

Improving Observation and Feedback Loops Among Education Stakeholders

A Summary Brief Based on the Impact Evaluation Findings of STiR Education's Programmes in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, India



Study Context

STiR Education commissioned Ichuli Institute, an independent research organisation headquartered in Kampala, Uganda, to investigate long-term trends and impacts from their programme over 4 years in Karnataka state and Tamil Nadu state in India.

The goal of the study is to understand how the STiR programme impacts the intrinsic motivation – the self-motivation, drive, interest and satisfaction in engaging in a behaviour or activity – of students, teachers and education officials in order to improve teaching practices and student learning.



The Challenge

A lack of knowledge about good and diverse teaching practices and an inconsistency in using them is one of the barriers that prevents all children from having access to a quality education. In many schools in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, **teachers dedicate most of their classroom time to teacher-led activities** and spend little time engaging children in group, individual, hands-on or critical thinking activities. As a result, children may not be benefitting from the knowledge and skills that a quality education should offer them.

Even when teachers desire to **diversify and improve their teaching practices**, they often lack the training or support to do so. In order for teachers to better instruct students, they must be observed and receive constructive feedback so they can improve. Numerous studies have pointed to feedback as an essential element in improving teacher instruction.^{1,2} However, in many schools, the **practice of classroom observation and feedback is irregular and often focused mainly on praise rather than constructive criticism**. Furthermore, observers often lack an instrument for guiding their observation and feedback processes as well as for measuring a teacher's progress over time.

Developing a **culture of improvement that helps educators thrive is a key goal of STiR's programme**. **Observation and feedback loops** between officials, head teachers/head masters and teachers are a **critical part of this process**, aimed at strengthening their capacities. STiR works to support ELs/ELMs* and head teachers/head masters so that they prioritise observing their teachers, mentor them through feedback and encourage them through praise. Teachers are also encouraged to observe their peers' lessons and provide **peer-to-peer feedback and support**.



¹ Hattie, J. and Timperley, H. (2007). 'The Power of Feedback'. *Review of Educational Research*, 77(1), pp. 81-112.

² Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible Learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. Oxon, U.K.: Routledge.

* EL stands for Education Leader and ELM stands for Education Leader Manager in STiR's programme. In Karnataka, ELs are Cluster Resource Persons (CRPs) and ELMs are Block Resource Persons (BRPs). In Tamil Nadu, ELs are Block Resource Teacher Educators (BRTEs) and ELMs are Block Resource Teacher Educator Supervisors (BRTE Supervisors)





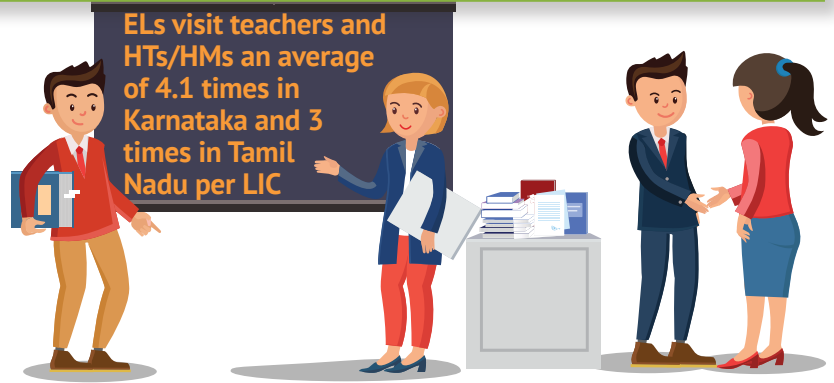
The Findings

Year 1 of the study found that many teachers and head teachers/head masters reported getting regular support from their superiors.

Specifically, findings showed that:

ELs and ELMs in both states reported routinely observing, supporting and giving feedback to teachers and head teachers/head masters. Most head teachers/head masters also reported engaging in observation and feedback with their teachers, indicating positive role modelling from ELs/ELMs to head teachers/head masters to teachers.

This finding was supported by **88% of teachers and 84% of head teachers in Karnataka** who reported that ELs observe them at least once per LIC. Teachers and head teachers in Karnataka reported an average of 4.1 visits by ELs per LIC and those in **Tamil Nadu reported an average of 3 visits** per LIC. All ELs/ELMs in Tamil Nadu reported supporting and giving feedback to head masters while 96% said they give feedback directly to teachers.



Almost all **head teachers reported observing, supporting, supervising and giving feedback to teachers** in their classrooms, primarily weekly or monthly in Karnataka and weekly in Tamil Nadu. Teachers in Karnataka corroborated this when 93% of them confirmed that they are observed by someone at school either weekly, monthly or termly. These findings indicate that there has been **substantial effort among stakeholders in terms of engaging in observations**.

