

Awareness of Right To Information Act Among Students: An Empirical Analysis

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Abstract

Right to information is utmost important for the progression of the society that rejects vagueness and values participation. A government which runs as 'for the people' should remain accountable and open for all purposes. The present study examines the awareness of RTI act among the students. The data was analysed with the help of t-test and descriptive analysis. It was observed that mean scores of male students is higher than female students and it can be concluded that male students are more aware of Right to Information Act as compared to their female counterpart. However, no significant difference exists between the awareness of Right to Information Act among students on the basis of their marital status. This indicates that a significant difference exists between awareness of Right to Information Act among students on the basis of their age. It shows that the older students are more aware of Right to Information Act as compared to the younger. The present study suggested the need to spread more awareness of RTI act among female and young students. Increased awareness of RTI act can help the various stakeholders in the educator sector such as students, teachers and parents to examine the quality of education in the schools and colleges.

Keywords: *RTI, Awareness, Accountability, Transparency, Demographic.*

I. Introduction

Accountability and transparency are the two founding bricks of a democracy in a country. For as late as the 20th century, states acknowledged living by the policy of formal censorship, instead of granting their people the 'right to know' the actions of the authorities (Singh, 2014). However, as democratic ideals have progressed in the world political systems, it is increasingly being recognised that participants of a democracy are entitled with an inherent right to know the intricacies of government decisions and functioning that directly impact their lives (Dhaka, 2009). This right stands from the belief that citizens of a state are also the collective owners of the democratic state, and hence right to information flows naturally from their powerful position.

Chakraborty (2010) also finds that in a democratic and republic social system in our modern world, the citizens of the state are not ruled upon, but instead 'governed' by the State. Therefore, the free availability of knowledge and information and the right of citizens to speech and express not only furthers responsibility and transparency; it also helps in determining the shape of policies and their actual execution by the government. Access to information acts as an antidote against corruption- it restricts the authoritarian abuse of power and discretion. Singh (2014) has emphasized that information access protects citizens' liberties by guaranteeing people's participation as well as knowledge of new and existing laws or policies developed by the State. Chakraborty (2010) opines that a government should be active, responsible and should exercise of its power, then its citizens must be recognised as holding the right to scrutiny and given the access to information. Nair (2006) argues that whatever is done in a public fashion, through the actions of public officials, must be accessible information for the public, as a matter of right. The author further points out that the main responsibility of the public officials lies in explanations, not justifications; the acts are mainly responsible for saving bureaucracy from the clutches of corruption and oppression. In today's information age, literacy is no less than a survival skill.

Nair (2006) has pointed out the necessity of finding, evaluating, and using accurate and relevant information in today's constant deluge of misinformation and chaos. The educational usability of Right to Information manifests itself in two ways: one, the emergence of information-efficient people who demand solutions to problems by discovering and analysing

correct information; and two, by raising awareness among the common public about the power of RTI. Universities play a very significant role in raising public awareness about RTI. The University Grants Commission (UGC) directed all its affiliated institutions to enforce the RTI Act, 2005. The directions by UGC have prompted educational institutions to take the requisite measures to implement many clauses, including proactive disclosure of certain types of information. Today, the major challenges to RTI's success are attempts towards its dilution via political lobbying, amendments and political pressures. The paper concludes that RTI has transformative power in a democracy. Its potential must be utilized by concerted push towards its actualization (Singh, 2010).

