

A Critical Appraisal on Perception of the Parents about RTE Act

Shashikala G.M.

Research Scholar, Rani Channamma University Belagavi,
Karnataka, India.

Dr. Yarriswamy M.C.

Associate Professor, Rani Channamma University Belagavi,
Karnataka, India.

Abstract

Education is one of the important basic needs in present scenario. The instrumental role of education can be fully realized only if the education imparted in schools is of a desired quality. The investigator tries to explore the status of RTE Act implementation to improve the quality of elementary education in Davangere district, Karnataka state. The status of implementation of RTE Act is analysed by availability of infrastructure satisfaction level among parents. From the findings it is concluded that there are misconceptions about RTE Act especially among parents. The irony is that this is despite the fact that most of the parents have little or no awareness about the provisions of the RTE Act. This is indicating in the preference that RTE should be repealed. The levels of satisfaction are higher in rural areas compared to the urban areas. There is an urgent need of intervention to improve the implementation of RTE Act regarding its all aspects.

Keywords: RTE Act, perception, parents.

1. Introduction

In recent times, it has constantly been stated that the 21st Century will create a knowledge society. The creation of knowledge society will probably be unique in the history of the human race since it will be the first time that humanity will create wealth on the basis of intangible ideas. In the past most of the wealth created was on the basis of brick and mortar establishment which in turn required some form of educational advances. An accepted conventional wisdom is that there is a doubling of global scientific output nearly every nine years. Knowledge society requires as its basis the creation of wealth which is in turn underscored by advances in liberal and scientific education across large sections of the populace. It is for this reason that over the past few decades countries like India are increasing their investments in education. Unlike in the past where plant, machinery and manufacturing units were the symbols of wealth, in recent years the perception of wealth has changed with the onset of new industries. The 'industries of the future include those related to different aspects of technology'¹, those which can be 'financialised' and those that make up 'intangible capitalism'². OECD opines that they "enjoy a comparative advantage because the education level

of their population was higher, but this advantage is vanishing as tertiary education expands in many developing and emerging economies. Countries are increasingly competing not only through the education level of their population but also through the quality of skills, their effective use and efficient allocation of skills to industries", especially if they have to participate in the increasingly global value chains³. Thus, any growth in employment in the era of rapid technology induced economic change requires individuals to constantly acquire new skills. Inability to do so will mean that citizens will stare at the "spectre of uselessness"⁴ due to redundancy of skills.

Indian constitution made amendment which states that the state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years. The right of children to free and compulsory education act 2019 received assent of the President of India on 26th August, 2009.

2. Objectives

The objective of the study was to take a holistic view of the context and impact of RTE among different stakeholders in one district of Karnataka. Our objective is to look at the numbers and gain an understanding of the impact from a cross-section of stakeholders to understand their

satisfaction levels. The objectives of the present study are:

- 1) To understand the implementation of RTE Act, especially in the context of the benefits accrued to students of Elementary Schools in Davangere District.
- 2) To understand the perception of parents and the contribution of RTE in the district.

3. Review of Related Literature

Right to Education (RTE) has been a matter of much debate – often without consensus. Investigator review some of the more pertinent studies that are relevant to our perspective and area.

Saroj Vyas(2011) studied the awareness among elementary school teachers in the National Capital Region on Right to Education Act. Among the other things that have been highlighted by the study, it revealed that the government teachers are more aware about the provisions of the RTE when compared to non-government teachers.

Sakshi Jain and Meenakshi Mital (2011) in their study titled “Assessment of SarvaShikshaAbhiyana in Sarvodaya Schools of Delhi”. The study reveals certain positive outcomes of the programme but also identifies certain loopholes. One of the major deficiencies identified by the researchers includes the low awareness about the objectives and provisions of the programme. These in turn negatively affected their efficacy.

Niranjanaradhya.V.P, and Abhinav Jha (2013) have undertaken a Case Study of Gram Panchayat – Ramnagar in Karnataka. They believe that RTE still needs to traverse a number of miles before its achievements can be termed as meaningful. Their study reveals that the impact of the RTE Act has no meaning for the primary stakeholders and has had little impact. The problems are compounded by the fact that there is a general lack of awareness about the meaningful provisions in the act.

