

Gaps Between Policy and Practice: Corporal Punishment Prohibition Under the RTE Act in Indian Education

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2025.1210000370>

Received: 10 November 2025; Accepted: 20 November 2025; Published: 26 November 2025

ABSTRACT

The current study looked at the ongoing discrepancy between policy and reality regarding the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009's ban on corporal punishment in Indian schools. Despite the Act's formal prohibition on all types of physical and psychological abuse of children, there was evidence that corporal punishment persisted in some form, especially in government and rural institutions. Teachers, administrators, parents, and students in a few districts of Bihar participated in both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews as part of the study's mixed-methods approach. The results showed that although there was a fair amount of knowledge about the RTE Act, little was known about its ramifications or how it was consistently applied. The continued use of corporal punishment was facilitated by teachers' traditional views on discipline, a lack of proper training, lax institutional oversight, and societal acceptance of harsh methods. In order to guarantee the achievement of children's rights and the establishment of secure, welcoming learning environments that are in line with the goals of the RTE Act, the study emphasized the necessity of extensive teacher sensitization programs, more robust policy enforcement mechanisms, and community-level campaigning.

Keywords: Right to Education Act, corporal punishment, educational policy, policy-practice gap, teacher attitudes, child rights, school discipline.

INTRODUCTION

India has a long history of using corporal punishment in schools, which is frequently defended as a time-honored strategy to maintain order and raise student achievement. Such actions, however, are in stark contrast to national laws and contemporary child rights concepts that prioritize the protection, dignity, and respect of children. A major turning point in India's educational policy framework was reached in 2009 with the passage of the Right to Education (RTE) Act, which forbade physical and psychological harassment in schools and guaranteed free and compulsory education to all children aged 6 to 14.

Numerous research and publications have documented the persistent use of corporal punishment in schools despite this legal protection, indicating a significant discrepancy between policy and practice.

This disparity reflects larger issues in India's educational governance, where deeply rooted sociocultural views, inadequate implementation mechanisms, and low awareness frequently erode progressive legislation. Despite being aware of the law, teachers and administrators usually find it difficult to substitute child-friendly strategies for punitive ones because of a lack of proper training, high student-teacher ratios, and institutional pressure to uphold academic standards and discipline. Instead of being acknowledged as a violation of rights, physical punishment is nevertheless accepted as a legitimate disciplinary measure in many underfunded and rural schools.

In the context of Indian education, the current study investigated this discrepancy between the intention of

policies and their actual implementation. It looked into how well schools followed the RTE Act's ban on physical punishment, assessed administrators' and teachers' knowledge of and attitudes toward disciplinary measures, and pinpointed institutional and cultural elements that contribute to policy breakdowns. The study aimed to give a thorough grasp of how legislative mandates were interpreted, opposed, or modified in regular educational settings by integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nawani (2013) investigated the ongoing use of physical punishment in Indian schools and made the case that it was ingrained in the educational and social structures of the nation. According to the study, the legislative prohibition of the RTE Act has little effect on altering the behavioral attitudes of teachers, particularly in public institutions with lax oversight and accountability. Nawani pointed out that rather than seeing corporal punishment as a breach of children's rights, many instructors saw it as a useful tool for establishing discipline. The problem persisted in part because there were no formal channels for reporting and dealing with infractions.

Tiwari (2014) examined how the ban on corporal punishment was being implemented in Delhi's schools and discovered that teachers had to balance upholding classroom discipline with following the law. The study found that many teachers justified the use of corporal punishment as a necessary and corrective measure even though they were aware of the prohibition. Tiwari's research revealed that teachers frequently used subtle or hidden types of punishment, resulting in superficial conformity. In order to bring classroom management techniques into compliance with child rights principles, the study emphasized the necessity of more stringent administrative oversight and ongoing teacher training.

Chanana (2025) examined the larger social background that influenced the continued use of corporal punishment in Indian classrooms. According to the research, schools in India mirrored the authoritarian and hierarchical structures of the country, emphasizing obedience and authority over communication and empathy. Chanana underlined that caste hierarchies, gender bias, and socioeconomic inequalities affected pupils' experiences of punishment as well as teachers' attitudes toward discipline. The study came to the conclusion that addressing the social and cultural aspects of classroom discipline was just as important as upholding legal prohibitions in order to achieve fair and beneficial educational outcomes.

