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Business of teaching: Focus on learning beyond textbooks, says expert

ByM Ramya, TNN | Feb 28, 2013, 02.59 AM IST

CHENNAI: It's not enough to have good classrooms, mid-day meals or even qualified teachers, to improve learning among children. Schools and governments should focus on teacher accountability says Karthik Muralidharan, an [economics professor](#) at the [University of California](#). And the [Government of India](#) seems to agree with him.

His report, 'Using Evidence for Better Policy: [The Case of Primary Education](#),' features in [the Economic Survey](#) that was released on Wednesday, a day before [the Union Budget](#). "No credible study on education has found any significant positive relationship between teachers possessing formal training credentials and their effectiveness for improving student learning," he says. The report adds that there is no link between teacher salary and its effectiveness in improving student learning, and that increased spending does not translate into better outcomes.

Calling for [an urgent relook](#) at the 'business-as-usual' way classes are conducted, it says schools should move from the policy of 'completing the textbook' to focusing on 'reading to learn'. The one thing likely to work is monitoring of teacher performance and rewarding them when they meet set objectives, it adds.

Educationist S S Rajagopalan does not agree that the pupil-teacher ratio plays little role in improving student learning. "Multi-grade classes are the bane of our state education system. We must ensure at least five teachers in [a primary school](#), otherwise most of their time will go in running from one class to the next trying to discipline the children," he said.

Rajagopalan said that while insisting on pupil-teacher ratio, the government should also focus on inspector-school ratio. Now there are chief educational officers monitoring more than 100 schools or assistant education officers looking at 60 to 80 schools, he said.

"Ideally one inspector should oversee just 40 schools, and regularly go on inspections to ensure that the teachers are doing their job so children can learn," he added.

[Educational consultant](#) K R Maalathi said that in the current situation the "government is giving exorbitant salaries, but not exploiting the potential of the teachers to the hilt." She suggests an increase in investment in teacher education and in-service training, and continuous monitoring. "Evaluation should follow, and then appraisals similar to those done in the corporate sector should happen," Maalathi said. The experiment has worked in many a good private school, she added.

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