Sushant Chandra’s (2016) study on RTE in Uttar Pradesh highlights some of the important issues plaguing education in that state, especially in the low enrolment rates for economically weaker section and disadvantaged category children who are eligible for 25 percent reservation under the RTE. He opines that the State has issued a number of regressive

notifications which have not gone beyond the parent Statute, which is contrary to the spirit of the Act.

4. Method Used

Investigator applied different methods, the study depended on a combination of methods drawn from quantitative and qualitative analysis underscored by the use of structured questionnaire interviews of different stakeholders. The quantitative analysis entailed a survey of 200 schools using a structured questionnaire based interviews.

5. Sample Selection

The investigator used the uniformly random selection method in Davanagere district in Karnataka. Based on the availability of the number of schools in each taluk- government, aided and unaided schools were selected. From each school thus selected the one parent were interviewed using the structured questionnaire method.

6. Hypotheses of the Study

1. There is no difference in the attitude and approach among rural or urban based parents regarding RTE in the district.
2. There is insignificant difference in the attitude and approach of parents of children in government and private schools towards RTE
3. There is a general lack of awareness about RTE in the district among parents.
4. There are benefits and improvements due to RTE in the expansion of school education in the district.

7. Tools Used in the study

- ❖ General data sheet for school information
- ❖ Structured questionnaire for parents and
- ❖ Interview.

8. Statistical Techniques Used

Investigator have deployed the use some of the useful and preferred methods such as Standard Deviation, cross tabulations, Chi-square, Average means apart from other methods such as frequency, percentages, averages, average mean and an assortment of others.

9. Major Findings Schools

There is an assortment of school, especially if we were to consider their date of establishment. A number of schools predate India’s independence and

have their origins in the princely state of Mysore. Approximately 20% (or 39) schools in the sample were established before 1947 while 14 schools (about 7%) are more than 100 years old (established before 1919). The oldest school in our sample dates back to 1884. Another 62 (or about 31%) were established before the turn of this century, i.e. in the period 1948 to 1999 while only 22 schools (or about 11%) were established after 2000. In totality, 115 schools (or about 58%) of the schools in our sample were established before the RTE came into existence. Hence, a majority of the schools in our sample predate RTE, indicating a number of challenges in the implementation of RTE. Interestingly, only one school was established after the passage of RTE. Hence, our study attempts to provide insights into how the older schools have adjusted to the dynamics introduced by the RTE – if at all they have adjusted. A total of 123 schools claim to have more than 25% of the students from economically weaker sections (EWS).

In our sample, 88 schools or 44% of the schools are government schools while 51 or 26% are aided schools (meaning private schools that are receive grants-in-aid from the government). Apart from these 55 or about 30% of the schools are private schools. It is pertinent to note that 66 of these 88 schools (or 75%) of these government schools are in rural areas. Hence, a larger part of our sample consists of government schools, which are mostly in rural areas. It is imperative to note that the burden of expanding school education in the district has mostly fallen on the government.

Geographic Location (Rural Vs Urban)

Our study has focused on rural as well as urban schools. In a country such as India, any study of the impact of education without understanding the rural dynamics is always anachronistic for the simple reason that a large part of our population resides in the villages. In our sample, 117 schools or about 58.5% are in rural areas while about 65 schools in the sample or about 32.5% of the schools are government schools. An insight gleaned from our study is that despite most of the schools being established before the passage of the RTE, the district has a unique aspect to its credit: most of the students are in rural schools that are less than one

kilometer from their place of residence. Our study indicates that 58 of the schools or about 25% of the total sample consists of rural schools where the distance to school for the pupil is one kilometer or less. This indicates that the reach of the education system was substantial even before access to education in terms of distance from home to school was incorporated into the RTE. Delving deeper into the responses, we place on record that about 126 of the total respondents or about 63% of the parents opined that the distance from the school was less than one kilometer while in about 48 cases (or 24%) it was more than one kilometer but less than two kilometers. Only in about 10% of the cases was the school beyond 5 kilometers. Only two cases of these was distance of school above 4 kilometers. Thus, it is clear that the spread of the education system had largely made schools accessible to pupils – something that was not the case before this century.

