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CSR and Business Ethics in Education Sector: A Study of Western Rajasthan

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ABSTRACT

This research investigated the role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and business ethics in fostering the development of the education sector in Western Rajasthan, a region facing ongoing socio-economic difficulties, gender disparities, and inadequate infrastructure. The researcher utilized secondary data, policy documents, and case studies from initiatives led by the Azim Premji Foundation, Infosys Foundation, and Educate Girls. The analysis focused on how CSR initiatives improved educational access, enhanced equity for marginalized communities, and elevated the quality of teaching and learning, as well as it examined the ethical dimensions of CSR, emphasizing transparency, accountability, inclusivity, and long-term sustainability. The results indicated that organizations that integrated ethical principles into their CSR strategies achieved more effective and sustainable educational results. The research also pointed out implementation gaps, regulatory hurdles, and inconsistent stakeholder engagement. It concluded with suggestions for advancing socially responsible and ethically oriented CSR practices to promote inclusive educational development in Western Rajasthan.

Key Words- CSR, Business Ethics, Education sector, Western Rajasthan

INTRODUCTION

The education system in Western Rajasthan has faced ongoing issues like socio-economic challenges, gender inequality, poor infrastructure, and limited access to quality resources. Even with government programs like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and the Right to Education (RTE) Act, there were still gaps in equity, access, and inclusivity (MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 2023). This situation called for the involvement of non-state actors, especially businesses, through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

CSR in education means the voluntary efforts of companies to improve learning opportunities, infrastructure, and the quality of education (Carroll, 1999). In Western Rajasthan, efforts by groups like the Azim Premji Foundation, Infosys Foundation, and Educate Girls showed how CSR can help promote literacy, lessen gender gaps, and boost community involvement (Annual impact report 2021–22. Educate Girls., 2022). It is crucial to note that the success of these efforts depended not just on financial investments but also on the ethical values of the companies involved.

Business ethics were essential in making sure that CSR activities were transparent, accountable, and inclusive. Ethical guidelines highlighted values like fairness, responsibility, and sustainability, which helped to differentiate real educational efforts from those done merely for compliance or to enhance reputation (Crane, 2019). When CSR was driven by ethical standards, it helped build trust among stakeholders, increased the long-term effectiveness of initiatives, and aligned business objectives with community needs.

This research looked at how CSR, combined with business ethics, helped improve the education sector in Western Rajasthan. It investigated the impact of corporate actions, the ethical principles behind them, and their effects on students, teachers, and communities. By reviewing secondary data and case studies, the study offered insights into how CSR focused on ethics could reduce educational gaps in the region and promote sustainable, inclusive growth.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Author & Year	Research Title	Publication/Journal	Objectives	Finding and conclusion
Carroll, A. B. (1999)	Corporate social responsibility: Evolution of a definitional construct	Business & Society, 38(3), 268–295	To follow the development of CSR definitions and frameworks.	Created a four-part CSR model (economic, legal, ethical, philanthropic) and emphasized the significance

Author & Year	Research Title	Publication/Journal	Objectives	Finding and conclusion
				of ethics in business practices.
Crane, A., Matten, D., Glozer, S., & Spence, L. J. (2019)	Business ethics: Managing corporate citizenship and sustainability in the age of globalization (5th ed.)	Oxford University Press	To investigate the concepts and methods of business ethics and corporate responsibility.	Emphasized the importance of transparency, engaging stakeholders, and ethical responsibility for sustainable CSR practices.
Azim Premji Foundation (2021)	Issues in education: Teachers and teacher education	Azim Premji Foundation	To offer direction for fair teacher training and career growth.	Highlighted the importance of ethics and fairness in teacher training to improve learning quality.
Infosys Foundation (2022)	Annual report 2021–22	Infosys Foundation	To showcase CSR initiatives in education, healthcare, and rural development.	Improvements in school facilities, digital skills, and scholarships were reported; emphasized the need for transparency in CSR reporting.
Educate Girls (Program Evaluation) (2021–2022)	Evaluation of the Pragati program / Annual impact reporting Populi / Educate Girls (mixed-method evaluations & impact report)	Populi / Educate Girls (mixed-method evaluations & impact report)	To evaluate Educate Girls' programs aimed at re-enrolling teenage girls in Rajasthan and to measure their learning and life skills outcomes.	Reported significant re-enrolment and learning improvements thanks to community volunteers and government partnerships; the program was cost-effective but encountered issues like the distance to exam centers and maintaining learner support. It showcased a successful ethically focused, community-driven intervention in Rajasthan.
Ministry of Education (2023)	UDISE+ 2021–22: Unified District Information System for Education	Government of India	To offer statistical information about school enrollment, facilities, and gender equality.	Uncovered differences in educational access and infrastructure across regions, directing CSR efforts in an ethical manner.
The CSR Journal (2025)	Over 1800 Companies Contributed to CSR in Rajasthan in FY24	The CSR Journal	To provide details on the amount of CSR funds directed to Rajasthan in FY2023-24, along with the sectors that received the most funding.	Rajasthan got ₹1145.67 crore from 1851 companies; the education sector received the biggest share (₹546.43 crore). This shows that education is a key CSR priority in Rajasthan. However, the report indicates that the funding does not always lead to effective results or fairness across different regions.

