The Effects of Coaching on the Teaching and Learning of English in Indian Government Schools

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Abstract: Although English is mandatorily introduced as a second language early in majority of government primary schools in India, its quality remains dismal due to lack of appropriate curricula, poor ESL teacher competencies and weak professional development opportunities. In an effort to promote the adoption of an innovative ESL program in urban government schools, coaching was introduced to support teacher and implementation of the new program. Through classroom observations, structured interviews and learner pre/post tests, the impact of coaching on teacher practices, teacher beliefs and student outcomes were studied and compared with those of teachers who were not coached. The powerful results found in the coached-teacher classrooms build a strong case for reviewing the current professional development policies within Indian schools, both for English and in general. Implications for research, policy and practice are discussed.

Keywords: ESL, teachers, coaching, student learning

Introduction

This paper presents a study investigating the role of coaching support for primary school teachers while adopting an innovative bilingual approach to teaching English as a second language (ESL). An interactive ESL program was implemented in 250 regional medium government schools in an urban Indian city across grades three and four. In grade three, the program aimed at building English reading skills (Let's Read and Write – LRW), and in grade four, it focused on developing basic speaking and comprehension skills (We Learn English – WLE). This widely tested program, created by a non-government resource agency, was designed to aid teachers with little to no ESL competencies and habituated to rote-based teaching methods. Extensive real-time bilingual audio-input was used in the program to introduce new English content and guide teachers in the use of new interactive teaching strategies. Under a directive by the school administration, all the teachers participated in an experiential workshop which oriented them towards the principles of the pedagogical approach in the program, while offering an opportunity to observe and practice the teaching strategies through demonstrations and micro-teaching sessions, respectively. The school administration planned to launch this initiative merely on the basis of these workshops, in a manner characteristic of the broader Indian education system where professional development is synonymous with one shot trainings without any ongoing guidance and supervision (Ramchandran, Pal, Jain, Shekar, & Sharma, 2005; Tyagi, 2010). The resource agency, in order to build a case for creating on-going support critical for adoption of reforms, suggested that coaching support be introduced to 30 schools as a pilot. A study was commissioned to examine the impact of coaching support on the 30 schools. This paper describes the nature of this impact in terms of practices and beliefs of teachers who were coached and differences in the student outcomes related to the coached (C) and uncoached (uC) teachers.

Theoretical underpinnings

Coaching, as a form of support for professional growth, has been widely endorsed for its potential to impact teachers practice positively, by helping them integrate newly learned skills into their ongoing practice and in improving their efficacy (Cantrell & Hughes, 2008; Joyce & Showers, 1982; Poglinco, et al., 2003). According to Joyce and Showers (1982) a coach's role is to provide support to teachers in their new endeavor through provision of companionship, technical feedback, analysis of application, adaptation to the students and personal facilitation. Coaching support is provided on an individual basis or in a group. In this program, the coaching support was individual in nature, in which a skilled peer would visit a teacher's ESL class and provide support. This support comprised of activities like, co-teaching, modelling, debriefing the challenges of implementation, observation and feedback on enactment (Raval, Mckenney, & Pieters, 2010; Gibbons & Cobb). It was aimed at helping teachers adapt the program realistically to their dynamic classroom challenges (Putnam & Borko, 2000), involving students who had no background to English or to the new learning approach that involved audio-technology and extensive interaction.

Clarke & Hollingsworth (2002) emphasize the importance of understanding the process by which teachers grow in order to facilitate their professional development effectively. Since the purpose of this study was to draw attention of administrators and decision makers towards the significance of ongoing professional support for teachers especially during the early stages of a reform, it sought to examine both the changes in different kinds of professional outcomes of teachers, as well as how these changes took place. The model of professional development advocated by Clarke and Hollingsworth, aided the study's intentions well, as it (a) highlights the principle domains of the teacher's world in which change occurs as a result of professional development, and (b) unpacks the processes that mediate this change. Their model features four domains: (a) the external domain represents an external source of information and in this study refers to the coaching intervention; (b) the personal domain represents the teachers' knowledge, beliefs and attitudes, which in this context would include ideas including but not limited to general pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and motivation, (c) the domain of practice represents professional experimentation which specifically refers to the implementation of the ESL program and, (d) the domain of consequences represents salient outcomes that pertain to ESL competencies of students in this study.

