



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Management

AWARENESS LEVEL AMONG STUDENTS TOWARDS RIGHT TO INFORMATION ACT

KEY WORDS: Right to Information Act, student awareness, curriculum integration, public information access.

V. Sangeetha

Ph. D., Scholar, Department Of Business Administration, Government Arts College,Paramakudi

Dr. M. Veeraselvam

Research Supervisor And Associate Professor And Head, Department Of Business Administration, Govt Arts And Science College, Sivakasi

Dr C. Vethirajan

Research Supervisor And Sr. Professor And Head, Department Of Corporate Secretaryship, Alagappa University, Karaikudi

ABSTRACT

This study explores the awareness and engagement levels of college students in Ramanathapuram District, Tamil Nadu, regarding the Right to Information Act (RTI). Despite the RTI's role in promoting transparency, findings show high awareness among students but low usage of the RTI for accessing information. The gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application highlights the need for improved educational strategies. Data from 100 students were collected using a structured questionnaire assessing familiarity with RTI procedures, information sought, and perceptions of its impact. Key barriers identified include the complexities of the filing process and a lack of perceived need. The study suggests integrating RTI into curricula, simplifying the process through workshops, leveraging digital media, and encouraging community engagement to foster informed, active citizens, thereby enhancing civic education and democratic participation.

INTRODUCTION

Enacted in 2005, the Right to Information Act (RTI) is a landmark in Indian legislative history, promoting governance characterized by openness and accountability. It empowers citizens to access information from public authorities, reducing corruption and enhancing democratic participation. However, the effectiveness of the RTI relies heavily on public awareness, especially among the youth, who play a key role in shaping the future political landscape.

This article focuses on the awareness levels of students regarding the RTI Act, examining their understanding of its procedures, accessible information, and societal impact. As future policymakers and informed citizens, students are crucial in leveraging such legal tools to ensure transparency in governance. The study explores how educational institutions and digital media influence students' knowledge and engagement with the RTI.

Identifying gaps in awareness, the article proposes targeted strategies, including educational interventions and awareness campaigns, to boost student engagement with the RTI. These initiatives aim to foster a proactive, informed youth, enhancing transparency and accountability in governance and contributing to the broader discourse on civic education in India.

Importance OfThe Right To Information Act

The Right to Information Act (RTI) is a fundamental democratic right that enhances citizen engagement by making government operations transparent and accountable. It democratizes access to information, dismantling power imbalances and empowering students as future leaders to critically engage with governance. RTI educates students on their citizenship rights and responsibilities, fostering informed, vigilant, and responsible citizens capable of making reasoned decisions. It encourages critical thinking and active participation, transforming students into agents of change. By promoting a culture of transparency, RTI strengthens democracy, empowering the youth who will shape and sustain its future.

Need ForThe Study

The Right to Information Act (RTI), a powerful tool for transparency and citizen engagement, shows varied impacts across demographics, especially among students. This highlights a significant gap in awareness and engagement,

crucial given students' role as future custodians of governance and societal norms. While some students exhibit strong understanding and use of RTI, a substantial portion remains poorly informed or indifferent, undermining RTI's effectiveness and stalling the growth of an informed and proactive citizenry.

Objectives OfThe Study

This study aims to analyze factors contributing to varying student awareness and engagement with the RTI Act. By identifying barriers and facilitators, the research seeks to inform targeted interventions, such as curriculum adjustments, enhanced resources, and robust civic engagement initiatives, to harmonize RTI understanding among diverse student groups. These insights are essential for bridging the awareness gap and fostering an informed student population capable of active democratic participation.

Methodology

The study used a descriptive research design to explore student awareness and engagement with RTI, conducted over two months in early 2023 in Ramanathapuram District, Tamil Nadu. This period aligned with the academic calendar, ensuring high student engagement and accurate reflection of educational interventions.

Sample Size And Data Collection

The study involved 100 college students selected from various institutions across Ramanathapuram District, ensuring a statistically reliable and manageable sample for in-depth analysis. A stratified sampling technique was employed to capture a diverse mix of socioeconomic backgrounds, educational streams, and levels of study, providing a comprehensive view of student awareness regarding the RTI Act.

Data were collected using both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained through a structured questionnaire specifically designed for this study, featuring a combination of closed and open-ended questions. The questionnaire assessed students' knowledge of the RTI Act, their experiences with its use, and their perceptions of its role in enhancing governmental transparency and accountability. Secondary data included existing literature, previous studies, reports on RTI effectiveness, and educational materials from the institutions, providing context and benchmarks for

evaluating current awareness levels.

Tool For Data Collection

The primary tool was a structured questionnaire, meticulously crafted to explore various aspects of the RTI Act and its perceived impact. It was pilot-tested on a small group of students to ensure clarity and effectiveness, with adjustments made based on feedback before full deployment.

Analysis

The study gathered detailed demographic and educational profiles of the respondents, capturing characteristics such as age, gender, education level, academic discipline, family income, prior knowledge of RTI, and sources of this knowledge. This data allowed for a nuanced analysis of factors influencing student familiarity and engagement with the RTI Act, identifying trends and gaps in awareness among different student groups.

