annually from all sources (Delhi Free Seats Order, 2011).

Taking into consideration these rules, the actually eligible descriptive showed that of those households who were aware, 12.5% may have been eligible as some of them were: (1) identified as general category and reported their income as INR 8,000 – 11,000 making them

[10] According to the office memorandum published by the Department of Personnel and Training (2013), the income criterion to be considered as non-creamy layer OBC (eligible for the freeship) was INR 600,000.

at the cusp of eligibility, or (2) identified as OBC and reported their income to be above INR 36,000 making some of them eligible, and some not. However, for presentation purposes, the households that may have been eligible have not been included in the analysis of discrepancies.

Tables 15 and 16 present contingency tables on the basis of income and caste for those who self-reported they were eligible and those households who were actually eligible. Tables present data about the number and proportion of households from an income category who reported themselves as eligible (Table 15) and were actually eligible (Table 16). These computations are based on the households that were assessed as not having under-reported their income. However, SC households who may have under-reported their income were taken into consideration as they were eligible regardless of their income.

Table 15

Aware Households Who Self-Reported as Eligible

Caste	Less than INR 7,000		INR 8,000- 11,000		INR 12,000 and above		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
General	14	36.8	25	41	34	44.2	73	41.5
OBC	5	13.2	6	9.8	14	18.2	25	14.2
SC	19	50	30	49.2	29	37.7	78	44.3
Total	*38*	*100*	*61*	*100*	*77*	*100*	*176*	*100*

Note. n = 176. Source: Insights into Education Household Survey (2015)

Table 16

Aware Households Who Were Actually Eligible

Caste	Less than INR 7,000		INR 8,000 – 11,000		INR 12,000 and above		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
General	16	36.4	0	0	0	0	16	12.5
OBC	6	13.6	7	18.4	14	30.4	27	21.1
SC	22	50	31	81.6	32	69.6	85	66.4
Total	*44*	*100*	*38*	*100*	*46*	*100*	*128*	*100*

Note. n = 128. Source: Insights into Education Household Survey (2015)

According to Section 2 (c) of the Delhi Free Seats Order, 2011, households belonging to the general category and who had an income above INR 100,000 annually were not

eligible for the freeship provision in 2014-15. As can be seen from the Tables 15 and 16, there are some discrepancies in the level of awareness households have about the freeship provision. Of households that were aware and self-reportedly eligible, 44.2% reported their monthly income as above INR 12,000, and considered themselves eligible for the freeship provision. However, according to the Section 2 (d) of the Delhi Free Seats Order, 2011, they were not eligible as their annual income exceeded INR 100,000 in 2014-15. In Tables 15 and 16 all the households identifying as SC were eligible for the freeship provision. It is important to note that these computations are based on those households who reported to be aware of the provision.

Table 17 below shows data on the households that were self-reportedly eligible and aware, and whether or not they had ever applied for a private school or KV freeship. Of these, 29.4% had not applied for the freeship provision, and 70.6% (n = 149) had applied for the freeship provision at least once. Households that did not apply stated it was because they were unsure if they were eligible (39.7%), did not have documentary evidence for eligibility (25.8%), and did not have time or money to try (14.5%). The majority of the households (67.7%) who were self-reportedly eligible and had not applied for the freeship provision reported that they would not try next year.

Table 17

Ever applied for the freeship provision in a private school or KV schools (aware and self-reported as eligible)

Options	n	%
Applied	149	70.6%
Never Applied	62	29.4%
Total	211	100

Note. The table represents the number of self-reportedly eligible households who had ever applied for the freeship provision. n=211. Missing data = 2 households. Source: Insights into Education Household Survey (2015).

Of the households that applied, 81.9% reported that they had no help for the application process. There was no significant relationship between household income and whether they had help for the freeship application, X^2 (2, n= 115)= 1.233, p= .540. Similarly, there was no significant relationship between caste and help, X^2 (2, n= 147)= 3.611, p= .164.

As shown in Table 18, of the households that reported themselves as eligible and had applied for a freeship, 44.2% identified as SC, 14.3% as OBC, and 41.5% as general caste. A chi-square analysis helped to further understand if there was a relationship between caste and if households had applied. The analysis was only conducted for those households who were aware and self-reported to be eligible. The results show that there was a significant relationship at a 0.05 level of significance. The resulting X^2 (2, n= 207) = 8.144, p= 0.017. The effect size was small with Cramer's V as .198. However, there was no association between income and if they had ever applied for the freeship admission, X^2 (2, n= 165) = 1.186, p= .553.

Table 18

CrossTabs for caste of the households and if they had ever applied for the freeship provision

Caste	Applied		Not Applied		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
General	61	41.5	36	60	97	46.9
OBC	21	14.3	10	16.7	31	15
SC	65	44.2	14	23.3	79	38.2
Total	147	100	60	100	207	100

Note. n = 207. Source: Insights into Education Household Survey (2015)

I further analysed the relationship between income and if the households were successful, and caste and if the households were successful. For this analysis, of those who applied for the freeship (n = 149, Table 17), I computed the data for 145 households as for the remaining, the identification number for caste and income was missing. The majority of households who were unsuccessful reported it was because they were not selected in the lottery.

As shown in Table 19, of those households that were successful in securing a freeship seat, 49.1% identified as SC, 34.3% as general category, and 16.7% as OBC. There was a significant relationship between caste and if they were successful at a significance level of .01. The resulting X^2 (2, n=143) = 10.740, p=.005. The resulting Cramer's V is .274 which shows a small association. There was not enough evidence for an association between household income and if they were successful, X^2 (2, n= 110) = 3.383, p=.184.

Table 19

CrossTabs for caste of the respondent and if they were successful

Caste	Successful		Not Successful		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
General	37	34.3	23	65.7	60	42
OBC	18	16.7	3	8.6	21	14.7
SC	53	49.1	9	25.7	62	43.4
Total	108	100	35	100	143	100

Note. n = 143. Two households did not declare their caste and have been excluded from the analysis. Source: Insights into Education Household Survey (2015).

Interestingly, as presented in Table 20, all the SC households were eligible for the freeship provision. Of the OBC households who were successful in securing a freeship seat, nine households (56.3%) reported their income level of INR 12,000 and above making some of them eligible. Furthermore, of those general category households who were successful in securing a freeship seat, 11 (40.7%) households reported their income level as INR 12,000 and above which according to RTE rules was above the eligibility criteria at the time of the survey. These computations are based on households that did not under-report their income.

Of the households who were successful in securing a freeship seat, 21 were assessed as under-reporting their income, of which 7 households belonged to general category. This under-reporting is important to highlight as for general category households, the decision-making factor for eligibility is the income criteria. Such discrepancies are important to analyse as they can make one question the equitable nature of the provision (discussed further in Chapter 5).

