Teacher-Leadership Strategies for Enhancing Student Performance in Under-privileged Communities

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*Abstract:-***As it is believed that leaders are born and not made, similarly, Behavioral Theories believe that people can become leaders through the process of teaching, learning and observation. Hence who other than a teacher can become a great leader? This research paper is contemplating to give insights into the teacher-leadership strategies to deal with the grass-root level problems in similar developing or underdeveloped economic nations facing the same educational inequity.**

*Keywords***: Teacher- Leadership, Safe space, Stakeholders, Student- Involvement, Instructional strategies.**

I.   INTRODUCTION

Sally [4]states that teachers with certain trained leadership qualities work to improve the conditions within their schools, community and add to the professional knowledge and skills of their co-fellow teachers, they interact with and help to mentor other teachers. Modelling of such successful teaching strategies, serving on committees and participating in decision-making are additional hallmarks of teacher -leaders. Therefore the teachers who are involved in significant schools making and creating a positive impact in their classrooms consider themselves as leaders? In reality, does their leadership skills put them ahead in increasing measurable and intangible student achievement outcomes? Is it simply a route to a job in the educational administration or this a proven means to improve the professional culture within a school?

Danielson [6] argues that:

Teacher leaders are in a strong position to influence the school's instructional program. Teachers are the school's experts in the subjects they teach and in the patterns of learning of their students. Teacher leaders, by mobilizing the energy of their colleagues, have a significant influence on the quality of that program (p. 84).

Hence in light of the aforementioned questions to be addressed, we being a part of a reputed NGO have faced the ground reality and the problems in low-income private run schools. The context will be similar to countries with the same or lower economic status and would like to share the journey through different sections in this research paper. The first section gives the introduction to the context which is followed by the second section describing the problems that we encountered during the journey of this fellowship and the factors behind these problems which directly or indirectly affected the student behaviour and the assessment outcomes. The third section explains the proven problem-solving Leadership Strategies and methods that enhanced the classroom performance. Thereafter the fourth section shows the analysis with respect to the data that we collected throughout the year and subsequently the fifth section concludes the work done till now showing the progress.

II.   FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENT BEHAVIOUR AND OUTCOMES

A. Psychology of students

India is the second-most populous country next to China and has the second-largest education system in the world. However, it is plagued by various issues at a fundamental level which dampens the possibility of the system to attain optimum efficiency. To get effective outcomes from children, they require 21st-century key skills like critical and creative thinking, communication and collaborative skills. These key skills provide positive and potent behaviour that enable children to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of the real world. These key skills also enable children to behave in healthy ways, given the desire, scope and opportunity to do so. UNICEF defines life skills as an approach for transition of behaviour and subsequent behavioural growth intended to bring about a balance of three aspects: Knowledge, Attitude and Skills.

These skills promote fundamental capacities of well being and competence they face in reality. Children learn 21st-century skills by interacting with people around them, be it parents, teachers, family, friends and so on [2]. It is by acquiring such skills that they can cope with real-world problems. Learning of key skills normally takes place at a young age. The students in our classroom do have the same psychology irrespective of the demographic and economic background. At this early age, the child develops positive skills within the society through interaction among peers or develops negative skills from societal influences. To bring a positive change in children, school is seen as the best place for the formal introduction of key skills in education at an early age and teachers-leaders are the best people for these developments.

B. Socioeconomic Factors

Socioeconomic factors have a large, comprehensive and perpetual influence over school achievement. Based on the data we acquired through numerous assessments, the largest effects were for cognitive and school measures (teacher-administered math and reading scores), followed by

behavioural and health measures, which had the smallest associations. Socioeconomic disadvantage and other risk factors that are associated with poverty (eg, lower parental education and high family stress) harm cognitive development and academic achievement, smaller effects on behaviour and inconsistent effects on socioemotional outcomes [3].

C. Community

Living in tenacious poor conditions has adverse effects on children, which may tend to ineffective learning outcomes. To overcome these challenges, parents of such communities purely rely on schools for better education. Children from communities of poor conditions are the largest portion with low school readiness than from neighbourhoods of social high risk. Through numerous community visits, the evidence is clear and unanimous that poor children arrive at a cognitive and behavioural disadvantage. Children from lower-income households score relatively scale down on measures of vocabulary and communication skills, the familiarity of numbers, mathematical operations, ability to concentrate and societal skills is very common among them.

