

Reimagining Teacher Training in India

Post-Conference Report

Hosted by the **International Innovation Corps**
at the University of Chicago Center in Delhi | March, 2019



An analysis of teacher training policies in 25 countries¹ reveals that teacher quality is the most important factor affecting student achievement out of a host of school-related factors. It has also been found that certain education systems have achieved substantially better outcomes than others by "getting more talented people to become teachers, developing these teachers into better instructors, and ensuring that these instructors deliver consistently for every child in the system".² Teacher capacity building thus becomes an important area of the education reform agenda that government and private resources should target in a well thought-out manner.

In India, the overall learning levels among students still remain disappointing. ASER 2016 underlined that 1 out of every 2 Indian students can't read books meant for three classes below, a scenario that has not changed since 2009. Building and sustaining teacher capacity needs urgent attention at the policy and implementation levels. Teacher education in India has been divided into two key areas: pre-service education and in-service teacher education. Both these models have been critiqued by educationists and on-ground practitioners both for design and implementation. Even though INR 85,010 crore has been allocated to the education sector in 2018 (accounting to slightly ~3% of the GDP) out of which a lion-share assigned to teacher salaries and training, there are clear gaps in skills and attitude of teachers which are yet to be bridged. In-service teacher training needs upgradation. While only about 20% of school teachers are still professionally untrained, only 14.9% of teachers received in-service training for elementary education in 2015-16. *Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan* or the Integrated Scheme for School Education (2018) continues to see teacher education as a significant component and has allocated a substantial chunk within the 20% of its budget to improve the quality of school education, along with putting its weight on education technology for scaling innovative practices in classrooms. However, several factors need to be addressed for ICT to be leveraged most effectively within classrooms and schools like infrastructure availability in government and low-budget private schools, seamless integration of technology within teaching and learning curriculum and training and technology readiness of teachers in the system³.

While the promise of enhanced use of technology in instruction is clear, and there are many advocates for doing so but the evidence on the impact of greater use of technology in the classroom is mixed and seems to depend crucially on the details of the model by which it is implemented. Nonetheless, the question persists: what would it take to prepare and motivate teachers to ensure that students are learning well in schools? If technology is the way ahead, how is the government school system setting teachers up to successfully leverage it - before and during the job span?

¹'Teachers Matter', OECD report, 2005

²'How the world's best performing school systems come out on top', McKinsey & Company report, 2007

³<http://www.centralsquarefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Teaching-with-Technology-Early-EdTech-Adoption-by-Indian-School-Teachers.pdf>

THE EVENT

The conference had four sessions, as follows -- the opening panel, titled Current Gaps in Teacher Training, brought together Arti Qanungo (Teacher, Government Girls Senior Secondary School, New Delhi), Sandeep Mishra (Country Director, STIR Education), Biswajeet Saha (Director, Skill Education & Training, CBSE), and Maya Menon (Founder Director, The Teacher Foundation) to shed light on current trends, successes, and challenges within teacher training in India.

The second session involved presentations from five "innovations" in teacher training by: Vinod Karate of The Teacher App, Karthik Menon and Nimisha Kapoor from Pratham, Ruvneet Bains from Pearson, Sonia Mondal from Peepul, and Abhinav Mathur of the Million Sparks Foundation. The presenters shared the theory of change behind their interventions, the impact their innovations have generated, their learnings, and the opportunities these innovations present to address the teaching development problem at scale.

Given the expertise among the attendees, the third session divided participants into small groups where they were able to engage more closely and substantively with a specific topic of interest to them. The themes included: pre-service training of teachers, in-service training of teachers, teacher incentives and motivation, technology vs. teachers, institutional arrangements, and stakeholder approaches to teacher education.

The final panel sought to bring together various threads from conversations during the day, to conclude with "Next Steps." Panelists included: Magdalene Premlatha (Teacher, Government H.S School, Thiruvār, Tamil Nadu), Srinivas Rao Pokuri (Head, Digital Education, SCERT Andhra Pradesh), Aditya Nataraj (Founder-Director, Kaivalya Education Foundation), and Dhir Jhingran (Founder Director, Language and Learning Foundation)



KEY INSIGHTS

01 | **Teacher education must be continuous — supplemented by both in-person and online support**

A number of countries have resorted to the cascade model of training delivery for teachers' continuous professional development—particularly those operating on a large scale. This approach has been relatively cost-effective and allowed for maximum reach within a short timespan. However, researchers and practitioners have often criticised this approach for its inability to customize training, failing to leverage peer-to-peer experiences, and an absence of continuous post-training support. Teachers must get the opportunity to interact with senior colleagues and mentors to benefit from the experiential knowledge that these mentors possess. Providing such support on a continuous basis enables teachers to have hands-on practice in classroom situations to hone their skills and build confidence in delivering interactive lessons.

