
What Makes a School Successful?

How the commitment of teachers and parents can make or break a school



Rural government schools demonstrate better learning outcomes when teachers are committed, head teachers provide leadership and the parents and community care about quality education.

Better infrastructure or better qualified teachers by themselves don't lead to better learning.

What Makes a School Successful?

How the commitment of teachers and parents can make or break a school

Infrastructure facilities and teacher profile seem to be largely non issues in ensuring better learning in rural government schools. Successful schools display higher levels of discipline, commitment and teacher involvement as well as better school management practices. In addition active SDMC members and involved parents have a significant contribution to learning outcomes. Successful schools make special efforts to provide remedial inputs to all children especially weaker ones.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Why do some schools perform well while others do not? What differentiates a successful school from other schools?

Findings from the Learning Guarantee Program (LGP), a joint initiative of the Karnataka government and Azim Premji Foundation provides some answers. This program measured the performance of 896 schools in 7 backward districts of Karnataka during 2002-05. The performance evaluation was based on:

- enrollment
- attendance
- learning achievement

Data from the LGP reveals the following:

Five Factors that Made a Positive Difference

1. Presence of a committed head teacher
2. Active involvement of teachers
3. Active involvement of parents
4. Educational background of parents
5. Good school practices (cleanliness, neatness and orderliness)

Five Factors that Did Not Make a Difference

1. Infrastructure
2. Teacher profile
3. Caste of teachers, head teachers
4. Proximity of teachers to school
5. Economic background of parents

In other words, most infrastructure and teacher demographic related parameters did not have a major bearing on learning outcomes.

The key differentiators were essentially an

- **'An efficient teacher system'** comprising the commitment, discipline and efforts of the Head Teacher and other teachers and
- **'An involved community system'** comprising active SDMCs and parents.

These findings suggest that the government's heightened emphasis on better school infrastructure and formal qualifications of teachers, by themselves will not bear fruit.

Qualitative improvements will happen through the leadership and commitment of head teachers and teachers and an active demand for good quality education from parents.

LEARNING GUARANTEE PROGRAM: A BACKGROUND

Learning Guarantee Program (LGP), a joint initiative of the state government and Azim Premji Foundation, was a study conducted in 7 most educationally backward districts of North East Karnataka during 2002-2005. In the first year of the program, 896 schools voluntarily enrolled in the program and their performance was evaluated described below.

Measuring School Performance

Qualifying schools had to ensure 100% enrolment and 90% regular attendance. Next, based on the learning achievements of children on standardized tests, schools were categorized as follows:

- **Category A:** schools where 80% children scored over 90% in learning outcomes
- **Category B:** schools where 70% children scored over 90% in learning outcomes
- **Category C:** schools where 60% children scored over 90% in learning outcomes

The results of the LGP were not encouraging. Of the 896 participating schools, the “successful” or “high performing” schools were only 40 i.e. less than 5%. These were as per the categories below:

Category A	Category B	Category C	Total Winning Schools
12	14	14	40

Factors Influencing School Performance

The study then looked at the successful schools and the parameters behind their success when compared to other schools. Schools were evaluated on quantitative measures such as school infrastructure, school management, socio-economic background of enrolled children and community factors such as functioning of the SDMC and presence of active NGOs in the village. The qualitative measures included attitude and commitment of teachers, quality of teaching and class room practices.

The study sample comprised the 40 winning schools and 40 other schools which ‘matched’ the winning schools on basic parameters like district and block, type of school (lower primary school/higher primary school, Girls/Co-ed, approximate school strength) etc. The ‘matching’ school concept was used to minimize the impact of other environment variables. Findings from the LGP are discussed below.

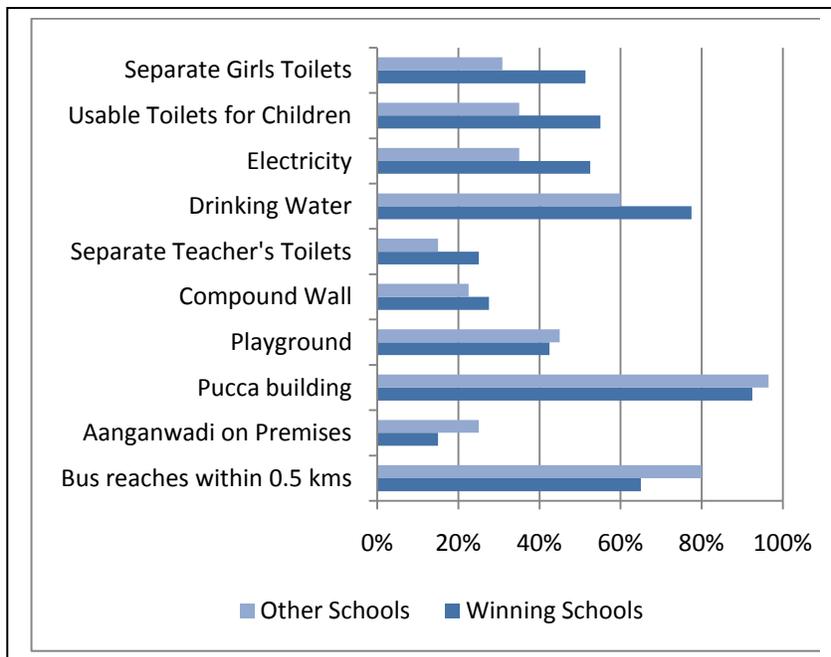
WHAT MAKES FOR A SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL?