Review of Literature

Chakraborty (2010) provided insights into the role of higher education in realizing the potential of RTI in India. As per the author, RTI played a significant role in building a participatory democracy that assures quality governance and accountability among officials. The author provides that educational institutions in the country have an essential role in disseminating the basics of RTI. Universities and colleges enable awareness among the masses regarding relevant national and international issues while also aiding the identification and discussion of their solutions. The author has advocated the creation of educational programmes to spread knowledge regarding RTI, particularly among disadvantaged communities. Roy (2009) highlighted issues pertaining to the implementation of RTI. The legal aspects of tenability and exemptions under RTI have been critically assessed in the article. The author has identified three overarching matters of public concern, namely; UPSC selection process, disclosure of file noting, and transparency in judicial functioning. The author advocates that file noting comes under the purview of RTI Act; while in the case of UPSC examinations, disclosure of scores was held to be under public interest. The author notes that Indian judiciary can play a highly proactive role in ensuring transparency in public systems. Digabarrao (2012) conducted a study titled "Awareness about Right to Information: Differences among College Students in Aurangabad" and examined the awareness of RTI. The present study was based on primary data collected from 140 college students of Aurangabad. It was found that 72.85 percent of the students were highly aware of RTI. The analysis of the data revealed that most of the college students were moderately aware about RTI. The study shows a significant difference in the awareness of RTI

act among the male and female students and rural-urban students. Moreover, a concern was shown to include RTI act in the curriculum of school and colleges for the effective implementation. Ahmad (2013) conducted the study titled “Teacher-Trainees Awareness of Right to Information” with a structured questionnaire on 60 students of which 38 were from social sciences and 22 from science stream. The finding of study indicated that 10 percent teacher trainees had high level of awareness and 58.33 percent had moderate whereas 31.66 percent had low level of awareness of Right to Information act. Secondly, it was found that no significant association was observed in the awareness of Right to Information act among male and female teacher-trainees. It was also found that urban teacher trainees have more awareness than rural teacher trainees. The study directed a no significant association between awareness of science and social science trainees. Thote (2013) examined the awareness and proper usage of RTI act among the senior secondary school teachers on the bases of gender and locality. The data was obtained from the the secondary school teachers working in Damoh district affiliated to M.P. The data has been collected from 200 senior secondary school teachers from different schools of central India with the help of self-structured RTI questionnaire. It was found that secondary school teachers were less aware about RTI act and were less concerned with its proper usage. The study predicted a significant difference in the awareness of RTI act among the male-female and urban-rural teachers. The age of the respondent was also associated with the awareness of RTI act and it can be concluded that young respondents were more aware than of older respondents. It was found that a significant difference in the awareness of the RTI act exists among the teachers who had regular reading habit with those who had rarely reading habit. Singh (2015) assessed the awareness level of RTI act among the university and college teachers attending UGC-HRDC sponsored orientation and refresher courses in Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla. The study was based on the primary survey collected in orientation and refresher courses in Himachal Pradesh. The data of awareness of RTI act has been analyzed on the basis of gender, experience, discipline and institution type. The analysis of the data revealed that most of the college and university teachers were aware of RTI Act 2005 but had incomplete information related to the RTI act. The analysis of the data had shown that no significant association was observed between RTI act and gender and experience of the respondent. But it has been found that a significant difference was observed in the nature of job and stream. The analysis of the data had shown an equal level of awareness was found among the teachers who

had less than 5 years of experience and more. A significant difference was found in the awareness level of RTI Act 2005 among government sector and semi government sector teachers. It was found that awareness level was higher among the arts teachers compared to science teachers. Lata (2016) analyzed the awareness of the RTI act among students in Gurgaon. The study was based on the primary survey conducted with the help of 150 college students in Gurgaon. The results of the study described that majority of the students were aware of Right to information act but were not interested to understand the usefulness in the actual life. It was exhibited that main sources of awareness of RTI act were TV channels, newspapers and friend circle. The results of the study had clearly depicted significant difference was found in the level of awareness of RTI act and gender of the respondent. A significant difference exists between locality of the respondent and level of awareness of RTI Act. The study highlighted that students from rural areas were significantly less aware about the procedure of RTI as compared to students of urban areas. It was revealed that awareness about the procedure of RTI act was moderate among the sampled respondents. Paramasivan (2016) identified the awareness level of college students of Periyar towards RTI act. It was estimated that 87 percent of the students were aware of RTI act in the study area and 13 percent of the students were unaware of RTI act. The main source of awareness of RTI act was newspaper followed by TV, teachers and public. Majority of the students were aware of the important aspects of RTI act. The study recommended the inclusion of RTI act in the curriculum in order to enhance its awareness and utilization. It was mentioned that the teachers in the educational institutions should be accountable to promote the awareness of the RTI among their students. It is the responsibility of the educational institutions to organize special awareness campaigns to spread its awareness. Garg (2017) raised questions regarding the efficiency of Right to Service Acts in India, in the context of Delhi administration. The study suggested the need for strengthening the quality of services provided by the administration. The internal systems must be redesigned for all departments to make them more internet-friendly. Free services must be provided to the poor regarding filing of digital applications and tracking. Decision-making and knowledge management must be transferred to computers for fairness and impartiality.