An aspect of our finding that requires special mention is that among the rural schools about 25% of sample consists of schools (or about 51 out of 199) where children from rural areas who are attending school are first generation students. Our findings are in consonance with the findings of various government reports that clearly point out an increasing trend of increased gross enrolment ratio (GER) among students in 2015-16 compared to the period 2000-01. The number of students in Primary, Upper Primary and Secondary level (class I to X) education in India increased from 1900 lakhs in 2000-01 to 2358 lakhs in 2015-16⁵. The expansion of rural government schools is independent of the existence of private schools. Only about 30 of the 199 schools in sample have the presence of another private school in their close vicinity (less than 1 kilometer radius). We opine that there is a high level of correlation between awareness about provisions of RTE and the location of the schools: only about 44 of the 199 schools (or 22%) in the rural areas have any awareness about RTE while in the urban areas only one parent claimed ignorance about RTE with a large majority knowing at least some provisions of the RTE.

Educational Qualifications of the Parents

The investment in education by an household is always based on socio-economic and

cultural factors. Hence, our study tried to elicit the educational background of the parents too. This was deemed to be essential because it would enable us to understand the increased investments of households in education, a factor we have already identified with relevant statistics. The table below offers us insights about the education levels of the father as well mother of the pupil. It indicates that only about 13% of the pupils' father has education that exceeds graduation. Nearly 70% of the male head of the households have education levels that are 10th class or less. This is indicative of a larger change in the mindset wherein the less educated households are increasingly keen on sending their children to school. In our unstructured interviews, it was often stated by parents that they are sending their children to school so that the next generation will find better jobs and will not be stuck in low paying occupations like their own generation. We find that a large number of mothers are uneducated or barely literate when compared to the fathers.

Table 1: Education levels of the Parents

| | Particulars | FATHER | MOTHER |
|------|-----------------------------|--------|--------|
| 23.1 | Not Educated | 22 | 35 |
| 23.2 | Only literate | 12 | 15 |
| 23.3 | Upto 7 th Class | 40 | 43 |
| 23.4 | Upto 10 th Class | 58 | 45 |
| 23.5 | 10+2 | 41 | 42 |
| 23.6 | Graduation | 21 | 16 |
| 23.7 | Post Graduation | 6 | 2 |
| 23.8 | Other | 0 | 2 |

A useful aspect that deserves special mention is that unlike the traditional conception that school teachers do not take classes regularly we find that a large number of parents (156 of the 199 or 78%) believed that teachers are taking classes regularly. This clearly indicates a change in trend from the previous two decades when the most frequent complaint was that schools, especially government schools existed but teachers were not regular in taking classes. Another insight gleaned is that most of the parents believed (80%) that the teachers are well trained with about 56% expressing satisfaction about the number of teachers in the school while

about 52% of the parents believed that the school had sufficient number of teachers.

The satisfaction levels of the parents can be broadly categorized into the following: no benefit, some benefits and substantial benefits as indicated by the parents in their responses. We cite the following insights to indicate that the spread of education in the aftermath of increased investments in education post passage of the Act has increased satisfaction among parents. A large number of parents 158 out of 195 (or about 79%) valid responses (out of total responses of 199) indicated that teachers make the teaching interesting for the child. This is against 37 (19% of the total sample size) who felt otherwise. A number of students also seem to be keen to go to school. About 132 respondent parents (or 66%) opined that their child expressed keenness to go to the school every day. It is imperative to note that this could also be because of reasons such as mid-day meal while about 56% claimed that their child was not scared of going to school every morning.

The contribution of RTE needs to be contextualized in the fact that a large majority of students are provided free text books. It is pertinent to note that about 74% of the students are provided free text books. Almost all the parents (182 of the 199 respondents or 91%) opined that there are various extracurricular activities in the school – a factor that may be contributing to the increased interest among students to attend school daily.

There are a number of areas which indicate **substantial benefits** – as indicated in the perception of the parents themselves.

Approximately 63% of the parents accept that there has been an improvement in the performance of students in examinations. While 90% of the parents agree that students' regularity in attending school has improved. Another 55% agree that the communication skills of the students have improved.

Parents

Education is a social and public good, especially when it provided using public resources as in the context of RTE. Hence, the satisfaction of the parents, who in this case form an important stakeholder thus, forms an important aspect to the implementation of RTE. It is for that reason that in

our study we have placed importance to the feedback of the parents.