The following key factors were seen to make the difference between successful schools and others:

Factors that did not make a difference	Factors that made a difference
Infrastructure	Presence of head teacher
Teacher profile	Education background of parents
Whether teachers stay close to school	School practices (cleanliness, neatness and orderliness)
Caste of teachers, head teachers	Involvement of teachers
Economic background of parents	Involvement of parents

Factors Pertaining to Infrastructure

On most infrastructure related parameters the situation is similar across winning and non winning schools and there are no significant statistical differences.



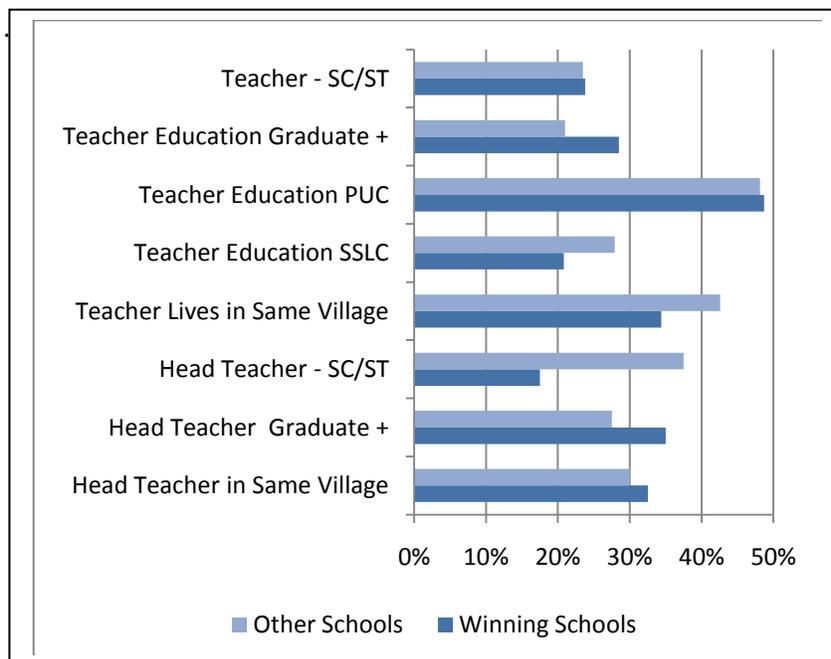
Though most winning schools boast of pucca buildings, other facilities like toilets and electricity are not present in nearly half of them.

A large proportion of winning schools do not have compound walls or proper play grounds.

The proportion of schools with drinking water and usable toilets for children is marginally more (significant at only 90% confidence level) in winning schools as compared to other schools - just a directional difference.

Factors Pertaining to Teachers' Profile

The profile of the teacher does not seem to be influencing in any way the success of the school.



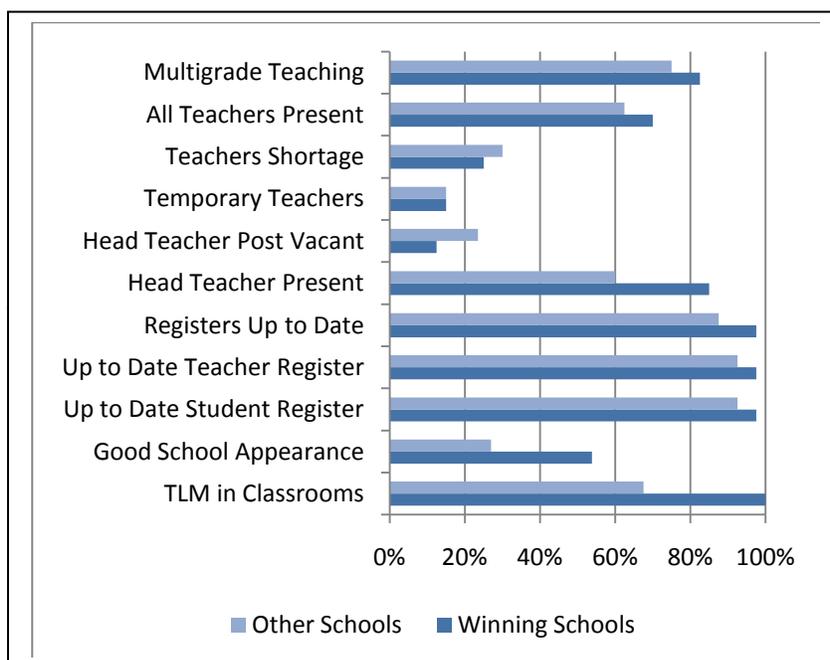
A typical teacher in a winning school is very much like his/her counterpart in other participating schools.

