

No-Detention Policy Revisited

Posted at: 06/01/2025

No-Detention Policy Revisited : A Solution to the Alarming Learning Gap?

Context

In December 2024, the Union government made an important change to the **Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009**. It now allows schools, including Central government-run schools, to **detain students in Classes 5 and 8** if they fail their year-end exams.

To ensure fairness, students who fail will get a **second chance** through re-examinations after two months of additional teaching. This policy is part of a larger effort to address learning gaps and aligns with a **2019 amendment** that removed the no-detention policy in the RTE Act. Before this national amendment, **18 States and Union Territories** had already introduced detention in their schools.

What Was the No-Detention Policy?

1. Original Idea (2009)

- The RTE Act introduced a **no-detention policy** to ensure:
 - A **stress-free environment** for students in Classes 1 to 8.
 - A shift from traditional year-end exams to **Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE)** for holistic learning.

2. Purpose

- To reduce the pressure of exams on children and allow them to focus on learning, not just passing.

Why Did the No-Detention Policy Fail?

1. Misinterpretation of the Policy

- Many schools **stopped conducting meaningful assessments**.
- Students were **automatically promoted** to the next class, regardless of whether they understood the material.

2. Focus on Inputs, Not Outcomes

- The education system focused on providing resources like books and infrastructure but **ignored actual learning progress**.

3. Failure of CCE (Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation)

- **CCE was poorly implemented** because of:
 - Lack of **teacher training**.
 - Insufficient resources.
 - Low commitment from schools.
 - Teachers often filled evaluation forms without genuinely assessing students.
 - Many education boards gave up on CCE and returned to traditional exams.
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What Were the Results of the No-Detention Policy?

1. Declining Learning Levels

- **Basic literacy and numeracy skills dropped** among students over the years.
- **ASER 2022 findings:**
 - Only **42.8% of Class 5 students** could read a Class 2-level text (down from 50.5% in 2018).
 - Only **25.6%** could solve basic arithmetic problems (down from 27.9% in 2018).
- **ASER 2023 findings for youth (ages 14-18):**
 - A **quarter of students** could not fluently read a Class 2-level text in their regional language.
 - Over **50% struggled with division problems**, a skill taught in Classes 3 and 4.

2. High Failure Rates in Board Exams (2023)

- Over **65 lakh students** failed Classes 10 and 12 board exams.
- Failure rates:
 - **12%** in national boards.
 - **18%** in state boards.

3. Widening Gaps During COVID-19

- The pandemic disrupted education, making existing learning gaps worse.

4. Expert Observations

- The **no-detention policy reduced accountability** among schools and teachers.
- Poor implementation led to **declining teaching standards** and **worsened student outcomes**.

Why Was the Policy Rolled Back?

1. To Address Learning Gaps

- Many students in higher classes lacked basic skills because they were **promoted without mastering earlier concepts**.
- Detention was seen as a way to ensure students learn the necessary material before moving to the next class.

2. Evidence from Surveys

- Studies like **ASER 2022 and 2023** revealed serious issues in foundational skills like reading and math.

3. Expert Support

- Education experts agreed that **automatic promotion harms students in the long run**.
- They supported detention as a way to hold schools and teachers accountable.

The Way Forward

1. Regular Assessments

- Schools should conduct **frequent tests** in every class to identify learning gaps early.
- Teachers should use these assessments to help students improve before year-end exams.

2. Better Teacher Accountability

- Teachers should be **trained and evaluated** regularly to ensure they meet teaching standards.
- Schools should introduce **incentives for good teachers** and consequences for poor performance.

3. Focus on Helping Students

- Instead of just detaining students, schools must provide **specialized teaching** to help them catch up.
- School heads should personally monitor the progress of students who are struggling.

4. Shift Responsibility from Students to Teachers

- Detaining students punishes them for not learning, but the **real issue is the lack of effective teaching**.
- Teachers must ensure all students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, receive proper attention.

Conclusion

The rollback of the no-detention policy is a step toward addressing India's learning crisis. However, **detention alone is not the solution**. To improve education, the government and schools need to focus on:

- Better teacher training.
- Regular student assessments.
- Supportive teaching methods.

By combining accountability with targeted interventions, this policy change can create a more effective and equitable education system for all students.



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