Table 20

CrossTabs of caste and income of the freeship successful households

Income Band	SC		OBC		General		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Less than INR 7,000	9	23.1	3	18.8	7	25.9	19	23.2
INR 8,000 – 11,000	15	38.5	4	25	9	33.3	28	34.1
INR 12,000 and above	15	38.5	9	56.3	11	40.7	35	42.7
Total	39	100	16	100	27	100	82	100

Note. n = 82. This table does not include households who had under-reported their income. Source: Insights into Education Household Survey (2015)

4.2.4 Schooling Experiences Post-Admission

The majority of freeship households reported that they did not know of any explicit segregation in classrooms and schools of freeship children such as separate shifts (99.1%), classes (98.1%), or uniforms (98.1%). However, 98.1% of households also reported that separate training for freeship students, which was proposed as an integration measure, was also not instituted.

Of those who were successful in securing a freeship seat, households reported several other post-admission challenges. Financial pressure was reported by 37.1% of households, and 21.9% of households reported that they were compelled to spend on private tuition. Furthermore, 21% reported that their child found the academic standards too high, and 17.1% reported that they found it difficult to help with homework. Some households (18.1%) reported that they felt pressure to spend money on their child's clothes to fit in. While there were other challenges such as parents feeling the pressure to dress up, these were the main

aspects reported. Academic-related challenges and pressures to ‘fit in’ are further discussed by interviewees in Chapter 5.

Despite the challenges, of the households who were successful in securing freeship seats, 74.3% reported that they were able to access private schools which would otherwise have been out of reach. 32.4% felt they could access schools of good quality and reputation. Lastly, 3.8% of the households reported that their child’s future would be secure as a positive aspect of the freeship provision.

4.3 Analysis of Interview Data with SC Freeship Households

The interview data analysis aimed to understand the schooling experiences of SC freeship households with a focus on aspects of inclusion and exclusion. Data analysis was conducted using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis procedure. The themes helped in understanding social experiences of households, mainly, regarding social integration of freeship children and parents, parent-school interactions, and perceived social differences from the SC household perspectives.

4.3.1 Parent-School Interactions

Parent-school interactions were analysed by identifying responses related to PTMs and other types of interactions that took place between parents and teachers. Parents reported different ways of communicating with the school which included conversations during PTMs, WhatsApp, the Snap Homework application, and personal contact with teachers in school or via teachers’ personal phone numbers. These methods of communication were also identified by Rodrigo’s (2020) earlier analysis of the same interview dataset. The majority of parents reported attending PTMs which were organized by the schools for all the students to include parents in the child’s academics.

Most parents reported that teachers were supportive in their interactions, but some reported limited interactions. Positive interactions included teachers that reportedly conversed in Hindi if parents were not fluent in English. Some parents shared that teachers provided detailed feedback about their child's academics, and helped them to understand homework, circulars, and other information shared by the school. Apart from PTMs, one parent reported that teachers at their school communicated with parents via phone to support them in how to help the child with coursework.

Some parents reported negative interactions with teachers, stating they were blamed for the child's poor performance. One parent shared their experience where, in front of other parents, a teacher threatened to take them and their child to the principal because the child was not performing. Another interviewee stated that a teacher said that if their child is unable to manage the schooling level, they should leave, or the school will expel the child and give the freeship seat to someone else[11]:

> So, they [the teacher] kept saying the same thing again and again that we're EWS, 'Your child is so weak. So, we'll give the seat to another child who really needs it, right? We'll remove him. I'll go forward and complain, I'll do this, I'll do that...' So, this creates a lot of problems. They kept saying the same thing again and again, that, 'We've given you a seat, we've given you a seat.' (HHID, B296)

Some parents experienced differentiated interactions where the teachers reportedly gave more time to non-freeship parents in comparison to freeship parents. Similar patterns have been discussed by Rodrigo (2020). For example, one parent reported that teachers gave more detailed feedback to non-freeship parents:

> …it's like, if we go first then they'll speak to us first. If a general category one comes later then they'll speak with them later. But the thing is that Ma'am [the teacher] will speak to them for longer and will tell them more about their child, like what is their child eating, wearing, how they're behaving. They'll tell them about everything. If we go to talk to them then they'll only tell us about their studies. (HHID B299)

[11] All interview quotes are translated to English from the original in Hindi.

The nature of parent-teacher interactions as identified in the analysis reflect the heterogeneity of the educational experiences for parents. These aspects may have the potential to further inform children's educational experiences and the capitals they gain from that education. For instance, if parents do not receive in-depth feedback about their children, it can have an impact on the child's development as parents may not be able to support them, and this by extension, may affect children's learning opportunities.

4.3.2 Social inclusion of children

Some parents stated that they were anxious about whether their child would be treated equally since classrooms had students from different backgrounds. Rodrigo (2020) found the same regarding anxieties and fears. Some of the parents felt relieved after spending some time at the school and witnessed teachers' support and felt the school's quality was good. The majority of interviewees reported that there was no differential treatment of children on the basis of class timings, shifts, the curriculum taught, and uniforms. Rodrigo (2020) found the same. Parents reported that children sat and studied with each other. Parents further reported that students were not aware of their caste categories, which eased the social integration in classrooms. It is important to highlight that these instances have been reported by parents and not observed by researchers.

A parent mentioned an instance where their child was made to sit at the back of the class, and students from non-freeship provision sat in front. The mother voiced her concern, and the teacher moved her child to the front. Another parent from a different household made a general remark about how students who are considered academically weak were made to sit at the back of the class and those who pay fees sit in front. Three other parents expressed doubts saying that there may be differential treatment because of caste and social status, which may bias teacher behaviour, however, they had not witnessed differential treatment.

One parent felt that teachers were able to distinguish between freeship and non-freeship students simply by looking at their faces. They felt that the school wanted to eliminate freeship students and give the seats to non-freeship students.