Profile of head teachers across the two categories of schools differ on caste and years spent in the school.

While caste may not be a critical aspect, the duration of the Head Teacher in the school is important as it points to a certain continuity and consistency in the school management practices.

Factors Pertaining to School Practices

The winning schools typically have better school management practices



Winning schools are better in terms of cleanliness, neatness and orderliness etc.

The presence of teaching learning material is a key differentiator

The presence of teachers and head teachers is another distinct pointer to teacher commitment and involvement.

Notably, almost 1 in 4 schools in the other schools category have the head teacher post vacant.

Factors Pertaining to Administrative Practices

The indicators relating to the block education officials, SDMC do not show any significant differences between the two categories of schools. The SDMCs of the winning schools seem to be a lot more active than their counterparts with an average of at least one meeting each month.

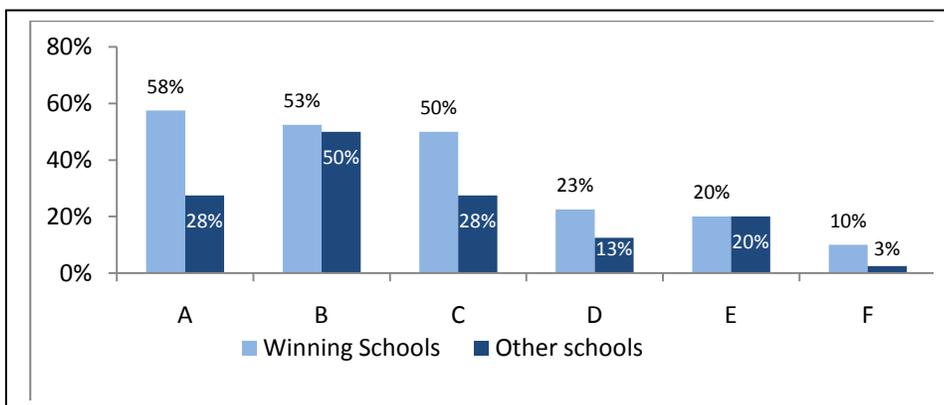
Factors Pertaining to Socio-Economic Background

The absence of 'education' among parents is higher in the 'other' schools category, where more than half are uneducated. While 54.7% of parents in other schools did not have any formal education, the corresponding figure in winning schools was 41.7%.

WHAT DO SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS DO DIFFERENTLY?

Qualitative research suggests that successful schools made an effort to provide additional inputs to children. These were carried out with greater intensity by the winning schools. Many schools reported taking extra classes on holidays and after school. Several schools identified the relatively weaker children and provided them special inputs. The model question papers provided seem to have been made well use of to get the children to practice them repeatedly.

The key influencing activities are shown below:



What Made the Difference?

Winning schools did the following to improve performance:

- Took special classes for weak students and gave additional homework
- Conducted special tests and practiced model question papers
- Held meetings with parents to improve learning efficiency
- Motivated the children better

Factor	Description
A	Took special classes for weak students and gave homework
B	Carried out remedial teaching, used innovative learning methods
C	Conducted special tests and practiced model question papers
D	Held meetings with parents to improve learning efficiency
E	Took steps to reduce absenteeism
F	Motivated the children

Help Provided by SDMC: More cooperation was seen from the SDMC members and president in the winning schools segment. They helped increasing the attendance, supplying learning material, providing infrastructure, improving admission, and giving financial help to schools.

Effort of Parents: In winning schools, **73% of parents paid regular visits** to monitor the progress of children and hold discussions with teachers. They contributed towards infrastructure, uniforms and took an interest in school activities. But parents do not seem to have done anything much in 40% of the schools in the other schools segment

CONCLUSIONS

Significant differences exist between the LGP winning schools and other participant schools which disprove some commonly held perceptions. Infrastructure facilities and teacher profile seem to be largely non issues while active SDMC members and parents have contributed to learning. Winning schools also display higher levels of discipline, commitment and teacher involvement. Their teachers seem to have traveled that extra mile to get the award. Also social background of the students seems to have a positive correlation with the success of the schools on the Learning Guarantee parameters.

NOTE: This is a short synopsis of the study. A detailed paper with the methodology, sample, and findings can be requested from Azim Premji Foundation



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