Author & Year	Research Title	Publication/Journal	Objectives	Finding and conclusion
Behera, P. K., & Sahoo, J. (2025)	Role of CSR in the education sector of India: An analysis	ResearchGate Preprint	To assess the role of CSR in India's education sector.	The conclusion was that CSR played a positive role, but there were gaps in monitoring, ethical practices, and long-term sustainability.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To investigate the contribution of CSR initiatives on educational accessibility and quality in Western Rajasthan.
- To Investigate the implementation of CSR in western Rajasthan follows to ethical standards (transparency, equity, accountability).
- To determine the success factors and limitations in educational projects driven by CSR in Western Rajasthan.

HYPOTHESES

• Hypotheses 1

H0- There are no significant contribution of CSR initiatives to educational access and quality in Western Rajasthan.

H1- There are significant contribution of CSR initiatives to educational access and quality in Western Rajasthan.

• Hypotheses 2

H0- There are no significant implementation of CSR in the region follows ethical principles (transparency, equity, accountability).

H1- There are significant implementation of CSR in the region follows ethical principles (transparency, equity, accountability).

METHODOLOGY

This research study is primarily qualitative secondary data and employs descriptive analysis along with a comparative case study approach. The sources utilized include UDISE+/SDG state indicators, reports from NITI and various states, CSR state booklets, corporate foundation reports, and published impact articles from reputable sources.

The analysis is based on three case studies: the schools and scholarships of the Azim Premji Foundation, the educational programs of the Infosys Foundation, and the initiatives of the Educate Girls NGO in Rajasthan. Whenever feasible, the outcomes of the programs as reported by the implementers and third-party evaluations are referenced.

CONTEXT: EDUCATION IN RAJASTHAN

The education sector in Rajasthan has undergone notable progress in recent years, supported by state-level policies, UDISE+ tracking, and targeted schemes. Indicators such as school enrolment, infrastructural development, and access to primary education have shown steady improvement across much of the state. However, despite these positive strides, significant challenges persist in Western Rajasthan, particularly in districts such as Jaisalmer, Barmer, Bikaner, and Jodhpur. These districts are geographically vast, climatically harsh, and socio-economically disadvantaged, making the task of ensuring equitable education far more complex.

One of the critical concerns is the gap between enrolment and learning outcomes. While state dashboards indicate an impressive rise in gross enrolment ratios, field-based studies reveal that actual student learning levels in language and mathematics remain below national averages. This disparity reflects a systemic issue where access has improved, but quality and learning achievement have lagged behind. Another pressing issue is gender equality in education, particularly at the secondary and higher education levels. Though Rajasthan has narrowed the gender gap in primary enrolment, dropout rates for girls rise sharply in middle and secondary schooling. Factors such as early marriage, household responsibilities, and limited access to nearby secondary schools contribute to this challenge, disproportionately affecting girls in rural and desert regions.

The presence of out-of-school children continues to be another significant barrier. According to UDISE+ and state monitoring reports, Western Rajasthan accounts for a higher percentage of out-of-school children compared to other parts of the state. This is driven by multiple interrelated factors including poverty, migration of families for seasonal labor, lack of parental awareness, and the distance of schools from remote villages. In particular, nomadic communities and children from marginalized castes remain at greater risk of educational exclusion.

Policy summaries and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) progress reports from NITI Aayog further underscore the urgency of addressing dropout rates, gender inequities, and quality learning deficits. While Rajasthan has improved in several SDG 4 indicators (Quality Education), its western districts continue to reflect persistent gaps. These findings suggest that infrastructure-driven interventions alone are insufficient without complementary measures focused on pedagogy, inclusivity, and equity.

