

Where is my teacher?

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Key findings

One of the primary reasons for poor quality of education in government schools is shortage of teachers

Adding to this acute shortage of workforce, government school teachers are burdened with a wide array of teaching and non-teaching administrative activities

Policymakers should consider innovative methods to improve the number of teaching hours available to government school students

The Government of India and state governments recognise the importance of education. They have focused intensely on improving access and uptake of education through initiatives, such as [Right to Education \(RTE\)](#), [Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan \(SSA\)](#)¹, and [mid-day meal \(MDM\)](#). There have also been multiple efforts to measure and monitor the quality of education using tools like Management Information System (MIS). MIS platforms like *Shaala Siddhi* prioritise overall academic performance of students while awarding grades to schools.

Despite the focus on quality, India performs poorly in global education rankings. As of 2017, the country ranked 99th in education as per the [Legatum Prosperity Index, 2017](#). The [Annual Status of Education \(ASER\)](#)² report shows that a majority of rural students in the age group of 14 to 18 years lack foundational skills like reading and basic arithmetic.

“Paise hote to bachchon ko yehan kyun bhejte?”
(If we had the means, would we be sending our children to a government school?)

- Parent of a government school student, UP

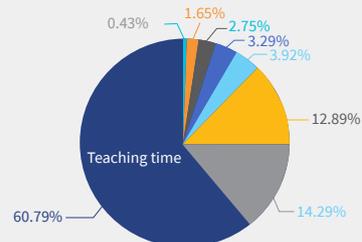
MicroSave conducted a [study](#) on Direct Benefit Transfer ([DBT](#)) in education in Uttar Pradesh (UP). During the course of this study, we were able to observe the education ecosystem closely and note some of the challenges that teachers and students faced.

There are multiple factors that contribute to the poor performance of the students who study in government schools. Primary among them is the shortage of formal instruction hours.³ [Statistics](#) show that government schools constitute around 75% of all institutions in the country and employ around 58% of the teaching workforce. Besides teaching, government school teachers are also expected to perform multiple non-teaching activities.

In conducting these non-teaching activities, a teacher’s absence during class hours may either be physical or mental. [Government data](#) indicates that the average time spent by a teacher in non-teaching activities is equivalent to 11 days per academic year. Considering the sheer number

of tasks handled, this seems to be a significant underestimation. The pie chart below illustrates the actual work allotment as per responses from stakeholders. We can see that a majority of the non-teaching work is not related to academia.⁴

Distribution of working hours



- Immunisation drives
- Election duty
- Benefit demand estimation and distribution to each class
- Survey / data collection / monitoring
- Data for UDISE / Shaala Siddhi and other such platforms
- Maintaining various registers
- Mid-day meal-related activities

Average values based on qualitative primary research conducted in four districts of UP

Teachers complain that they are expected to cover multiple courses in multiple classrooms because of acute staff shortages. The innumerable non-teaching activities that are added to their heavy workload mean that many teachers have poor job satisfaction as they are unable to fulfil their primary purpose – teaching.

“Teacher dijiye, laptop nahi”

(Children need more teachers, not freebies like laptops)

- Teacher, Meerut, UP

Due to staff shortages, many schools do not even have principals. Principals of small schools are often transferred to larger schools; leaving the post vacant in the smaller institution.

1. Now under *Samagra Siksha*
 2. Established in 2008, ASER Centre is *Pratham’s* autonomous research and assessment unit that conducts a household-level annual survey.
 3. [Studies](#) show that the presence of a teacher who provides instruction in a formal classroom environment is an important aspect of a child’s education.
 4. [Calculation](#) of teacher’s time allocation based on field responses.

Students have been exposed only to this form of instruction. So, they do not complain about the poor quality of learning experience. Yet there are tell-tale signs that the system does not do them justice. Instances of [dropouts](#) are much higher between classes VIII and IX (around 17%), the grade after which the government stops most of its unconditional transfers. According to [NSSO's education report 2014](#), in rural areas, "not interested in education" is the top reason behind the dropouts, which points to a failure of the system.

