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Teaching Under the RTE Mandate: Unpacking the Challenges Faced by Educators

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Abstract

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, popularly known as the Right to Education (RTE) Act, came into action in India from April 1, 2010. The Act introduces a number of changes in education delivery through schools in India. Many of the changes are simply revolutionary, and if they are implemented properly will vastly improve the system of imparting education in the country. The Act is a landmark in the history of education related legislation in India. The act has also stressed on the importance of teachers in the implementation of RTE. Teachers have important formal and informal roles in the education sphere, and their influence stems from there. This paper attempts to highlight the dilemma faced by teachers, to ensure that in the classrooms and in the communities the rights of children to education are accorded the highest value. As a result, their response to the RTE Act, which accords such an important role to teachers, needs to be taken. In recognition of this and of the present challenging conditions that impact teacher effectiveness, a questionnaire was framed to get hold of the attitude of teachers on their duties and responsibilities as stated in Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act 2009. It was administered to a sample of 50 teachers presently teaching in private and government schools of New Delhi. The data was analysed qualitatively. The result investigates teachers' views about approaches to discipline problems in schools such as corporal punishment. They testified to feeling overburdened with administrative and other duties and thus were unable to devote time to teaching, thus directly impacting the students. The study puts in the picture, the efforts shown by teachers in issues of classroom management, assessment of students, along with their taking charge of enforced norms of RTE Act.

Key Words: The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, Role of Teacher, Responsibility, Struggle.

Introduction

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, popularly known as the Right to Education (RTE) Act, came into being in India from April 1, 2010. The Act introduces a number of changes in education delivery through schools in India. Many of the changes are simply revolutionary, and if they are implemented properly will vastly improve the system of imparting education in the country. The Act is a landmark in the history of education related legislation in India. However, some of the provisions of the Act, although included with noble intentions, will have unintended consequences that might counter some of the advantages of the new system itself.

Some of the major provisions of the Act are as under:

- Free and compulsory education to all children of India in the six to 14 age group;

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o No child shall be held back, expelled, or required to pass a board examination until completion of elementary education;

o Provides for 25 percent reservation for economically disadvantaged communities in admission to Class One in all private schools;

“It cannot be an argument for curtailing a right, once granted; simply that society would pay a further price for extending it. There must be something special about that further cost...to say that although great social cost is warranted to protect the original right, this particular cost is not necessary. Otherwise, the Government’s failure to extend the right will show that its recognition of the original right is a sham, a promise that it will intend to keep only until that becomes inconvenient” –Dworkin

Role of a Teacher in a School

“The teachers place in society is of vital importance. He acts as the pivot for the transmission of intellectual traditions and technical skills from generation to generation and helps to keep the lamp of civilization burning”

-- **Dr. S. Radhakrishnan**

The teacher is the yardstick that measures the achievements and aspirations of the nation. The worth and potentialities of a country get evaluated in and through the work of the teacher, the people of a country are the enlarged replica of their teacher. They are the real nation builders. On them rests the failure or the success of the system. A school without teacher is just like a body without the soul, a skeleton without flesh and blood, a shadow without substance. As social engineers, the teachers can socialize and humanize the young by their man-like qualities.

It needs no description that the teacher is the pivot of Indian Educational system. Undoubtedly, they have a huge role to play to put this act successfully into operation.

The specific duties of the teachers under this Act

- o Maintain regularity and punctuality in school
- o Complete entire curriculum in specified time
- o Assess the learning ability of each child and provide supplementary additional instruction if required
- o Hold regular meetings with parents and apprise them of regularity in attendance, learning abilities, progress and other issues concerning the child.

o Here is a reflective, smoother, and more cohesive rephrasing of the passage:

Availability of Teachers and Required Pupil-Teacher Ratio:

o When we look at the current scenario of teacher availability and the mandated pupil–teacher ratio, the challenges appear immense. The requirement of recruiting

nearly five lakh new teachers and constructing an equal number of additional classrooms to achieve the 30:1 ratio feels daunting. Although there are around seven lakh teachers serving in the thirteen lakh recognized primary schools, a significant portion—nearly three lakh—are either untrained or still undergoing training.

