

# Doubts Over Efficacy Of No Detention Policy For Quality In Education

**Snigdha Mishra**

*DTE and SCERT, Odisha, Bhubaneswar*

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## ABSTRACT

India's flagship programme 'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan' (SSA) for Universalisation of Elementary Education has enhanced enrolment rate and retention of children in school. The country has now shifted its focus from retention to quality of education for improvement in children's learning achievements. The UN recommendation has been reinforced in the provision of the Right of children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act 2009, which came into effect in India on 1st April 2010, enshrining in law for the first time the rights of all Indian children aged between 06 and 14 years to free and compulsory elementary education regardless of caste, class, gender etc. The RTE act, though deserves due credit for laying down in fairly specific terms state's responsibility towards education, it would be appropriate to examine the status and awareness on the part of schools and concerned authority to provide free elementary education to the children aging between 06 to 14 years of age 'The No Detention Policy' was brought in to provide elementary school children an environment free from fear, anxiety and stress to allow them learn and grow on their own pace as well as check the drop out rates. It, however, has turned out to be counter productive. It seems all is not well with the 'no detention' policy introduced under the RTE Act.

The present article concentrates on the challenges faced by the schools and parents with the No Detention Policy.

**Keywords:** Right to Education, No Detention Policy, Admission in appropriate classroom, CCE

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India's flagship programme the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) for universalisation of elementary education has undoubtedly enhanced enrollment and retention rate

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of children in schools. But changing scenario around the globe, calls for urgent attention towards ensuring quality of education to meet the human resource demand for market and for the upliftment of the society in general. The Govt. of India is also now shifting its focus to quality of education. Right to education (RTE) 2009 is a step forward which focuses on the quality of teaching and learning. This has led to substantial reforms and making concerned efforts in educational planning and management. National curriculum framework (NCF), 2005 has made recommendations for children centred

Address for Correspondence

DTE and SCERT, Odisha, Bhubaneswar

E-mail:

pedagogy (constructivist approach), curricular and examination reforms. The Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) is also in place as per Govt. of India's Policy for over all development of students.

### Quality in Educational Versus No Detention Policy

Under RTE, there is 'No Detention Policy' upto class VIII to achieve the goal of universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) and to increase retention of children in schools by way of 'no pass-fail' system. According to this policy, no child will be detained from classes I to VIII and promotion to next class will be given on the basis of their performance in various examinations and tests for formative and summative assessment provided, the child's attendance in the school is more than 75%. Also appearing in unit tests and terminal examination is mandatory. In spite of all these efforts to ensure quality in education or taking care that learning should take place, in reality it is not happening.

Due to quality issues of education and implementation problems, people of India are not accepting the pass-fail system. According to 'The Hindu' news Daily, an observation from Chennai reported; Teachers complain that students have developed a lackadaisical attitude – why study when there is no fear of failing? Also reported in 'The Hindu' that, All India Democratic Students Organization (AIDSO) protested in Bangalore is demanding re-introduction of the pass-fail system till class VIII.

In India, it is very difficult to implement any programme or scheme as a blanket because of diversity, pluralistic society, geographical setups, the rural, urban divide etc. So policies are made for the welfare of people but there are challenges in the implementation, same is true for 'No Detention Policy'.

The 'No Detention Policy' has been adopted in almost all the states but with some variation. In general, half-yearly and annual examinations are conducted in all the states and promotion is given on the basis of examination or attendance. The 'No Detention Policy' was implemented with fair objective of reducing stress on children due to examination fear. But quality of education and aim of education has also to be achieved, there cannot be and should not be any compromises in this regard. Keeping this in view several strategies to impart quality education have been formulated and are being practiced also. Still

ensuring effective implementations for achieving aim of providing quality education in all schools specially, rural areas is far reaching and day dreaming. Effect of 'No Detention Policy' and weak implementation of strategies to achieve quality education is clearly evident in government schools in rural areas.