D. School making the difference

Research on educational outcomes revealed effective data that schools make a difference in the life of students from different communities (ie, students from similar home backgrounds achieve significantly different levels of performance in different schools). Furthermore, schools and classrooms differ in their grades (ie, some schools achieve not just higher scores, but more equitable outcomes than others). Activities other than academics, such as sports and lessons in the arts, have been shown to increase student's school readiness [3]. These activities should be encouraged in all schools to maximize school readiness by making smarter choices concerning the constraints such as space for playground, library etc. especially in low income private aided schools.

School readiness revolves around a child's ability to succeed both academically and socially in a school environment [3]. It requires physical well-being and appropriate motor development, emotional health and a positive approach to new experiences, age-appropriate social knowledge and competence, age-appropriate language skills, and age-appropriate general knowledge and cognitive skills. It is well recorded and reported that poverty decreases a child's readiness for school through aspects of health, home life, schooling and neighbourhoods. We chose to bring a positive change in students from these low-income communities by adapting a classroom with these new methods and strategies to bring out child's school readiness.

E. Support provided in and out of school through interventions

To balance the negative and positive educational outcomes in children in our communities, support is to be provided to attenuate the effects of poverty and socioeconomic status on academic success. Actions which lead to successful outcomes are:

- Provide support to schools which strive to achieve equity of outcomes.
- Provide support for various intervention programs that provide academic, social and community support to raise the success of disadvantaged students.
- Look out for dropouts in school and bring awareness to students about short-term and long-term goals.
- Never miss an opportunity to support potential success outcomes in students.
- Take measures to minimize the difference in school readiness before entering school for quality early education [3].

III. LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES AND METHODS IN ENHANCING THE CLASSROOM PERFORMANCE

A. Safe Space

Creating a safe space for the students is the most primary objective of a teacher-leader which will indirectly contribute to overall classroom development and performance enhancement.

As proposed model by York-Barr and Duke[7] how teacher leadership could influence student achievement:

Improvements in teaching and learning practices such as creating positive learning relationships between teachers and students and among students, establishing classroom routines and expectations that effectively direct student energy, engaging students in the learning process, and improving curricular, instructional, and assessment practices, ultimately result in high levels of student learning and achievement (p 290).

Initially, the teacher-leader has to face the resistance to break the ice among the students.

Safe space is that physical and psychological space of the student where they are fearless in becoming vulnerable to each other and with the teacher. As these students come from weaker sections of the society creating a space belonging to them is the first stride in the process.

B. Setting up a classroom culture

The toughest challenge a teacher-leader encounters, in the beginning, is to set up the expected classroom culture as the students are very new to the idea of setting up the culture in the classroom in a first-year intervention classroom. Therefore it requires a rigorous and consistent practice of the new rules. This entire process of culture setting consumes a good chunk of time in the entire process of teaching and learning, but this initial investment guarantees the teacher-leader a good return at the end of the academic year.

Once the classroom culture and rules are established, behaviour management becomes easier with culture in place. The top approaches in classroom behaviour management are:

- Set and reinforce expectations both for self and students
- Use of positive narration to maximise everyday output especially for elementary students,
- Create a positive classroom environment,
- Make the student understand the consequences of not fulfilling the expectations without efforts.

C. Stakeholder Inclusion

The overall growth in the child as a student can only happen when the relationship between teacher and student goes beyond the classroom maintaining certain norms and the people surrounding the aforementioned primary entities support to the fullest. When the stakeholders such as parents, different educators, principal, other school management members, and the community share their responsibility towards the entities then it becomes an easy path. As teacher-leader it is highly recommended to include the stakeholders as much as possible by holding spaces/meetings/PTMs, community visits, creating common online platforms to bring all at one place and move forward as a community, which is necessary for the holistic development of a student.

D. Structured Lesson plans

Preparing an everyday lesson plan(LP) eases the job of the teacher and with time the teacher -leader turns out to be an expert in lesson/ content planning. The teacher can anticipate the breakdowns in the classroom as well with the continuous effort of LP.

This also helps students to understand the framework of the everyday classroom, as well as the students, are aware of the fact that structured lesson planning sets expected outcomes from them after every topic being taught.

E. Buddy Bonding

Creating a group of two students one from the higher-order and the other from the lower order group helps in enhancing the average classroom performance. This bonding among the students creates a healthy competition among the groups and thus pushes towards holistic development in the classroom.

F. Monitor Progress

The best practice to monitor the progress of individual students is to make the tracker visible to the students in the classroom. Making creative and grade level trackers will help in the progress of the classroom. Every time a new tracker is introduced in the classroom it should be made clear about the rewards and there must be a continuous effort from the teacher -leader to motivate the students concerning the tracker parameters.