Parents gave mixed responses regarding the teacher support for inclusion. Some parents felt that teachers promoted inclusivity in classrooms by seating different children with each other. Some reported that teachers were helpful and supportive regarding coursework, made sure children completed homework, and paid attention to eating habits in school. One parent said that the teacher provided instructions in Hindi if the child could not understand English:

> The thing is that the teacher typically speaks English in class. And the kids who don't know it, they explain in Hindi, and really well. And there's a rule that students who are weak will be given extra classes. After school. (HHID B413)

On the contrary, some parents felt that the teachers were not supportive. Some interviewees complained that adequate attention was not given to their children in case the child missed some work. One parent felt that there was a lack of teacher support for their child because of their freeship status:

> The teacher complains about something everyday, about everything. Sometimes she'll write about fruit, like, we didn't send fruit, this and that. Everyday, she'll write that we didn't send fruit.
>
> […]
>
> I think they do it because of EWS. Because it's not like kids in mansions aren't academically weak. They are too, right? Because everyone is. But Ma'am never stops them. She never does. I've never seen them, like yeah, today they said the same to them.
>
> […]
>
> [Nods and laughs] My daughter, it drives her crazy. (HHID B269)

Two parents reported doubts about students being hit in class. One parent felt that it was possible that their child was slapped. They did not complain in this instance since their child said that it was his fault:

> But now the thing is that he's scared and doesn't tell me anything if something happens at school. This creates problems. A little while ago, he, I don't know what happened, I don't know if he made a mistake or what, but he was writing very slowly, and I can't really say but maybe the teacher slapped him. It seemed like it was pretty hard. When he came back his whole cheek was red. But I never went to complain because maybe he was weak. He said it was his fault. Like, 'Mama, it's my fault. I was writing really slowly, so.' (HHID B296)

As can be seen in the abovementioned quote, there is a sense of fear from the child due to potentially being hit by the teacher. The literature review (Chapter 2) also reports corporal punishment to be commonly experienced by students in Indian schools. In Lafleur and Srivastava's (2019) work, students who worked slowly, submitted their work late, and disobeyed the teacher were often labelled as 'naughty'. The child participants in that study reported that those students were hit by teachers: "Such teacher behavior led to further stigmatization, resulting in isolation for some who reportedly ate lunch and played alone, while others formed sub-groups with other 'naughty' peers." (Lafleur & Srivastava, 2019, p. 20). While such stigmatization was not mentioned by the interviewees in this analysis, we cannot say with certainty that it was absent. Instances such as these reflect how if children do not follow the dominant school norms, it can result in further marginalization and stigmatization, but that parents might also internalize this.

There was variability in the data regarding parents' perception of their child's participation in school. Some parents described their child's performance and participation in school as good or average. According to several parents, children showed improvement. Regarding the academics and accommodation measures for struggling learners, some parents reported that they were aware of extra classes which included both non-freeship and freeship students, but some did not. The disparity in extra classes was also found by Rodrigo (2020).

Some parents requested such extra classes, especially for English. A parent reported that their children were enrolled in extra English classes which were very helpful:

> So, like, I'm not that educated, I'm not well educated. I can't teach my son English and things, whatever it is. So, so they have extra classes on Saturday. Like Saturday is off for the younger kids, so they also have extra classes then. That's it that's what I really liked, so that's why. I haven't seen extra classes in any other school nearby up till now. (HHID B411)

Apart from academics, some parents discussed their child's participation in extra-curricular activities. On the one hand, some parents expressed that their child was doing well in extra-curricular activities such as sports. Some children won medals and certificates. On the other hand, some parents expressed concerns about the lack of participation in extra-curricular activities. These mixed responses were also discussed by Rodrigo (2020). For instance, one parent stated that their child was not selected for dance despite good feedback about their dancing skills:

> So, what I say is when my child is good at dance, and you're [the teacher] saying that she's good at dance, it says in her book, 'Your daughter is good.' So, what I'm trying to say is, fine, if there are school functions, then why isn't my daughter given a part? (HHID B007)

One parent felt that their child may not be selected because they are not academically strong and so do not catch the teacher's attention. Furthermore, a parent spoke about the differences in English speaking and mannerisms of EWS and non-EWS students:

> Because the other kids, their parents know English really well, and the way they walk and talk is really [unclear]. So, our kids would get shy. So, the EWS kids, right, they get left behind and aren't brought forward. Then slowly, after they see their talent, they come up. Like [name omitted], she didn't come up in the first year. But then when Ma'am saw that this child is good at everything, she's doing well in school, then she brought her out in front. But, if the EWS child is behind and doesn't do anything, then Ma'am can't bring him forward. (HHID B299)

4.3.3 Inclusion measures for parents

While the inclusion of children is important, it is also essential to include parents. Some parents stated that orientation meetings were organized by their schools when their

child had joined where teachers provided information about ideal parental behaviour. Rodrigo (2020) also discussed the presence of such meetings for the parents which they considered helpful. Several parents stated difficulties in understanding circulars and homework because they lacked English fluency. They depended on the private tuition teachers or their relatives for clarity about the school's daily business. One parent stated that they would like the school to organize English-speaking classes for parents so they could be more involved in their child's education. Parents reported school directives on the type of food to send to school or suitable birthday gifts. Some parents reported that their school asked children not to distribute any gifts or birthday treats so that students do not feel social differences.

Several parents reported a lack of any accommodation regarding school costs. As reported in Table 12, parents reported incurring costs on notebooks, books, uniforms, extra-curricular activities, private tuitions, and other costs. Some parents could not send their children for excursions because of the high costs charged by schools. Schools described these excursions as non-compulsory. These patterns could have a detrimental effect on children's schooling experiences and can result in feelings of exclusion as some students were able to enjoy the activities. That is those whose family had the necessary capital to provide for such opportunities, as compared to others, would benefit.

However, parents were willing and trying to manage the extra expenses for their children which reflects their keenness and aspirations for their children's education. Several parents reported that these costs were difficult to manage as they sometimes had to sacrifice other needs to ensure that the child did not feel excluded. Some of the parents reported that in case of a household's financial crisis, teachers were supportive and did not ask the parents to send any special type of food or make their child wear a particular type of uniform.

Some parents said they expressed tensions related to school costs before admission. Several parents stated that the costs only increase as the children progress which is a further

cause of concern. Therefore, several parents stated that they would seek assistance, such as concessions for books, uniforms, and excursions so that the child can be integrated at school and enjoy the experience. These financial strains reflect how the school functioning may be based on the fee-paying parent's budget which can affect children who do not come from such affluent backgrounds.

Parents also reported technology-related challenges. Some parents claimed to receive school support, and others did not. As mentioned earlier, some parents reported the usage of the Snap Homework application which provided information to parents about homework, important events, and day-to-day happenings in school. Some parents found it useful as they could access homework and knew about class tests, in case their child forgot to mention it. However, some parents did not find the application useful because of associated internet expenses, smartphone expenses, and a lack of technological understanding.

> There is this one application that's been downloaded from where we get the homework. Since last year. School gave a number [code] and we were able to do it. I do not know how to use the internet. Their father calls to tells me, or he sends it to the tuition teacher. A lot of times the internet doesn't work, so homework doesn't get done. (HHID B176)

Some of the parents who faced technological issues discussed it with the school. Schools gave mixed responses on accommodations. Some assured parents they would write the homework in the child's diary for the parents' reference. In other cases, schools made no effort and told the parent to figure out a way to access the application by buying a phone or using someone else's. The disregard of parental needs and asks could result in parental feelings of exclusion who play an integral role in the development and growth of children.

4.3.4 Social differences as perceived by the parents

Some parents felt socially different due to their educational status. Several parents felt hesitant in talking to other parents and teachers due to their lack of fluency in English.