II. Objectives of the Study:

The following are the main objectives of the present study:

- a) To find out the level of awareness of RTI act 2005 among the students.
- b) To find out the significant difference if any among the students in relation to demographic variables.

III. Research Methodology

The present study was primarily based on the primary data. The data has been collected from the students of Punjab with the help of a structured questionnaire. The analysis of data was made with the descriptive and inferential statistics.

IV. Results

The main objective of the study is to study the awareness of Right to Information Act among the students. It was found that majority of the students are aware of Right to Information Act'. For this purpose the data pertaining to the variable of awareness of Right to Information Act among students had been collected through self-constructed questionnaire of the investigator. The distribution of scores is presented in terms of frequency distribution along with their mean and SD as demonstrated in Table 1

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of scores of Students on the variable of Awareness of Right to Information Act (N = 300)

Scores	Frequency	Percentage
31-33	30	10
33-35	60	20
35-37	45	15
37-39	75	25
39-41	45	15
41-43	45	15
Total	300	100.00
Mean	36.90	
SD	2.95	

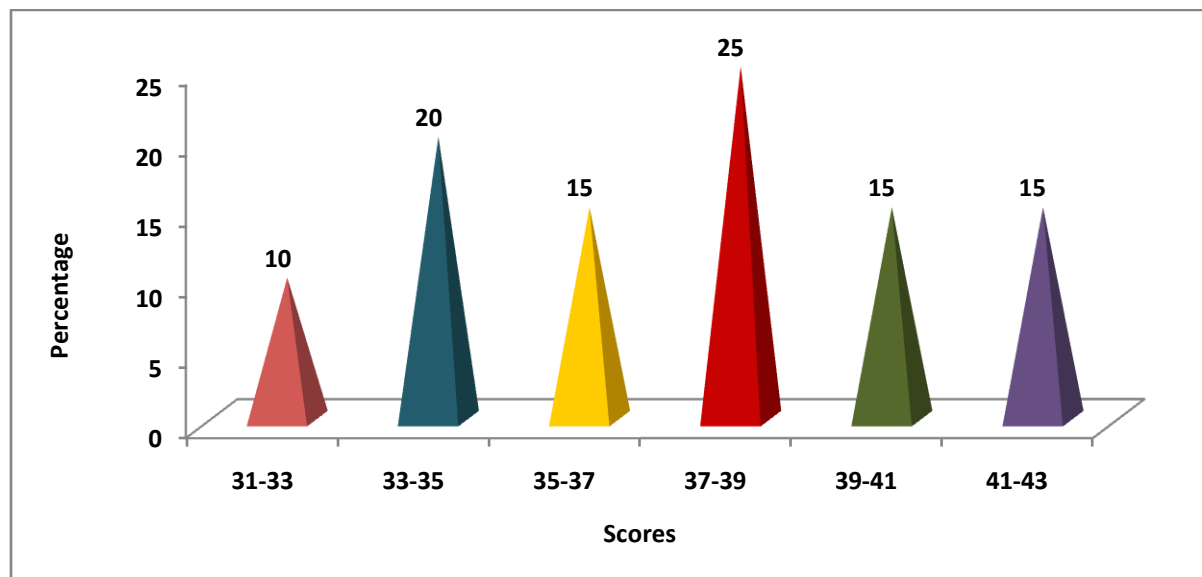


Fig. 1 Percentage Distribution of scores of Students on the variable of Awareness of Right to Information Act

Table 1 indicates that the maximum proportion of the students (25%) scored between 37-39 on the variable of awareness of Right to Information Act followed by 20% students scored between 33-35 and 15% students scored between 33-35 and 39-43. Only 10% students were scored between 31-33. The range of scores on the scale is 0-48.

