

## Karnataka's initiative to recover lost learning offers a useful model

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The country's education system continues to reel from the massive loss of learning that our children had to suffer during the covid pandemic. Till a few months ago, few states were even facing the crisis with honesty, and fewer were attempting to do anything systematically about it. However, in these past months, most states have begun to take some action to tackle this unprecedented situation. While I am not familiar with the details of the response of every state, of those that I am familiar, there are now clearly a few which are acting thoughtfully and systematically. From the states doing good work, let's take the example of Karnataka. The state is doing almost everything right and therefore could be a model for other states to follow.

Karnataka has launched Kalika Chetarika ('learning recovery' in Kannada), a comprehensive programme to recover lost learning across all classes in schools. Let us consider the elements that make it an effective approach.

First, the Karnataka government has not hesitated in publicly communicating that there has been a massive learning loss which must be recovered. In fact, it has made it clear that this is the only real priority for the school education system in the next academic year. This is not as simple as it seems. Too many states have, for too long, evaded acknowledging this crisis. They seem to have a deeply misguided notion that somehow the state administration will be blamed for learning losses and it would become a political liability. Such damaging positions have now mostly changed; but even then, few have had the clarity and courage which the Karnataka government has demonstrated. Such clarity is central to aligning everybody to do their best in this massive task of recovering lost learning among millions of children.

Second, a clear instruction was issued to every teacher, principal, school and all education department officials that this year all efforts must be directed at recovering lost learning. The plans being laid out must be executed with complete focus and teachers must not try to complete the current year's syllabus without learning recovery. The text of any government order makes a big difference to resourcing and actions on the ground, and the one issued on Kalika Chetarike needs to be read for its clarity and specificity.

Third, instead of jumping into action, there has been systematic planning, duly considering what would be educationally effective and operationally executable. To make this happen, a very good team has been put together from across the state. The points that follow will detail the key elements of this plan.

Fourth, this crack team has reviewed the curriculum and redesigned the syllabus for all classes. In essence, the content load has been reduced without compromising learning outcomes. This has been a herculean task, given the time crunch. It is also a very fine balance, necessary at the level of specifics to enable reduction without losing desired outcomes.

Fifth, a portfolio of Teaching–Learning-Materials (TLMs) has been developed to help support teachers in the classroom to recover lost learning. Because of learning losses, the same class has children whose learning levels vary widely; such TLMs will address children at different levels.

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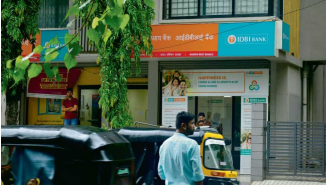
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Sixth, a comprehensive teacher handbook has been developed to guide the teacher on how to act optimally in the classroom. This includes how to assess which child is at what level, how to group them together, which set of TLMs to refer to, and which might be the relevant chapters in the existing textbooks. These detailed instructions for the teacher are critical to the success of the programme because each teacher is having to deal with children at widely different levels of learning in the same classroom, who will also recover lost learning at different speeds, and therefore they need appropriate pedagogical approaches.

Seventh, a detailed plan has been developed for training 2,000 master resource persons (MRPs) who, in turn, will train the 250,000 teachers involved. Care is being taken to identify good teachers to be trained as MRPs so as to maintain the quality of training.

Eighth, the logistics and operations have also been thought through in similar detail. For example, the printing of TLMs, their distribution, training locations and more are all included.

Ninth, core committees have been formed at various levels to help execute the entire plan. Their mandate is to eliminate all obstacles that come in the way of recovering lost learning.

This excellent plan, Kalika Chetarike, is now beginning to get implemented. Like all plans, eventually the results will depend on the quality of implementation. But at this stage, it is hard to imagine anything better; and the first signs of implementation are also good.

The School Education department of Karnataka deserves kudos—not only for this rigorous planning, but also for the courage to confront the matter directly.

There are other states also which are doing good work. But even now, there are too many who are just making noises and acting inadequately. We can only hope that these states learn from the example of Karnataka and others. These are states that are doing exactly what needs to be done.

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