Furthermore, several parents reported that they did not question teachers or raise a complaint against the school because they felt nervous. It can be argued that parental hesitance maybe stemming from a place of internalized social differences and social conditioning based on societal inequalities which can have an impact on children's educational experiences. They may be seen as conversion factors (family to child) at play. In her preliminary analysis, Rodrigo (2020) also identified certain hesitance experienced by parents because of their educational status and lack of fluency in English. One parent reported that they did not ask many questions during PTMs as they felt nervous about saying something that may offend the teacher:

> Not a lot, but sometimes I do feel it. For instance, when we go to parent-teacher meetings, other parents ask a lot of questions. I don't know where they get these questions from. We think we should ask these questions to the teacher. Can the teacher help us with the question? Should we share these things with the teacher? We're usually confused by these questions. If we can ask, then we do ask? Otherwise, we usually talk about academic-related things. The teacher doesn't tell us anything extra, and we don't ask. It's just that we're a little hesitant. We feel a little that maybe we shouldn't say something otherwise the teacher will wonder what we're talking about. (HHID B402)

According to a few parents, their child was performing well academically but was not speaking English fluently. One parent believed that their child's difficulty with English was because of the parents. Another believed socio-economic status differences meant that their child was not able to speak fluent English, but that it has improved significantly after being enrolled in their school.

Parents also reported their nature of interaction with non-EWS parents. Most parents said that they interacted more often with other EWS parents, also because they tended to live closer. For most interviewees, interactions with non-EWS parents were limited to a few exchanges of gestures or words either during PTMs or when they go to pick up their children from school. One of the other reasons for limited interactions was perceived social

differences where the non-EWS parents were often called ‘hi-fi’ or ‘*bade log’* (rich people) and EWS parents call themselves as ‘*gareeb log’* (poor people) and ‘*anpadh’* (illiterate).

Parents also expressed having limited time to socialize with other parents as they were busy with managing work. Some parents were hesitant in talking to non-EWS parents because of perceived differences in communication style. Several parents reported that they dressed according to the school culture and climate. The internalized differences may reflect long-felt, historical discrimination of SC households and how they are continually manifested in parental interactions, which can affect educational experiences. One parent reported experienced and perceived social differences:

> Like I said before, some [non-EWS parents] speak nicely, and then there are others who don’t want to talk to us because they come in their cars, and we come on foot. So, even if our children say bye, they turn around to look, like we’re going on foot and the way we dress is also a little bit different from them, like they look at their children in a weird way, like, ‘He’s saying bye to their children?’ (HHID B270)

4.3.5 Summary

The Sen-Bourdieu analytical framework (Hart, 2019) provided a lens for data analysis. The framework helped understand the potential role of familial capital in schooling access and schooling experiences of individuals. For example, the reported difficulty in sending children on excursion activities also revealed the potential role of limiting familial capital conversion to individual capital, which may affect capabilities and functioning. The framework helped understand power asymmetries and how SC households further experienced exclusion.

Chapter 5
Discussion

The analysis was conducted using the Sen-Bourdieu analytical framework. Hart (2019) brought together Amartya Sen's capability approach with Bourdieu's forms of capital, habitus, and field to advance the discussion of education inequalities and educational policy. This chapter brings together insights of the analysis according to the main research questions. The purpose of the analysis was to unpack the experiences of SC households regarding the freeship provision. The current study contributes to the literature on SC groups, particularly regarding Section 12 (1) (c) of the RTE Act. It helped uncover heterogeneity in household educational experiences.

5.1 What were the freeship access patterns at the household level with regards to income and caste?

As was shown in the analysis in Chapter 4, there was a significant relationship between both caste and school management type and household income and school management type. The results indicated that, of the children who were enrolled in grades 1–8 in SV schools, 38.4% identified as SC, 13.6% as OBC, and 48% as general. Additionally, of the children enrolled in grades 1–8 in private unaided schools, 19.2% identified as SC, 11% as OBC, and 69.8% as general. Moreover, of children enrolled in grades 1-8 in private unaided schools, 8.7% reported their income band as INR 7,000, 18.2% as INR 8,0000 – 11,000, and a large proportion, 73.1% as INR 12,000 and above.

These findings add to the literature. Generally, government schools are considered as the main education providers for children from marginalized communities (Bhattacharya et al., 2021; Lohati and Mukhopadhayay, 2019). The differences in the school management

types accessed by households may be due to certain affordability concerns with private unaided schools because of their direct out-of-pocket schooling (Chudgar, 2012). As visible in other studies (Gurney, 2018; Romero & Singh, 2022; Srivastava & Noronha, 2016), results may reflect segregation in the Indian education system with differences in access to school management types in relation to household caste and/or income. This segregation connects with Hart's (2019) discussion that how a family's capital converts into an individual's capital in terms of access to different types of schools, advantaging some over others.

Specifically, regarding freeship awareness patterns, studies have highlighted how parents did not have an accurate understanding of the freeship provision or were unaware of the provision (Mehendale et al., 2015; Noronha & Srivastava, 2016; Wad et al., 2017). This study found a significant relationship between income and freeship awareness. Of the households who had children between the ages of four to 10, 44.3% were aware of the freeship provision in private schools and even less in KV schools (15.7%). Of households from this group that were aware of the provision, 15.8% reported their income as INR 7,000, in comparison to 57.5% who reported their income as above INR 12,000.

Additionally, of the households who were aware, 70.1% reported obtaining information about the freeship provision through their social networks. This aligns with a previous study conducted by Srivastava and Noronha (2016) where they found that parental networks played an important role in the admission process. This also reflects on Hart's framework that how a family's capital may have the potential to provide opportunities for children to learn and may further marginalize those who do not have required capitals.

The discrepancies in awareness played out at a deeper level. Of the households who were aware, 66.4% considered themselves as eligible for the freeship provision. This figure includes households who may have under-reported their income. However, I computed the proportion of households who would actually be eligible, and found the proportion to be

lower – that is, 51.2% were actually eligible. This excludes non-SC households that under-reported their income (explained in Section 4.2.3 above). Of general category households who were aware and self-reported as eligible, 44.2% reported their income as above INR 12,000. Section 2(c) of the Delhi Free Seats Order (2011) defines the income limit for weaker sections as INR 100,000 annually in 2014-15. Accordingly, the households from the general category with incomes of INR 12,000 and above were ineligible for the provision. This could lead to further marginalization of certain eligible households, as those who are ineligible may receive a free seat. These findings further add to Sarin et al.'s (2017) finding that awareness about the freeship provision needs to be increased. This process may further help in realizing the RTE Act's initial intention of equitable education.

Chapter 4 also presents findings on whether households had ever applied for the freeship provision. Of the households who were aware and self-reported as eligible, 29.4% had not applied for the freeship provision. Romero and Singh (2022) identified lack of uptake of seats in Chhattisgarh. The current findings also add to Bhattacharya's (2022) findings that close to 49% of seats were unfilled in 2019-20.

