

Improving Observation and Feedback Loops Among Education Stakeholders

A Summary Brief Based on the Impact Evaluation Findings of STiR Education's Programme in Uganda



Study Context



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

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 Ugandan schools, **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 Ugandan 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 and teachers are a critical part of this process, aimed at strengthening their capacities. STiR works to **support education officials and head teachers** 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.



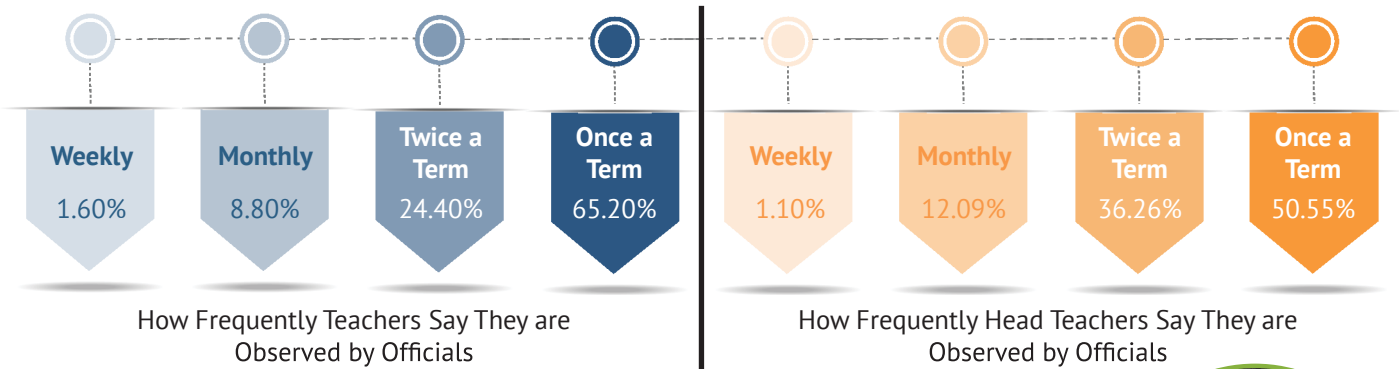
The Findings

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

Specifically, findings showed that:

Routine observations of teachers and head teachers by education officials is positively related to reports of head teachers frequently observing their own teachers, and teachers reporting that they are regularly observed by their superiors. Direct, corresponding connections across this chain of stakeholders is a positive sign that observation processes are streamlined under the programme and highly prioritised by education actors.

This finding was supported by **97% of teachers who said they receive feedback from the head teacher** or someone else in the management team on either a weekly, monthly or termly basis, although some improvement may be needed in secondary schools where nearly 15% of teachers reported never being observed. All teachers and head teachers reported that **local education officials observe them at least once per term** and a significant number reported that they are visited twice per term.



The finding that **classrooms 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:

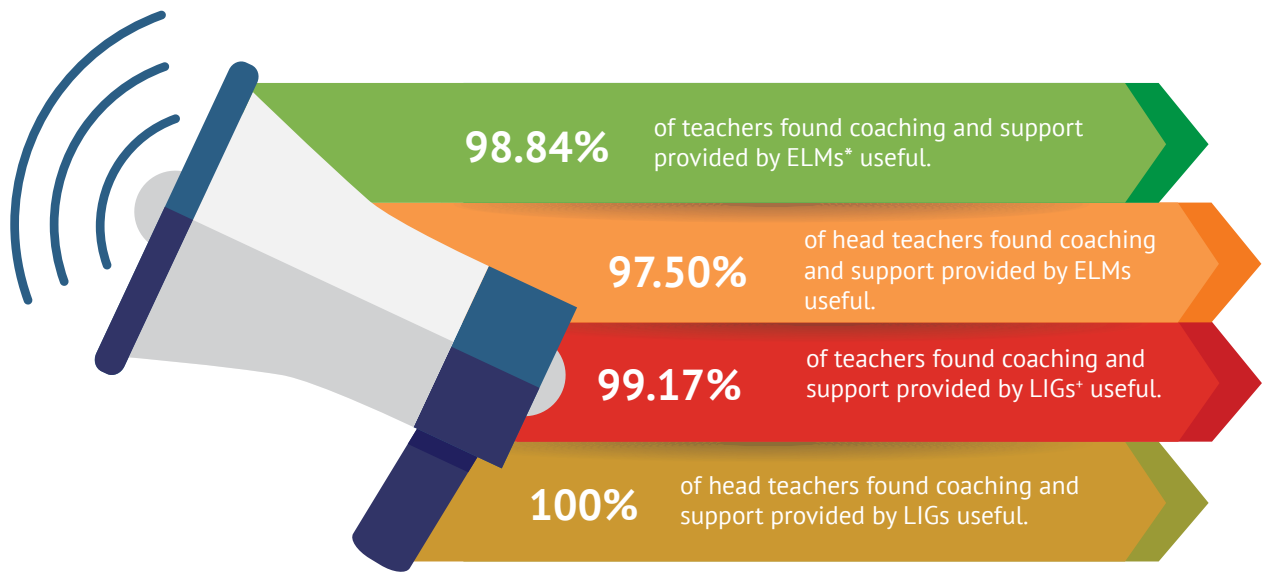
Teachers and head teachers reported receiving useful feedback from observations. However, teachers, head teachers and education officials admitted that the coaching provided during feedback sessions was primarily positive and focused on offering praise, rather than constructive advice to improve instructional practice. Despite this, teachers and head teachers reported that they are inspired by receiving praise and recognition from their superiors and consider it a critical driver of their intrinsic motivation.

