A Summary Brief of Findings from an Independent Evaluation of STiR Education's Programme in Tamil Nadu State, India

Study Context and Methodology

STiR Education commissioned an independent research evaluation to investigate long-term trends and impacts from their programme over 4 years in Tamil Nadu, India. STiR's research and learning partner for this evaluation is Ichuli Institute, an independent research organisation headquartered in Kampala, Uganda which offers technical, comprehensive strategic development services to clients in the education, research, and monitoring and evaluation sectors.

The overarching question of the longitudinal study is:

How does STiR's approach, focused on strengthening intrinsic motivation, contribute to sustained improvements in the foundations of lifelong learning among ELs/ELMs, teachers, and students?

A total of 206 primary, middle and high schools were representatively sampled across Villupuram and Dharmapuri districts in Tamil Nadu state to partake in the evaluation. Head masters and selected teachers and students from each school participated in data collection as well as the ELs/ELMs* assigned to each district.

Overall Findings and Conclusions

Findings from Year 1 of the study are presented in this brief to provide a **lens on the progress made after four months of STiR's programme implementation in Tamil Nadu.** Overall, the findings demonstrated that **stakeholders within the education system are well on their way to developing a shared purpose, working together and changing their mind sets within each of the foundations of lifelong learning** – the overarching achievement expected by Year 1, according to STiR's progress pathway.

Specifically, the evaluation found that the **concepts of mentoring, role modelling and trying out new practices are beginning to happen** – key to this year's focus of helping stakeholders establish a shared purpose and begin changing their mind sets. The evaluation also found that these **practices currently often lack substance and depth and additional efforts are needed to ensure that stakeholders are critically engaging through deeper reflection** on practice.

Going forward, STiR should focus on helping stakeholders to create a feedback process and role modelling approach that combines content knowledge with an effective, repeated cycle for effective mentoring and observation. STiR, with the support of state and district officials, can also do more to **ensure that EL institutes are being organised as planned** to ensure that knowledge transmission does not get bottle-necked with ELMs and that it gets passed down to ELs and, subsequently, to teachers. In addition, STiR and their government partners should continue to **monitor attendance at the mandatory teacher network meetings** so that all teachers have an opportunity to benefit from them.

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

Specific Headline Findings

Intrinsic Motivation

Finding 1

Positively, teachers, head masters and ELs/ELMs report high daily motivation levels as well as feeling motivated by the STiR programme. However, these self-reported attitudes are contradicted by high rates of absenteeism from work, which are corroborated by students, and the fact that at least 28% of teachers' overall daily time is spent on tasks unrelated to teaching and learning. Time spent off-task is also frequent among head masters and ELs/ELMs, indicating there may be negative role modelling in this regard from teachers' superiors.

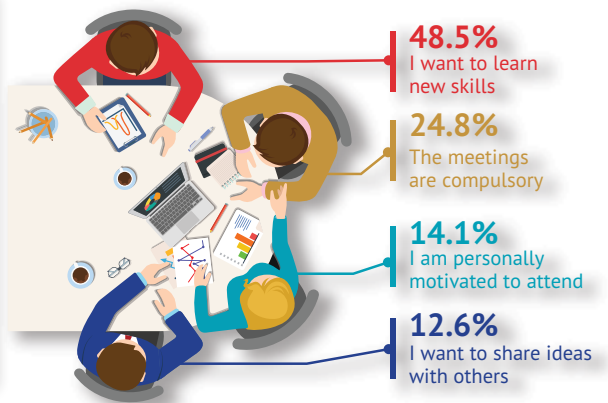**Percent absent at least once in past two weeks**

55% — **Teachers and Head Masters**

42% — **ELs/ELMs**
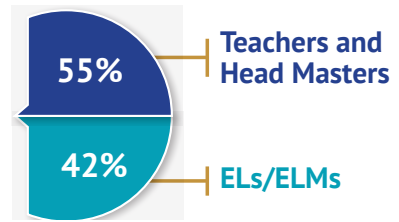
How motivated do you feel at work on most days?

TEACHER

	Not sure	Not at all	Somewhat motivated	Motivated	Highly motivated
All Teachers	5.6%	1.0%	16.7%	56.6%	20.1%
Female	5.2%	0.9%	17.2%	52.6%	24.1%
Male	5.8%	1.2%	16.3%	59.3%	17.4%

HEAD MASTER

	Not sure	Not at all	Somewhat motivated	Motivated	Highly motivated
All HMs	4.2%	0.0%	16.7%	54.2%	25.0%
Female	5.5%	0.0%	12.7%	54.6%	27.3%
Male	3.1%	0.0%	20.0%	53.9%	23.1%

Finding 2

71% of ELMs reported attending an ELM Institute in 2019; however, only 59% of ELMs organised at least one EL institute in 2019, potentially bottlenecking the transmission of knowledge from ELMs to ELs. Meanwhile, 81% of teachers attended a network meeting in the 2-3 months of project implementation in 2019, which exceeds STiR's progress pathway expectation for Year 1, but should continue to move towards 100% of teacher attendance as these meetings are technically mandatory.