o In many states, the heavy dependence on para-teachers, many of whom also lack proper training, further complicates the picture. NUEPA’s recent report highlights the gravity of the situation: Bihar ranks at the top among states with the poorest pupil–teacher ratio, closely followed by Uttar Pradesh. The reality becomes even starker when I consider that roughly 35 percent of primary schools in Uttar Pradesh operate with a pupil–teacher ratio of 60:1. Half of these schools have only three teachers or fewer, and 38 percent of those teachers are para-teachers.

o Reflecting on these numbers, it becomes clear that achieving the pupil–teacher ratio envisioned in the Act is still far from reach. Under the present circumstances, it feels less like a practical goal and more like an aspiration we are struggling to move toward.

RTE handicaps teachers

To ensure that in the classrooms and in the communities the rights of children to education are accorded the highest value, the reaction of teachers to the RTE Act, were taken. In recognition of this and of the present challenging conditions that impact teacher effectiveness, a questionnaire was framed to get hold of the attitude of teachers on their duties and responsibilities as stated in Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act 2009. It was administered to a sample of 50 teachers presently teaching in private and government schools of New Delhi. Consequently, a lot of issues related to the implementation of the RTE Act underscored.

According to Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, it is the duty of the teacher to maintain school attendance.

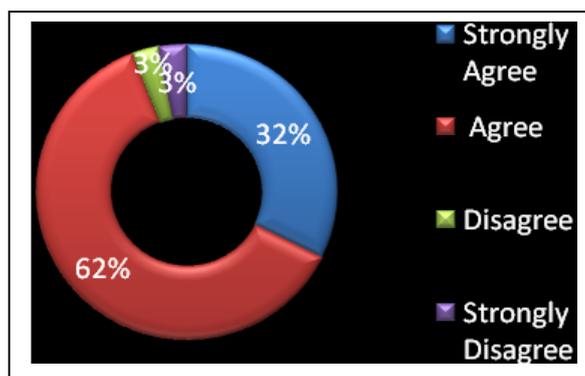


Fig.1.By attending class regularly, students are more likely to keep up with the daily lessons and assignments

83% of respondents appreciated this decision admitting that there is a momentous connection between attendance and academic performance of students (fig.1) and 94% teachers also agreed that by attending class regularly, students are more likely to keep up with the daily lessons and assignments (fig.2).

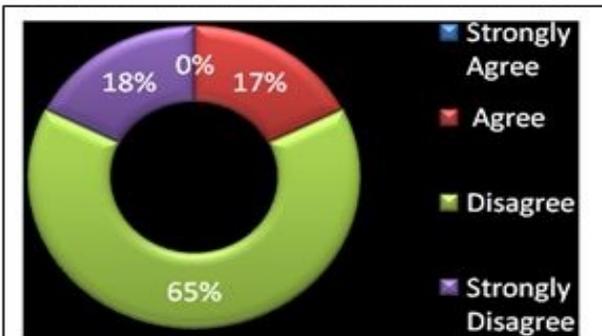


Fig.2.No momentous connection between attendance and academic performance of students

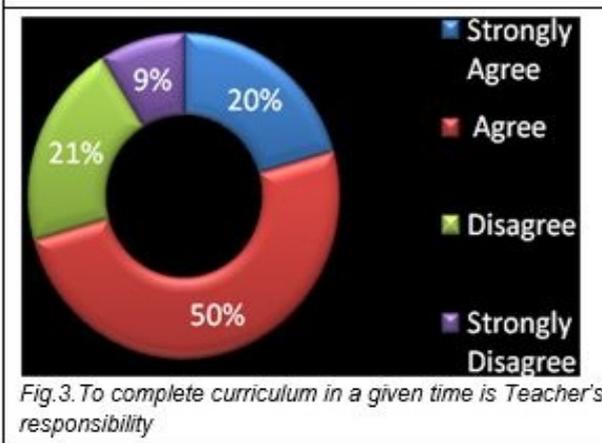


Fig.3.To complete curriculum in a given time is Teacher's responsibility

70% teachers accept that it is their responsibility to complete curriculum (fig.3). However, 91% of them correspond to struggle to complete syllabi because of vast course content and other administrative work. They also support to assess the learning ability of each child. (fig.4).

