

PRIVATE SCHOOLING IN INDIA: CHALLENGES IN ACHIEVING GENDER EQUITY

Executive Summary

India has witnessed a steep growth of private schools accounting for 46.2% of enrollment in 2020-21. However, girls are less likely to access private schools and preschools than boys; only 43.6% of enrollment in elementary education in 2020-21 consisted of girls. While there has been a convergence in the overall enrolment rates of boys and girls in India during the last two decades, private school enrolment rates for boys and girls have grown steadily apart. The pro-male bias in private school enrollment persists, irrespective of the rural/urban residence, household expenditure quartile, religion, caste, whether one's parents are educated or not and whether one resides in the northwest, north, east or south of the country. The extent of female disadvantage is higher among rural households and for non-eldest girls. This is partly because sending even one child to one would involve spending approximately 13% of the family's annual income for primary, 15.3% for upper primary, and 18.3% for secondary level of education. Having to choose a single child in a situation of financial constraint forces families to make impossible choices by discriminating between their children. Discrimination against girls is driven by deep-rooted cultural barriers including the perception of sons as old age security, girls' exogamy and Sanskritisation that restricts female labour force participation.

Other challenges face girls who become enrolled in private schools. Teachers' bias has a long-term impact on student learning making capacity building on gender-responsive teaching and learning methodologies critical. However, only 1.1% of teachers in private schools in India have received any in-service training. There are also concerns about safety in some private schools. In a recent survey, 77% of parents in private schools demanded protection of children from discrimination, bullying or other harassment based on parents' income, class, caste, gender, disability and other forms. Expanding private schools cannot ensure truly gender-transformative education. It will be critical to extend the RTE Act to the secondary level and strengthen the public education system, ensure the availability of desegregated data for admissions in private schools under Section 12 (1) (c) and regulate private schools to ensure gender balance in enrollment. At the same time, it will be important to ensure that private schools address gender bias and change social norms, ensure safety, address abuse and adhere to quality norms and provide space for Women's and Girls' Leadership.

Introduction

Girls face discrimination in India in terms of participation in schooling and sons are preferred over daughters in family resource allocation for education¹. Expansion of the schooling net has contributed to near parity in enrollment of the two genders at the primary level but girls remain disadvantaged in secondary education. India has witnessed a steep growth of private schools; the proportion of private schools in elementary education rose from 19.49% in 2007-08 to 22.74% in 2014-15² and stood at 28% in 2020. As per DISE 2020-21, 51% of enrollment is in

¹ <https://sci-hub.hkvisa.net/10.1080/03057920601024958>

² <http://udise.in/Downloads/Publications/Documents/ElementaryFlash2014-15.pdf>



government schools and 46.2% in private (unaided 36% and aided 10.2%) schools³. There are different kinds of private schools- expensive private schools that cater to the elites, less expensive ones for the middle class and at the lowest end of private schools is the unregulated low-fees sector which has expanded over the last two decades in response to the growing demand for "English medium" schools from the lower middle classes and the poor.⁴ This expansion of diverse forms of private provision has created new forms of discrimination⁵. This paper looks at the track record of India's private schools in catering to girls, especially those from marginalized communities and makes recommendations from an equity lens.

Inequitable Access for Girls in Private Schools

Globally, several studies indicate that girls are less likely to access private schools than boys; however, the evidence is context-specific⁶. In India, lower rates of enrollment of girls in private schools are corroborated by research in diverse geographies including Andhra Pradesh⁷, Uttar Pradesh⁸, Punjab⁹, West Bengal,¹⁰ Bihar and Maharashtra.¹¹ Similar trends hold for preschool education. More girls are enrolled in government pre-schools and schools while more boys dominate the enrolment in private schools.¹²

Current enrollment in unaided recognized private schools¹³:

	Primary (1 to 5)		Upper Primary (6-8)		Elementary (1-8)		Secondary (9-10)		Higher Secondary (11-12)	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Percentage2020-21	54.6	45.4	55.8	44.2	56.6	43.4	56.9	43.0	55.10	44.9