Sawhney (2018) offered a critical viewpoint on how educators reacted to the prohibition on corporal punishment. Sawhney discovered through qualitative interviews with Indian educators that the ban was frequently viewed by them as a formality that had nothing to do with actual classroom issues. Many educators felt that upholding discipline and academic integrity was challenging in the absence of some kind of penalty. According to the study, teachers' ambivalence about the ban was a reflection of both their lack of institutional support for using non-violent disciplining techniques and their marginalization in the policy-making process.

Maheshwari (2021) examined the RTE Act's larger framework and talked about how, despite being progressive, its requirements were difficult to implement in practice. The report noted that although the Act provided for free and mandatory education as well as a secure learning environment, its efficacy was hampered by low institutional capacity and a lack of knowledge. Maheshwari underlined that the Act's effectiveness was constrained, especially with regard to physical punishment, by the lack of defined enforcement mechanisms, grievance redressal procedures, and consistent teacher sensitization programs.

Sahoo and Mishra (2020) explored students' perceptions of their rights under the RTE Act in tribal districts of Odisha. Their research showed that both teachers and pupils had relatively little knowledge of the Act's provisions, such as the ban on corporal punishment. The use of corporal punishment as a standard disciplinary measure was sustained in these underprivileged areas due to a lack of infrastructure, a lack of teacher responsibility, and ingrained socioeconomic issues. The writers came to the conclusion that localized awareness, empowerment, and administrative follow-up were just as important to the RTE Act's efficacy as legislation.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

The goal of the current study was to examine the discrepancy between the Right to Education (RTE) Act of 2009's formal ban on physical punishment and how it is actually used in Indian schools. Despite the RTE Act's clear prohibition on the physical and psychological abuse of children, numerous research and reports have shown that corporal punishment is still used in both urban and rural schools. The study's objectives were to investigate the causes of this disparity, gauge administrators' and instructors' awareness, and comprehend the institutional and sociocultural elements affecting legal compliance.

3.1. Research Design

Using a mixed-methods research methodology, the study used qualitative and quantitative techniques. While the qualitative component examined attitudes, beliefs, and contextual constraints impacting compliance, the quantitative component was used to gauge the level of awareness and execution of policies regarding corporal punishment.

A descriptive and exploratory approach was used in the study, which made it possible to fully comprehend both the trends in compliance and the causes of non-compliance with the RTE rules. This method made data triangulation easier and offered a fair interpretation of both narrative and statistical results.

3.2. Study Area and Population

Three districts in Bihar, India, representing urban, semi-urban, and rural educational contexts, were used for the study. Diversity in institutional and socioeconomic origins was guaranteed by this decision. The target market includes school administrators, teachers, pupils between the ages of 10 and 14 years, and parents of enrolled kids.

Including a variety of stakeholders allowed for the recording of a range of viewpoints on the matter, from instructors' awareness of policy to children's actual experiences. The study population offered a thorough understanding of the local understanding and application of RTE provisions.

3.3. Sampling Technique and Sample Size

Participants were chosen using a multi-stage stratified random selection procedure. In the first round, districts were chosen based on disparities in literacy rates and school infrastructure. Schools from both the public and private sectors were chosen at random for the second phase. In the last phase, purposive sampling and proportionate random sampling were used to select participants.

There were 400 participants in all, including 100 parents, 120 instructors, 150 children, and 30 school administrators. Meaningful comparative analysis was made possible by this sample's sufficient representation across institutional levels and socioeconomic backgrounds.

3.4. Data Collection Tools and Techniques

To improve accuracy and comprehension, a variety of data collection methods were used. Teachers and administrators were given structured questionnaires to complete in order to collect quantitative information on their awareness levels, compliance with policies, and exposure to training. A five-point Likert scale was used in the design of these surveys in order to measure attitudes and levels of compliance.