The interaction between these domains happens as a result of two processes that teachers undertake: enactment and reflection. Enactment refers to the conscious putting into action of a(n) (new) idea or practice, and plays a critical role in transferring change from one domain to another domain. For instance, when a teacher develops an interest or conviction in a new approach (the personal domain), it would lead to enactment of the approach and hence influence the domain of practice. Reflection takes place not just on student outcomes but also on other perceived consequences of their actions during enactment. Similar two-way reflective links connect teachers' practice, the interpretation of outcomes (consequences of the practice) and revision of knowledge or beliefs.

Methods

The aim of this study was to assess if and how coaching support influenced the teaching of ESL through the bilingual interactive program in the primary schools. Based on the Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) domains, the research was guided by the following three questions:

1. What changes in the practice and personal domains were exhibited by coached teachers?
2. According to them, what engendered the changes?
3. What were the consequences for WLE and LWR learners of coached and uncoached teachers?

Data collection procedures

Domain of practice: Professional experimentation

Changes in the domain of professional experimentation, that is, the implementation of WLE and LRW by teachers, were determined by analyzing the structured classroom observations conducted by the coaches for grades three and four. The coaches collected this data as a part of their ongoing responsibility for a period of six months. 256 classroom observations covering 64 teachers were conducted for LRW at the grade three level. Therefore each teacher received about four visits from a coach in the six months. For grade four, 140 classroom observations of WLE from 35 teachers were analyzed. Again, each teacher received about 4 coaching visits in the six-month period. Additionally, 10 supervisors of teachers were interviewed to understand what changes they had perceived in the teachers' ESL teaching practices.

Personal domain: Knowledge, beliefs and attitudes

The changes in the personal domain were examined through semi-structured personal interviews with 20 teachers from C-schools. Teachers were asked to reflect on what specific changes they experienced as a result of the coaching support. Each interview lasted 20 to 30 minutes. The teachers were selected through convenience sampling, based on time available for participating in the interview.

Perceptions regarding causes of change

The perceptions about engendered changes were examined through interviews with the same 20 teachers mentioned above. The teachers were asked to reflect and elaborate on if and how changes that they experienced were influenced by the coaching support.

<u>Domain of consequence: Salient outcomes</u>

The domain of consequence was examined through a pre/post test assessing ESL outcomes of students of grade three and four. Approximately 20 percent of both coached (C) and un-coached (uC) schools were randomly selected (10 out of the 40 C-schools, and 35 of the remaining uC-schools). Within each selected school, 10 students of grade three and of grade four were randomly selected for the pre-test. The students from grade three (n-C=100, n-uC=344) took the LRW post-test, whereas those from grade four (n-C=166, N=uC=343) took the WLE post-test.

Instruments

<u>Classroom observation</u>

Classroom observations were conducted with the help of a curriculum profile. Curriculum profiles are sets of statements about activities and intended behaviors of teachers during the observed lessons (Ottevanger, 2001; van den Akker & Voogt, 1994). The extent to which teachers realize these intentions is established by crediting scores based on classroom observations, which results in the actual practice profile of the teacher. Three curriculum profiles were used to develop a profile of the quality of implementation of the LRW program in grade three, and the WLE program in grade four. For each item the observer could provide a score of A, B, C or D wherein 'A' refereed to 'Throughout the lesson/always; 'B' referred to 'Often, 'C' referred to sometimes, and 'D' as Never/Not attempted. Both tools had items which represented strategies needed to implement the English language materials.

The grade three observation tool had three main dimensions, (1) general pedagogical skills required to use the materials well, (2) ESL pedagogical content skills and (3) learner responses. Each of these parameters had other sub-items. Together, the tool comprised 17 items divided across these three parameters. The grade 4 tool contained 16 items as the WLE program was far more structured and simple to execute as compared to the LRW program. These items were divided across three parameters: general pedagogical skills, pedagogical content skills and learner responses. The items for both curriculum profiles are shown in Tables 1 and 2, respectively. Observers practiced completing observation profiles in non-sampled classrooms until acceptable levels of inter-rater reliability were met. (Cohen's kappa of .7 or higher).

