

Learning Environment Reforms: Student Perceptions of Safety and Discipline Post-RTE Act Prohibition

Monalisa Khanikar¹, Dr. Baloy Bhattacharjee²

¹Research Scholar, Department of Legal Studies, Arunachal University of Studies, Arunachal Pradesh, India
Email: monalisa12[at]gmail.com

²Research Supervisor, Department of Legal Studies, Arunachal University of Studies, Arunachal Pradesh, India
Email: khodameenalunya[at]gmail.com

Abstract: *This study looked at how pupils' perceptions of safety and discipline in Indian schools were affected by the ban on physical punishment under the Right to Education (RTE) Act. Surveys, interviews, and focus groups were all used in this mixed-methods descriptive study, which was carried out at a few government and private schools in Patna, Bihar. The findings showed that when the RTE rules were put into place, kids' perception of emotional and physical safety significantly improved. Counseling, discussion, and participatory disciplinary techniques have gradually replaced punitive tactics in schools, improving teacher-student interactions and creating a more welcoming environment. Nonetheless, issues remained, such as a lack of knowledge about students' rights, sporadic verbal reprimands, and insufficient training for teachers in positive discipline techniques. The study emphasized the need for ongoing efforts to institutionalize empathy-driven, child-centered education and guarantee the successful implementation of safety and discipline rules, even though legal reforms under the RTE Act have improved school conditions.*

Keywords: Right to Education Act, corporal punishment, school safety, discipline reforms, student perceptions, teacher-student relationship, child rights, inclusive education

1. Introduction

Students' academic development, mental health, and general growth are significantly influenced by their school's learning environment. The Right to school (RTE) Act, 2009, was a historic reform in India that sought to guarantee not only universal access to school but also the development of a secure, welcoming, and kid-friendly environment for all students. The RTE Act's ban on corporal punishment was one of its most revolutionary clauses, signaling a dramatic departure from the use of harsh punishment and a move toward methods based on respect, empathy, and positive reinforcement. Recognizing that fear-based discipline erodes self-esteem, learning motivation, and teacher trust, the law aimed to protect children's rights.

The shift in Indian schools from a punitive to a constructive disciplinary culture has remained difficult and inconsistent notwithstanding the legal framework. Many educators have had difficulty adjusting to non-violent and participatory forms of discipline since they were raised in an era of authority-based classroom management. In a similar vein, the institutional culture, teacher attitudes, and awareness of children's rights have all influenced how safe, equitable, and emotionally supportive students have felt. Therefore, assessing the Act's success in creating a supportive learning environment requires a knowledge of how pupils view safety and discipline following the RTE prohibition's implementation.

This study investigated how students' views of safety and wellbeing in schools have been impacted by the disciplinary measures implemented under the RTE Act. Its main goal was to determine how much the prohibition on physical

punishment has altered classroom dynamics, teacher-student relationships, and the general atmosphere of the school. The study aimed to determine if the RTE Act's goals have been achieved in reality by documenting students' lived experiences using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The findings illustrate both the advancements made and the difficulties that still influence the educational landscape, offering insightful information about the changing dynamics of child safety and discipline in Indian schools.

2. Literature Review

Nott (2019) highlighted the inconsistencies in India's neoliberal approach to educational welfare and looked into how the RTE Act was being implemented in Bengaluru. The analysis demonstrated that although the RTE Act sought to advance social justice and equal access, administrative flaws and trends toward privatization limited its use. Without guaranteeing significant pedagogical change, schools frequently adopted surface-level compliance with the Act's requirements, especially those pertaining to discipline and child safety. This led to a contradiction where official policies that supported inclusivity coexisted with unofficial behaviors that strengthened exclusion and inequality.

Tiwari (2014) investigated how the ban on physical punishment affected the disciplinary attitudes of teachers in Delhi schools and discovered that, despite being aware of the law's restriction, many of them still used authoritarian or fear-based approaches to classroom management. According to the survey, teachers firmly believed that physical punishment was required to uphold discipline and order, especially in classrooms that were overcrowded and underfunded. Such attitudes persisted, highlighting the disconnect between

behavioral change and legislative reform and suggesting that instructors needed further institutional support and training in order to implement effective disciplinary measures.

Tiwari (2019) also examined how educators view the prohibition on corporal punishment and how it affects teaching methods. The results demonstrated that although educators formally adhered to the ban, many thought the rule undermined their power. As a result, some teachers replaced physical punishment with verbal reprimands or emotional coercion, and non-violent disciplinary measures were employed inconsistently. The study came to the conclusion that teachers' attitudes and the school's dedication to creating a compassionate, rights-based learning environment were critical to the success of the prohibition on corporal punishment.