Source: UDISE 2020-21

While there has been a convergence in the overall enrolment rates of boys and girls in India during the last two decades, private school enrolment rates for boys and girls have grown

³ <https://dashboard.udiseplus.gov.in/#/reportDashboard/stdDashboard>

⁴ Geetha A B. Nambissan; Stephen J. Ball (2010). Advocacy networks, choice and private schooling of the poor in India. 10(3)

⁵ <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Shyamasree->

Dasgupta/publication/280727620_Expanding_the_School_Market_in_India_Parental_Choice_and_the_Reproduction_of_Social_Inequality/links/55c32d9308aeca747d5de47f/Expanding-the-School-Market-in-India-Parental-Choice-and-the-Reproduction-of-Social-Inequality.pdf

⁶ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/439702/private-schools-full-report.pdf

⁷ Woodhead, M., Frost, M., & James, Z. (2013). Does growth in private schooling contribute to education for all? Evidence from a longitudinal, two cohort study in Andhra Pradesh, India

⁸ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03057920902750400>

⁹ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0976399617715826>

¹⁰ [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Kumar-Rana/publication/262124983_Public-](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Kumar-Rana/publication/262124983_Public-Private-Interface_in_Primary_Education_A_Case_Study_in_West_Bengal/links/5e817f77a6fdcc139c13de2f/Public-Private-Interface-in-Primary-Education-A-Case-Study-in-West-Bengal.pdf)

Private_Interface_in_Primary_Education_A_Case_Study_in_West_Bengal/links/5e817f77a6fdcc139c13de2f/Public-Private-Interface-in-Primary-Education-A-Case-Study-in-West-Bengal.pdf

¹¹ Are Girls the Fairer Sex in India? Revisiting Intra-Household Allocation of Education Expenditure, Discussion Paper No. 5706, May 2011

¹² <https://www.hindustantimes.com/education/aser-report-2019-more-girls-in-govt-schools-boys-in-private-schools/story-vyfAZuzp951fJ08b02AVYI.html>

¹³ Private recognized unaided schools are schools which have received recognition from the government but do not receive any aid or grant from the government



steadily apart¹⁴. The steep rise in private schooling over the years can be attributed more to boys than girls.

The pro-male bias in private school enrollment persists, irrespective of the rural/urban residence, household expenditure quartile, religion, caste, whether one's parents are educated or not and whether one resides in the northwest, north, east or south of the country.¹⁵ Interestingly, however, no statistically observable pro-male bias or bias in favour of the eldest son was found in the northeast. In Meghalaya, the youngest girl inherits family property and the norm is for women to continue to co-reside with their parents after marriage; there is evidence to suggest a preference for girls' education in the state¹⁶. Thus, it is patriarchal norms which drive educational decisions that disadvantage girls.

There is also finer-grained nuance in terms of who attends a private school within the family. Even the richest households (quintile 5) are 5.8% points more likely to send their male children to private schools than the poorest households (quintile 1)¹⁷. Similarly, girls of Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) households have less probability of attending private schools. Girls from rich and poor families are both disadvantaged in attending private schools compared to boys; later-born boys are also favoured over firstborn daughters¹⁸. The extent of female disadvantage is higher among rural households¹⁹ and for non-eldest girls and lower for poorer households (with boys also potentially pulled into child labour), girls born to educated mothers having at least ten years of schooling and Christian mothers²⁰.

Leclercq (2003) observed that the addition of private schools has caused the schooling system to be "extended and diversified" rather than "universalized"²¹. The growth in the number of private schools in India has not resulted in more equitable enrolment patterns along gender, caste, and class lines.²² In a context of growing unregulated privatization and limited availability of public schooling, as research from Punjab suggests, privatization of education has been advantageous to the upper castes and boys and disadvantageous to SCs, OBCs and girls²³.

