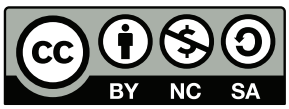
Azim Premji University

Teacher Efforts to Support Learning Recovery after School Reopening

Field Studies in Education | June 2022



These papers present findings from Azim Premji Foundation's field engagements in trying to improve the quality and equity of school education in India. Our aim is to disseminate our studies to practitioners, academicians and policy makers who wish to understand some of the key issues facing school education as observed by educators in the field. The findings of the paper are those of the Research Group and may not reflect the view of the Azim Premji Foundation including Azim Premji University.

Teacher Efforts to Support Learning Recovery after School Reopening

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Executive Summary

India has had among the longest school closure in the world, resulting in learning loss comprising forgetting of what was learnt and the loss of curricular learning that would have happened if schools had remained open. The impact has been particularly harmful in the early years of learning, when the foundational abilities that are critical for later learning across subjects have been lost or simply not been acquired. As schools reopen, this learning loss must be addressed on priority, otherwise learning gaps will accumulate across school years to unmanageable levels – this situation is a national emergency.

Various initiatives have been taken by the central and state governments for addressing learning loss as schools reopen. While so far these efforts have been uneven, many states are preparing long-term plans going ahead. However, whatever initiatives may be taken, it is undeniable that teachers are central to the effort of addressing learning loss. Therefore, this study focuses on efforts of teachers towards learning recovery since schools reopened. The study was conducted in 41 districts across five states and covered 108 teachers, as many schools, and 1644 students in classes 2 to 5.

The Azim Premji Foundation has been working with the teachers included in the study for a long time. While working within the same resource and support constraints as most of our public-school teachers, they are known to make exceptional efforts towards student learning and have consistently demonstrated their commitment and capability. It should be noted that the teachers in this study are a small percentage of the teachers in the school system. The larger objective of the study was, therefore, to determine what is needed for learning recovery at scale from the efforts of these teachers, and their experiences and reflections.

Baseline and endline assessments of students for language and mathematics were done to understand the extent of learning recovery during the duration of the study. It is important to point out that the specific abilities assessed comprised those from two classes below, and not the current class – with the exception of class 2 since it was assumed that these students did not have any formal learning exposure except during class 1 – to understand the recovery of foundational abilities necessary for further learning across classes and subjects.

Key Findings

Teacher efforts: this subsection indicates key findings from teacher interviews and classroom observations related to efforts teachers are making towards recovery of learning loss.

- **Teacher efforts towards engaging students:** In the classroom, 89 percent of teachers were observed to make space for students' narratives and experiences in their daily interactions and teaching-learning processes. This was part of a special effort towards getting students into the routine of classrooms and schools, particularly those in Classes 1 and 2, who were coming to school for the first time. 81 percent of teachers reported the use of fun games and activities throughout the day, while 83 percent of teachers reported efforts to convey a sense of the school as a safe space for newly enrolled students through personalized conversations.
- **Working with multilevel classrooms:** In attending to multilevel classrooms, or even multigrade multilevel classrooms – a reality in most public primary schools – 72 percent of teachers were seen to divide students into logical learning groups. They used different materials, activities, and

pedagogic techniques to engage with these groups through a differentiated approach within the same classroom session. Other practices reported by teachers included activity-based learning in school (69%) and making learning opportunities available for students beyond school hours through community-based group projects and worksheets (64%). Teachers also reported having undertaken specific efforts to prepare themselves for the anticipated challenging situation once schools reopened, with 95 percent of teachers reporting participation in online forums (seminars, workshops, trainings).

- **Classroom practices:** 81 percent of teachers encouraged and allowed students to use local dialects and made conscious efforts to connect with the home language of the students, which was often different from the medium of instruction in the school. 75 percent of teachers were observed to rely on a variety of teaching-learning resources, including worksheets, library books, contextualized local teaching-learning materials (TLMs) and charts, to engage students better with foundational abilities in language and mathematics.
- **Student assessment:** 38 percent of teachers were observed to use multiple tools for assessment, including self and peer assessment in the form of worksheets, group discussions, role play, class work, home assignments, observations, project work, in oral, written and mixed modes. 87 percent of teachers reported using oral assessments, with other strategies including worksheets and observation, with a specific focus on each student after schools reopened. Teachers also reported using games and activities for assessment, and conducting assessment after school reopening for determining student learning levels for creating learning groups.