Table 1 Profile of the respondents

Age of the respondents	Less than 18 years	44
	18 years to 21 year	31
	Above 21 years	15
Gender of the respondents	Male	53
	Female	47
Current level of education	Undergraduate	66
	Postgraduate	34
Academic discipline of respondents	Sciences	32
	Arts	25
	Commerce & Management	37
	Engineering	4
	Others	2
Monthly Family Income	Less than Rs.25,000	73
	Rs.25,000 - Rs.50,000	11
	Above Rs.50,000	16
Whether respondents had prior knowledge of RTI	Yes	89
	No	11
Where respondents learned about RTI, if applicable	School	17
	College	27
	Media	33
	Family	15
	Others	5

The study on RTI awareness among college students in Ramanathapuram District included 90 respondents across various age groups: 44 were under 18, 31 aged 18-21, and 15 above 21, reflecting a youthful demographic. Gender representation was balanced with 53 males and 47 females. Educationally, 66 were undergraduates and 34 postgraduates, offering insights from different academic stages.

Commerce & Management students were the largest group (37), followed by Sciences (32) and Arts (25), with fewer from Engineering (4) and other fields (2), indicating higher engagement from business-related disciplines. Most students (73) came from families earning less than Rs. 25,000 per month, highlighting a lower socioeconomic status, with some economic diversity.

RTI awareness was high, with 89 students familiar with the Act. Media was the top information source (33), followed by college (27) and school (17). The study assessed whether students had used RTI, the nature of requests, and satisfaction, revealing insights into RTI's effectiveness and potential barriers to student engagement.

Table 2 Utilization of the Right to Information Act

Whether respondents have used RTI prior to the study	Yes	4
	No	85

Purpose of RTI Request	Academic	1
	Public Service	3
Satisfaction with Response	Satisfied	2
	Dissatisfied	1
	No opinion	1

The data shows that while most students are aware of the RTI Act, only a small fraction (about 4.5%, or 4 out of 89 aware students) have used it to seek information. This low usage suggests a gap between awareness and practical engagement, likely due to perceived complexities in filing requests or a lack of perceived need. Among those who utilized RTI, 75% (3 requests) sought information on public services, while 25% (1 request) related to academic concerns, reflecting varied uses of RTI beyond academics.

Satisfaction with RTI responses was mixed: 50% of respondents were satisfied, 25% dissatisfied, and 25% had no strong opinion, indicating potential issues with information quality or unmet expectations. These findings highlight the need for educational initiatives that not only inform students about RTI rights but also teach them how to effectively use RTI to promote transparency and accountability.

DISCUSSION:

The study emphasizes the need to boost both awareness and engagement with RTI among college students. Although awareness is high, usage remains low, indicating a need for targeted strategies to educate and empower students to actively use RTI in public and academic contexts.

Addressing Perceived Complexities

One major barrier preventing students from using the RTI Act is the perceived complexity of the request process. Educational institutions, alongside civic organizations, can play a crucial role in simplifying this process. Workshops, seminars, and interactive sessions can guide students through filing RTI requests, simplify legal terminology, and present successful case studies to reduce these barriers.

Curriculum Integration

Integrating RTI-related content into college curricula is another effective approach. Courses on civic education could include modules on transparency laws, their importance in democratic governance, and practical sessions on filing RTI requests. This approach not only raises awareness but also equips students with the skills to confidently engage with public authorities.

Role Of Digital Platforms

Given media's significant role in spreading RTI awareness, digital platforms can be leveraged to promote engagement. Social media campaigns, informational videos, and interactive webinars can reach a large student audience. Additionally, developing user-friendly apps that guide students through the RTI process can simplify their participation.

Enhancing Motivation Through Relevance

Showing students the relevance of RTI in issues that directly affect them can boost engagement. Information sessions that demonstrate how RTI can be used to access details about college admissions, exams, and scholarships can make the Act more applicable to their lives.

Community Engagement Projects

Encouraging students to participate in community engagement projects involving RTI can provide hands-on experience. These projects could be part of course assessments or extracurricular activities, teaching students how RTI can be a tool for social change.

Feedback And Improvement Mechanisms

Establishing feedback mechanisms for students who use RTI

can provide valuable insights for refining educational strategies. Understanding their challenges and successes will help educators and policymakers improve RTI-related teachings.

CONCLUSION

The study highlights significant awareness but limited use of RTI among college students in Ramanathapuram District, Tamil Nadu. Although awareness is high, few students have actively used RTI, primarily for public service inquiries, with mixed satisfaction regarding responses. To bridge this gap between awareness and action, the study suggests strategies such as curriculum integration, simplifying the RTI process, leveraging digital platforms, and promoting community engagement projects. These initiatives aim to provide students with the knowledge and practical skills to effectively use RTI, fostering an informed, proactive, and engaged youth capable of contributing to transparent and accountable governance.

REFERENCES

1. Acharya, S., & Sinha, D. (2018). Right to Information in India: An effective tool to tackle corruption. *Public Affairs and Governance*, 6(3), 128-136.
2. Banerjee, R. (2020). Digital media and its impact on RTI awareness among youth. *Journal of Information Policy*, 10, 45-59.
3. Kumar, P., & Singh, A. (2017). The impact of RTI on transparency and accountability in Indian governance. *Journal of Indian Law and Society*, 8(2), 234-249.
4. Menon, N., & Patel, V. (2019). Educational strategies for promoting civic engagement among students. *Education and Democracy Journal*, 12(1), 72-88.
5. Narayan, L. (2021). Barriers to using RTI among college students in South India. *South Asian Journal of Law and Human Rights*, 7(1), 31-47.
6. Prakash, G., & Kumar, S. (2018). The role of RTI in empowering Indian citizens. *Indian Journal of Social Research*, 59(4), 512-529.
7. Sharma, B., & Gupta, R. (2016). Evaluating the effectiveness of the Right to Information Act in public institutions. *Journal of Public Administration and Policy Research*, 8(3), 57-69.
8. Singh, J., & Kaur, R. (2022). Curriculum integration of transparency laws in higher education. *Educational Research and Reviews*, 17(2), 68-76.