Boys may also be more likely to benefit from private supplementary tutoring. In West Bengal, 89% of male secondary and higher secondary students avail of private tuition; in Delhi 32.2% of

¹⁴ Soham Sahoo (2016): Intra-Household Gender Disparity in School Choice: Evidence from Private Schooling in India, *The Journal of Development Studies*, DOI:10.1080/00220388.2016.1265943

¹⁵ Absence of Altruism? Female Disadvantage in Private School Enrollment in India
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0305750X16303576>

¹⁶ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0305750X17304102?via%3Dihub>

¹⁷ https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-15-5366-0_6

¹⁸ https://gupea.ub.gu.se/bitstream/handle/2077/52351/gupea_2077_52351_1.pdf?sequence=1

¹⁹ https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Sarmistha-Pal-2/publication/331843961_Economic_Reforms_and_Growth_of_Private_School_Enrolment_in_India_Is_There_a_Cause_for_Concern/links/5c9011f592851c1df94a5935/Economic-Reforms-and-Growth-of-Private-School-Enrolment-in-India-Is-There-a-Cause-for-Concern.pdf

²⁰ <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/141567/1/dp9808.pdf>

²¹ Leclercq (F.), 2003, « Education Guarantee Scheme and Primary Schooling in Madhya Pradesh », *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 38, n° 19, pp. 1855-1869.

²² <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03054985.2016.1217688>

²³ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0976399617715826>



male students and 36.6% of female students at the primary level avail of private tuition²⁴. There has been a particular growth in private tuition during the pandemic rising to 39.2% in 2021, particularly among the most disadvantaged households. 39.2% of students in private schools took tuitions in 2021²⁵.

Costs of private schooling

At the heart of the exclusion of girls is the significant difference in the relative probability of parents investing in the education of boys and girls. Differences start opening from the age of five²⁶. Sending a child to a private school involves considerable expense. The average household expenditure on private education amounts to 7.5% of yearly per capita household expenditure compared with 2.7% in public schools.²⁷ According to NSSO (75th Round, 2017-18)²⁸, the annual expenditure for education at the primary, upper primary and secondary levels of education in government schools is Rs 1,253, Rs 2,181 and Rs 4,078 for these levels of education. The corresponding expenditure in private schools is Rs 14,485, Rs 17,360 and Rs 20,804. The average annual household income in 2012 in India was Rs 1,13,222.²⁹ Even if a family sends one child to a private school, it will have to spend approximately 13% of its annual income for primary, 15.3% for upper primary, and 18.3% for secondary level of education. The odds are further lower if the family is poor or belongs to one of the socially disadvantaged groups.³⁰

Family gender norms and girls' private school enrollment

Sending two becomes unaffordable. Having to choose a single child to educate in a private school in a situation of financial constraint and government schools of uneven quality forces families to make impossible choices by discriminating between their children. Those who are already most disadvantaged may find it reinforced.³¹ Discrimination against girls is driven by deep-rooted cultural barriers, including the perception of sons as old age security, girls' exogamy and Sanskritisation that restricts female labour force participation³². At the same time, the education of girls in private schools is promoted by the increased demand for educated brides including among lower-income and lower-caste groups with attendance in private schools acting as a status marker³³.

24 <https://www.livemint.com/Politics/Dk8ry9VQkyRXcsJVHp9aNJ/Private-tuition-outside-schools-colleges-thrives-in-India.html>

25 <http://img.aseercentre.org/graphics/householdmajorfindings2.pdf>

26 Himaz, R. 2009. "Is there a boy bias in household education expenditure: the case of Andhra Pradesh in India". MPRA Paper 21889, University Library of Munich, Germany

27 Singh, Renu; Bangay, Colin (2014). Low fee private schooling in India – More questions than answers? Observations from the Young Lives longitudinal research in Andhra Pradesh. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 39(), 132–140

28 https://www.mospi.gov.in/documents/213904/301563//KI_Education_75th_Final1602590967945.pdf/4d0dc4c4-a8f0-0795-df06-be25f2b3a6f7