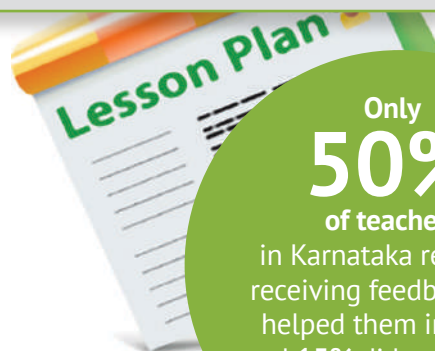
The finding that **classroom observations are happening regularly** is in line with STiR's expectation for Year 2 of the programme which instils positive routines amongst stakeholders. However, one point of improvement can be noted in terms of the quality of classroom observation feedback; **most of the feedback was in the form of praise rather than constructive advice on how to improve**.



An important finding from the study concluded:

Teachers and head teachers reported receiving useful feedback from observations. However, teachers, head teachers/head masters and ELs/ELMs admitted that the coaching provided during feedback sessions is often positive and focused on offering praise, rather than constructive advice to improve instructional practice. Despite this, teachers reported that they feel they have developed as a result of the feedback they receive.

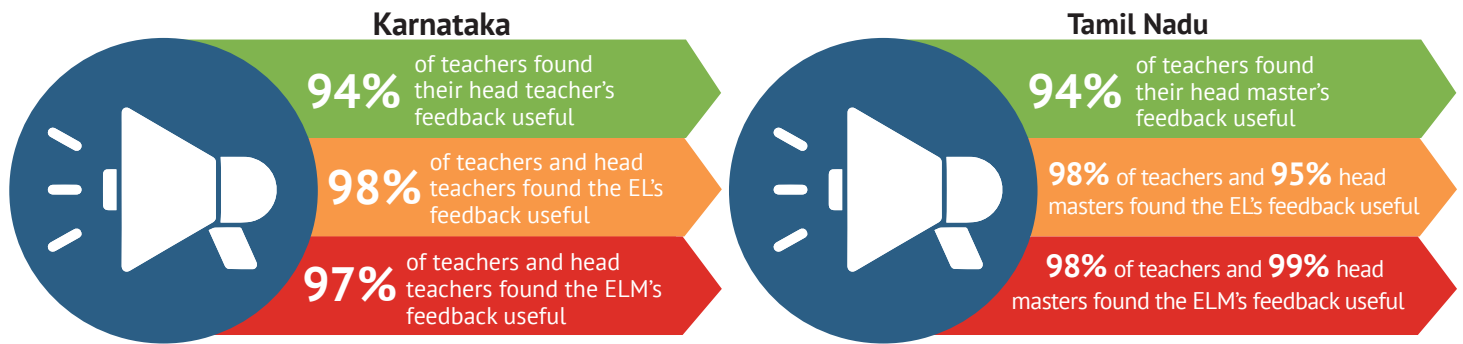
The vast majority of teachers and head teachers in both states reported that the coaching and feedback provided to them by ELs/ELMs was useful. Feedback on their lesson planning, however, was largely positive and rarely focused on ways they could improve, centering instead on praise, thanks and encouragement.



Only **50%** of teachers in Karnataka reported receiving feedback that helped them improve and **15%** did not receive feedback at all.

Only **37%** of teachers in Tamil Nadu reported being asked to make some corrections to their lesson plans

The **focus on praise rather than constructive feedback** was further uncovered when 95% of ELs/ELMs in Tamil Nadu reported that feedback should only be positive. This suggests that there are likely many lost opportunities when school actors could be supporting teachers' professional growth and helping them improve their instructional practices through constructive feedback.

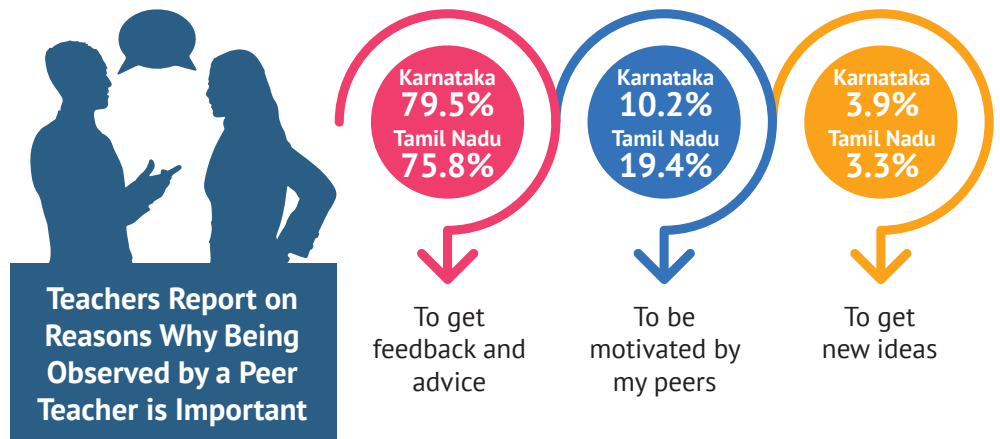


Aside from receiving feedback and praise from their superiors, peer feedback and observation is also important.