It is in this context that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and business ethics acquire critical importance. CSR initiatives in education, if guided by principles of equity, transparency, and accountability, can supplement government efforts in bridging these gaps. Organizations such as the Azim Premji Foundation, Infosys Foundation, and Educate Girls have demonstrated how ethically grounded CSR programs can re-enrol out-of-school children, train teachers, and enhance educational access in Rajasthan's underserved regions. Such interventions not only align with ethical business conduct but also directly contribute to achieving sustainable educational development in Western Rajasthan. (SDG India index & dashboard 2023–24. Government of India, 2023; Education, 2023).

CSR activities works under Carroll's Pyramid of CSR that offers a systematic method for examining the CSR responsibilities of educational institutions and their stakeholders.



source: <https://www.toolshero.com/strategy/carroll-csr-pyramid/>

Carroll's CSR Model in the Education Sector of Western Rajasthan

Carroll's model outlines four levels of responsibility:

1. Economic Responsibilities (Base of the Pyramid)

Ensuring the financial stability of schools, colleges, and universities is essential for Corporate Social Responsibility in education. Private institutions, especially in rural and low-income areas, need to implement affordable fee structures to make education available to everyone. Additionally, investing in modern facilities like digital classrooms, well-stocked libraries, and advanced labs is crucial for improving education quality and closing the gap between urban and rural areas. Moreover, offering scholarship programs for underprivileged students, particularly girls, not only fosters inclusivity but also tackles gender inequalities in higher education, thus promoting social equity and empowerment. (carroll, 1991)

2. Legal Responsibilities

Following state and central education laws, as well as UGC and AICTE standards and the Right to Education (RTE) Act, is a key duty of educational institutions. Keeping minimum quality standards, like suitable teacher-student ratios and clear admission processes, promotes fairness and accountability in the system. Equally crucial is the protection of student rights, which means shielding learners from exploitation, discrimination, or any unfair practices, thus creating a trustworthy and inclusive environment in the education sector. (India, 2009) (University Grants Commission , 2022)

3. Ethical Responsibilities

Maintaining fairness and integrity in exams, assessments, and job placements is a fundamental ethical duty of educational institutions. It is equally important to promote inclusive education that meets the needs of marginalized groups, especially in rural Rajasthan where socio-economic differences are more evident. Addressing gender equality by providing equal opportunities for female students is crucial for closing the educational gap and empowering women in the area. Additionally, implementing ethical teaching methods and a value-centered curriculum encourages comprehensive development, preparing students with both academic skills and a sense of moral and social responsibility. (carroll, 1991) (India, 2009)

4. Philanthropic Responsibilities (Top of the Pyramid)

Setting up free coaching centers and skill-development programs in remote areas like Barmer, Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, and Bikaner is vital for closing educational gaps and equipping students for future prospects.

In addition, running awareness campaigns focused on child education, digital literacy, and women's empowerment promotes a culture of learning and social advancement in local communities. Building strong partnerships with NGOs and community groups is also essential, as they help lower dropout rates and tackle the issue of out-of-school children in rural Rajasthan. Moreover, motivating alumni to engage in the development of rural schools creates a supportive and sustainable cycle, ensuring ongoing educational progress and empowerment. (Carroll, 1991) (Foundation., 2024)

Business ethics in the education sector of Western Rajasthan focuses on practices that promote transparency, accountability, equity, and sustainability. Transparency is shown through fair admission processes that remove hidden fees and unfair practices, building trust with students and parents. Accountability involves the proper management and use of CSR funds in educational projects to ensure they benefit the intended communities directly. Equity is crucial for closing the urban–rural educational gap by directing resources to underdeveloped districts, thus encouraging inclusive growth. At the same time, sustainability is becoming more important in this desert area, where schools are urged to implement eco-friendly practices like using solar energy and conserving water. Together, these business ethics principles enhance the credibility and long-term effectiveness of education as a catalyst for social change. (Carroll, 1999) (UNESCO., n.d.)

CASE STUDIES-

1. Azim Premji Foundation — localized, education-first philanthropy

The work of the Azim Premji Foundation in Western Rajasthan demonstrates all four aspects of Carroll's (1991) Corporate Social Responsibility model. Economically, it enhances the education system by funding rural teacher training programs, resource centers, and scholarships for disadvantaged students, making education sustainable without putting financial pressure on communities. Legally, the Foundation ensures its projects comply with the Right to Education (RTE) Act and NCERT/SCERT standards, maintaining accountability in public schools. Ethically, it focuses on inclusivity by improving educational outcomes in remote areas like Barmer, Jalore, and Jaisalmer, promoting gender equality, and opposing the commercialization of education. Philanthropically, the creation of Azim Premji University, fellowship programs, and community outreach efforts—including digital literacy and teacher mentoring—demonstrates its commitment beyond just legal requirements, with Azim Premji's promise to donate over 67% of his wealth highlighting this societal commitment. In Western Rajasthan, the Foundation works with thousands of government school teachers to enhance teaching methods, reduce absenteeism, and tackle local issues of gender inequality and inadequate learning outcomes, thus promoting education as a means for equitable development. (Foundation., 2024), (Carroll, 1999).