The vast majority of teachers and head teachers reported that the coaching and feedback provided to them by education officials was useful. Feedback on their lesson scheming and planning, however, was largely positive and rarely focused on ways they could improve, centering instead on praise, thanks and encouragement. Only about **30% of all teachers reported receiving feedback that helped them improve** their lesson schemes and plans. Secondary teachers were less likely overall to report receiving constructive feedback. The focus on praise rather than constructive feedback was further uncovered when **more than half of education officials reported that feedback should only be positive.**



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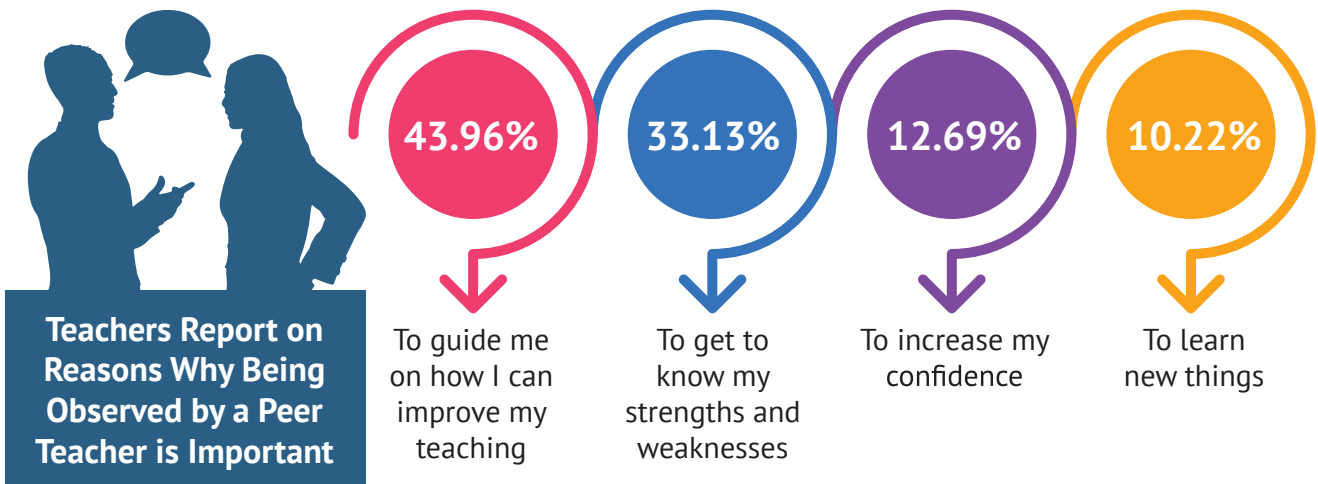


*ELMs include teacher trainers such as CCTs and UNATU/ASSHU representatives
 *LIGs include district education officials such as DIS, DEO, MIS and MEO

Although 49% of teachers reported feeling motivated when they are praised and appreciated at work, these findings suggest that there are **likely many lost opportunities when head teachers and education officials could be supporting teachers' professional growth and helping them improve** their instructional practices through constructive feedback rather than only praise.

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

The study concluded that: Teachers reported that they are regularly observed by their peers and that feedback from these visits helps them to improve their practice. Unlike the coaching and feedback provided by head teachers and education officials, which is primarily focused on praise, peer-to-peer learning within the programme appears to be highly appreciated by teachers and provides a stronger basis for constructive support.



Specifically, 91% of teachers reported receiving feedback from their peers on a weekly, monthly or termly basis. Many reported that the feedback was useful, although secondary teachers were less likely than primary teachers to report this. Most teachers believe that **peer observation is important because it helps them identify their strengths and weaknesses and improve their teaching**. Some teachers also stated that feedback increases their confidence or helps them learn new things. These findings suggest that peer-to-peer mentorship under the STiR programme, especially in primary schools, **is frequent and provides teachers with constructive inputs** to help them grow as educators. This is significant, as **creating a basis for continuous professional development within a school environment**, rather than only from external support mechanisms, is **critical to growing the skills of teachers** and creating a culture of professionalism with colleagues.



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 by head teachers and higher quality instruction by teachers.



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 and education officials. 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 education officials 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.



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