A major issue in the implementation of RTE is the lack of awareness among parents about the provisions related to RTE. Only 26% of the parents were aware of all the provisions of RTE while about 49% professed no knowledge about any of the provisions of the Act. The standard deviation of those without knowledge of any provisions of RTE is a high 0.522. We flag this as an important issue that requires further research and for remedial action.

An interesting aspect of the post-RTE era is that there is an increased regularity among teachers attending classes. A large percentage of parents (about 78% or 155 out of 199) in the sample opined that teachers were regular in taking classes

The satisfaction levels among the parents about infrastructure offer interesting insights, especially when extrapolated with other insights. A pertinent issue is that in most of the cases, parents seem to be satisfied, which is half way on our five point satisfaction scale⁶. A brief overview of the responses is imperative for our conclusions. We have analysed the satisfaction levels on a few parameters based on their perceived importance for our conclusions. We place high importance to **physical infrastructure** (in order of preference and importance attached) which including (a) classrooms, benches, blackboard, toilets and subsequently chalk and duster. Among the **Teaching infrastructure** we place importance (in order of preference) on (a) number of teachers, qualification of teachers, attitude of teachers, syllabus and overall quality of teaching. The next facet that we have stressed includes what we have termed as ‘**soft investments in education**’ which includes, extracurricular activities, skills taught and manner taught, Mid-day meal scheme, quality of meal, quantity of meal, fees and attendance. The last important aspect that we have stressed “**academic performance**” which include exam performance and overall performance. In our analysis, we have taken the average mean responses of the satisfaction on our five point scale of the above grouping to understand parent satisfaction.

Our study indicates that among above four classifications we have provided, parents’ satisfaction levels are on an average highest in the

academic performance and related aspects – which augurs well for the education system. While 87% are very satisfied, somewhat satisfied or satisfied about the overall performance of their wards, it is 88% for exam performance and 86% in connection with the syllabus. These responses are the highest in our survey. Teaching performance satisfaction levels were eroded because of the dis-satisfaction among parents about the number of teachers which had one of the lowest levels of satisfaction of about 70% where the average standard deviation was 0.16 far less than the academic performance average standard deviation which scored 0.20.

However, it is imperative that we qualify the findings because we opine that in many cases, the contribution of RTE have been overlooked and the lack of awareness among the parents seem to make them to state their satisfaction about infrastructure levels but this does not seem to carry over to the overall awareness about the provisions of the RTE act. In yet other cases, parents seem to have taken the least controversial position. An illustration best illustrates the dilemma of the parents: in the case of Duster and chalk availability, parents’ satisfaction level is 36% and 24% respectively. However, in our unstructured interviews when the parents were broached on how they came to these opinions, a large number of parents seem to have no satisfactory explanation.

Table - 2 :Parents Satisfaction levels with the infrastructure in the school

| Type of Infrastructure | Very Satisfied (1) | Somewhat Satisfied (2) | Satisfied (3) | Not Satisfied (4) | Extremely Unsatisfied (5) |
|--------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Classrooms | 42 (21) | 56 (28) | 89 (44.5) | 10 (5) | 1 (0.5) |
| Blackboard | 37 (18.5) | 59 (29.5) | 96 (48) | 7 (3.5) | 1 (0.5) |
| Students Benches & Desks | 29 (14.5) | 35 (17.5) | 80 (40) | 39 (19.5) | 14 (7) |
| Chalk | 14 (7) | 29 (14.5) | 46 (23) | 87 (43.5) | 18 (9) |
| Duster | 27 (13.5) | 36 (18) | 71 (35.5) | 52 (26) | 10 (5) |
| Toilets for Boys | 22 (11) | 51 (25.5) | 85 (42.5) | 28 (14) | 5 (2.5) |
| Toilets for Girls | 21 (10.5) | 45 (22.5) | 94 (47) | 28 (14) | 4 (2) |
| Number of teachers | 23 (11.5) | 38 (19) | 75 (37.5) | 44 (22) | 15 (7.5) |

| | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------|---------|
| Attitude of teachers | 32 (16) | 43 (21.5) | 95 (47.5) | 22 (11) | 4 (2) |
| Qualification of teachers | 37 (18.5) | 41 (20.5) | 101 (50.5) | 14 (7) | 3 (1.5) |
| Overall quality of teaching | 29 (14.5) | 43 (21.5) | 90 (45) | 29 (14.5) | 5 (2.5) |
| Extracurricular Activities | 23 (11.5) | 53 (26.5) | 93 (46.5) | 23 (11.5) | 4 (2) |
| Syllabus | 24 (12) | 40 (20) | 104 (52) | 24 (12) | 4 (2) |
| Skills taught in school | 28 (14) | 49 (24.5) | 80 (40) | 32 (16) | 7 (3.5) |
| Manners taught in school | 28 (14) | 51 (25.5) | 74 (37) | 36 (18) | 6 (3) |
| Fees charged | 34 (17) | 26 (13) | 106 (53) | 19 (9.5) | 5 (2.5) |
| Mid-day Meal quality | 62 (31) | 23 (11.5) | 65 (32.5) | 13 (6.5) | 5 (2.5) |
| Attendance | 39 (19.5) | 52 (26) | 86 (43) | 11 (5.5) | 3 (1.5) |
| Quantity of Meal provided | 44 (22) | 32 (16) | 68 (34) | 11 (5.5) | 4 (2) |
| Overall Performance of Students | 27 (13.5) | 45 (22.5) | 97 (48.5) | 22 (11) | 3 (1.5) |
| Exam performance | 27 (13.5) | 32 (16) | 114 (57) | 23 (11.5) | 2 (1) |

(Percentages in Brackets)

The above detailed satisfaction levels can be further analysed into the following correlation regarding rural and urban divisions among parents.

Rural – Urban Satisfaction Correlation

| Type | Very Much Satisfied | Somewhat Satisfied | Satisfied | Not Satisfied | Extremely Unsatisfied |
|-----------------------|---------------------|--------------------|-----------|---------------|-----------------------|
| Rural (117) | 28 | 26 | 60 | 3 | 0 |
| Urban (79) | 14 | 29 | 29 | 7 | 1 |
| Total Responses (196) | 42 | 56 | 89 | 10 | 1 |

In the above table we find that out of the total rural parents in our sample of 117 and 79 urban parents, the satisfaction three positive satisfaction

levels (very much satisfied, somewhat satisfied and satisfied) is about 97%

10. Conclusion

Thus, as the insights offered in the above pages indicate, the education system has made substantial progress. We encapsulate some of our findings briefly as part of our conclusions. The progress in the education system is especially discernible in the public funded education system which has expanded the access to education among the poorer classes. First, As our study indicates a large number of the publicly funded schools have a larger proportion from Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) category. The awareness about RTE among the parents is, as a generalization, quite low and this needs to be urgently improved. There are a number of misconceptions about RTE, especially among parents. The irony is that this is despite the fact that most of the parents have little or no awareness about the provisions of the RTE. This is indicated in the preference that RTE should be repealed. The levels of satisfaction are higher in rural areas compared to the urban areas. As a generalization, satisfaction levels indicate that supervision of the urban schools seems better than those in the rural areas.

Educational implications

Our findings have substantial implications for the future of education system. We opine that there is all round satisfaction about the improvement in the performance of the students which is visible in areas such as manners, academic performance and increased regularity in attending school. However, we opine that there is an urgent need for the government to investment resources in improving awareness, further improvements in infrastructure and skill upgradation of the stakeholders.

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End Note

¹ Alec Ross (2016), *The Industries of the Future*, Simon & Schuster, London.

² Jonathan Haskel and Stian Westlake (2017), *Capitalism without Capital: The Rise of the Intangible Economy*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey,

³ OECD (2017), *OECD Skills Outlook 2017: Skills and Global Value Chains*, OECD Publishing, Paris, p.74 (<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264273351-en>).

⁴ Richard Sennett, *The Culture of New Capitalism*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2006. He opines that in UK the shelf life of a set of skills is about seven years, after which they become redundant. Hence, there is a need for a worker to remain a 'lifelong student' and constantly acquire new skills if they have climb the labour market value chain.

⁵ Educational Statistics at a Glance (2018), Op.Cit, p.23.

⁶ The responses about satisfaction were (1) Very Satisfied, (2) Somewhat Satisfied, (3) Satisfied, (4) Not Satisfied and (5) Extremely Unsatisfied.