Learning levels and learning recovery: Students were assessed at the beginning of the study period – this assessment indicated the status of learning related to the specific abilities from the previous two classes (with the exception of class 2). Students were assessed again at the end of the study period to understand how learning recovery was progressing, given that the chosen sample of teachers were expected to put in the required efforts.

- **Language**
  - **Demonstration of previous class abilities in language at the start of the study period:** 53 percent, 70 percent, 58 percent and 61 percent of students, from classes 2, 3, 4 and 5, respectively, were not able to demonstrate abilities in language from the previous two classes at the start of the study.
  - **Improvement in demonstration of previous class abilities in language at the end of the study period:** 41 percent, 46 percent, 50 percent and 41 percent of students, from classes 2, 3, 4 and 5, respectively, showed improvement in abilities from the previous two classes in language during the duration of the study.
- **Mathematics**
  - **Demonstration of previous class abilities in mathematics at the start of the study period:** 29 percent, 57 percent, 52 percent and 54 percent of students from classes 2, 3, 4 and 5, respectively, were not able to demonstrate abilities in mathematics from the previous two classes at the start of the study.

- **Improvement in demonstration of previous class abilities in mathematics at the end of the study period:** 52 percent, 54 percent, 47 percent and 63 percent of students from classes 2, 3, 4 and 5, respectively, showed improvement in abilities from the previous two classes in mathematics during the duration of the study.

While in no way attempting to establish a simple causal relationship, it is clear overall that the efforts of teachers included in the study have had some impact on learning recovery, although much work is still required. Also, it may be recalled that the abilities assessed in this study are from the previous two classes (with the exception of class 2) and not class-appropriate abilities. Even as students are now in the process of moving to the next class, they are still not proficient in the abilities of two classes below. In other words, hardly anything has been learnt in the past two years, and if we go on with a business-as-usual attitude, the loss in learning will soon be insurmountable.

Thus, there is need for well-coordinated multi-pronged efforts at the systemic level to address learning recovery. The approach must be holistic and long-term, with teacher capacity and support in focus, as well as dissemination of practices that can be adopted by all teachers. It is critical at this point to refurbish the curriculum – to identify the essential learning outcomes that are critical for further learning. Content must be selected thoughtfully based on these essential learning outcomes. Continuously assessing students is also critical to determine learning levels on which to base plans for providing focused attention, either individually or in groups, as well as to modify teaching-learning. This requires time – at least one full year must be provided for these efforts. Needless to say, teachers will also need customized capacity building, both on-site support as well as orientation to the refurbished curriculum and pedagogical strategies that support multilevel classrooms. The efforts cannot be cosmetic – a consistent effort at this critical juncture is required to not only address the current crisis but to enable a shift to teaching-learning that enables success for each student.

1. Introduction

India has had the longest school closure in the world – schools closed in March 2020 and have opened in a staggered manner across states between September 2021 and January 2022. There is overwhelming evidence of learning loss due to this long school closure, warranting treating the situation as a national emergency.[1] Learning loss comprises both regression or forgetting of what was learnt and the loss of curricular learning that would have happened if schools had remained open.

The impact has been particularly harmful in the early years of learning, when the foundational abilities that are critical for later learning across subjects have not been acquired or have been lost. As schools reopen, this learning loss must be addressed on priority, otherwise learning gaps will accumulate across school years, impacting completion of school education, and the preparedness of an entire generation to take up higher learning and meaningful employment.

Initiatives towards learning recovery can be categorized into efforts at the level of the Centre and state-driven efforts. Some examples of the former are the 100-day reading campaign, and the focus on foundational literacy and numeracy through the FLN Mission. States have adopted the initiatives taken by the Centre while also taking other specific measures.

Most states have reduced the content of textbooks, based on either identification of essential learning outcomes or concepts. The curriculum has been systematically refurbished in a couple of states through prioritizing learning outcomes, and a few other states are in the process of doing the same.