29 <https://wid.world/document/n-k-bharti-wealth-inequality-class-and-caste-in-india-1961-2012/>

30 Soham Sahoo (2016): Intra-Household Gender Disparity in School Choice: Evidence from Private Schooling in India, *The Journal of Development Studies*, DOI:10.1080/00220388.2016.1265943

31 Härmä, Joanna (2009). Can choice promote Education for All? Evidence from growth in private primary schooling in India. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*

32 https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Sarmistha-Pal-2/publication/331843961_Economic_Reforms_and_Growth_of_Private_School_Enrolment_in_India_Is_There_a_Cause_for_Concern/links/5c9011f592851c1df94a5935/Economic-Reforms-and-Growth-of-Private-School-Enrolment-in-India-Is-There-a-Cause-for-Concern.pdf

33 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03057920601024958>

NSSO 2017-18 inquired into the differential reason for boys' and girls' attendance in private educational institutions. The proximity of the school, social reasons and quality of education played a more significant role in girls' education. The availability of special facilities and English as a medium of instruction appeared to carry more weight for boys³⁴. Another major reason for girls' education not being prioritized is the feeling that they would not continue their education beyond a perceived ceiling due to their engagement in domestic activities such as tending to siblings, animals, cooking, family's financial constraints, early marriage etc.³⁵ Thus, one study found that parents felt that since girls will not go for higher studies, they were enrolled in Hindi medium government schools³⁶.

Reasons for attending current private institutions ³⁷			
	Male	Female	Person
	Percentage		
Located nearby	26.0	28.0	26.8
Tried in a government institution, but did not get admission	11.8	10.2	11.1
Social reasons ³⁸	10.9	11.5	11.2
Due to the availability of specific facilities ³⁹	14.9	13.2	14.2
The medium of instruction is English	16.8	16.4	16.7
Quality of education in nearby government institutions is perceived to be not satisfactory	33.8	35.2	34.4
Other reasons	6.9	6.6	6.8

Source: NSSO 75th Round, 2017-18⁴⁰

Female teachers in Private Schools

Women account for 62% of teachers in unaided private schools and up to 73% in urban unaided private schools⁴¹. The overall feminization of teaching in the private unaided school sector⁴² should be seen in relation to the fact that their teachers are paid much less. It is also attributed to fact that women are culturally seen to be more nurturing reflecting sexist views⁴³. However, having women teachers academically benefits girl students in India. Research from AP suggests that this could be a result of higher quality female teachers and more competent female students 'self-selecting' into urban, private schools on account of gender norms and institutional structures of teacher hiring⁴⁴.

At the same time, the feminized nature of the private school teaching force implies that the women teachers in private schools were particularly hard during the pandemic⁴⁵ when many

³⁴ http://164.100.161.63/sites/default/files/publication_reports/Report_585_75th_round_Education_final_1507_0.pdf

³⁵ <https://scroll.in/article/999570/reducing-the-school-dropout-rate-for-girls-will-require-more-than-just-policy-interventions>

³⁶ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0976399619853720>

³⁷ http://164.100.161.63/sites/default/files/publication_reports/Report_585_75th_round_Education_final_1507_0.pdf

³⁸ e.g. children of colleagues, neighbors, relatives etc. also attending the school

³⁹ e.g. air-conditioned classrooms, state of the art teaching aids, transport facility, day boarding or hostel facilities, school timing, extracurricular activities, co-educational structure, separate toilet facilities for boys and girls

⁴⁰ http://164.100.161.63/sites/default/files/publication_reports/Report_585_75th_round_Education_final_1507_0.pdf

⁴¹ <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381329>

⁴² <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381329>

⁴³ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/in-a-first-women-schoolteachers-outnumber-men/articleshow/84126769.cms>

⁴⁴ <https://www.ideasforindia.in/topics/human-development/teacher-student-gender-matching-and-learning-outcomes.html>

⁴⁵ No Teacher, No Class: State of the Education Report for India 2021. New Delhi, UNESCO



private schools closed. 55% of private school teachers faced salary cuts during the pandemic and 65% of teachers' salaries were put on hold by low fees private schools⁴⁶. The for-profit schooling model has proven to be unsustainable in the face of the pressure of the pandemic with teachers hard hit in the process.