In this current study, the parents reported several reasons for not applying, such as, lack of clarity about their eligibility, lack of documentary evidence, and lack of resources (time and money). Some of these barriers have also been identified by Romero and Singh (2022), including documentation, unawareness of the provision, and other barriers. This calls for more action on the part of the government to encourage participation to tackle some of the issues related to documentation that have been a challenge for households and may affect the uptake of the free seats.

Interestingly, in this study, there was an association between caste and whether households had ever applied. Of those who were aware, self-reported to be eligible, and had applied for the freeship provision, 44.2% identified as SC, 14.3% as OBC, and 41.5% as

general. Furthermore, there was a significant relationship between caste and if households were successful in securing a freeship seat. Of all those who were aware and self-reportedly eligible, 149 households had applied. I computed the data on 145 households as there were some missing data. Of the households who were successful in securing a freeship seat, 49.1% reported their caste as SC, 34.3% as general, and 16.7% as OBC.

The more critical finding is that of the general category households who were successful in receiving a freeship seat, 40.7% reported their income band as INR 12,000 and above. This is in violation of the RTE Act and the Delhi RTE Rules on income eligibility. This finding is consistent with Sucharita and Sujhatha (2019), who found that some children who belonged to relatively financially stable families were able to secure freeship admission. In that study, their families were able to produce forged admission documents. This shows that some households in more advantageous positions may be better able to access freeships even if they are not eligible. From the Sen-Bourdieu framework, this could increase the potential for conversion of the family's capital (economic capital, cultural, and social capital) into the child's capital and capabilities.

While some SC households were able to secure freeship admission, the findings on awareness and discrepancies in ineligible households receiving it, connects with Hart's (2019) assertion that "the problem is that not all children will enjoy equal opportunities to access quality learning opportunities" (p. 592). In this study, some of the factors that may play an integral role in freeship access, are knowledge about the application process, social capital, and monetary aspects. Therefore, resources such as the presence of the freeship provision does not ensure that students in need will be able to access it. Social inequality is persistent and affects the way households were able to access education, as differences in capital may play a role in its uptake and the type of school accessed.

5.2 What challenges were faced by SC households under the freeship provision?

This question helped uncover some pre- and post-admission challenges. Existing studies have shown that households faced multiple pre-and post-admission challenges such as financial costs, the cumbersome application process, and securing the required documents (Bhattacharjee, 2019; Mehendale et al., 2015, Srivastava & Norohna, 2016). In this study, SC households reported similar challenges along with several others such as academic-related struggles, perceived social differences, and technology-related challenges.

Some studies found that parents faced admission-related issues such as donation requests, not being allowed to enter the school premises post-admission, and/or being rejected after an interview or admission test (Srivastava & Noronha, 2016; Wad et al, 2017). On the contrary, in this study, not many households presented these aspects as the challenges of freeship admission. The main reason not to secure freeship admission was reported as not being selected in the lottery.

As presented in Section 4.3.3, parents had keen aspirations for their children's education and career. However, academic-related challenges were discussed by various interviewees. Some parents reported that a lack of their own education influenced their ability to help their child with academics. This connects with Hart's (2019) discussion that family's capital in all its varying forms and degrees goes through different forms of activations and transfers to form individual capitals. In this instance, families reported facing a lack of know-how about schooling and academics, which may further play a role in accruing individual cultural capital. In order to ensure the child's success, parents reported enrolling their children in private tuition resulting in financial strain for some families. This could be detrimental to households' sustenance and continuity of the child's education in the long run. The burden of private tuition costs for RTE freeship households was also found by Srivastava and Noronha (2016).

Several interviewed households reported that they were not fluent in English, because of which they faced difficulty in helping their children. Sucharita and Sujatha (2019) have discussed language barriers faced by children in the classroom. Here, language barriers were present for the parents as well. This is similar to socially disadvantaged groups in other settings. Ashraf (2019) conducted a study with Pakistani parents in England and found that families faced challenges in helping their children at home due to parents' lack of fluency in English and their own education levels. When analysed through Hart's (2019) framework, the language barriers might signify how the family's cultural capital, which is not in alignment with the broader institutional culture, may result in some difficulties regarding obtaining and providing learning opportunities to their children and could result in (re)production of inequalities. Therefore, it is imperative that there is a critical analysis of the curriculum and how students and parents from different backgrounds can be included in classroom practices.

Several interviewees reported facing financial strains as they incurred costs on books, school uniforms, ID cards, and other expenses. Therefore, most parents asked for concessions or cost subsidies to help manage expenses. In principle, freeship access should be fee-free. However, these findings are not surprising as previously, Srivastava and Noronha (2016), found that households enrolled through the freeship incurred the second-highest out-of-pocket expenditure after households accessing private schools on a full fee-paying basis.

According to some interviewees, schools provided extra-curricular learning opportunities for students at an additional cost. Some parents were able to manage these additional costs, and some were not, resulting in exclusion. Similar findings were presented by Sarin and Gupta (2014) where freeship children were not able to participate in excursion activities, and consequently felt embarrassed and isolated. The excursion activities were optional but were created according to the financial status of fee-paying households (Sarin & Gupta, 2014). This connects with Hart's (2019) discussion that multiple forms of conversion

and activations take place, such as “using family economic capital to pay for extra-curricular activities that contribute to a child’s cultural capital (attending art galleries, theatre trips, overseas residential experiences), which may later be converted into the capability to pursue a range of careers and to mix comfortably in different fields” (p. 592).

According to Section 3(2) of the RTE Act, “no child shall be liable to pay any kind of fee or charges or expenses which may prevent him or her from pursuing and completing the elementary education” (Government of India, 2009), which is particularly applicable to those admitted under the freeship. However, this MA study and existing literature show that students faced financial strains, and only the tuition fee was likely to be free (Singhal et al., 2017; Srivastava & Noronha, 2016). This may affect the continuity of a child’s education. Parents may pull children out of school due to severe financial constraints. Such practices require further investigation by the state and central governments where the freeship provision should be free in all its forms.

Interviewees reported technology-related challenges. Some parents were unable to access coursework due to internet costs or limited access to technology. The technology-related challenges in some instances intertwined with the schooling costs borne by the households and further added to the financial strain consistent with Singhal et al.’s (2017) findings. For example, one parent reported installing the homework app on the tuition teacher’s phone at an additional cost. Some faced technology-related challenges due to a lack of knowledge on how to use the application or phone.

As generally accepted in the literature and shown in the present analysis, those children who fare better in all forms of capital may have an advantage in the education set up which is made up of practices representative of relatively higher socio-economic status households. According to Hart’s (2019) framework, the family’s capitals such as the financial ability to provide technology and the know-how of the system gets transferred to individual

capitals through different conversion factors. However, when families lack the necessary capital to enable conversion then the question becomes if the freeship provision is effective in bridging the gaps and providing equitable education which was its initial intention.