Bridge courses have been designed from class 2 onwards in a few states, focusing on foundational abilities from the class students would have been in while schools were closed. School readiness programmes have also been designed for classes 1 and 2, for students who enrolled during the pandemic and hence have never attended formal school. A few states have developed programmes for learning recovery, ranging from developing workbooks to tracking student learning, undertaking remedial programmes, and supporting teacher efforts towards teaching ability-based groups of students. Orientation of teachers for school reopening has been done in both face to face and digital mode in some states, while a few others have conducted capacity building programmes for specific interventions.

However, thus far, efforts have been uneven across most states. While some states have taken up systematic, long-term efforts, others are still looking at one-time short-term programmes and/or supplementary materials as being sufficient to address this crisis.

However, whatever initiatives may be taken, it is undeniable that teachers are central to the effort of addressing learning loss. Therefore, it is important to understand efforts made by teachers – whether individually or driven by state initiatives – towards learning recovery. This study focuses on teachers who have been known to make exceptional efforts towards student learning over a long period of time, including during school closure. The intent was to study the efforts these teachers were making towards learning recovery after schools reopened.

1 Azim Premji Foundation. (2021). *Loss of learning during the pandemic*. https://azimpremjiuniversity.edu.in/publications/2021/report/learning-loss-during-pandemic

2. Methodology of the Study

The study was conducted in 41 districts across five states (Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttarakhand) and covered 108 teachers, as many schools, and 1644 students in classes 2 to 5 (see Table 1). As the schools were reopened only for a few months before the end of the academic year, the study was carried out over the brief period of January to April 2022, with around only seven weeks between the baseline and endline assessments conducted with students. The objective of the study was to understand what could be achieved by teachers who have been making continuous efforts to engage with students throughout the period of school closure, and have also specifically focused on learning recovery after schools reopened. Hence, the study was done only with a purposive sample of teachers. These teachers were selected based on prior knowledge of their engagement in school teaching-learning processes; the Azim Premji Foundation has been consistently working with these very committed and capable teachers over a long period.

Table 1: State-wise teachers observed, and students assessed

	Districts	Number of students assessed*	Number of teachers interviewed and observed
Chhattisgarh	4	424	22
Karnataka	9	463	30
Madhya Pradesh	4	190	08
Rajasthan	11	224	21
Uttarakhand	13	343	27
Total	41	1644	108

**Number of students assessed in language: 820; Number of students assessed in mathematics: 824*

The main focus of the study being efforts of the teacher on recovery of foundational abilities, a briefing of the teachers was done in the initial visit to get their consent and also to provide them an outline of the study. This included a brief teacher interview to understand their opinions, beliefs and planned practices for learning recovery among their students. In addition, two classroom observations were done with each teacher across the seven-week period with the purpose of identifying specific practices that they were engaging in for recovery of foundational abilities. A debrief interview was also conducted at the end of the seven-week cycle with a subset of teachers, to allow them to reflect on the observation data and also on their practices.

Baseline and endline assessments were done with the same cohort of students for language and mathematics. The assessments focused on foundational abilities in both these subjects. Students were assessed for foundational abilities corresponding to the previous two classes with reference to the class they were currently in, with the exception of class 2. In case of class 2, a decision was taken not to assess abilities related to early childhood care and learning (ECCE) since it cannot be assumed that all students were enrolled in any type of ECCE programme especially in light of the pandemic. Hence, students enrolled in class 2 were assessed only on abilities from class 1.

Class-appropriate abilities were not assessed as students had returned to school only recently and it was assumed that they had little or no exposure to class-appropriate teaching-learning.

3. Findings

Efforts of teachers towards learning recovery were determined through teacher interviews and observation of classrooms. To estimate the effect these efforts are having on learning recovery, students were assessed at the beginning of the study (baseline) and at the end of the study (endline). This was not done to establish any causal relationship between teacher efforts and learning recovery, but to identify whether teacher efforts are aligned towards learning recovery.