Teacher Bias and other school effects

Teachers' bias has been demonstrated to have a long-term impact on student learning. Thus, research shows that an increase in the gender-biased attitude of math teachers increases the female disadvantage in math performance; the effect is greater for medium-performing students and in classes where the majority of students are boys⁴⁷. Similarly, there is robust association between gender norms at the household and strict level and gender gaps in mathematics learning⁴⁸. Teachers fundamentally hold the same biases prevalent in society. Their capacity building on gender-responsive teaching and learning methodologies is important to change their views and norms.⁴⁹ However, only 1.1% of the teachers in private schools in India have received any in-service training⁵⁰ making it imperative for the government to ensure that teachers and non-teaching staff in private schools are trained on issues of gender discrimination.

Safety Concerns

A particular concern for girls' schooling is for schools to have safe and secure access and be well connected by road, especially for rural households.⁵¹ Distance and transportation costs contribute to decisions about choice of school; village private schools may be preferable and cheaper than sending a girl to a more distant "free" secondary school⁵². At the same time, ethnographic research into girls' experiences in private schools has looked at parental concerns about discipline and safety for girls as a form of parental control over women's movements; what constitutes discipline or safety are fairly gendered constructs that are based on the desire to maintain segregation of the sexes, control mobility and other behaviour of pre and adolescent girls⁵³.

There are real concerns about safety in some private schools. Media reports have highlighted incidents of gender-based violence and sexual assault in some private schools. In a recent incident, a Class XII girl committed suicide, and the police arrested a teacher of a private school under the POCSO Act and other sections for sexual harassment.⁵⁴ In another incident, the police

⁴⁶ https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/private-schools-report-20-50-dip-in-revenue-55-teachers-faced-salary-cut-121072500236_1.html

⁴⁷ <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/236336/1/dp14305.pdf>

⁴⁸ <https://arxiv.org/ftp/arxiv/papers/2110/2110.15312.pdf>

⁴⁹ https://unesdoc.unesco.org/in/documentViewer.xhtml?v=2.1.196&id=p::usmarcdef_0000374509&file=/in/rest/annotationSV/C/DownloadWatermarkedAttachment/attach_import_88edf536-9d80-47e8-8a0a-c83ac392f045%3F_%3D374509eng.pdf&locale=en&multi=true&ark=/ark:/48223/pf0000374509/PDF/374509eng.pdf#%5B%7B%22num%22%3A212%2C%22gen%22%3A0%7D%2C%7B%22name%22%3A%22XYZ%22%7D%2C69%2C25%2C0%5D

⁵⁰ [http://udise.in/Downloads/Publications/Documents/Flash_Statistics-2015-16_\(Elementary\).pdf](http://udise.in/Downloads/Publications/Documents/Flash_Statistics-2015-16_(Elementary).pdf)

⁵¹ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03057920601024958>

⁵² https://econpapers.repec.org/article/saeindgen/v_3a22_3ay_3a2015_3ai_3a2_3ap_3a243-264.htm

⁵³ https://econpapers.repec.org/article/saeindgen/v_3a22_3ay_3a2015_3ai_3a2_3ap_3a243-264.htm

⁵⁴ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/coimbatore/class-xii-girl-ends-life-due-to-sexual-harassment-by-teacher/articleshow/87675019.cms>



received over 78 complaints of sexual harassment meted out to young women and minor girls at schools in Chennai and other places within one week resulting in the arrest of a teacher at a private school.⁵⁵ A four-year-old lower kindergarten student in a private school at Nagarabhavi, Bengaluru, was sexually assaulted by a bus attendant on the school premises. The police said that the child had been subjected to days of abuse before the mother saw her crying one day.⁵⁶