Thus, alternative teacher support and preparation programmes need to be envisioned to support teachers during classroom teaching through observations followed by developmental feedback to identify strengths and areas for development; provide a peer support network, at the school or virtual level, for emotional and practical support on a day-to-day basis; and offer coaching support to new

teachers for 2-3 years after they graduate from teacher education institutions.

While there is an urgent need to overhaul how training is delivered to teachers, approaches that could be explored are peer-to-peer capacity development followed by STIR Education (a non-profit working in India and Uganda) or technological support platforms like ChalkLit by Million Sparks Foundation (a tech-led education initiative in India). Both approaches work around leveraging existing people support to establish follow-up mechanisms with teachers to ensure learnings from training are translated back into the classroom. Coaching and mentoring are core elements of these models which show promising effects of nudging behaviour shifts and more engaged classroom practices.

“Student learning can only improve if the classroom teaching-learning process undergoes a change. We need to recognize the centrality of the teacher and teacher education that focuses on pedagogy and beliefs and attitudes in transforming teaching and learning.”



Dr. Dhir Jhingran
 Founder Director, Language and Learning Foundation

02

Evidence-based and contextualized content is needed for teachers to cater to student diversity

Every year a majority of aspiring teachers graduate from teacher education institutions with a large gap in skills to manage the diverse needs and backgrounds of students in their classrooms. A primary school teacher attends the same training programme as that of a senior one, leaving less scope for differentiation and discussion on age-specific teaching techniques. Moreover, a bulk of the sessions provide a heavy dose of theory with no time for planning of how to implement those ideas in the classrooms. Hence, the concept of student-centred learning sounds impractical to most theory-oriented teachers facing such diversity in the learning levels of students.

“The system currently does not prepare teachers adequately to deal with diverse situations and learners in the classrooms. Teachers need to be trained in grasping subject knowledge as much as understanding how their outlook towards inclusion in classrooms and schools can affect learning outcomes.”



*Magdalene Premlatha
Teacher, Government H.S
School, Tamil Nadu*



To support teachers to be effective in classrooms, there is an urgent need to provide them with pedagogically sound and contextualized content, brought to them in their local languages. Contextualized content should also be combined with hands-on experience during teacher training to build teachers’ familiarity with adapting content to the needs of the classroom. This implies that these trainings must assist teachers in cultivating the autonomy necessary to choose and adapt lessons that fit the appropriate learning levels of their students. While an emphasis on theory is vital, that must be balanced with reflections, micro-teaching, and developmental feedback to gain and simultaneously hone the skills and mindset needed to be effective teachers.

Peepul, an education non-profit in India, is supporting teachers to create customized resources for their classrooms through coaching, classroom visits and exposure to additional content. They also work closely with schools to handhold teachers in content delivery. Such initiatives need to be expanded further to include remediation and advanced training as per the ongoing needs of teachers.



03

Teacher Education Institutions need to revamp to better prepare teachers - before and on the job

Presently, teacher education institutions operate largely under the assumption that aspiring teachers have basic subject knowledge understanding, but this is unfounded. There are close linkages between qualified staff availability or up-to-date training curriculum and the efficient functioning of such institutions to produce well-equipped teachers. Institutionally, teacher education centres like SCERTs (State Councils of Education Research and Training) and DIETs (District Institutes for Teacher Education) must strive to keep both quality and staffing at the highest possible level. However, these institutions are currently encumbered by a number of challenges, including isolation from schools and current developments in school education, limited professional development opportunities such as internships and exchange programmes, and a lack of diverse faculty members to train aspiring teachers.

What these institutions need is an updated vision to provide a multidisciplinary, academic environment in order to emerge as exemplary learning labs. Moving ahead, a

comprehensive analysis of the roles and responsibilities of teaching in school systems needs to be conducted by these institutions in order to determine the relevance of courses to be taught in teacher education programmes. The methods of training must combine live projects, seminars, panel discussions, and learnings from other states and countries to diversify the understandings and experiences of existing and aspiring teachers. Additionally, aspiring teachers need hands-on classroom exposure during their studies to witness and practice these methodologies in a controlled environment.

“We are constantly tinkering in education - in curriculum, technology, infrastructure. But there is a structural problem of how teachers are trained, the limited options available for becoming a teacher, the lack of clarity and purpose of continuing professional development and the role the government has historically played - that of policing rather than enabling”



Maya Menon
Founder Director,
The Teacher
Foundation

Pratham Education Foundation works to provide hands-on training to aspiring teachers in selected DIETs across 13 Indian states on a teaching-learning approach known as CAMaL (Combined

Activities for Maximized Learning). In the learning camps run by these teacher-aspirants during 2015-16, a 26 point increase was observed in the proportion of school students who could read at least paragraphs (Grade I level text) and a corresponding 25 point decrease in the proportion of school students who could only read letters or less.

responsibilities of these officials should be standardized to prevent overburdening them with administrative duties. While data collection is important for organizational and procedural decision-making, CRPs and BRPs should understand the rationale behind the collection and be empowered to utilize data at the school level to support teachers.