3.1 Insights from teacher interviews and classroom observations

3.1.1 Engaging students

- In the classroom, 89 percent of teachers were observed making space for children's narratives while 62 percent of teachers were observed facilitating inclusive and engaging activities.
- During interviews, 81 percent of teachers reported the use of fun games and activities throughout the day while 73 percent of teachers reported creating a child-friendly environment wherein students could feel comfortable sharing their anxieties, home situation, incidences of violence or fear, and so on with the teachers. About 50 percent of teachers also reported use of the library, interesting assembly and developing Covid related habits.
- 83 percent of teachers reported efforts to convey a sense of the school as a safe space for newly enrolled students (students of classes 1 and 2 who were coming to school for the first time) through conversations while 74 percent of the teachers reported involving them through games and activities. About 50 percent of teachers reported engagement with each of the following practices: giving students extra time to adjust to the school routine, discussing the everyday routine in different forums with students, and involving parents, Anganwadi workers, MDM cooks and other staff of the school in making students comfortable.

- Teachers conveyed that their intent was to build a sense of confidence among the students about coming back to school and helping them overcome the anxieties and tribulations they might have faced over the last two years.

Views from classrooms

The language teacher in class 3 continues her 5-day plan to work on rhyme extension. Her focus today is to get students to present their homework on extending the rhyme. They have spent the last two days learning this new rhyme – finger reading, reciting, and writing it in their notebooks. She has asked them to extend the rhyme adding new words they have heard as homework. All have been given the same homework, despite the teacher knowing that many students are not at class level and will not be able to do it. But doing the same homework will make them feel included and encourage them to attempt it. As expected, some students have not done the homework. The teacher writes the rhyme on the board, leaving a few words blank, and asks these students to come forward, recite the rhyme with actions first and then complete the blanks on board with what they have sung. As they write on the board, some make spelling mistakes. The teacher encourages them, saying 'yes its OK, just write what you have in mind', instead of correcting the spellings. Once they have all returned to their seats, she corrects the mistakes with the help of the entire class. (*Class 3, Language*)

When a child in class 2 says that rats are yellow, the teacher does not dismiss the response, asking instead, "Where have you seen the yellow rat?" The child responds by saying that he has seen it on TV. The teacher then asks all students the colour of rats we see in our houses. In this manner, she helps students reflect on their responses while also communicating to them the difference between the TV shows and reality. (*Class 2, Language*)

Voices from the field

I believe the first step towards getting students ready to learn is to get them comfortable in a fear-free environment. For that, we need to talk with them about their favourite toy, food, their family, stories, charts, etc., and that too in their local language, so they open up. Slowly, we can build their interest towards talking about things present in the textbook. And in no time, we will see that students have started to participate in the planned academic activities. A teacher cannot expect students to speak or answer questions on textbook exercises if the teacher hasn't connected the content with students' experiences. (*Teacher*)

3.1.2 Working with multilevel classrooms

- In attending to multilevel classrooms 72 percent of teachers were seen to divide students into logical learning groups and use diverse materials, activities and pedagogic techniques to engage with these groups through a differentiated approach within the same classroom session. 57 percent of teachers were observed to be taking steps to address each child's needs. While most classrooms comprise students at different learning levels, the pandemic has sharpened and deepened these differences, since some students received support during school closure while others did not.
- Focus on group-based learning (72%) and activity-based learning in school (69%) were approaches that found favour among teachers to help students recover learning loss and reach class-level abilities at the earliest possible. 64 percent of teachers saw the value of making learning opportunities available for students beyond school hours through community-based group projects and worksheets. The intent was to reduce the differences in learning levels by using pedagogical strategies and resources that address multilevel classroom.

Views from classrooms

In a language classroom, the teacher makes groups of students comprising those who are reading at class level and those who are struggling to read, respectively. While doing so, the teacher also considers the distance between the homes of these students. She does this to ensure they live closeby so that they can continue learning at home as well. These peer groups are called vishay mitr (subject friends). Each group is given a story card or word making activity. The teacher also distributes story books among the students – each has to read a story and then narrate it to the other group members. (*Class 2, Language*)

Voices from the field

When I paired students level-wise for a reading task, it not only helped them to understand that they had to respect each other's difficulty but also learn from each other and read properly. I had read all the books before giving them to the groups, so that I knew which book is text-heavy, which has easy words, which covers an easy topic, etc. so that I could distribute them as per the learning level of the group. Through this approach, I was able to work on language learning outcomes like retelling read story in their own words, reading new words through guessing, and writing the told story. Though my students might have learnt in different capacities, they were able to explore new resources and participate in the same task as their friends. Working in groups also made students sensitive towards each other. When a peer couldn't keep up with their pace of reading, they got frustrated and often complained; this made them realise how difficult it is for some students to learn and how they can help them.
(*Teacher*)

3.1.3 Classroom transaction

- 81 percent of teachers were observed to encourage students to use local dialects and make conscious efforts to connect with the home language of the students, which was often different from the medium of instruction in the school. 75 percent went beyond the textbook and brought in the local context, while 72 percent encouraged children to speak and share their experiences.