Bose, Ghosh, Sardana, and Boda (2021) examined Delhi's school system's overall regulatory framework and showed how informal market forces impacted adherence to laws like the RTE Act. According to their research, schools were able to get around some RTE requirements, such as those that guaranteed the safety and wellbeing of children, because of regulatory ambiguity. Although there were legislative frameworks in place to safeguard students, the authors contended that ineffective oversight undermined enforcement, leading to inconsistent application of discipline measures.

Pattanayak (2021) questioned if policy promises were reflected in real practice by critically examining the inclusive education discourse in India. According to the study, systematic injustices, strict curricula, and ingrained hierarchies continued to influence educational environments, meaning that inclusion frequently remained a rhetorical concept. In this setting, the RTE's goal of creating safe and encouraging learning environments frequently ran counter to the realities of resource limitations, insufficient teacher preparation, and exclusionary practices. The author underlined that structural transformation was necessary in addition to policy creation for an education system to be truly inclusive and non-punitive.

Menon and Sharma (2023) examined obstacles to girls' education in India and concentrated on gender aspects within the larger context of educational reform. According to their findings, girls' engagement and retention rates were significantly influenced by their sense of physical and emotional safety at school. They pointed out that many schools still lacked safeguards against psychological and disciplinary harm to female pupils, even though the RTE Act was designed to guarantee equality. This demonstrated the ongoing necessity of gender-sensitive strategies in the context of reforming child protection and punishment.

3. Materials and Method

One of its most important clauses, which reflected a move away from traditional punitive methods of discipline and toward more inclusive, participatory, and sympathetic approaches, was the ban on corporal punishment. The process of altering teacher attitudes and school culture remained gradual and intricate in spite of the legislative necessity. The

purpose of this study was to find out how students felt about the changes in their classroom, the conduct of their teachers, and their general sense of security following the implementation of the RTE ban. The study also sought to ascertain whether the changes had successfully helped to make classrooms safer and more encouraging for all students.

Research Design

A mixed-methods descriptive research strategy was used for the study. This method was selected in order to record the qualitative depth of students' perceptions as well as the numerical trends. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were used to acquire qualitative data, while structured questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data. A thorough grasp of how the RTE reforms affected pupils' daily experiences with safety and discipline was made possible by the mixed-methods approach. The findings were both socially and statistically grounded because to the mix of narrative accounts and numerical patterns.

Study Area and Population

The study was carried out in a few Patna, Bihar, government and private schools. These educational institutions were selected to reflect a range of institutional and socioeconomic backgrounds. Students in grades six through ten made up the study population because they were old enough to consider their experiences with safety and punishment in the classroom. In order to give contextual information about the institutional implementation of the RTE provisions, teachers and school officials were also included as secondary participants. Including both public and private schools made it easier to spot differences in how policies are implemented and how students are treated in various educational systems.

Sampling Technique

To guarantee a balanced representation of responders from both public and private schools, a stratified random selection technique was employed. A certain number of pupils were chosen at random from each school to take part in the survey. Additionally, a select group of educators and administrators were specifically selected for interviews due to their direct engagement in discipline-related decision-making and student management. This sampling strategy allowed for meaningful comparisons between various institutional contexts while guaranteeing the diversity and applicability of the replies.

Data Collection Tools and Techniques

Three primary tools were used to gather data: focus groups, interviews, and questionnaires. Both closed-ended and open-ended questions were included in the survey to gauge students' opinions on their school's general climate, the fairness of disciplinary measures, and their sense of physical and emotional safety. Teachers and administrators were interviewed in order to learn how institutions responded to the ban on corporal punishment and the difficulties in implementing alternative disciplinary measures. Small groups of kids participated in focus groups to share their opinions, feelings, and experiences about school safety and discipline. The validity and dependability of the results were enhanced by the triangulation of these techniques.

Variables and Indicators

The study concentrated on important aspects of school life that showed how post-RTE reforms had affected things. These included how children felt about their mental and physical safety as well as how teachers behaved. The type and frequency of disciplinary actions, the degree of student involvement in upholding discipline, and the level of communication and trust between teachers and students were other factors. Students' knowledge of their rights under the RTE Act, specifically with relation to the ban on corporal punishment, was also investigated in this study. Following the implementation of the legislative ban, each of these indicators helped to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how the learning environment had changed.