Processes of police verification of those in contact with children need to be strengthened. The NCPCR has issued guidelines for child safety which call for setting up a grievance redress committee for child sexual abuse in schools.⁵⁷ The National Institute for Public Cooperation and Child Development has also recommended forming a committee in schools in its handbook on the implementation of the POCSO Act for school management and staff.⁵⁸ Mechanisms for grievance redressal must be strengthened to address incidents of abuse or school-based gender-based violence. In a recent survey, 77% of parents in private schools demanded protection of children from discrimination, bullying or other harassment based on parents' income, class, caste, gender, disability and other forms⁵⁹.

Legal and Policy framework about girls' experiences in private schools

One of the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals is to ensure that all boys and girls have access to free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education and to eliminate gender disparities in education by 2030. Article 10 of CEDAW, to which India is a signatory, mandates member states to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women to ensure their equal rights in the field of education.⁶⁰ There are international precedents of recognition of private schools reaching the poor. Thus, the World Bank IFC recently disinvested from for-profit fees-charging school education⁶¹.

India's legal and policy frameworks call for an educational system that is non-discriminatory. Article 14 ensures equality before the law and article 15 prohibits any discrimination on grounds of sex, caste or religion.⁶² Section 8 (c) of the RTE Act emphasizes the non-discrimination of any child belonging to a weaker section or a disadvantaged group, including gender, from pursuing and completing elementary education on any grounds. The National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution in 2002 suggested incorporating the right to free education (as a part of article 21A) for girls and students from SC and ST communities until they attain the age of 18 years⁶³. The recently introduced New Education Policy also promises to constitute a 'Gender-

⁵⁵ <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/chennai/complaints-of-sexual-assault-in-schools-continue-coming-in/article34693608.ece>

⁵⁶ <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/bangalore/school-is-not-always-the-safest-place-for-girls/article4284065.ece>

⁵⁷ <https://www.ncpcr.gov.in/showfile.php?lang=1&level=1&&sublinkid=1397&lid=1550>

⁵⁸ <https://www.nipccd.nic.in/file/reports/pocso12.pdf>

⁵⁹ <https://www.oxfamindia.org/knowledgehub/oxfaminction/status-report-education-during-pandemic-government-and-private-schools>

⁶⁰ <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/cedaw.pdf>

⁶¹ <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/oxfam-and-22-civil-society-organizations-applaud-ifcs-decision-stop-investing-fee>

⁶² <http://www.legalservicesindia.com/article/955/Women-Education-and-Media.html#:~:text=Article%2014%20ensures%20equality%20before,to%20any%20office%20under%20state.>

⁶³ https://www.thehinducentre.com/multimedia/archive/03091/ncrwc_3091109a.pdf



Inclusion Fund' to build the country's capacity to deliver equitable quality education for all girls as well as transgender students.

The RTE Act, in section 12 (1) (c) sets aside 25 per cent of seats in grade 1 of private unaided schools for children belonging to disadvantaged groups. 33.84 lakh children were admitted to private unaided schools under this provision in 2018-19⁶⁴. However, gender-wise desegregation is not available, making it difficult to understand the extent to which it has benefitted girls, especially from the marginalized section. Micro research points towards relatively gender-equitable trends in admissions^{65,66}. An examination of the data from state MIS of three states namely Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh and Odisha undertaken by IndusAction shows that the share of enrollment of girls under 12 (1) (c) was 50.5% in Uttarakhand, 48.1% in Chhattisgarh and 44.7% in Odisha. ⁶⁷However, the provision in 12 (1) (c) has not resulted in the closure of the gap in enrollment of boys and girls.