The answer could be potentially found by looking at the current patterns and trends of inequities that came to the forefront even more during the pandemic. At the beginning of the pandemic there were mass closures of government schools across India, whereas, private schools, particularly higher-fee and elite schools, resumed more quickly. Schools largely relied on online modes of education delivery. Children from lower socio-economic status backgrounds who were enrolled in private schools faced difficulties in obtaining access to online education (Vyas, 2020). Undoubtedly, this calls for more active research and sincere consideration on the part of the government to create structures that are inclusive for everyone, especially the most marginalized.

In this study, SC parents further discussed anxieties and fears related to social differences and their experiences, and fears about social inclusion given the mixed socio-economic backgrounds in the schools. This is similar to Gilbertson and Dey's (2021) work that found that freeship households reported concerns about their children's potential insecurities regarding social integration. Furthermore, several interviewees in this study reported feeling a certain level of hesitance in discussing matters of concern with the school due to their lack of English fluency, lower education status, and at times, their freeship status. As discussed by Ashraf (2019) in the context of England, the lower educational status, English fluency, and lack of support from the school staff had an adverse impact on the home-school relationship, a similar pattern could be present in the current study.

In this study, I analysed the aspects of social differences from parental perspectives as their experiences may have an impact on children's schooling experiences. For example, a parent discussed that they did not use their voice because they were not sure whether what

they say would be acceptable. This, when analysed through Hart's (2019) Sen-Bourdieu analytical framework, shows how some individuals might become marginalized when their position in society does not play out to their advantage in the 'game'. Therefore, even if students are accessing school, there may be several constraints in the conversion of capital to capability. There should be consistent response and adequate post-admission resources and support for parents across all schools to ensure that parents are able to raise their concerns without any systemic barriers, as this can affect a child's growth and development in schools.

The discussion about academic issues, schooling costs, technology, and social differences-related challenges reflects some of the ways the conversion of familial capital to individual capital could be affected. As discussed by Hart (2019), these conversions are not straightforward. They are complex in nature as the family's habitus, field, and different forms of capitals play an integral role. The challenges faced by the households have references to personal networks, monetary aspects, and know-how of the system that a family possesses and how they convert into individual capital and access to services. This again reflects on the discussion that societal structures influence the way education is experienced, and there is an ever-increasing need to take into consideration household perspectives on policymaking, especially from the most marginalized.

5.3 What were the experiences of SC households regarding inclusion and interaction with the school under the freeship provision?

Some interviewees reported that their child was performing well academically and had shown growth after being enrolled in the freeship provision. Similar to Sucharita and Sujhatha's (2019) findings, in this study, SC parents reported that the teachers supported students in the classroom by helping with coursework and giving bilingual instructions. However, there were other parents in the current analysis who felt the opposite and reported

that teachers did not pay thorough attention to their children. Two parents from different households raised their concerns about potential corporal punishment. While the broader study could not collect direct observation data, in the *Insights into Education* micro-study with 16 children (half with freeships), child participants reported witnessing corporal punishment at the schools they accessed (Lafleur & Srivastava, 2019). The literature review (Chapter 2) also found corporal punishment to be a common experience by students in India.

In this study, one parent discussed certain levels of fear in the child because of which they stopped discussing school practices with their parents. There may have been an internalization of negative self-perceptions as the child considered that they deserved physical punishment because they were at fault for not following classroom norms. Student self-perceptions and those of others can affect learning patterns, such as motivation and confidence (Hodd & Pandey, 2006, as cited in, Lafleur & Srivastava, 2019). Corporal punishment is banned under the RTE Act; however, it still persists, and perhaps more so in spaces where power asymmetries are present. Such instances require greater action on the part of the government to ensure rules are being followed.

Previous studies found that students from marginalized backgrounds were made to sit outside the classroom or at the back, and there were differences in educational experiences, based on caste and gender (Nambissan, 2009; Ramachandran & Narorem, 2013). Specifically, regarding the freeship, Noronha and Srivastava (2013) found that in some schools, freeship children studied in different shifts by separate staff in the evenings. On the contrary, in this analysis, survey and interview data showed that children did not attend separate shifts and were not taught separately. This is consistent with Sarangapani et al.'s (2014) findings. In this study, according to several parents, teachers did not explicitly differentiate on the basis of caste or income. While this can be seen as a positive step towards

inclusion, parents reported some experiences which could reflect on the teachers' implicit biases.

Every individual's educational experiences are different and how they make value of schooling is also different due to the differences in the capital (Hart, 2019). The majority of parents, both in the survey and interview, stated the absence of explicit differential treatment of children on the basis of class timings, shifts, uniforms, and books. However, in the in-depth interviews, some mentioned that their children were not selected for extra-curricular activities. The lack of participation in extra-curricular activities has been discussed by Singhal et al. (2017) as well, who conducted a study with households in urban Ahmedabad and found that smaller numbers of freeship children participated in extra-curricular activities compared to those enrolled without the provision.

While some parents stated that their children participated in school activities and received acknowledgment for it, others reported the opposite. Parents surmised several reasons behind non-selection, such as children not thought to be academically strong and parental lack of information about extra-curricular activities. Additionally, one parent reported that their children, and all EWS children, would have to put in extra effort to gain the teacher's attention, otherwise they would be left behind. This reflects on the differences in educational experiences of individuals which are not homogenous and depends on several social aspects including a sense of affiliation, recognition, and sense of belonging individuals feel in educational settings (Hart, 2019). The lack of participation by SC children in extra-curricular activities was also discussed by Nambissan (2009), albeit this study was conducted before the RTE Act was implemented. Nonetheless, it is relevant in helping to illuminate differences in participation of marginalized children.

Several parents in this study reported that the students in the classroom were friends with each other regardless of freeship status. Furthermore, as with the finding of Mehendale

et al. (2015), most of the interviewed parents in this study reported that the children were not aware of each other's socio-economic backgrounds which made social integration relatively easier. Also aligning with Sucharita and Sujhatha's (2019) observations, parents in this study reported that students played with each other and shared food with each other. However, in Lafleur and Srivastava's (2019) linked micro-study directly with children, they reported overall patterns of differentiation and stigmatization in peer interactions.

Sarangapani et al. (2014) found that some teachers and schools provided after-school or weekend classes to students admitted under RTE. While the presence of extra classes was reported by some parents in the current study, they were not specific to EWS students or freeship students. Some parents appreciated these extra classes especially since they were relatively less educated. Furthermore, some parents would have liked the school to organize extra classes for children's English-speaking skills. This reflects the aspirations parents had for their children's education, and how they would like their children to gain cultural capital, which the children then can convert into other capitals or capabilities.