Teacher Motivations for Attending Network Meetings

48.5% I want to learn new skills

24.8% The meetings are compulsory

14.1% I am personally motivated to attend

12.6% I want to share ideas with others

Engagement

93% of students reported liking school 'very much'

Finding 3

Students report liking school and were observed being positive in class and participating in classroom activities, though there is room for improvement in how they readily embark on assigned activities, contribute to class discussions and collaborate with their peers. Teachers were observed greeting students and calling on a variety of students, although they sometimes praised students unequally, treated boys and girls differently and did not call on students by name.

Finding 4

ELs and ELMs reported routinely observing, supporting and giving feedback to teachers and head masters. Most head masters also reported engaging in observation and feedback with their teachers, indicating positive role modelling from ELs/ELMs to head masters to teachers. The majority of teachers also reported that their head master reviews their lesson plans frequently and that ELs often visit them at school and provide them with direct coaching and support.

ELs visit teachers and HMs an average of 3 times per LIC

Finding 5

ELs/ELMs reported supporting head masters in building useful relationships with their teachers during feedback sessions which relates to the high number of teachers and head masters who said they receive useful feedback from observations. However, head masters and ELs/ELMs admitted that the coaching they give during feedback sessions is often positive and focused primarily on offering praise, rather than constructive advice to improve instructional practice. Nonetheless, teachers reported that they feel they have developed in their teaching methodology as a result of observation and feedback.

82% of teachers agreed that their head master routinely guides them on how they can improve

Learning Time and Intentional Teaching

Finding 6

The majority of teachers reported meeting other teachers from their school or block to learn from each other and expressed willingness to continue even after the STiR programme ends. This is indicative of their self-reported willingness for professional growth which many have also demonstrated through attending additional, albeit compulsory trainings. However, although most teachers who have been observed by a peer teacher reported improving as a result of it, 38% of teachers have not yet had this opportunity.

Finding 7

The majority of teachers reported learning two instructional methods promoted by STiR and 60% are frequently trying them in their classrooms, but less than 15% of them could accurately describe how to apply them. However, nearly all teachers reported being confident in applying these strategies and most felt there had been a positive change since starting to use them. Teachers were observed using a number of other good teaching practices like articulating lesson objectives, explaining content clearly, making connections to existing content and modelling.

✓ teachers trying new practices
✓ improvement in application needed

Foundations of Curiosity and Critical Thinking

When in class, teachers were on-task 89% of the time.

Finding 8

Independent observations found that teachers are on-task for 89% of lesson time. However, the majority of the learning process is teacher-centred rather than student-centred, so students have very limited opportunities to work independently or in groups. This corresponds to observations of limitations in teachers' abilities to develop the critical and creative thinking abilities of their students.

Safety

Finding 9

Teachers self-reported and were observed being welcoming, friendly and respectful towards students. Students reported feeling safe in their school and classroom. But, conversely, students reported that corporal punishment is a common method of discipline with a high percentage of students believing it is the best means of discipline, indicating a disconnect between purported feelings of safety at school and normalised physical punishment practices. Teachers and ELs/ELMs were less likely than students to admit to using or witnessing corporal punishment at school.

Teachers are welcoming and friendly...

and use physical punishment to discipline...

but education stakeholders often do not admit this is the case.

Self-Esteem

Finding 10

Students reported high levels of determination and excitement when faced with difficult academic exercises. This may be connected to observations of teachers exhibiting a positive attitude towards learner's challenges. However, evidence of learners' self-esteem is contradicted by the fact that over 50% of learners have never been happy with their achievements at school and 52% reporting giving up on at least half of the difficult exercises they encounter. This may be connected to teachers' observed lack of providing specific and corrective feedback and the low rate of students asking teachers and their peers for help.

53% of students reported feeling frustrated by difficult exercises

More than **80%** said they were determined to solve a problem

Recommendations for STiR and its Government Partners

STiR works to **strengthen the education system** and **empower stakeholders** including teachers, head masters and ELs/ELMs to **perform their respective functions** so all children develop a love of lifelong learning.

Going forward STiR and its government partners should focus on ensuring that:

- Teachers are both routinely and effectively implementing good teaching strategies in their classrooms;
- There is a clear framework and standardised tool for peer teachers, head masters and ELs/ELMs to utilise when observing teachers;
- Feedback mechanisms between teachers, head masters and ELMs improves and progresses from mainly positive praise to more constructive feedback for professional development;
- Time 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;
- EL institutes are organized as frequently as planned;
- Teachers are attending network meetings regularly to learn from each other and new skills; and
- Steps are taken to improve the physical and emotional safety for all students.