2. Infosys Foundation — corporate CSR with structured reporting

The Infosys Foundation takes a thorough approach to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in education based on Carroll's (1991) model. Economically, it invests in libraries, digital learning centres, and school facilities, ensuring that underserved communities have sustainable access to quality education. Legally, the Foundation follows India's CSR laws under the Companies Act, 2013, and collaborates with government schools to comply with educational standards and guidelines. Ethically, Infosys focuses on transparency by providing structured CSR reports and prioritizing fair access to technology-based learning, especially for rural and disadvantaged students. Philanthropically, it exceeds legal requirements by funding scholarships, teacher training, and innovative learning initiatives, while also supporting the preservation of art, culture, and heritage as part of a well-rounded education. This multi-faceted approach, supported by regular CSR reports, showcases the Foundation's dedication to socially responsible, inclusive, and transparent educational practices. (Carroll, 1991) (Foundation. I., (2023))

3. Educate Girls — NGO model rooted in Rajasthan practice

Educate Girls, an NGO based in Rajasthan, exemplifies the application of Carroll's (1991) CSR model in the education sector. Economically, it utilizes public-private partnerships and community volunteers to provide cost-effective solutions, ensuring the financial sustainability of programs for educating girls. Legally, it aligns with the Right to Education (RTE) Act and state education policies, aiding in enrolment initiatives and school reactivations while adhering to legal requirements. Ethically, the organization focuses on inclusivity and fairness by reaching out to out-of-school girls in remote areas like Jalore, Sirohi, and Barmer, promoting gender equity in educational access. Philanthropically, Educate Girls has established robust community networks through its Team Balika volunteer program, which raises awareness, offers life skills training, and provides mentoring for adolescent girls. This comprehensive approach not only meets all aspects of Carroll's CSR pyramid but also tackles the urgent issues of gender inequality and poor learning outcomes in Western Rajasthan. (Carroll, 1991), (Girls, 2023),

Analysis: How CSR and business ethics play out in Western Rajasthan

The analysis says that after reviewing all the studies related to CSR and business ethics, it was observed that everything revolves around Carroll's pyramid. Let us describe

Alignment with Local Needs

According to Carroll (1991), aligning with local needs involves both economic and philanthropic duties. Major initiatives, such as those from the Azim Premji Foundation and Infosys, tackle regional issues—like barriers to access, gender inequality, and quality disparities—through scholarships, teacher

training, and infrastructure projects. These actions promote the economic sustainability of education while also serving a philanthropic purpose by transcending profit motives. Case studies from Western Rajasthan show that intentional alignment with local contexts (for instance, girls' education in Barmer and Jaisalmer) leads to greater effectiveness.

Transparency and Accountability

Transparency corresponds to legal and ethical responsibilities in Carroll's framework. Organizations like the Azim Premji Foundation and Infosys uphold their credibility by creating detailed CSR reports, ensuring they meet legal requirements, and applying standardized monitoring systems. For instance, Infosys' organized CSR disclosures and HDFC Bank's CSR booklet for Rajasthan demonstrate legal adherence and ethical transparency. However, smaller projects or one-off donations often do not go through third-party assessments, resulting in accountability gaps. This absence of localized impact data weakens the ethical commitment to fairness and transparency, which can erode community trust.

Sustainability and Local Ownership

Sustainability is closely linked to economic and ethical duties in Carroll's model. Programs that enhance teacher skills and support government systems—like those from the Azim Premji Foundation and Educate Girls—promote lasting educational success. This method guarantees economic sustainability while ethically fostering systemic improvements instead of establishing separate frameworks. In contrast, initiatives that only concentrate on infrastructure (for instance, constructing schools without operational backing or community involvement) may serve as a temporary charitable act but do not address the economic and ethical aspects of Carroll's pyramid, leading to unsustainable results.

Equity and Exclusion Risks

Equity challenges bring attention to ethical and philanthropic responsibilities. Although prominent CSR initiatives, such as "model school" branding, might achieve philanthropic objectives, they can overlook remote and marginalized communities. Ethically, CSR initiatives should include targeting strategies for underprivileged groups (like girls, tribal communities, and migratory families) to avoid elite capture and promote inclusivity. Carroll's framework stresses that genuine CSR must weave fairness, justice, and inclusivity into its ethical foundation, ensuring that philanthropic actions do not unintentionally deepen social divides.