G. Translate ideas to action

To motivate a student to achieve his/her goal, a teacher -leader must have the capability to translate the creative ideas of the students into actions. To bring a holistic change in the classroom, students have become equal partners and took ownership of the classroom with grade-level projects. Learning and leadership often lead to a successful collaboration to transform partners.

H. Student Problem Solving space

Space for students to come forward and solve their problem statements be it classroom, school, community. Problem-solving spaces ensure that students are aware of problems in their environment and come up with numerous solutions to cater to community needs. Post this space, students are more invested in the classroom.

I. Professional Problem solving spaces

The teacher-leaders from an organisation always face the same type of problems as the setting of these schools are very much similar. Problem-solving spaces at regular intervals boost the confidence in these teacher-leaders. These spaces bring all teacher- leaders with common goals at a point to share best practices, in turn, gives us a scope to hold high expectations in students. Partner differences are bridged by common purpose with improved adaptation to change with more effective skills.

Fig. 1 : Teacher- leader role in Ed Crisis.

IV. ANALYSIS

A. Assessment Analysis

Assessments play a role in the whole teaching-learning process which makes students discover and leads them to demonstrate their true abilities. According to Sommer [8] this also ensures to test higher-order skills in students such as interpretation and evaluation. Effective outcomes can be achieved by linking assessment results to classroom instruction and by providing constructive activities to discover learners abilities [1].

B. Reading Comprehension(RC) Analysis

Assessments bring out equitable evidence of reading comprehension. It has provided essential information about

student needs, weaknesses, obstacles and deficits. This enhances learning abilities and amends instructional time according to needs and implements appropriate techniques. It also involves different methods and strategies that impulse students to disclose their learning skills[5]. Mastery levels of RC assessments taken at Beginning of Year and End of Year show the growth in levels of RC which enhanced reading fluency, vocabulary, speaking and writing skills. In RC, the National(India) average standards for grade two(n) must be level (n-1) that is the level for grade II should have been level1.
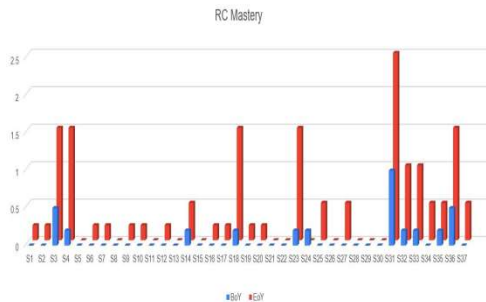

Fig. 2: RC Mastery data showing BoY and EoY Assessment results.

C. Mathematics Analysis

For a better balance between education and measurement concerns, use of mathematics assessment plays a key role in assessing students. Students are assessed based on three measuring principles - related to content, learning and equity [2]. These principles form a basis to support emerging national standards in mathematics education. It also gives us a scope to monitor the learners' understanding of the mathematical language, concepts and skills. An assessment provides specific information to target the learning needs of students and scaffolds student learning. Here data of assessments point to Mid of Year (MoY) vs End of Year (EoY). This analysis shows the achievement of students in mathematics and their mastery despite the challenges faced in the communities they live in.
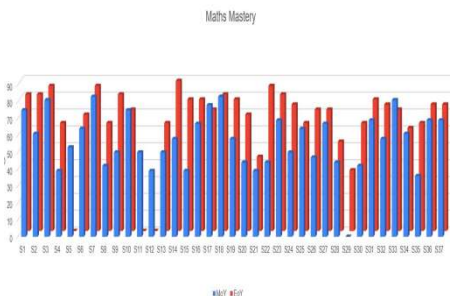

Fig. 3: Maths Mastery data showing BoY and EoY Assessment results.

V.   CONCLUSION

As part of the fellowship at TEACH FOR INDIA, during the academic year 2019- 20, we were able to bridge the gap to grade levels in RC as well as in Mathematics with new methodologies and strategies. We are ahead of National(India) average standards by **11.8%** in Mathematics. Despite the consistent practice of the aforementioned strategies and procedures we were only   able to achieve the EoY RC assessment result as **0.42** i.e. class average which is 0.58 below the National Standards. The BoY assessment result for RC assessment showed a classroom average to be at emergent level . The main reason behind this difficulty in achieving the RC level is due to the fact that RC assessments are mainly conducted with English, and in India, a majority of the population speaks Hindi and other regional languages as their mother- tongue , therefore making it an arduous task to accomplish such standards.

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