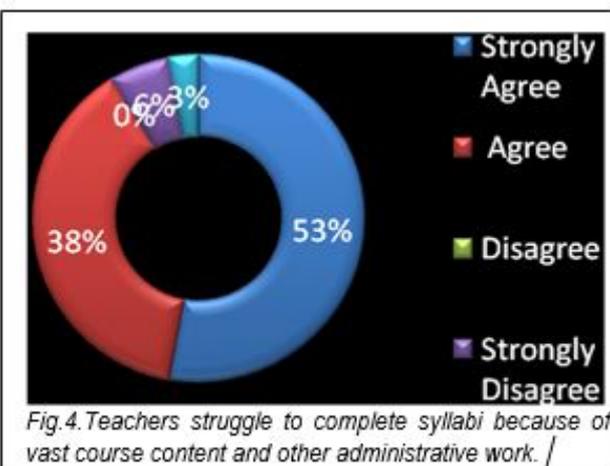


Fig.4.Teachers struggle to complete syllabi because of vast course content and other administrative work. /

According to Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, "No teacher may fail a child in any class until he/ she completes his/her elementary education".

In a way, there won't be any kind of assessment of the children. 50% of teachers opposed this pronouncement of the act relating to screening and failing students (fig.5).

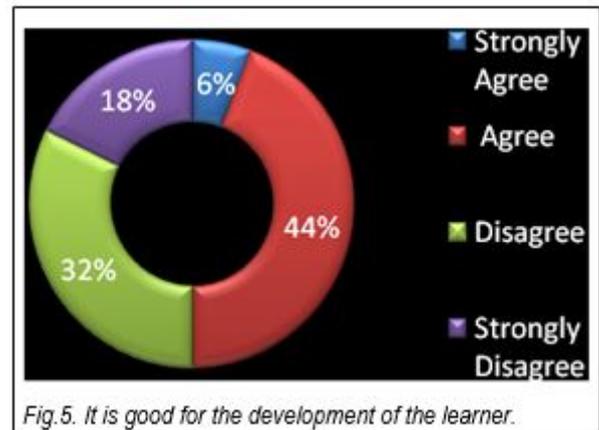


Fig.5. It is good for the development of the learner.

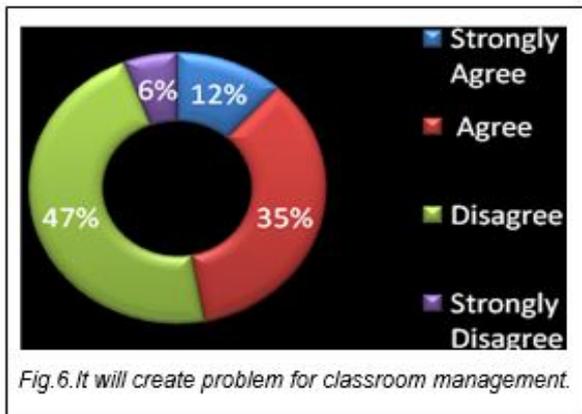
The intention of this regulation is certainly to support those children who are not able to attain the level of performance required to gain admission into the next class. Through this provision, the Government wants to reinforce that performance standards are relative, that failing a child is an unjust mortification for the child's personality. While all these reasons hold well, a number of issues remain unaddressed:

1. *Skill development:* While it is true that failing a child may well cause the child to intensely doubt his or her abilities, the Government fails to appreciate that failing a child also serves as a protective mechanism. Under the mechanism of failing, a child whose skills are clearly deficient with respect to his or her peers is held back in the same class and denied promotion.