<u>Teacher and supervisor interviews</u>

Supervisor interviews were semi-structured, focusing on: their perceptions of the benefits of the coach, changes in teaching strategies perceived in the C- and uC schools, changes in the responses of learners between C- and uC schools. Similarly teacher interviews were also semi-structured and focused on: nature of support received from the coach, benefits or dis-benefits to their teaching and learner behavior as a result of the coaching intervention and perceptions about how the change took place.

<u>ESL pre/post-test</u>

The grade three test assessed the impact of LRW by measuring reading and writing skills. The test administered in grade four aimed at assessing impact of WLE by measuring speaking and comprehension skills. The specific skills tested are reflected in Tables 3 and 4, respectively.

Data analysis

Data on classroom observation was analysed by examining the teachers' transition from lower to higher levels (from D to A) within the six months. The positions recorded for September and February were compared. The percentage of teachers who had progressed by one level, two levels and three levels across various parameters in the curriculum profile between September and February was calculated. Differences between the pre and post test scores for the C-schools and the uC-schools were calculated. Effect sizes were determined to indicate the strength of the learning gain for both types of schools. Interview data was analysed based on the interconnected model of teacher growth. Specifically, to answer the question on changes initiated by the coaching support, the reflections by teachers indicating a change were categorized into domains of *practice, consequence or personal* using Atlas ti. Once domains of change were identified, causal relationships and interactions across domains were sought in the teacher-given descriptions.

Findings

Domain of practice

Data on professional experimentation obtained by classroom observation from class 3 (Table 1) revealed that there was a general improvement amongst teachers over the six months. The average percentage of teachers who moved up by one level, two and three levels in the general pedagogical skills was 32.3 percent, 10.6 and 4.3 percent respectively. In all, 47.2 percent of teachers reflected progress in the general pedagogical skills. Similarly, for the pedagogical content skills, 38.7 percent teachers moved up by one level, 9.8 percent teachers moved up by two levels and 5.8 percent teachers moved up by three levels. This totaled 54.9 percent teachers who had progressed at least by one level. Finally in the learner responses, the average percent of teachers who moved up by one level was 34.3 percent, those who moved up by two levels was 10.9 percent, and those who moved up by three levels was 1.6 percent. In all 46.6 percent teachers reflected a progress in the quality of learner response.

Table 1: Teachers in grade 3 whose classroom practice moved up by 1, 2, 3 or 4 categories

Items	No of categories				Total
General Pedagogical Skills	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	
Teacher is prepared (has read instructions, ready with teaching aids)	20.7%	10.3%	6.9%	0.0%	37.9%
Teacher gives clear instructions when introducing and conducting activities	34.5%	10.3%	3.4%	0.0%	48.2%
Teacher uses teaching aids	30.8%	11.5%	7.7%	0.0%	50.0%
Teacher asks questions to students.	35.7%	10.7%	0.0%	0.0%	46.4%
Teacher gives students time to answer	40.0%	10.0%	3.3%	0.0%	53.3%
Average	**32.3%**	**10.6%**	**4.3%**	**0.0%**	**47.2%**
Pedagogical content skills					
Teacher teaches phonemic sounds appropriately	46.4%	7.1%	3.6%	0.0%	57.1%
Teacher teaches oral vocabulary appropriately	25.0%	8.3%	8.3%	0.0%	41.6%
Teacher teaches sight vocabulary appropriately	40.0%	13.3%	13.3%	0.0%	66.6%
Teacher helps students read/write by giving them contextual clues to answer/understand	42.3%	3.8%	3.8%	0.0%	49.9%
Teacher helps children decode when reading/writing	28.6%	10.7%	0.0%	3.6%	42.9%
Teacher clarifies meanings of unfamiliar or new words and sentences	59.1%	18.2%	4.5%	0.0%	81.8%
Teacher uses a bilingual approach	29.6%	7.4%	7.4%	0.0%	44.4%
Average	38.7%	9.8%	5.8%	0.5%	54.9%
Learner Response					
Students are able to make letter sound association	31.0%	6.9%	3.4%	0.0%	41.3%
Students are able to decode	33.3%	18.5%	0.0%	0.0%	51.8%
Students are able to read sight vocabulary	38.1%	14.3%	4.8%	0.0%	57.2%
Students read with understanding	40.0%	8.0%	0.0%	0.0%	48.0%
Students ask questions.	27.6%	6.9%	0.0%	0.0%	34.5%
Average	34.0%	10.9%	1.6%	0.0%	46.6%