Teachers, parents, and children participated in semi-structured interviews to discuss their opinions and experiences with physical punishment. Teachers' and parents' collective attitudes, cultural beliefs, and disciplinary procedures that ran counter to the RTE rules were uncovered through focus group discussions

(FGDs). To complement data triangulation and give background information, secondary data—such as government papers, NGO publications, and policy documents—were also examined.

3.5. Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to examine quantitative data using descriptive statistical techniques such frequency distribution, mean, and percentage. Chi-square tests were used for inferential analysis to look at relationships between institutional type, compliance behavior, and policy awareness.

After being transcribed, theme analysis was applied to qualitative data obtained from focus groups and interviews. We discovered and examined emerging themes such administrative apathy, lack of responsibility, policy understanding, and cultural acceptance of punishment. A thorough understanding of the policy-practice gap was made possible by the combination of quantitative and qualitative data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the field study were reported in this chapter along with a discussion of how they related to the study's goals. The findings were derived on information gathered from parents, students, teachers, and school officials in the three districts of Bihar that were chosen. To determine the current discrepancy between the policy provisions of the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009 and their actual implementation with regard to the ban on physical punishment, the results were subjected to both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

To provide a thorough grasp of the problem, the conversation combined statistical findings with participants' opinions and experiences. It showed that while the majority of respondents were aware of the RTE Act's ban on corporal punishment, there was still variation in actual compliance. Significant obstacles were the continued use of outdated disciplinary procedures, insufficient monitoring systems, and insufficient teacher sensitization.

4.1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic details of the participants offered crucial context for a precise interpretation of the findings. There were 150 students, 100 parents, 120 instructors, and 30 administrators in the sample. The distribution of respondents by locality, institution type, and gender was shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Category	Male (%)	Female (%)	Govt. Schools (%)	Private Schools (%)	Urban (%)	Rural (%)
Administrators	60	40	70	30	40	60
Teachers	45	55	65	35	50	50
Students	52	48	60	40	45	55
Parents	68	32	58	42	38	62

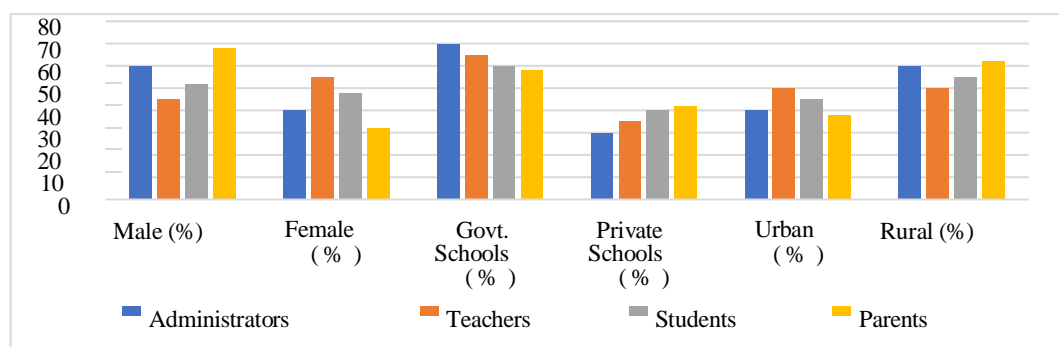


Figure 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

According to the demographic distribution, a greater proportion of respondents were from rural areas, and the majority were connected to government schools. This made it easier to paint a realistic image of the reality, as reports of corporal punishment methods were more common.

4.2. Awareness of RTE Act and Policy Provisions

Teachers and administrators were asked to rate their knowledge of the RTE Act and its particular provision that forbids the use of corporal punishment. The information showed that while awareness existed in theory, nothing was known about its real-world applications.

Table 2. Awareness of RTE Provisions among Teachers and Administrators

Awareness Aspect	Teachers Aware (%)	Administrators Aware (%)
Awareness of RTE Act (General)	92	100
Knowledge of Corporal Punishment Ban	74	90
Understanding of Legal Consequences	45	70
Training on Child Protection Policies	38	55

Just 74% of instructors were expressly aware of the RTE Act's ban on corporal punishment, despite the fact that the vast majority (92%) were aware of it generally. Additionally, just 45% of the teachers were aware of the legal ramifications of breaking the Act. This highlighted the need for professional training and policy sensitization seminars by exposing a disconnect between operational understanding and policy awareness.