Section 16 of RTE Act prohibits holding back and expulsion of a child from school till the accomplishment of elementary education. The 'no-detention' provision in the RTE Act does not mean that children's learning will not be assessed. The RTE Act makes provision of continuous and comprehensive evaluation (CCE) procedure which will enable the teacher to assess the child's learning and performance in a more constructive way.

### General Observation related to 'No Detention Policy'

No examination, no detention policy in schools proves disastrous as it is apprehended that all is not well with this policy introduced by former Human Resource Development Minister Shri Kapil Sibal. Over five years after the Right to Education Act came to force, implementation of one of its key provisions which prohibits holding back and expulsion of children from schools till the attainment of elementary education is bringing shocking results.

The provision was brought into provide elementary school children an environment free from fear, anxiety and stress, to allow them learn and grow on their own pace as well as check the dropout rates. It, however, has turned out to be counter productive.

Many government school teachers and Headmasters have the opinion that, ensuring minimum learning level of children has now become a big challenge for them. Children now show a lackadaisical attitude towards their studies. Parents also don't bother any more as they know their words cannot be held back in the class. They do not mind allowing their children to remain absent even on the day of examination. 'No Detention Policy' has its own strengths and weaknesses:

- ◆ **Doubts over Efficacy** – The states had been resisting the policy since the day it was mooted by the Ministry. A Parliamentary Committee also expressed its doubts over the efficacy of the no detention policy when it was being introduced along with the RTE Act. A Sub-Committee, set up by the Central Advisory Board of Education has come up with a conclusion that, the

no-detention policy has had a 'very bad' impact on the children, recommending that government should reintroduce the examination system at least for class V and VIII. The different states are of the opinion that the learning levels of students have deteriorated because of no-detention policy.

- ◆ **Allows the students to focus on other activities** – Students, who are not good in academics, prefer to focus on extra curricular activities as they are not too burdened with studies now. The no-fail policy should be taken with right attitude, only then it will help students.
- ◆ **No seriousness for studies** – Students seem very careless and carefree as they are not over burdened with studies. They have become absolutely tension-free, with not much interest in studies. School teachers believe that students enjoy project work and various other activities more than just rote learning. In a way they are being moulded to move beyond textbook learning.
- ◆ **Exams create a competitive attitudes** – The views of US President Barack Obama states that “Indian students do well across the world because they go through a number of examinations during their school years.” Now other countries when are following the examination process similar to the Indian methodology, India has withdrawn itself from its own example. It is a general belief that examinations and tests are important as they make students more competitive. It is a good step only during the beginning stage, but not good to implement no-fail policy after standard V because, from the secondary section onwards, students have to start preparing themselves for the board exams. Once students are used to taking exams in the lower standards, it would help them in the higher grade to appear competitive examination.
- ◆ **Importance of Discipline remain unlearnt** – The students take the no-fail policy for granted when they know that they are not being held back. Because of competition and its side effects, the Right to Education Act came up with no-fail policy to ease pressure among students.
- ◆ Academics will be affected – A student of class II or III doesnot understand what a no-fail policy means, but as he or she grows up and understands it, his or her

attitude towards classroom behaviour or academics is going to change. Teachers might come up with strategies to handle the situation but the fact cannot be ignored that once a student enters higher class, her or she will face the pressure later.

- ◆ **Can't pass a student without evaluating his/her intellect** – The no-detention policy has become a double – edged sword and most parents and teachers will want to do away with it as they may feel that students become lax and take things for granted. There are two important considerations here : Each student should be trained to study what has been covered in school irrespective of examinations being held. The important thing is to get the student excited about learning and not just excelling in examinations. Secondly, one has to remember that this policy is meant for the students' benefit, to augment student retention, build student motivation and reduce the dropout rate. All teachers have to work on an inbuilt evaluation system that is aimed at checking students' understanding of the concepts taught. Not failing a child till standard VIII should not lead to a child being pushed ahead through the classes without checking his understanding. This is a good system as it cuts down undue examination stress, which is mostly brought on by the child's anxiety about his/her ability to retain all the things learnt and reproduce it accurately at the examination and not so much with his/her actual intellectual potential.

