

## A STUDY ON THE AWARENESS ABOUT THE RTE ACT, 2009 AMONG TEACHERS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN WEST BENGAL

### Abstract

\*Mr. Ajit Mondal

*The study was undertaken to explore the awareness about the Right to Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act) among the teachers of elementary schools in the districts of Nadia and North 24 Parganas, West Bengal. As sample 160 teachers of elementary schools were drawn from the two districts. A questionnaire comprising 20 multiple choice items was used by the researcher. The study revealed that the level of awareness of the teachers about the Right to Education Act was not up to the mark, although the act has been implemented for more than three years. Major findings of the study revealed that the teachers of Government-aided schools were more aware than that of the Non-aided private schools in West Bengal.*

**Keywords :** Right to Education, Human Right, Elementary Education, Development

Since independence, India has undertaken several initiatives to achieve universalisation of elementary education (UEE), which has yielded mixed results. The Right to Education legislation in India has seen a chequered history in evolving from a directive principle to a fundamental right. Attempts to make the right to free and compulsory education available to the Indian child began a little more than a century ago. In 2002 the 86<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act made education a fundamental right for Indian children in the age group of 6-14 years. At last, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Act (RTE), 2009 was passed by the Indian Parliament on 4<sup>th</sup> August, 2009 and came into effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2010. The RTE is the first central legislation in the landscape of Indian elementary education that puts the responsibility of enrolment, attendance and completion of elementary education of 8 years for the age group of 6 to 14 years on the government. This Act has got seven Chapters which are divided in thirty eight Sections and one Schedule. The title of the RTE Act incorporates the words 'free and compulsory'. 'Free education' means that 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 elementary education. 'Compulsory education' casts an obligation on the appropriate Government and local authorities to provide and ensure admission, attendance and completion of elementary education by all children in the 6–14 age groups. Children with disabilities will also be educated in the mainstream schools. But the implication of the Act and its effectiveness may be estimated in terms of achieving the goal of Universal Elementary Education (UEE). The researcher has been familiar with the results of few current literatures in this area in the light of emergence of his study.

Islam & Chakraborty (2013) have studied the awareness level of equitable quality cited in the RTE Act, 2009 among in-service secondary school teachers in the three districts of West Bengal – Murshidabad, Nadia and Purulia. The study revealed that the level of awareness of student-teachers towards equitable quality in the light of RTE Act, 2009 among teachers is not encouraging. Rajput & Aziz (2013) conducted a case study to examine the level of awareness regarding the Right to Education Act, 2009 among urban slum dwellers of JJ Resettlement Colony of Madanpur Khadar of New Delhi and observed that 20% were not sending their children to school because of lack of birth certificates, lack of fund to spend on their child's education, lack of interest, lack of regular livelihood and lack of awareness about the RTE Act among the parents. 88% parents of the sample were unaware of the provisions of the RTE Act. Vithalrao (2011) executed an enquiry to know the awareness about child rights among teachers in Mumbai city and the study revealed that significant difference was found in the awareness level of male and female teachers but all the teachers were aware of the child rights more or less. Kumar & Sharma (2011) revealed in his study that teachers are significantly more aware than that of parents. Sunita (2010) made a study on teachers' literacy towards the child rights and she found that the secondary school teachers were aware about the child rights at satisfactory level. The reviewed studies have showed that there is a dire need of an in-depth study on the awareness among elementary school teachers about the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009.

The enactment of this Act has been hailed as a historical moment in the crusade of universal literacy (Mondal & Mete, 2013). The RTE Act has a robust provision which makes it mandatory for private school to admit 25% of

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\*Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Surendranath College for Women (University of Calcutta)

the students from economically weaker section of the society to supplement the government's efforts aimed at universalizing elementary education in the country. The RTE Act puts emphasis on quality elementary education which has been considered as an integral part of right to education. Chapter V of the RTE Act brackets some terms and norms under which the quality of elementary education is to be ensured, i.e. adequate teacher- student ratio (the 1:30 ratio specified in the Act) and further that mother tongue should be the medium of instruction as far as possible, development of various skills in child, good & effective infrastructure, qualified and competent teachers, and comprehensive and continuous evaluation method of child's understanding of knowledge etc. The experience however, tells that the RTE Act is not being implemented in all seriousness in letter and spirit. The disheartening fact is however, that there are problems relating to drop - out rate, low levels of learning achievement and low participation of girls, tribal and other disadvantaged groups despite the enactment of much-hyped RTE Act. Success can be achieved only when there is qualified and competent teaching staff always ready to accept challenges and ensure the quality education. Concerted efforts including building awareness among teachers are required to make the RTE Act a reality. If our teachers are not well informed of the basic provisions of this Act, it will remain a piece of paper. So it is very important and essential to assess the awareness of elementary school teachers of West Bengal towards Right to Education Act 2009. The study may help the policy makers and implementing authorities to identify the problems which prevent the practice and implementation of RTE Act at the schools in West Bengal.

#### Objectives of the Study

- To find out the difference in level of awareness between male and female teachers of schools of the RTE Act, 2009.
- To compare awareness of the RTE Act between the

elementary school teachers belonging to urban and rural areas.

- To compare awareness of the RTE Act between the elementary school teachers belonging to Govt. - aided and Non-aided private Schools.

#### Method

**Population and Sampling :** In the present study analytical and descriptive survey method was employed. It was designed to explore awareness of the RTE Act among teachers. The study was undertaken with an eye to finding out the levels of awareness of the RTE Act among the elementary teachers in West Bengal with respect to gender, locale and type of school. A questionnaire was used on 160 elementary school teachers in the Nadia and North 24 Parganas districts of West Bengal who were selected by random sampling method. Among these Elementary Teachers, 80 were male and rests 80 were female. 80 elementary teachers belong to rural areas and other 80 elementary teachers belonged to the urban areas of the two districts. 80 elementary teachers belonged to the govt.-aided schools and other 80 elementary teachers belonged to the non-aided private schools.