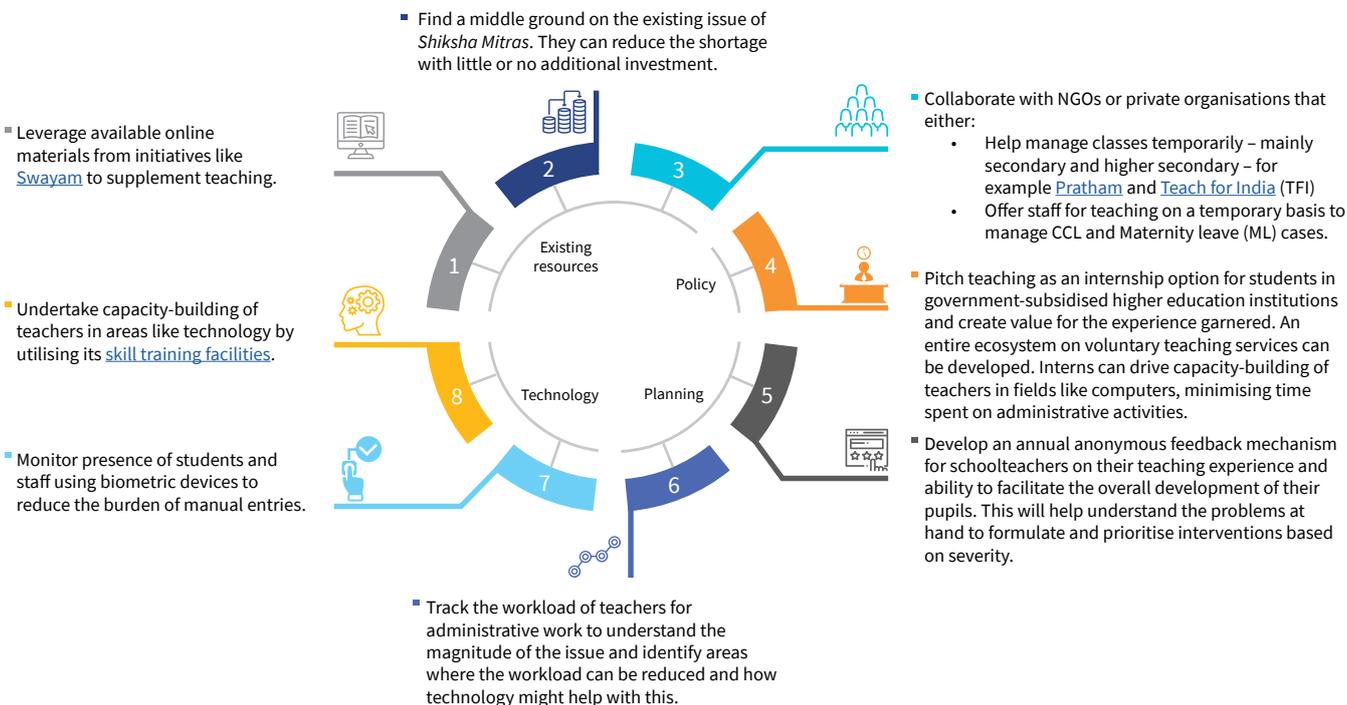
"Bachhe bhi dekhte hain ki hum kuch na kuch kaam me lage rehte hain, agar timing follow ho to hum education pe concentrate kar payenge"
 (Students also see that we are usually busy with paperwork. If timings are fixed and followed, we can concentrate on teaching)
 – Teacher, Lalitpur, UP

Government officials are aware of the teacher shortage and its implications. Officials in the areas we worked report that even

though there is an acute shortage of teachers, there has been no recruitment in the past two years. Officials also mentioned that facilities like Child Care Leave (CCL)⁵ exacerbate the staff crunch. To manage the staff shortage, in 2002, the government of UP opened up a contractual teaching post called *Shiksha Mitras*.⁶ A *Shiksha Mitra* or 'para teacher' functions as a normal elementary school teacher but may not have the necessary minimum qualification required for the position. They draw a lower salary and are not entitled to the various benefits of the job. However, the program has been mired in [controversy](#) since 2011. *Shiksha Mitras* have been demanding the same compensation and perks as regular teachers upon meeting the minimum qualification criteria. Both the High Court and the Supreme Court have overturned this demand.

"Do saal se hiring nai hui he teachers ki, sarkar process hi final nai kar pa rahi hai"
 (No hiring has been done for the past two years, the process of recruitment is still mired in confusion)
 – Government Official, Lalitpur, UP

To summarise the problem, the quality of education in government schools is subpar. One of the primary reasons is the shortage of teachers that limits teaching hours. The government will have to create incentives to motivate educated young people to take up teaching. While attracting more manpower and hiring them is the most obvious solution, there are other ways to supplement the efforts. The government can:



Conclusion

Teacher shortages and excessive administrative work allotted to teachers continue to be some of the leading reasons for the poor learning experience in government schools. Policymakers need to appreciate that a problem of this magnitude cannot be solved through recruitment alone. There is a need to explore innovative methods that bridge the gaps that prevents children from accessing quality education. Though there are many challenges around infrastructure, it is time to utilise technology to address the issue around both absenteeism of teachers and administrative work. The government can explore and implement ideas like [smart classrooms](#) on a national level. After all, the future of the nation is at stake.

5. CCL is a two-year leave entitlement programme for female staff. Teachers misuse this provision by availing it in instalments of two-three months to extend their annual vacation.
 6. Similar positions exist in other states, but the name may differ.