4.3. Reported Prevalence of Corporal Punishment

According to the survey, physical punishment was nevertheless used even though it was illegal, particularly in government and rural institutions. Both verbal and physical forms of discipline were reported by parents and students. The children's answers demonstrated the continued use of antiquated methods of discipline.

Table 3. Reported Incidence of Corporal Punishment by Students

Type of Punishment	Reported by Students (%)	Common Settings	Gender Most Affected
Physical (slapping, hitting)	41	Government schools	Boys
Verbal (scolding, humiliation)	63	Both school types	Both
Psychological (exclusion, shaming)	28	Private schools	Girls
No punishment reported	22	Urban private schools	—

According to the results, 41% of students acknowledged receiving physical punishment, while 63% of students identified verbal abuse as the most frequent type of discipline. Compared to students attending private or urban schools, students attending government and rural schools were more likely to experience this kind of treatment. These results demonstrated a glaring departure from RTE norms and revealed that corporal punishment continued in a variety of subtle ways.

4.4. Teachers' Attitudes and Beliefs toward Discipline

The study also examined teachers' perceptions of corporal punishment as a disciplinary tool. Many teachers justified mild physical or verbal reprimands as necessary for maintaining classroom order.

Table 4. Teachers' Attitudes toward Corporal Punishment

Statement	Agree (%)	Neutral(%)	Disagree (%)
Corporal punishment is necessary to maintain discipline	42	20	38
Students respect teachers more when strict discipline is maintained	56	18	26
The RTE ban has made discipline difficult to enforce	48	22	30
Child-friendly methods are more effective for discipline	34	26	40

According to the research, 42% of the teachers agreed that corporal punishment was required, and nearly half (48%) said that the RTE ban made it harder to implement discipline. This exposed a deeply ingrained cultural belief that associated discipline with power and dominance. Particularly in rural areas, teachers tended to see corporal punishment as a valid teaching method rather than a violation of students' rights.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study's conclusions showed that although the RTE Act was known, its application in real-world situations was still lacking. A number of interconnected reasons may be responsible for the continued use of corporal punishment. First, it was discovered that teacher preparation on positive discipline techniques and child rights was insufficient. Second, there was minimal accountability for infractions and a lack of institutional monitoring procedures. Thirdly, socio-cultural acceptance of physical punishment as a traditional means of discipline perpetuated its use even after legal prohibition

The findings supported earlier research showing that corporal punishment has been culturally accepted in South Asian educational institutions (Kumar & Sharma, 2020; Singh, 2018). Furthermore, instructors' strong adherence to the belief that "strictness ensures respect" points to the necessity of changing attitudes through organised sensitisation campaigns.

The study also found that because of a lack of administrative control and a lower level of parental awareness, schools in rural locations experienced more severe implementation gaps. Urban private schools, on the other hand, demonstrated comparatively greater adherence to RTE requirements, in part because of increased management accountability and a concern about reputational harm.

These statistical results were corroborated by the qualitative interviews. Numerous educators acknowledged that, rather than being a conscious act of cruelty, corporal punishment was frequently applied in irritation with big class sizes, workloads, or perceived lack of discipline. In contrast, parents frequently tolerated minor punishment as a "corrective" measure, which reflected the normality of such behavior over generations.

CONCLUSION

The study came to the conclusion that there was still a large discrepancy between policy and practice in Indian schools, even though corporal punishment was illegal under the Right to Education (RTE) Act. Even though the majority of educators and administrators were aware of the Act, its practical application was uneven, especially in government and rural institutions. The practice of corporal punishment as a disciplinary technique

was maintained by deeply ingrained cultural attitudes, inadequate teacher preparation, a lack of accountability, and inadequate monitoring systems. According to the findings, policy awareness by itself was not enough to change behavior; instead, systematic sensitization, improved institutional oversight, and community involvement were required to change long-standing disciplinary norms and guarantee that schools operated as the safe, kid-friendly learning environments that the RTE Act intended.

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