04 | Mid-tier education officials need standardized job charts as well as incentives for development

Teachers often suffer from a sense of isolation, working with little or no support in schools whilst being overburdened with administrative duties that take time away from teaching. To provide a greater support system to teachers, mid-tier education officers known as Cluster Resource Persons and Block Resource Persons (CRPs and BRPs) were instituted. They were tasked to provide decentralized academic support through the provision of resources, in-service training, and on-site supervision surrounding content and pedagogy. However, 10 years after their installation, multiple challenges have emerged. BRPs and CRPs are overburdened with administrative data collection which takes away from their primary responsibility. Also, due to the extensive travel and erratic schedule of these coordinators, very few women end up taking these roles.

“State governments must ensure that the most talented and committed teachers, not just the most senior, are selected into roles to lead Clusters, Blocks and Districts. These leaders need extensive training in leading change, coaching, facilitating and managing performance of teachers in order that teacher skills and motivation improve rapidly and on scale”



Aditya Nataraj
Founder and Director,
Kaivalya Education
Foundation

A shift in perception is needed for these officials from simple administrators to academic facilitators at the school and classroom levels. Roles and

Piramal Foundation is working towards developing leadership capacities in these officials in order to better support teachers and Head Teachers in schools. Additionally, some state governments like Madhya Pradesh have started rethinking on ways to rewrite the selection of this cadre by focusing on instructional and leadership skills. In a bid to add more value to their role as academic facilitators, the state has changed the hiring process

from nomination to selection through recommendations from teachers who attend training sessions facilitated by CRP/BRP applicants in advance. Removing structural barriers and creating a more enabling environment by building the capacity of these mid-tier officials is key to supporting teachers.



05

Intrinsic motivation is a worthy goal and professional development opportunities are needed to foster it

Teacher enthusiasm exists on a spectrum between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Some teachers are motivated by continuous improvements in student learning while others are encouraged by external recognition and pathways for professional progression—all of which are valid. As a concept, however, teacher motivation has yet to be explored fully in global and national research domains.

In practice, it ought to be viewed as a joint goal for policy planning and implementation to hone a cadre of able teachers prepared to transform millions of school goes into active learners. The goal of teacher motivation begins with creating a shared purpose among all participants within educational institutions. Economic incentives alone

are not sufficient and need to be complemented with charted out learning opportunities for teachers before and during their job tenure.

Bhutan's education system provides an example of how a well-defined career path can assist in energising teachers. Bhutan's Teacher Human Resource Policy (2014) focused on giving better pay to attract and retain high performing teachers as well as performance-based recognition for sustaining efforts. Moreover, after two years of being in the job, teachers get to select specialized areas of interest to engage in with their peers, such as assessments or teacher training. Eventually, after seven years, teachers assume those roles full-time and begin coaching other junior teachers.

“Teachers, who genuinely want to make a difference, often find themselves demotivated in large bureaucratic systems. The change in mindsets to recognizing teachers as the solution and providing them ample opportunities to grow and identify that growth is one of the urgent needs in Indian education.”



Sandeep Mishra
Country Director, STIR
Education

Additionally, Pearson's Excellence Programme as a part of the MyPedia initiative aims at providing year-round

support to teachers through workshops, support visits, training by Academic Relationship Managers alongside an online platform containing supplementary courses. There are further elements of assessment-based teacher certification to recognise teaching competencies including leadership and management workshops for school leaders so that teacher development trajectories align to the whole-school improvement. Cultivating teachers' agency and assisting them to realize their role from a wider school development lens should have large motivational benefits.

06 | **Leveraging data at the classroom-level can better equip teachers to improve student learning**

The benefits of using data for evidence-based program management in education have been universally acknowledged. To focus on and improve quality, India has embarked on a nation-wide push for the creation and use of education management information systems (EMIS). The implementation of these digital administrative systems, however, have traditionally focused on compliance with processes and inputs mandated at the national level. At the cluster, block, and district levels, teachers spend valuable time inputting in computers standardized test scores, state achievement assessments, and school-wide surveys, without an understanding of how this information can be applied in the classroom to directly improve learning.