Challenges and Limitations in the Region

Western Rajasthan encounters numerous challenges that hinder the effectiveness and sustainability of CSR initiatives. The region's extensive and dry landscape, along with its low population density, greatly raises the logistical expenses related to overseeing and sustaining these initiatives. The Rajasthan CSR Report 2019 (CSRBOX) states that despite significant investments in various sectors, the effectiveness of CSR programs is frequently undermined by the difficulties in providing consistent oversight and support in remote locations. This issue is worsened by data shortages, as the lack of publicly accessible, localized, district-level learning outcome data complicates thorough impact assessments. The UDISE+ Report 2023-24 (EducationWorld) points out that many districts, especially in tribal and rural areas, fall behind in educational outcomes, making it hard to customize interventions to meet community needs effectively. Moreover, the fragmentation of initiatives presents a major obstacle. Many small-scale CSR projects tend to function independently without coordination with state systems, resulting in duplicated efforts and service delivery gaps. The Rajasthan CSR Report 2019 highlights that this absence of a cohesive strategy stops initiatives from utilizing synergies or addressing systemic issues in a comprehensive manner. Additionally, there is a worry about the trade-offs between branding and impact, as some CSR activities seem more aimed at boosting corporate visibility rather than creating lasting systemic change. Reports show that a significant share of CSR funding is concentrated in a few industrialized states, while marginalized areas like Western Rajasthan receive disproportionately low financial support, indicating that CSR efforts may sometimes favor corporate branding over genuine, sustainable impact. (CSRBOX, 2019), (EducationWorld, 2023)

Recommendations

To improve the effectiveness of CSR efforts in education, companies and foundations should focus on systemic changes instead of just individual projects. This means investing in teacher training, supplying quality learning materials, and backing governance systems, rather than just doing one-off infrastructure projects that often lack long-term plans. Moreover, using clear monitoring dashboards for district initiatives can boost accountability, with yearly reports on key metrics like enrollment, retention, and learning results making sure that progress is trackable and visible to the public. Involving community-based partners also enhances these initiatives by fostering cultural fit and local ownership, a method successfully shown by groups like Educate Girls and the Azim Premji Foundation. At the same time, state authorities and regulators are vital in coordinating and maximizing CSR contributions. Creating a state-level CSR-education coordination cell can help document corporate activities, focus on interventions in neglected panchayats, and enable shared funding for impactful systemic projects. Utilizing existing resources like state SDG dashboards and UDISE+ data lays a strong groundwork for targeted mapping and informed decision-making, ensuring that both corporate and state actions are directed towards sustainable improvements in educational results.

Conclusion

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and ethical practices in education can greatly improve access, quality, and learning outcomes in Western Rajasthan. This is especially true when interventions are tailored to local contexts, managed transparently, and designed for long-term sustainability. Customized strategies that tackle the specific geographic, social, and cultural issues of the region are essential for programs to make a real difference. For example, capacity-building initiatives for teachers and government institutions, like those from the Azim Premji Foundation, enhance institutional capabilities and support sustainable educational advancements. Scalable corporate funding, along with accountability measures similar to those used by the Infosys Foundation, guarantees that resources are used effectively and outcomes are closely monitored. Additionally, community mobilization efforts, such as those by Educate Girls, encourage local ownership, cultural relevance, and active involvement, which are vital for success in remote and underserved regions.

Combining these strategies with Carroll's CSR Pyramid highlights the various responsibilities of organizations involved in educational development. At the economic level, corporations offer the financial and infrastructural support needed to improve access to quality education. The legal responsibility ensures that CSR initiatives follow government regulations and standards, such as aligning projects with UDISE+ data and state educational policies. Ethical responsibilities focus on fairness, equity, and transparency in program design and execution, making sure that marginalized communities in Western Rajasthan are included and benefit. Ultimately, philanthropic duties involve voluntary efforts that go beyond just following rules or making profits. This includes training teachers, engaging with the community, and implementing educational programs that support long-term social growth. By improving collaboration among businesses, foundations, government bodies, and community groups, sharing localized impact information, and focusing on fair resource distribution, the ethical, legal, economic, and philanthropic aspects of CSR—as described in Carroll's model—can be fully achieved. This comprehensive strategy enhances both the developmental effects and the ethical roles of CSR in Western Rajasthan, promoting inclusive, high-quality education that tackles immediate issues while also fostering long-term systemic advancements.

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