Data Analysis

In order to summarize student replies, descriptive statistics including frequency, percentage, and mean scores were computed after quantitative data was evaluated using statistical software. To find variations in attitudes across grade levels, gender, and school kinds, a comparative analysis was carried out. Qualitative data acquired from interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed and examined thematically. We found, classified, and analyzed recurring themes pertaining to emotional health, safety, and discipline. This two-pronged strategy enabled the study to combine empirical data with firsthand accounts, offering a comprehensive understanding of the post-reform educational landscape.

4. Results and Discussion

After the Right to Education (RTE) Act was put into effect and physical punishment was outlawed, the study's findings provided a thorough insight of how children felt about the safety and disciplinary climate in schools. The conclusions were based on quantitative survey data that was bolstered by qualitative information gleaned from focus groups and interviews. The findings demonstrated notable gains in students' emotional health, perception of safety, and justice in disciplinary actions. Nonetheless, differences were noted between socioeconomic backgrounds, gender, and school kinds. The debate highlights the discrepancies between policy and practice in attaining child-friendly education and interprets these findings in light of the RTE's goals. Following the implementation of the prohibition on corporal punishment, most kids reported feeling more secure in the classroom. Students said that there had been a significant decrease in the use of physical punishment and that teachers were being more circumspect in their approach. There was also a noticeable improvement in emotional safety, which is the absence of verbal abuse, humiliation, and dread of authoritative figures.

Safety Parameter	Before RTE (%)	After RTE (%)	Change Observed (%)
Felt physically safe in school	58	87	+29
Reported absence of corporal punishment	42	91	+49
Felt emotionally safe with teachers	61	84	+23
Confident to report misconduct	35	68	+33

The results showed that after RTE, safety perceptions had considerably improved. According to qualitative reports from focus groups, pupils were increasingly characterizing their professors as "understanding" and "approachable." However, a small percentage of students—especially those attending government schools—reported receiving verbal reprimands or experiencing emotional stress as a result of too much academic pressure.

Changes in Disciplinary Practices

After the RTE requirements were put into effect, a significant change occurred in the nature of disciplinary procedures. In most cases, verbal warnings, counseling sessions, and moral training took the place of physical punishment. Additionally, students noted that more participatory methods were being used, allowing them to voice their thoughts at disciplinary hearings.

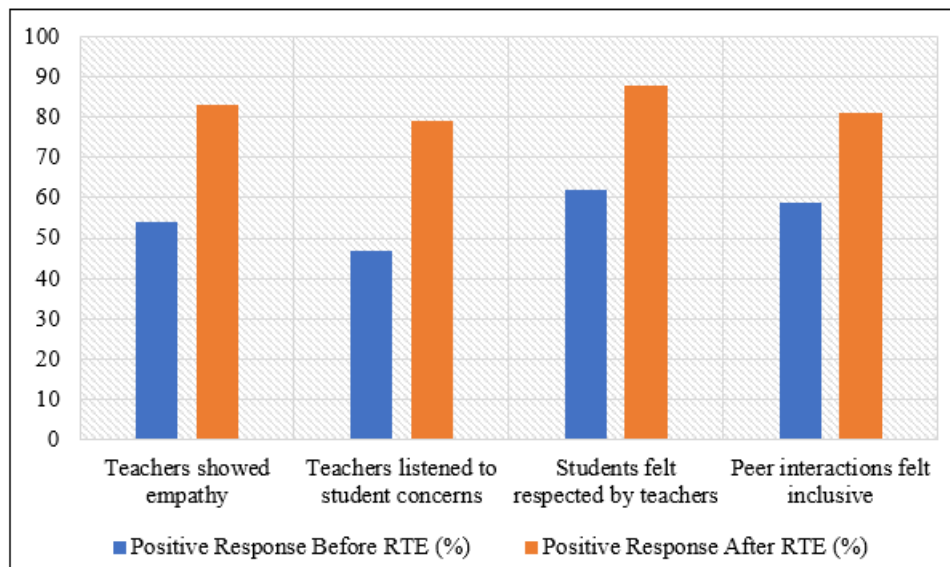
Type of Disciplinary Action	Prevalence Before RTE (%)	Prevalence After RTE (%)
Physical punishment (slapping, hitting, etc.)	46	7
Verbal reprimand	72	64
Counseling or guidance sessions	18	67
Peer mediation or student involvement	10	45
Parental involvement in discipline	25	52

According to the data, disciplinary actions have shifted from being punitive to being corrective. According to teacher interviews, the majority of schools have started implementing student involvement initiatives and behavioral counseling as alternatives to punishment. There is a need for additional training in positive discipline approaches, nevertheless, as some teachers indicated difficulties in keeping the classroom under control without resorting to fear-based tactics.