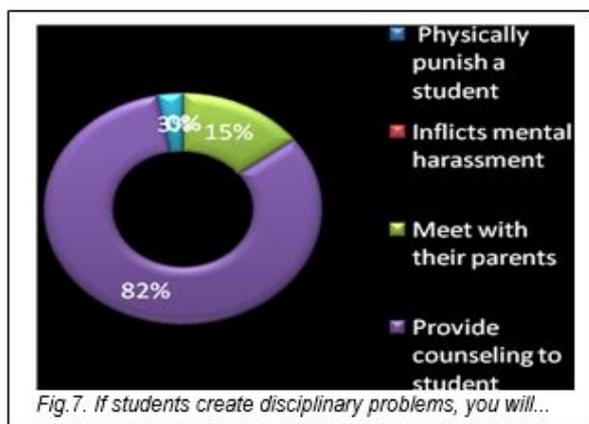
2. *No feedback mechanism:* Failing also acts as an important feedback mechanism, making the child and his parents and teachers aware that the child is deficient in critical skills. It also acts as feedback for teachers – if more students fail in a teacher's class than those in other teachers' classes, the teacher's methods and effectiveness should be put under the scanner. However, under the new system, when every child is promoted to the next class irrespective of performance, both parents and teachers in general put in less of a marginal effort to ensure development of the child.

3. *Postponing development doesn't work:* One reason often put forward is that failing creates a frustration and lack of confidence in the child, causing them to drop out of school. However, a child that is deficient in skills will find it even harder to catch on in a senior class. The frustration and inclination to quit will therefore be even stronger. Ultimately, the child may be inclined to drop out of school in frustration with the system (experienced over a number of years) rather than with just a particular teacher or class. With the latter, there is still hope to bring the child back into the system.

4. *Inability to deal with failure:* A child who does not learn the value of accountability, performance, and hard work in the initial stages of its schooling will be ill-equipped to meet these constants of life in later stages. The child will grow up not with resilience, but with a sense of entitlement, feeling that it is the duty of teachers to provide special training when he or she does not perform. When this sense of entitlement is suddenly removed after 14 years of age, the child may well feel deprived, unsupported, and unable to deal with performance expectations. Rewarding competence is the rule in all professions and vocations – why not embed it into the child at an early age?



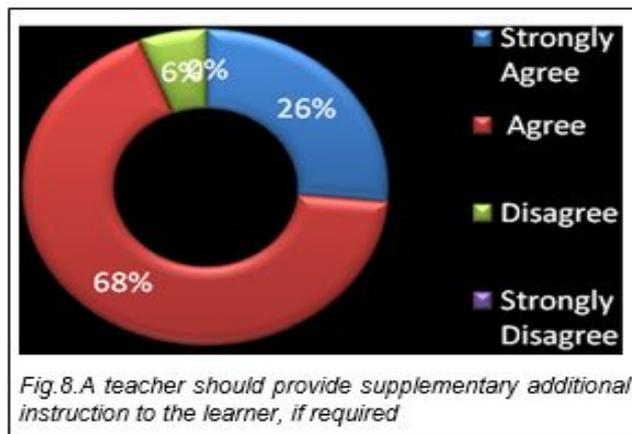
However, 47% of teachers also believe that this will create classroom management problem (fig.6). Doing away with disciplinary action against students, even if they violate the disciplinary code of the school is a dangerous trend. Our schools in no way support corporal punishment. Corporal punishment is against the law. If students create disciplinary problems, 82% teachers rejoiner to provide counselling to them (fig. 7).