- Many teachers reported undertaking specific efforts to prepare themselves for the challenging situation they anticipated they would face when schools reopened. 95 percent of teachers reported participation in online forums (seminars, workshops, trainings). 70 percent participated in orientation to bridge courses and the use of worksheets while 68 percent reported preparing worksheets/TLMs to be used when schools reopen. 54 percent made efforts to acquaint themselves with methods to identify learning loss and learning needs of individual students and 19 percent reported reading articles / blogs on innovative ways of assessing students.
- It is important to point out that these are good classroom practices, that must be seen in all classrooms. However, in the current scenario, these good practices have become critical since they will provide the path to recovery of learning.

Views from classrooms

The teacher asks students to make a sentence of their choice, encouraging them to use words they were comfortable with; this not only paves way for the local language to be part of the classroom but also for students' existing knowledge. Ashish makes a sentence using dham, the Garhwali word for sunshine. The sentence he makes is 'We get dham from the sun'. This set off a chain of sentences using dham – e.g., 'Dham gives light'; 'We get heat from dham'; and so on. (*Classes 4, 5, Language*)

In a Class 5 mathematics game on addition and subtraction, students are asked to jump on different numbers marked on the floor. One child makes a slight error in recognizing the correct number and jumps on the wrong one. The teacher and other students help him to recognize the right number by saying 'Where is the arrow pointing, if you are not able to understand where to go, then look at the arrow'. In another activity, number cards from 1 to 10 are placed in a line and the teacher asks the students to stand on a given number and then move forward by adding a number he calls out. For example, when a child stands on number 4 and the teacher asks him to add 3, the child moves forward by counting 1, 2, 3 and reaches 7. Some students participate in both the activities based on addition - subtraction and counting, and some participate only in counting activities – they can decide. He uses the local dialect as well as the medium of instruction. (*Class 4, Mathematics*)

Voices from the field

While I use the workbooks given by the state as the main resource, I have learnt many new methods for teaching-learning from YouTube. I feel a connect with my students and am also aware of the trust parents place in us when they send their children to school. Because of these things, I feel that it is my responsibility to teach well and work hard. (*Teacher*)

3.1.4 Resources

- Teachers were observed to rely more on a variety of teaching-learning resources, including worksheets, library books, contextualized local TLMs and charts, to better engage students in foundational abilities in language and mathematics, with 75 percent of teachers doing so.
- However, only 43 percent were observed making meaningful use of resources for teaching-learning in terms of age-appropriateness, seamless integration into teaching-learning, independent use by students, and so on.

Views from classrooms

The teacher in the multigrade mathematics classroom uses resources like pebbles, tree leaves, match sticks, etc to help students understand the concept of addition, subtraction, and place value in mathematics. While working on the concept of place value (ones and tens), he helps students to 'make numbers' using bundles of 10 matchsticks as well as loose sticks. Saying 56, he picks up 5 bundles of ten matchsticks and 6 loose sticks, and then asks students to make various two-digit numbers. Further, students use the workbook developed by the State, wherein they have to write the number name in a blank space next to pictures of bundles and loose sticks. (*Classes 4, 5, Mathematics*)

3.1.5 Assessment

- Through their pedagogic processes, teachers were observed to use multiple tools for assessment, including self and peer assessment in the form of worksheets, group discussions, role plays, class work, home assignments, observations, project work, and all these in oral, written, and mixed modes. However, only 38 percent of teachers were found to be undertaking such diverse forms of assessment. 34 percent of teachers used assessment throughout the lesson, while 31 percent were observed to be using the results of assessment to give feedback and support reflection.
- 87 percent of teachers reported the use of oral assessments, 63 percent reported the use of worksheets, and 69 percent reported the use of observation, with a specific focus on each student after schools reopened. 40 percent of teachers also reported assessment through games and activities.
- Assessment must be a part of all classrooms – however, it is particularly relevant in the current scenario since the teacher must be able to understand where each student is placed, and also what kind of support each student needs.