Several schemes have been launched by the Government of India to provide financial incentives to parents to promote the education of girls at the secondary and higher secondary levels (e.g. National Scheme of Incentives to Girls for Secondary Education (which explicitly excludes unaided schools) and the Balika Samridhi Yojana. However, these schemes often suffer from the fact that the quantum of aid provided is not sufficient to cover the expenditure on education⁶⁸.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

Expanding private schools cannot ensure the attainment of truly gender-transformative education. This requires a rights-based framework that targets the most vulnerable and transforms power hierarchies in learning spaces, communities and policy structures to give poor and vulnerable girls a voice and ensure their right to quality education is sustained.⁶⁹ To achieve this, the government needs to

- 1. Extend the RTE Act to the secondary level and strengthen the public education system** by enhancing spending on education to 6% of GDP with a view of gradually ensuring all government schools eventually meet the norms of Kendriya Vidyalaya schools. The existence of a robust, free and transformative public education system is critical for addressing gender-based exclusion.
- 2. Ensure availability of desegregated data for admissions in private schools under Section 12 (1) (c).** Gender desegregated data of admissions under Section 12 (1) (c) must be placed in the public domain.
- 3. Regulate private schools to ensure gender balance in enrollment:**
 - a. The guidelines for the implementation of the RTE Act's Article 12 (1) (c) should be amended to prioritize the admission of girls within each notified social category. Parity in enrollment under this section should be ensured.
 - b. Make maintaining gender parity in non-reserved seats a criterion for the up-gradation of extra sections within a grade or to a higher grade.
- 4. Address gender bias and change social norms**

⁶⁴ <http://loksabhadocs.nic.in/loksabhaquestions/annex/16/AU2122.pd>

⁶⁵ https://www.indusaction.org/wp-content/uploads/RTE-RetentionLearning-Survey_2019_Final-Version.pdf

⁶⁶ https://ruor.uottawa.ca/bitstream/10393/35008/1/Sutherland_Laura_2016_thesis.pdf

⁶⁷ IndusAction (2022). Brightspots 2022 [Unpublished manuscript].

⁶⁸ <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10671-021-09302-z#change-history>

⁶⁹ https://www.equalrightstrust.org/ertdocumentbank/ERR8_Elaine_Unterhalter.pdf

- a. Develop modules for training on gender, sexual harassment, social exclusion and inequality for Teachers as well as for orientation of PTAs and parents.
 - b. Undertake awareness campaigns with the parents and community members regarding the importance of girls' education to change gender norms
 - c. Ensuring that the teachers in private schools are trained in social exclusion, gender, anti-discriminatory and sexual harassment laws. Sensitization of teachers regarding issues of the LGBTQIA+ community, gender diversity and gender-nonconforming and transgender children should also be mandated.
 - d. Children in private schools should receive orientation on child rights and gender justice. Provision for the availability of counselling and therapy in schools must be made mandatory.
5. **Ensure safety and address abuse:** Schools should be mandated to follow NCPDR's guidelines which recommend the formation of a committee at the school level to deal with cases of sexual abuse. This should constitute 25% of students, management, teachers and parents. The representatives of the committee should be 50% female.
6. **Adhere to quality norms:**
- a. Ensure that the curriculum used by the private schools is gender-sensitive and does not promote gender stereotypes/ gender discrimination. Support SCERTs to review the textbooks used in private schools to ensure their adherence to the National Curriculum Framework to avoid bias in the curriculum and ensure adequate and appropriate representation of girls in textbooks and supplementary materials used in private schools.
 - b. Ensure all schools, including private schools, comply with the norms of quality, especially those critical for ensuring gender-transformative education. This includes provisions like trained teachers and separate toilets and other WASH facilities for girls as laid down under the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009.
7. **Provide space for Women's and Girls' Leadership**
- a. Gender balance must be maintained in the management committee of the school. At the same time, gender balance in other structures created for social accountability of private schools should have representation based on gender and from marginalized communities.
 - b. In line with Goa's provision for private school regulation, all schools should have elected student councils above grade 8. The guidelines for the same should encourage leadership by girls and children from marginalized communities. Student representatives may liaison with the management committee and/or PTA where necessary to address any concerns faced by children, particularly girls.

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