Data on professional experimentation obtained by classroom observation from grade 4 (Table 2) also revealed a general improvement amongst teachers over the six months. The average percentage of teachers who moved up by one level, and two levels in the general pedagogical skills was 41.7 percent and 4.1 percent respectively. In all, 45.7 percent of teachers reflected a progress in the general pedagogical skills. Similarly, for the pedagogical content skills, 36.2 percent of teachers moved up by one level and 4.7 percent of teachers moved up by two levels. This totaled to 40.9 teachers who had progressed at least by one level. Finally in the learner responses the average percent of teachers who moved up by one level was 43.0 percent and those who moved up by two levels was 6.9 percent. In all 49.9 percent of teachers reflected a progress in the quality of learner response.

Table 2: Teachers in grade 4 whose classroom practice moved up by 1, 2, 3 or 4 categories

Items	No of categories				Total
General Pedagogical Skills	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	
Teacher gives prior instructions and introduces the lesson	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%
Teacher is listening attentively	43.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	43.5%
Students are listening attentively	43.5%	8.7%	0.0%	0.0%	52.2%
Teacher provides interaction opportunities as directed	35.3%	5.9%	0.0%	0.0%	41.2%

Teacher synchronizes time with the audio	57.9%	5.3%	0.0%	0.0%	63.2%
Teacher engages all students	36.4%	4.5%	0.0%	0.0%	40.9%
Average	**41.7%**	**4.1%**	**0.0%**	**0.0%**	**45.7%**
Pedagogical content skills					
Teacher uses English as classroom language	28.6%	4.8%	0.0%	0.0%	33.4%
Teachers pronounces clearly	36.4%	13.6%	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%
Teacher creates time for practicing listening and speaking	42.1%	5.3%	0.0%	0.0%	47.4%
Teacher clarifies meaning of new words	38.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	38.9%
Teacher ensures that they respond with understanding	35.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	35.0%
Average	**36.2%**	**4.7%**	**0.0%**	**0.0%**	**40.9%**
Learner Response					
Children answer with confidence	42.9%	4.8%	0.0%	0.0%	47.7%
Children answer with understanding	57.1%	4.8%	0.0%	0.0%	61.9%
Children answer accurately	33.3%	9.5%	0.0%	0.0%	42.8%
Children ask questions/give instructions confidently	31.6%	10.5%	0.0%	0.0%	42.1%
When a child is answering, other children listen attentively	50.0%	5.0%	0.0%	0.0%	55.0%
Average	**43.0%**	**6.9%**	**0.0%**	**0.0%**	**49.9%**

From external domain to personal domain to domain of practice

During interviews, fifty percent of the participants shared that regular monitoring of their work, the sense of someone watching over, was a motivator towards regular implementation of the program, in absence of which they succumbed to the pressure of administrative tasks. Teachers shared sentiments like, *"When she comes, then I remembered that I have to teach, because otherwise I would be busy with various (administrative) routines."* and, *"Because of the her presence I would remember that someone is coming and I have to undertake this program; I would feel someone is watching my progress and that kept up my motivation to teach regularly."*

From external domain to domain of professional practice

Forty percent of the teachers shared examples of direct changes in their *professional practice* as a result of the support provided by the external stimulus - the coach. One teacher shared, *"As a result of the coach's intervention, we started using English words in the class while teaching."* While another quoted, *"There was a question in the radio lesson about the occupation of the parents. I did not know the name of several occupations in English. So the coach suggested that sometimes I may not know the English word, in which case I can retain the Marathi word for the specific occupation, but I should encourage the use of the English sentence structure. I took this suggestion and asked the children to use the Marathi word for their parent's occupation."* Speaking about the LRW experience, yet another respondent expressed, *"She explained to me how to teach letter sound association using the picture cards. She first demonstrated how to use the materials, and after that I began to use the material."*

Personal domain

Changes in the personal domain and perceptions about how they were engendered were understood through interviews with the teachers. They shared that they had experienced personal changes in terms of greater regularity in teaching, a greater sense of motivation and confidence, sense of learning and support, new knowledge and beliefs about ESL as well as general pedagogical strategies.