Views from classrooms

Each child in Class 5 is teamed with a partner. The teacher provides flash cards with punctuation marks to child A, and flash cards with the names of punctuation marks to child B. Child A shows a flash card of a punctuation mark and child B shows the matching flash card with the name of the punctuation mark. In this manner, the teacher supports students in self and peer assessment. (*Class 5, Language*)

The teacher is assessing ongoing work on a story in Class 4. Students are reading the story in groups, and the teacher observes the groups by moving around the class. She provides necessary feedback when she feels students are stuck. When she observes students looked confused, she sits with them and helps them read – she first encourages them to read and then helps them herself. During oral assessment, some students get stuck while telling the story, so she probes them with some clues and supports them in completing the story. The students are then asked to write the story as homework, which will be displayed in the classroom. (*Class 4, Language*)

Table 2 provides an overview of the quantitative analysis of classroom observations of teacher practices.

Table 2: Quantitative analysis of classroom observations of teacher practices

Indicators	Practices	Percentage of each observation
Engaging Students	**Makes space for students' narrative and experiences (e.g., through daily sharing of experiences); respects, encourages and appreciates each student's inputs**	89%
	Plans engaging and inclusive activities and encourages students to participate in engaging activities in addition to academic learning (e.g., opening/closing class with a song or dance)	62%
Multilevel Classroom	**Divides students in groups according to learning levels, provides different materials/ different activities to each group as needed, and encourages peer learning**	72%
	Identifies and addresses each child's needs to provide individualized support and resources (e.g., worksheets, home assignments based on student's need, children's literature, and so on)	57%
Classroom Transaction	**Goes beyond the textbook and refers to/uses the local context to develop lessons**	75%
	Encourages students to share thoughts, ideas and experiences; responds sensitively and thoughtfully; uses these to develop lessons	72%
	Encourages use of local dialect by students and, whenever possible, uses the local dialect in teaching-learning	81%
Resources	**Uses a variety of resources to engage students in learning (e.g., worksheets, books, charts, local stories and materials)**	75%
	Meaningful resources to engage students in learning (e.g., age appropriate, related to concept, used to develop lesson)	43%
Assessment	Conducts formative assessment throughout the lesson	34%
	Uses a variety of modes and tools for assessment (for example the following, but not restricted only to these - worksheet, group discussion, role play, class work, home assignment, observation, project work, and so on)	38%
	Uses result of assessment to give feedback and support reflection (e.g., shares individualised and focussed feedback with students, analyses the responses of students to help them reflect on their understanding)	31%

3.2 Results of student assessment

Language assessments included oral expression, reading fluency, listening comprehension, reading comprehension and writing skills from the previous two classes (with the exception of class 2).

Mathematics assessments included identification of numbers, counting, writing and comparing numerals, and use of basic mathematical operations for daily life problem solving from the previous two classes (with the exception of class 2).

Tables 3 and 4 below indicate the percentage of students who did not demonstrate previous class abilities in language and mathematics in the baseline assessment, and the percentage that showed improvement between baseline and endline assessment.

Table 3: Percentage of students who did not demonstrate previous class abilities in Language and Mathematics

Mathematics			Language		
Class	*Total number of students assessed*	*Percentage of students who did not demonstrate previous class abilities in baseline in mathematics*	*Class*	*Total number of students assessed*	*Percentage of students who did not demonstrate previous class abilities in baseline in language*
*2**	173	29%	2	210	53%
3	148	57%	3	190	70%
4	275	52%	4	234	58%
5	232	54%	5	186	61%

Table 3 indicates that as school reopened, a significant proportion of primary class students were not able to demonstrate abilities from the previous two classes in both mathematics and language. This was as high as 57 percent in mathematics (for class 3) and 70 percent in language (for class 3). These worrying proportions, across classes, themselves indicate the need for immediate, systematic, long-term action.