The mean score of students on awareness of Right to Information Act was 36.90 with standard deviation 2.95 which shows that average score of students on awareness of Right to Information Act is 65% which is quite high.

Hence the hypothesis stating ‘Majority of the students are aware of Right to Information Act’ is confirmed.

2 Awareness of Right to Information Act among Students in relation to Demographic Variables

In the present study an attempt was also made to compare awareness of Right to Information Act among students on the basis of demographic factors of gender, marital status, age, religion, caste, locale, income with the hypothesis, ‘There exists no significant difference in the awareness of Right to information act of students on the basis of gender, marital status, age, religion, category, education level and stream of study’. For this purpose the awareness of Right to Information Act

among students is compared on the basis of demographic variables of gender, marital status, age, religion, category, education level and stream of study using appropriate statistical techniques.

(i) Comparison of Awareness of Right to Information Act among Students on the basis of Gender

To compare awareness of Right to Information Act among students on the basis of their gender, t-test was employed.

Table 2 Comparison of Awareness of Right to Information Act among Students on the basis of Gender (N = 300)

S. No.	Group	N	M	S.D	SE _M	t-ratio
1	Male	174	37.47	2.61	0.20	3.99 (p=.000)
2	Female	126	36.12	3.22	0.29	

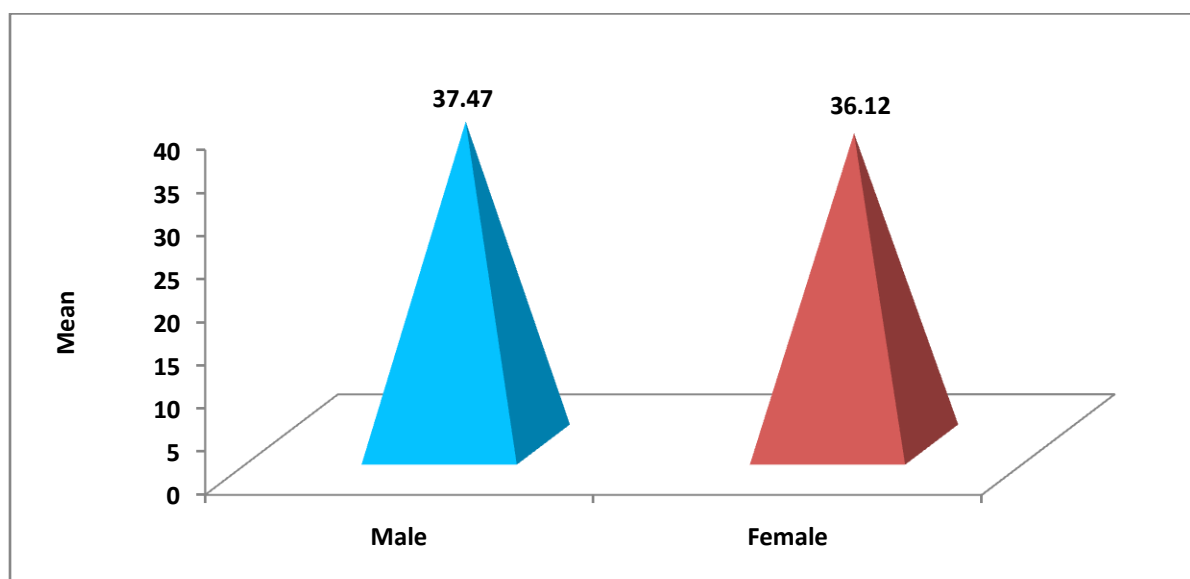


Fig. 2 Awareness of Right to Information Act among Students on the basis of Gender

Table 2& Fig. 2 indicate the comparison of awareness of Right to Information Act among students on the basis of gender. The mean scores of male and female students on the variable of awareness of Right to Information Act were 37.47 and 36.12 respectively. The t-ratio

was calculated as 3.99 which is significant at .01 level ($p=.000$). This indicates that a significant difference exists between awareness of Right to Information Act among students on the basis of their gender.