As mentioned in Section 5.3 above, parents from different caste and income groups faced various challenges regarding schooling costs, which also included costs related to extra-curricular activities. According to interviewees, the schools did not provide any concessions or subsidies to the parents from disadvantaged backgrounds. Several parents reported that they did not vocalize their opinion regarding financial costs because they felt that there would be no effective change, the school would not listen to the voice of an individual parent, and several parents accepted the situation due to their freeship status.

The analysis here is consistent with Gurney's (2018) findings from a study conducted with parents in lower-income areas in Delhi where some parents did not exit or voice their opinion on dissatisfaction with school quality. The analysis further adds to Gurney's (2018) argument that parents not using their voice is not because they are loyal to school but because

of financial limitations which restrict their options of perceived good quality schools, and the belief that even if they raised their voice, chances of effective change were bleak.

Regarding the inclusion of and assistance for the parents, other than one interviewee, parents reported no extra classes being organized for the parents to help them with English or any other matter of concern. Sucharita and Sujatha (2019) conducted a case study of two schools in Delhi and discussed that the schools organized parental orientation. Similarly, in the current study, some parents reported that schools organized parental orientation programs that either included both freeship holders and non-freeship holders or only households from freeship backgrounds. During orientations, information about how to talk to children, and how to help the child with academics, home environment, and mannerisms was provided to the parents. These orientation programs could be viewed as the ways through which schools include parents and provide pertinent information about a child's development. However, it can also be viewed as the inclusion of parents into the dominant norms which may further have an effect on a child's way of learning and behaving in their culture and community and could result in further societal segregation.

As discussed in Section 4.3.1 above, families reported mixed experiences regarding their interaction with teachers. Some parents reported positive interactions in PTMs, and teachers using Hindi if parents were not fluent in English. The majority of parents reported that they met teachers only during PTMs. Some were able to meet the teacher after school or could connect via their personal phone numbers. Sarangapani et al. (2014) and Sucharita and Sujatha (2019) also found that there were periodic meetings between the teachers and parents. In this study, some parents experienced negative or limited interactions. One parent reported that they were spoken to harshly by the teacher during the PTM in front of other parents. Similar instances were illustrated by Sawhney (2018) in their case study of KV schools in Hyderabad. Teachers spoke to perceived lower socio-economic parents rudely in front of

other parents (Sawhney, 2018). Adding to Mehendale et al.'s (2015) discussion about the deficit thinking approach toward RTE students, in the current study, some parents reported that they were blamed for their child's lack of performance in school.

Although a different context, Ashraf's (2019) study about ethnic minorities in England, found that parents felt excluded because they were ignored by the school. Similarly, in the current study, some households expressed being ignored by the teachers because at times, parents reported that non-freeship parents were given more time as compared to freeship parents. There are multiple factors that result in social exclusion such as norms, biases, and social relations (Govinda & Bandyopadhay, 2010). Accordingly, the experiences of differentiated interactions might be related to certain teacher and school biases. Some teachers might show negative or limited interaction with parents because of perceptions about their backgrounds. These biases may emerge from the habitus of the individuals and these biases can be unconscious and conscious. The manifestation of biases in teachers' behaviours can have an impact on individual experience of education. For some it can be more discriminatory as compared to others. Therefore, teacher training should have cultural and bias-related components.

Responses regarding schooling experiences reflect that "unequal distribution, and access to capital in all its forms will have an impact on inequalities in educational experience" (Hart. 2019, p. 592). The lack of understanding about the cultural norms of the education institution is present for the parents as well, which may cause hindrances in the development of individual capabilities of children. Furthermore, deeply embedded societal inequalities and power asymmetries might be manifested in classroom spaces such as in parents-teacher interactions. The support and resources for the students and parents coming from the freeship provision could be largely absent or ineffective. Therefore, several parents have asked for support, such as extra classes for children and cost subsidies as they have keen

aspirations for their children and would like their children to gain an education that they have reason to value.

5.4 Summary

The RTE Act and the freeship provision were designed with the idealised intention of providing equitable education and creating space where students 'can eat and study with each other' (personal communication qtd in Lafleur & Srivastava, 2019, p8). However, this initial analysis on the experiences of households in Delhi found that it can be argued that the RTE has achieved its intentions in a partial way. The data analysis and discussion paint a complex and multi-layered picture of the experiences of the SC households, in particular.

While some SC students were successful in securing admission, there were a number of general category students above the income criterion who were able to gain freeship admission. Furthermore, freeship awareness was still relatively low, especially regarding KV schools. Regarding schooling experiences, the opportunity to fully participate in schools was different for everyone, which may be affected by their social positioning and family capital. Therefore, it is imperative that we consider the structural barriers in terms of capital acquired/inherited by the families and how that may influence the real opportunities individuals have to participate in school fully.

Hart (2019) discusses the area of outcomes of education and states that: "even if educational institutions were able to offer more equitable opportunities and experiences to all learners, the external environment will continue to play a key role in whether individuals are able to flourish and develop freedoms to pursue lives they have reason to value" (p. 593). The current analysis further extends this argument at a broader educational experience level. It showed how different schooling experiences were for households even after the existence of the freeship provision. There were several social, cultural, and economic constraints in place

which may play a role in educational experiences. In order to ensure that society collectively benefits from the education system, we should critically think about the systems and structures in place and how they may benefit some as compared to others.

Chapter 6
Conclusions

This MA study aimed to understand the experiences of SC households regarding the freeship provision with a focus on freeship awareness, schooling access patterns, and schooling experiences upon implementation of the RTE Act in India. The current study adds to the literature on SC households and their educational experiences. This chapter provides concluding remarks on the study, a discussion of limitations, implications, and recommendations for future research.

This MA study analysed some survey and interview data collected for the larger research project, *Insights into Education*. The intention was to add to the larger research project and uncover some of the potential areas for further investigation. The study analysed survey data through descriptive statistics with the aim to unpack some of the data trends and patterns regarding freeship access. The interview data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) process of thematic analysis with the aim to understand the schooling experiences of SC households under the freeship provision. The results and findings were brought together in the discussion chapter to answer the following research questions:

1. What were the freeship access patterns at the household level with regards to income and caste?
2. What were the experiences of inclusion and interaction of SC households with the school under the freeship provision?
3. What were the challenges faced by SC households under the freeship provision?

The study utilized the Hart's (2019) Sen-Bourdieu analytical framework, which was developed to further the discussions about education policy, international education, and educational inequities. Hart (2019) considered how a family's capital converts into an

individual's capital and eventually to capabilities and functioning. The conceptualization involved another layer including activation, transfer, and conversion of the capitals, and influence of field and habitus (Hart, 2019). As exemplified in the literature, the Indian education system is segregated where each household's experiences of education are different. The use of Hart's (2019) framework provided a lens to view household perspectives about the freeship provision, and to unpack the educational experiences of SC groups.