**Measures :** A self- made questionnaire was developed by the researchers. It contained 20 multiple choice items which covered five aspects of the Act. They were Responsibilities of Schools and Teachers, Norms and Standard for a School, Formation and Functions School Management Committee, Responsibilities of the Appropriate Government and Protection of Rights of Children under the RTE Act. The test was administered and the responses made by elementary teachers to test the awareness of the RTE Act were scored, tabulated and analyzed using Mean, Median, Standard Deviation and 't' test statistical techniques. Secondary data about the Right to Education Act, 2009 was collected through various Government documents, books, articles and websites.

#### Analysis and Interpretation of Data

*Table 1:-Awareness of the RTE Act between Male and Female Elementary School Teachers*

Group	N	Mean	S. D.	Mean-Difference	't'-Value
Male	80	10.34	2.9	30.79	1.88
Female	80	9.55	2.41		

Result reveals that the 't' Value is 1.88 which is not significant at 0.05 level. It means that male and female elementary school teachers are in the same level of awareness. Hence

Null Hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the awareness of the RTE Act between male and female elementary school teachers is accepted

*Table- 2: Awareness on the RTE Act among Teachers of Urban & Rural Elementary Schools*

Group	N	Mean	S.D.	Mean-Difference	't'- Value
Urban	80	10.19	2.59	0.49	1.16
Rural	80	9.70	2.83		

Result reveals that the 't' Value is 1.16 which is not significant at 0.05 level. It means that elementary school teachers belonging to urban and rural areas have equal awareness.

Hence Null Hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the level of awareness of the RTE Act among elementary teachers belonging to urban and rural areas is accepted.

*Table- 3: Awareness of the RTE Act between Govt. aided & Non-aided Private School Teachers*

Group	N	Mean	S. D.	Mean-Difference	't'- Value
Govt. Schools	80	10.92	2.99	1.96	4.9
Non-Govt. Schools	80	8.96	1.99		

Result shows that the 't' Value is 4.9 which is significant at 0.05 level. It indicates that the null hypothesis -There exists a significant difference in the level of awareness of the RTE Act among elementary school teachers belonging to Govt. aided and Non-aided private schools in West Bengal has been rejected. Hence, it is postulated that the teachers belonging to Govt.-aided schools are more aware about the RTE Act in comparison with Non-aided private elementary schools teachers in West Bengal.

The total means score '9.94' (49.7 %) shows that the overall awareness about the RTE Act is less than 50%. It conveys the message that the teachers included in the study are less aware about the RTE Act (Right to Education Act, 2009). From above analysis we infer that awareness of the male teachers is 51.7 % and awareness of the female teachers is 47.75 %, the difference between them is not significant. Therefore we can conclude that they are equally aware. Awareness among teachers belonging to urban areas is 50.95 % and rural area is 48.5 % and the difference between this score is not significant. Therefore we can deduce that they are equally aware. But the awareness among Govt. school teachers is 54.6 % and Non-Govt.school teachers is 44.8 %, the difference among them is significant which reveals that the elementary teachers of Govt. schools are much more aware about the RTE Act as compared to elementary teachers of the Non-Govt. schools.

#### Findings of the Study

1. Male and female teachers of elementary schools do not differ significantly in the level of awareness of

the RTE Act.

2. Elementary school teachers belonging to urban and rural areas do not differ significantly in the level of awareness of the RTE Act.
3. The level of awareness of the RTE Act is higher among elementary school teachers belonging to govt. aided than teachers of non-aided private schools.

#### Implications of the Study

From the above analysis and interpretation of the results, it can be said that the outcome of the last one is shocking. It is true that there is no significant difference on awareness between the teachers in urban and rural areas and between the male and female teachers in the Nadia and North 24 Parganas districts of West Bengal. However, the teachers teaching at elementary level run by private schools do not have the sufficient knowledge on the RTE Act and consequently they are less aware about the provisions under the Act in providing good quality elementary education guaranteed by the Act to the children between the age group of 6 – 14 years. The government school teachers and the teachers working in private schools have made a marked difference in awareness of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009. The teachers working in the government schools are better informed and well aware. Now the question is that how it will serve the mandate of the Act. It's a cause of big anxiety and poses a daunting challenge before the policy makers. This is the situation in West Bengal,

even after more than two years of implementation of this Act. The possible reasons could be that the entire awareness campaigns (short term training courses, seminars, workshops, conferences) launched by the government centered on the government schools and its teachers. It seems to the researcher that no efforts whatsoever have been made by the government to create awareness among the teachers working in private schools in West Bengal. If non – government private school teachers are not aware about the Act, urban areas would be failed to achieve the goal of the RTE Act to universalise the elementary education because private schools are mostly located in urban areas.

### Suggestions for Effective Implementation of the RTE Act

The government needs to plan and organize short term course/seminars/workshops/conferences together with sufficient resource material for the elementary schools teachers primarily serving in the private schools also together with their counter parts working in government schools across the country followed by the refresher courses/training programs. Such initiatives will build awareness among all elementary teachers and in return these will make the teachers informed and thereafter they will be able to give their best to achieve the sets objectives of RTE to make it attainable and successful. Moreover, teachers irrespective of management need to have at their disposal a deep fund of empathy, commitment, conviction and ability and motivation to persevere; of knowledge and resources to respond and create meaningful educational experiences for all children.

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