The study concluded that: Teachers reported meeting other teachers from their school or block to learn from each other and expressed an interest in continuing to do so even after the STiR programme ends, indicating a self-reported willingness for professional growth. However, although most teachers who have been observed by a peer teacher reported improving as a result of it, not all have had this opportunity.

Specifically, 88% of teachers and 85% of head teachers in Karnataka and 91% of teachers and head masters in Tamil Nadu reported meeting with other teachers to learn from each other. Additionally, the majority of teachers and head teachers/head masters in both states reported that **they would continue meeting with other teachers to learn from one another** even after the STiR programme ends. This highlights the **positive experience teachers have had** in their exchanges with other teachers.

In addition, **peer observation seems to be happening with some regularity**. In Karnataka, 78% of teachers reported that they are observed by a peer teacher,³ on average about once per month, whilst in Tamil Nadu 62% of teachers reported being observed by a peer teacher, on average either weekly or monthly.



However, the **benefits of peer observation are not yet universal for all teachers**. In Tamil Nadu, 33% of teachers who were observed by a peer did not receive feedback; but, positively, most of those who did receive feedback found it useful and felt they had improved as a result. Meanwhile, in Karnataka, most peer-observed teachers felt the feedback was useful, but almost half felt they had not improved as a result of it. This contradiction will have to be explored in subsequent evaluations.

³ Please note that all results on peer observation in Karnataka will need to be re-verified in Year 2 of the study because the STiR team in Karnataka suspects that teachers may have misinterpreted the question about peer observation (due to mistranslation) and information collected may not be accurate.

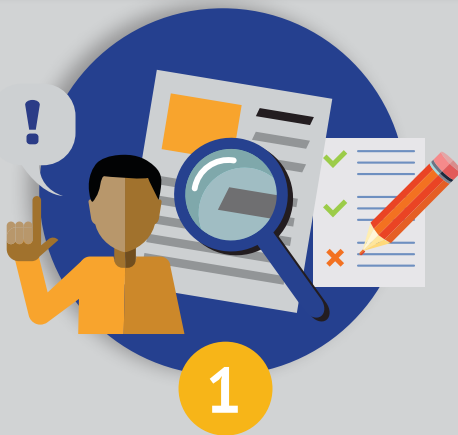


Recommendations for STiR and its Government Partners



STiR believes in strengthening relationships between stakeholders in the system by **building a culture where information flows up and down through coaching and feedback** in order to support growth and development. Coaching provides the greatest benefits when it helps school actors develop their capacities; as such, it should be **targeted, specific and corrective**. Improving this process will likely support better school management and higher-quality instruction.

Going forward, STiR and its government partners should focus on:



Developing a clear framework for school actors to utilise when observing teachers

This should include a **schedule for observations** by each actor to ensure teachers are routinely observed by their peers, head teacher/head master and ELs/ELMs. STiR has developed an **observation tool** for measuring teacher performance and tracking feedback, but it **does not appear to be consistently and accurately used** by all actors. The tool should be **reviewed and potentially improved** with stakeholder input, and all stakeholders should be **practically trained** on how to use it and **how to provide constructive feedback** in addition to praise.



Acknowledging that changing teachers' practices will be an on-going endeavor and teachers need time and space to practice new strategies and gradually improve

Time should be made in each teacher's school schedule so that they can **be observed frequently**, receive substantial feedback from their observers and **reflect upon it** so that they can **implement it** into their teaching routines. This level of **focus on constructive criticism and engagement in the feedback process** should be emphasised with all school stakeholders.

In the next phase of the study, it will also be important to investigate further how head teachers and ELs/ELMs conduct their observation and feedback sessions and what, if any, observation tools they use. **Further exploration of the content and process of observation visits** across stakeholders **could provide a better lens on this metric**. Ichuli and STiR will explore utilising additional reporting mechanisms such as observations/observation tool review by STiR programme staff and deeper questioning around this topic in the next round of the study.



Researched, Reported and Designed by:
Ichuli Consulting
Plot 2690, Ntinda-Kigowa Road
PO Box 56, Ntinda, Kampala, Uganda
www.ichuli.africa



Programme Implemented by:
STiR Education
3rd Floor, Chandra Bhawan
Building No. 67-68
Nehru Place, New Delhi, 110019
www.stireducation.org