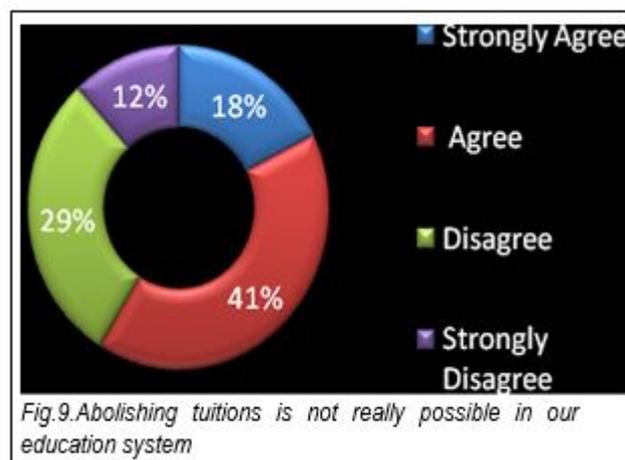
The Act has not mentioned anything about how to bring discipline into the classroom. Teachers cannot take any kind of actions against children who bully their fellow classmates. Teachers cannot be strict with children who are constantly neglecting their studies.

The RTE act states that no child can be detained or failed till class VIII. In a way, there won't be any kind of assessment of the children. Competitive spirit among the children will be lost. In the process, the entire education system will suffer.

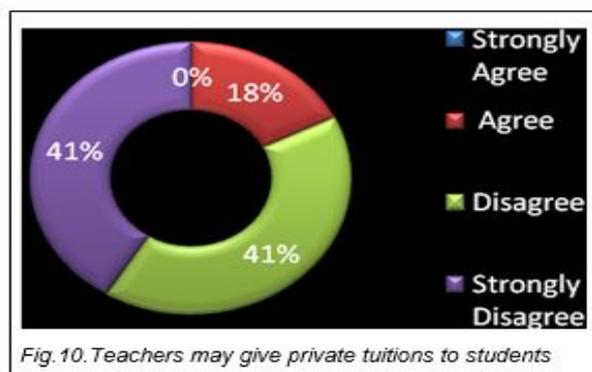
Furthermore, 94% teachers are in agreement to provide supplementary additional instruction to the learner, if required (Fig.8).



59% of them believe that abolishing tuitions is not really possible in our education system (fig. 9). The primary reason why teachers underperform in the classroom and then require their students to attend private tuitions is the want of additional income, unfettered by a loose monitoring and punitive system. Banning teachers from taking private tuitions does not do away with the cause of the problem.



Adding up 82% of the respondents gave their consent to Prohibition of private tuition by teachers (fig.10). The intention again is worthy of appreciation – any provision that improves standards of teaching in the classroom and removes perverse incentives for teachers to earn money from their students through unethical means is welcome.



Teachers support inclusive education and the provision of 25 % seats for economically weaker section and 44% of them also believe that it will make the task of teacher more challenging. Teachers feel the need to be trained for implementing recommendations given in Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act

Some Suggestions

1. *Allow failing*: Failing acts as a critical feedback mechanism for both students and teachers, and allows academic pressure to dissipate at the first stage itself, rather than accumulate and cause greater harm later. Use failing as a monitoring, feedback, and correction mechanism instead – both for students as well as for their teachers. This will also ensure lesser burden on the system and on weak students in higher classes. Also ensure that teachers do not use failing as a tool of fear by ensuring impartial evaluation and a strong formal escalation mechanism for teacher misconduct.

2. *Enforce strictly the ban on private tuitions and referrals*: While the ban on private tuitions, as enforced by the RTE, should be strictly enforced, it should be supplemented with a ban on referring students for private tuitions too. Again, an escalation and reporting mechanism is very important to ensure that the system works. Deviations should be punished severely.

Conclusion

The mechanism of monitoring relies heavily on inspections, assessments and punishments, with very little guidance, support and nurturing of teachers. We believe these are some of the major reasons for teachers becoming de-motivated. Therefore, even as more children are brought into the schooling system through the RTE Act, unless we bring in significant changes in our current approach to both children's and teachers' needs, its impact will remain limited.

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