As mean scores of male students is higher than female students, it may further be concluded that the male students are more aware of Right to Information Act as compared to their female counterpart.

(ii) **Comparison of Awareness of Right to Information Act among Students on the basis of Marital Status**

To compare awareness of Right to Information Act among students on the basis of their marital status, t-test was employed.

Table 3 Comparison of Awareness of Right to Information Act among Students on the basis of Marital Status (N = 300)

S. No.	Group	N	M	S.D	SE _M	t-ratio
1	Single	272	36.93	2.93	0.18	0.55 ($p=.958$)
2	Married	28	36.61	3.25	0.61	

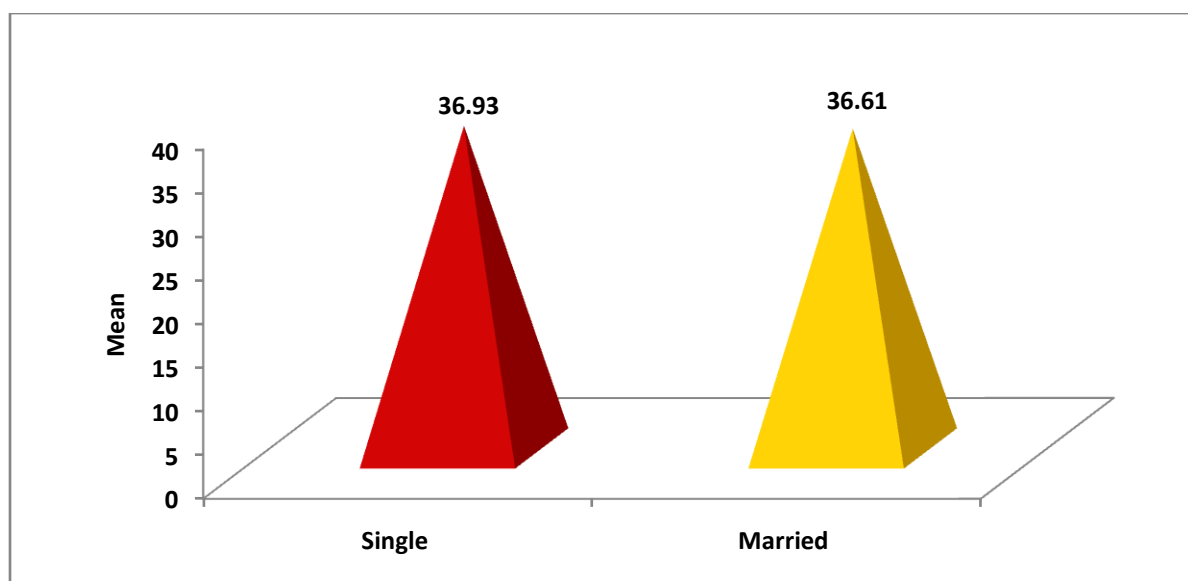


Fig. 3 Awareness of Right to Information Act among Students on the basis of Marital Status

Table 3 & Fig. 3 indicate the comparison of awareness of Right to Information Act among students on the basis of marital status. The mean scores of single students and married students on the variable of awareness of Right to Information Act were 36.93 and 36.61 respectively. The t-ratio was calculated as 0.55 which is not significant ($p > .05$). This indicates that no significant difference exists between awareness of Right to Information Act among students on the basis of their marital status.

Thus it may be concluded that the marital status of students does not contribute to the awareness of Right to Information Act among students.

(iii) Comparison of Awareness of Right to Information Act among Students on the bases of Age

To compare the awareness of Right to Information Act among students on the basis of their age, one-way ANOVA was employed.