Table 4: Percentage of students who have shown improvement from baseline to endline

Mathematics		Language	
Class	*Percentage of students who have shown any improvement from baseline to endline in mathematics***	*Class*	*Percentage of students who have shown any improvement from baseline to endline in language***
*2**	52%	2	41%
3	54%	3	46%
4	47%	4	50%
5	63%	5	41%

*Note: *Only class 1 abilities were assessed for students in class 2 during the study; **These are the averages of percentage values across abilities in each class with the denominator as students assessed minus those who already have previous class abilities.*

Table 4 indicates that a small but noteworthy proportion of students showed some improvement in demonstrating abilities from the previous two classes over the period of seven weeks between the baseline and endline. This was as high as 63 percent in mathematics (for class 5) and 50 percent in language (for class 4). On the one hand, this suggests that dedicated and well-aligned efforts of the teachers do probably have positive implications for learning recovery even over the short period of seven weeks of this study. On the other hand, a large proportion of students are still not able to demonstrate abilities from the previous two classes. Overall, the findings from the study suggest the need to consolidate structured and dedicated efforts for learning recovery over a long-term period.

4. Conclusion

The teachers in the sample of the study have been purposively chosen based on their understanding of how students learn and their commitment to making necessary efforts for student learning. While they are working in the same conditions as the majority of teachers – they have access to the same infrastructure, resources and professional support, and the size and composition of their classes is the same – they are in no way representative of the majority of teachers who, however well-meaning they may be, lack this understanding.

At the same time, while we are in no way attempting to establish a simple causal relationship, it is clear overall that the efforts of these teachers have had an impact on learning recovery in the short duration of the study (given the few months students spent in the current class when schools reopened before moving to the next). However, it must be pointed out that the abilities that were assessed are from the previous two classes (with the exception of class 2) and not class-appropriate abilities. Also, students are now in the process of moving to the next class – they are doing so while they are still not proficient in the abilities of the previous two classes, thus creating a gap of not just the present but also the previous two classes – this loss will only keep accumulating. In other words, hardly anything has been learnt in the past two years, and if we go on with a business-as-usual attitude, the loss will soon be insurmountable.

The good news is that the narrative of the need for learning recovery has entered educational discourse in the country. States are making plans to address this crisis. However, these efforts must not be cosmetic. Cosmetic changes will only give the appearance of recovery for a short period, hiding the graver gaps that must be treated with urgency.

Thus, there is need for all states across the country to take up systematic efforts to address learning recovery. The approach must be holistic and long-term. As often happens, multiple programmes are being implemented in all sincerity by states. These often end up confusing teachers, with a best-case scenario being that teachers then choose what they want from the various resources and strategies offered, and a worst-case scenario wherein teachers get confused and are unable to effect change in their practice. Thus, a policy for learning recovery must be developed at the state level, which may be reviewed often but must set a consistent course for the next few years in terms of approach and priorities.

The curriculum must be refurbished – with a systematic prioritization of learning outcomes and selection of content based on this exercise across classes. This refurbished curriculum must be implemented over the next few years to ensure all students have comprehensively acquired the foundational abilities necessary for them to achieve the goals of school education.

The study shows that even the committed and capable teachers who formed the sample of the study are in need of help where assessment is concerned. This is consistent with field observations, which have repeatedly indicated the need for capacity building of teachers in the area of assessment, particularly ongoing formative assessment in the classroom. Another critical area is to enable teaching-learning in multilevel classrooms. A systematic plan for capacity building of teachers – both face-to-face and online – and for on-site support must be developed immediately and implemented with due contextualization at the level of districts and blocks, if not clusters

and schools. Teacher learning communities must be formed for sharing and learning, comprising teachers within close geographical proximity.

One part of supporting teachers to enable recovery of learning loss is to ensure that the best possible material is available to teachers; states are already making efforts in this direction. However, the main focus of these efforts must be to capacitate teachers to exercise autonomy in classroom processes – this would require a change in the current culture of 'monitoring' by educational administrators.

It is important to note that the indicators described above are not observed in isolation – they have been emphasized to illustrate teachers' efforts in these extraordinary circumstances. It is also important to note that these are good practices that should be observed in every classroom at all times, not just during the pandemic. A consistent effort at this critical juncture is required to not only address the current crisis but to enable a shift to teaching-learning that enables success for each student.

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