Teacher-Student Relationship and School Climate

The RTE ban changed the teacher-student dynamic more broadly in addition to having an impact on disciplinary measures. Most kids said that their teachers were now more understanding and focused on their issues. There were higher levels of mutual regard and trust, and the school climate was seen as more inclusive overall.

Relationship Dimension	Positive Response Before RTE (%)	Positive Response After RTE (%)
Teachers showed empathy	54	83
Teachers listened to student concerns	47	79
Students felt respected by teachers	62	88
Peer interactions felt inclusive	59	81

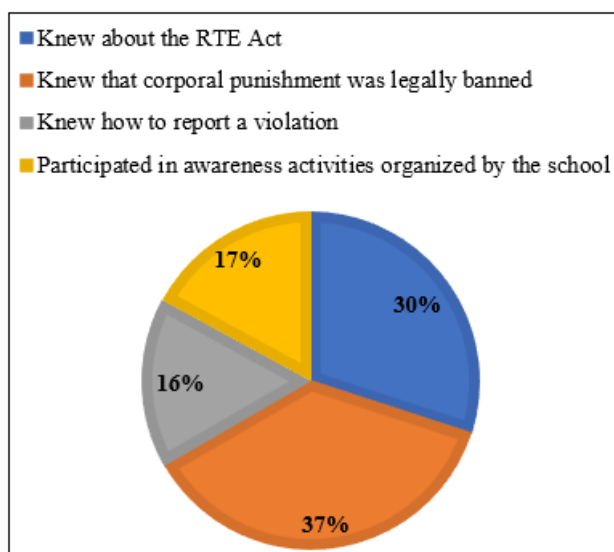


After the modifications, students perceived their schools as more friendly, according to qualitative studies. Students reported feeling more comfortable voicing their thoughts, and teachers were referred to as "mentors" rather than "authorities." Although they were mostly non-violent, some students at private schools said that there were nevertheless stringent behavioral requirements, especially with regard to academic achievement and consistent discipline.

Awareness and Implementation of RTE Provisions

Evaluating students' awareness of their rights under the RTE Act was a crucial component of the study. The findings demonstrated that although a significant number of students were aware that corporal punishment was prohibited, very few were completely aware of their legal rights and options.

Awareness Indicator	Percentage of Students Aware (%)
Knew about the RTE Act	72
Knew that corporal punishment was legally banned	88
Knew how to report a violation	39
Participated in awareness activities organized by the school	41



These results indicated that although the awareness campaign had achieved some success, there was still a lack of depth in comprehension. The prohibition itself was more well-known to the students than the grievance redressal procedures. Many schools had not yet set up official child protection or complaint cells, as mandated by the RTE guidelines, according to administrator interviews.

5. Discussion

The findings unequivocally showed that pupils' perceptions of safety and discipline improved measurably as a result of the RTE ban on corporal punishment. There was a discernible change in schools toward child-centered and non-violent methods. These results were consistent with earlier studies that suggested educational reforms could improve students' mental health and change institutional cultures.

However, the continued use of authoritarian attitudes and sporadic verbal reprimands in certain schools suggested that teachers' views had not completely changed. Teachers' concerns underscored the need for ongoing capacity building and behavioral training, especially in the area of classroom management. Furthermore, the lack of knowledge among students regarding their rights under the RTE Act exposed a crucial disconnect between the creation of policies and their grassroots execution.

The results indicated that the RTE Act had played a significant role in changing the moral underpinnings of discipline in Indian schools, moving away from pedagogy based on compliance and toward pedagogy based on rights. However, ongoing knowledge, teacher sensitivity, and institutional accountability were critical to the reform's success. The general increase in safety perception demonstrated that, although it needed to be reinforced via community involvement, monitoring, and training, legal restriction could be a powerful driver for cultural change.

6. Conclusion

According to the study's findings, kids' opinions of safety, justice, and emotional health in schools have greatly

improved since physical punishment was outlawed by the Right to Education (RTE) Act. Teachers increasingly embraced supportive and participative ways to punishment as a result of the reforms, which promoted a more inclusive and respected learning environment. Even though physical punishment had mostly stopped, there were still sporadic verbal reprimands and lingering authoritarian attitudes, which suggested that educators still needed to undergo more thorough behavioral change. The results showed that maintaining a culture of empathy, safety, and dignity in Indian classrooms required more than just legal reform; ongoing teacher preparation, student awareness initiatives, and more robust institutional frameworks.

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