Table 4 Comparison of Awareness of Right to Information Act among Students in relation to Age (N = 300)

S. No.	Group	N	M	S.D	SE _M	t-ratio
1	Up to 20 years	134	35.46	2.78	0.24	8.47 ($p < .000$)
2	21-30 years	166	38.07	2.55	0.20	

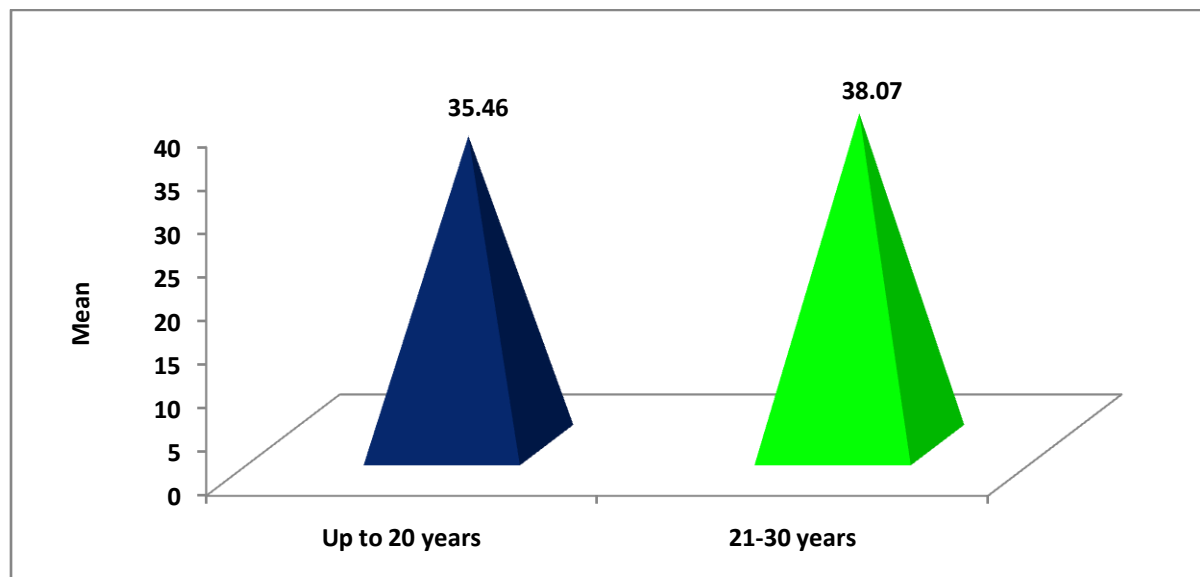


Fig. 4 Awareness of Right to Information Act among Students in relation to Age

Table 4& Fig. 4 indicate the awareness of Right to Information Act among students with respect to their age. The mean scores of students of age up to 20 years and the students of age between 21-30 years on the variable of awareness of Right to Information Act were 35.46 and 38.07 respectively. The t-ratio was calculated as 8.47 which is significant at .01 level ($p=.000$). This indicates that a significant difference exists between awareness of Right to Information Act among students on the basis of their age.

As mean scores of the students of age between 21-30 years is higher than the students aged up to 20 years, it may further be concluded that the older students are more aware of Right to Information Act as compared to those who are younger.

V. Conclusion

The results of the study directed that majority of the students were aware of Right to Information act. It was also observed that a significant difference exists between awareness of Right to Information Act among students on the basis of their gender. The study shows that mean scores of male students is higher than female students, it may further be concluded that the male

students are more aware of Right to Information Act as compared to their female counterpart. However, no significant difference exists between awareness of Right to Information Act among students on the basis of their marital status. This indicates that a significant difference exists between awareness of Right to Information Act among students on the basis of their age. As mean scores of the students of age between 21-30 years is higher than the students aged up to 20 years, it may further be concluded that the older students are more aware of Right to Information Act as compared to those who are younger. The present study suggested the need to spread more awareness of RTI act among female and young students. Increased awareness of RTI act can help the various stakeholders in the educator sector such as students, teachers and parents to examine the quality of education in the schools and colleges.

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