### **Structural Flaw of No Detention Policy**

A contradiction between an outmoded authoritarian system and a more enlightened idea of education is reflected in the clamour for the removal of the no-detention policy. The antagonism to the no-detention policy is misguided, as the fault lies in the authoritarian structure of our school system, not in the policy.

The national press is abuzz with reports on whether to re-introduce the old pass-fail system or continue with the current automatic promotion (NDP) to the next class, brought in as part of the implementation of the Right to Education Act. The Central Government is trading cautiously of the NDP and has asked for written responses from all State Government. Just by failing children, they cannot be made good learners. The teachers often

complain about 'no detention' and 'no punishment' seeing the two punitive measures as the most effective tools of control over children. Examinations have a tendency to become the only motivation for learning. All educated Indians are thoroughly conditioned to believe that "no exams, no learning" which is easily transferred to children.

In order to understand the educational worth of no-detention, we have to take into account three important ideas promoted by the RTE simultaneously. They are Admission in Age Appropriate Class (AAAC), Continuous and comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) and No Detention Policy (NDP). All the three ideas come from what could be broadly called the progressive education movement in the west that entered India under the name of 'Child-centered Education'. These ideas demand that children work together and progress in rational enquiry in a free atmosphere. It is assumed that interaction and collaboration with children of similar age will help them in this progressive meaning making. Therefore, there is the need of AAAC. Similarly, children progress with varied speeds and not necessarily through the same conceptual routes. Therefore the periodic examination on fixed questions for all becomes inappropriate and leaves much of the child's progress in scholastic as well as moral and emotional development unassessed. The need for CCE is therefore inevitable.

Since children progress as per their own speed, which is necessary for conceptual clarity, there is no point in pass-fail in classes. This will only artificially bunch children together. Therefore, the No Detention Policy is needed.

The three ideas are closely connected through assumptions regarding knowledge, human learning and the child's nature. They are complementary to each other and can only work in any education system if taken together seriously.

Organising the curriculum in the form of learning continuum will immediately contradict the grade wise structure of the school. Since learning is supposed to be continuous, no rigid, year wise division is made. Putting children into different grades and the pass-fail kind of examination system becomes redundant and an impediment to teaching learning. The only form of assessment that can serve the purpose then is the CCE. The pass-fail examination system is a natural, logical outcome of the authoritarian idea of knowledge as finished product enshrined in the textbook.

The contradiction between an authoritarian system and a more enlightened idea of education is being played out in the form of introduction and then the clamour for removal of CCE and NDP. CCE and NDP simply cannot be meaningfully implemented unless we challenge and dismantle the authoritarian education system.

The ideas like AAAC, CCE and NDP are the proven ideas which have been put in the RTE Act after a lot of exercises and debates, and much better for quality education. Education expert and member of the National Advisory Council of the RTE, Vinod Raina explained that No detention does not mean no examination. Under CCE you can have as many examinations and tests as you want. The purpose of these tests is not to fail the students but to map their progress, so that students can be helped to learn and perform better. RTE does not prevent a school holding examination. These examinations will indicate how children are studying and help teachers identify weak ones for corrective measures. This can also help evaluate teachers.

## Conclusion

Government of India has enacted and implemented the Act in the right spirit towards providing quality elementary education to all. Revoking the no-detention policy will require an amendment to the RTE Act. There is an urgent need to rethink about continuing 'No Detention Policy' and its pros and cons to maintain focus on quality of education rather than only enrolment and retention. The fact is that the children with weak foundation reach in class IX are unable to continue in higher classes. It is a serious concern of all attempts taken to educate all children.

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