6.1 Summary of Main Results

The survey data analysis showed significant relationship between household income and enrolment by school management type and caste and enrolment by school management type. In the survey data analysis, it was clear that more children from the general category households were admitted to private schools in comparison to SC. This finding adds to the literature on segregation in the Indian education system as the differences in nature of family capital may be playing a role in the access to school management type.

Regarding freeship awareness, there was no significant relationship between caste and freeship awareness, but there was a significant association between household income and freeship awareness. Most households were unaware of the freeship provision in private schools and KV schools. Of the households who were aware, a greater proportion was from income band of INR 12,000 and above as compared to less than INR 7,000. There were discrepancies regarding the eligibility. Of those households who were aware of the freeship provision, various general category households with reported incomes above eligibility considered themselves eligible, however, according to the RTE rules, they were not. This calls for greater action on the part of the government to ensure a wider spread of the information as several households might not be able to make use of the provision.

There was a significant relationship between caste and whether households had applied for the freeship provision. Of the households who had applied, 44.2% identified as SC and 41.5% as general. There was also a significant relationship between caste and if households were successful in securing a freeship seat. Of the households, who were successful, 49.1% identified as SC, 34.3% as general, and 16.7% as OBC. Importantly, there were a number of general category households who were able to secure a freeship seat and who reported their income to be above the eligibility criteria, or just on the cusp of it. This violates the RTE Act freeship provision and can result in further marginalization of equity-seeking groups as they may be not able to receive the opportunities created for them.

Regarding pre-admission, an encouraging finding from household interviews was that there was no ask for a donation, interview, or exam test for admission purposes. However, households reported facing multiple post-admission challenges such as financial pressures and costs as well as academic-related challenges. In addition to the aforementioned challenges, in-depth interviews with SC households revealed that they also faced various technology-related challenges. Furthermore, some of the households reported anxieties and fears related to the freeship provision and perceived social differences which reflects on the internalization of the societal differences and may have a certain level of impact on children's education. The aforementioned challenges can be detrimental as parents play an integral role as advocates, caregivers, and providers which demands that there should be certain accommodation measures for parents.

The inclusion and interaction patterns as experienced by SC households show that explicit differential treatment of children along the lines of separate shifts, classes, uniforms, and books were largely absent. However, for other aspects of the school experiences such as the teacher's attention and participation in extra-curricular activities has been largely mixed. Some of the social integration aspects have been reported by several parents such as teachers

making students sit together, sharing food, and not allowing the distribution of birthday gifts (in some schools). The accommodation measures regarding cost and extra classes for parents were largely absent. Several SC parents in the study asked for cost concessions.

Furthermore, patterns of parent-school interactions were mixed. Additionally, parents reported instances where due to their lack of fluency in English, lower education levels, and freeship status, they faced differences and barriers in communicating with non-EWS parents and with schools. These differences reflect the nuanced nature of the household experiences of the freeship provision where different aspects of admission and school are experienced differently by households. Some of the responses provided by the households reflect on the societal structures and the role of capital in the way school is experienced by families.

The aforementioned findings make one think about the efficiency of legislative enactment and outreach. Policies are not value-free (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009). Policy development and implementation are carried forward by people who have their own set of thought processes and biases. Therefore, it is important to reframe policy outreach mechanisms and include the perspectives of those for whom different legislations are being made and implemented. It is imperative that we include different perspectives, not at a symbolic level but rather at a deeper level, where the aim should be to understand how the processes can be made more representative and inclusive of people. This becomes even more imperative in the wake of the New Education Policy, 2020 where different provisions are underway or being implemented.

6.2 Limitations

Certain limitations of the study are that I was not involved in the data collection process which might result in a lack of contextual understanding. However, I have lived in India for over 20 years, particularly in Delhi, and am aware of the overall context. Also, I was

involved in data analysis for the larger research project as a research assistant, and I paid close attention to research and interview notes providing contextual descriptions. Additionally, I was a student in a private school when the freeship provision was implemented, and then later became a teacher and taught students who were admitted through the freeship provision, further providing some contextual understanding. While my positionality as a student initially and then teacher helped in understanding the data trends, it could also result in biases in the data analysis process, and I had relative privilege compared to the households in this study.

Secondly, data were collected from parents which was suitable to learn the household experiences. However, there may be some differences in representing children's experiences. The micro-study with children was helpful in this regard. Thirdly, using self-reported income has known challenges. The broader research project included a wide series of asset indicators and a novel set of MPI indicators to substantiate this. In the analysis reported here, I used field researcher assessments on asset verifications and excluded households that were assessed as under-reporting their income in income analyses.

6.3 Implications and Future Directions

While developing and implementing different education policies, initiatives, and laws are essential, it is imperative to ensure that different social groups are included in the schools which are the spaces of education policy implementation. The experiences shared by SC families in this study help uncover how certain ideologies are reproduced in the education system, which ideally should be the place of disruption of societal inequalities. The freeship provision and the related household experience depicted a complex picture.

Several households reported the absence of explicit differential treatment of children on the basis of class shifts, uniforms, schools, and other schooling aspects. However, several

households also reported that their children were not given adequate attention by the teacher, which calls for further monitoring to ensure that school implement the law with the same intention as that of its creation. While some SC households were successful in securing a freeship seat, there were several general category households who were ineligible at the time of the survey but were able to secure a freeship seat. The freeship regulations raise important implications for the education laws and policies as having a law is not sufficient, there should be more action to ensure effective implementation of the law.

Further research can focus on unpacking the schooling experiences of distinct and unique social groups which are collectively placed in the category of ‘disadvantaged group’. Furthermore, studies of households and children that completed their schooling under the freeship provision with the aim to unpack educational outcome differences, are important. Additionally, a comparative case study of specific schools can be undertaken to explore the implementation mechanisms of the freeship provision. Lastly, an evaluation of the teacher training component can be undertaken to unpack if the content is culturally sensitive, and child centred.

It is imperative for legislators and policymakers to take into consideration several systemic barriers that households might be facing. For example, having a freeship provision does not ensure that students will be enrolled in the same. According to Bhattarcharya (2021), there were various seats that were not filled under the freeship provision in different states. This calls for greater representation of marginalized groups so as to ensure that the education system benefits all. Lastly, as the New Education Policy (2020) is underway or being implemented in different phases, it is essential to take into consideration research on the RTE Act, and the new context emerging from the pandemic to create robust structures and systems where social integration is given attention.

Steps should include greater representation of marginalized households throughout the process of developing and implementing policies and laws. Furthermore, schools should be morally responsible for provisions that aim to provide equitable education. While I understand that these aspects might not be fully implemented, it is imperative to take different steps towards the larger goal of social integration and an education system that works for all.

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