The need of the hour is to move to

“small data” that goes beyond high-level monitoring and focuses on continuous application to accommodate student learning. Such data emanate from formative assessments, smaller in-classroom quizzes, and regular tests given to students after the completion of a unit or chapter. This focused scope enables teachers to understand students better rather than turning them into statistics. Small data do not always require sophisticated software, but support and time for teachers to reflect on, dissect and understand the nuances of why some students may be falling behind. However, the collection of such data should not further burden teachers. Instead efforts should be made to utilize existing data-sets to pilot small data interventions in a handful of classrooms under the supervision of the DIETs. Based on the results, successful pilots could be scaled-up to additional classrooms.

“Data collected from schools and blocks annually adds to the enormous pile of information collected prior with little focus on utilization for informed decision-making or improved learning outcomes. NCERT, SCERT and state governments together should determine which are the indicators to monitor and evaluate for optimal educational attainment.”



Srinivas Pokuri Head,
Digital Education,
SCERT Andhra Pradesh

Small data also provides teachers with the autonomy to make corrective adjustments. This, seen in the wider context of varying learning levels across districts, also allows Head Teachers and officials to determine annual goals for districts, broken down further into quarterly priorities leading to the creation of a culture of transparent communication across schools. Finally, parents must be made a party with whom this data is shared to cultivate trust and hold schools accountable for generating improvements in student learning.

07

Digital interventions strengthening teacher-student interactions in classrooms should be prioritized to scale

Recent research points to the landmark shift in thinking about technology within education. While models like 'Hole in the Wall' and 'A Laptop per Child' received their moments of glory in the late 1990s and early 2000s, there has been an overturning of the popular narrative surrounding digital interventions. The 2018 World Development Report declared that technology interventions will not work unless they strengthen teacher-student interactions in the classroom, whereas previous interventions that failed to address user demands and digital literacy or simply expected a supplementary gadget to augment learning in the classroom have not worked.

For technology to be a useful classroom aide, teachers must understand pedagogically where and how digital solutions can be integrated into lesson planning. First, an abundant and

user-friendly supply of relevant digital tools and bite-sized resources is needed for teachers to utilize. Second, encouraging them to participate in online courses and virtual roundtables with their peers and students will help demystify ed-tech tools and decrease the digital isolation that many teachers face. As teachers gain confidence in accessing and utilizing digital resources, their feedback and experiences can be leveraged to make ed-tech interventions even more targeted and contextualized.

"The challenge for state governments now is to be able to improve teaching practices by utilizing digital platforms. We need to move to a stage where teachers are consuming and discussing content and subsequently using those in the classrooms."



Vinod Karate
Founder, The Teacher App

Recent ed-tech solutions are supplementing existing teacher training efforts by focusing on democratizing learning in the classroom. The Teacher App has created an online platform that provides professional development resources and modules for free, working to reduce the barriers between teachers and quality content. Designed with a focus on usability, available content is created in Hindi, built in interactive modules and downloadable for offline use.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Ultimately, while the development of teachers requires a large number of interventions, one thing is clear — it is critical to not view teachers in isolation, but in the context of the larger institutional and administrative structures they inhabit. Many interventions focusing on teachers in isolation have failed to generate the intended impact in building their capacities and skills by ignoring these environmental realities.

In addition, the stakeholders that encompass this system must supplement ongoing efforts with increased collaboration between governments, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector to build consensus around key issues and identify a clear vision moving forward. Eventually then, as this report highlights, the goal of improving teacher capacity requires a range of contemporaneous investments and steps that address not just teachers, but the institutions, actors, and contexts that shape their performance.



ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL INNOVATION CORPS

The **International Innovation Corps (IIC)** is a **social impact fellowship program** that runs as a part of the **University of Chicago Trust** and the **Harris School of Public Policy**. Founded in 2013, the IIC recruits and places high-performing young professionals with up to five-years of experience and top-tier academic backgrounds from Indian and U.S. universities, on teams that work on-site with governments and foundations to implement large-scale projects to address India's most critical development challenges. The program aims at creating scalable, sustainable, and long-term social impact. IIC teams design interventions, pilot solutions, implement and iterate, and record and scale best practices by engaging stakeholders. Through direct impact on the ground, in complex multi-stakeholder environments, the IIC Fellowship ultimately seeks to cultivate future leaders of policy and international development.

Since its inception, the IIC has worked in a range of critical development areas, including education, energy and environment, agriculture, social innovation, and water and sanitation. Our implementation partners have included the NITI Aayog; the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor Development Corporation; the Department of Education, Rajasthan; the Department of Health, Karnataka; the Swachh Andhra Corporation, Andhra Pradesh; the Administrative Staff College of India; and the National Skills Development Council. Our projects have been supported by the Tata Trusts, the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, USAID, EdelGive Foundation, and Yes Bank.

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Supported by