From external domain to personal domain

Eighty percent of the teachers expressed the availability of the coach gave them access to new ideas, and new knowledge which was unavailable earlier. For instance, one teacher shared that she viewed the coach as someone who helped her become more aware of the gaps in her teaching, and offered alternatives. Another teacher expressed how the coach exposed her to new ESL concepts: *"When the coach used to come they would give us new ideas, tell us how to teach the lesson, they would talk about what children should learn in English."*

Several teachers gave examples of how, with the help of demonstrations, the coach helped them clarify how to use the material effectively. One of them described that, *"She would also demonstrate how to teach. When children had to listen to the radio lesson, if children did not understand something, we would pause the radio, and she would guide me: explain why a particular question is answered in a particular way. For e.g., if the question was what is your name in the first lesson. If children did not understand the question, she would pause the question, then she would explain what this question means and instruct the child that you must give your name to this question. She would also clarify that you are not to simply give your name, but you must answer: My name is…."*

From external domain to domain of professional practice to (reflective link) personal domain

Fifty percent of the teachers talked about a change in their personal domain, in terms of an increase in their knowledge and confidence about teaching ESL after trying it out with the coach's help. Many teachers expressed similar sentiments as this one who expressed that, *"Because of the coach's presence we learnt to teach in the way we were trained. My confidence has increased as a result of teaching the children."*

From external domain to domain of professional practice to domain of consequence to personal domain

Fifty percent of the teachers who were interviewed, referred to personal changes on account of the positive effects of their professional experimentation on children. The following excerpts from two different teachers reflects a confidence developing in the new approach of teaching ESL, which is grounded in actual changes in student ESL outcomes after trying the new approach. Both teachers ascribe changes to the coach's role in helping them try out the material in the first place. One of them explained, *"I used to teach according to the old method, where I used to talk and children used to listen; but as a result of the coach's help I have been able to use the new material well, and therefore I see a definite change in children's learning."* While the other shared, *"The coach helped me to encourage students to speak various sentence forms (tense, singular-plural). For e.g., I am playing, I am cooking etc. She also encouraged me to do likewise with is, are, am etc. Even today students are able to recognize tense, and speak in the correct tense. I have not seen this in 17 years of teaching, but I have seen such difference in the last two years."* Another teacher reveals a growing belief in the merits of the new approach which she trialed with the coach's help, which improved responsiveness in her students in this reflection, *"The coach helped me to use the material correctly. With the right use material, there were many changes in my teaching style. Earlier I used to be the only one speaking, and I would not get a response from the children. I was myself confused whether the children understand me or not. I would make them write the same word repeatedly. Sometimes I used to force a response out of children, and they responded with fear. But as I used this material correctly, I got an enthusiastic response from across the classroom. Those children who did not participate at all, now take an interest in the subject. Their fear of English has disappeared. I have also learnt to try out various ways of eliciting student's participation."*

From external domain to domain of consequence to personal domain

Ten percent of the teachers indicated that the indicated an impact on their personal domain as a result of the coach's interaction with the students. *"They would come and ask questions, and when children were able to respond, I would feel satisfied that someone from outside has come, and children are able to respond. I would feel very encouraged when they would appreciate how my children are progressing."*

During interviews supervisors of teachers also commented on the differences they perceived between coached and un-coached schools. They unanimously stated that the learning outcomes coached schools were better than in in non-coached schools. For instance, several of them found that the children in the coached school spoke English with a clearer pronunciation of words. Some of them also discussed the relative difference of interest and engagement level amongst students towards the subject. For instance, a supervisor shared, *"Children in coached schools love English, and those in non-coached schools have lower levels of interest in English."* Another added that, *"the confidence of children in coached schools has risen, and their fear of using English has reduced.* A third supervisor shared his observation stating that, *"Children in non-coached schools do not respond to questions as quickly as from coached schools."*

Domain of consequence

Pre and post-test scores of students' ESL outcomes were collected. Effect sizes reflected the comparative learning gains between the students from coached and un-coached schools (Table 3). Class 3 scores for LRW outcomes, reflect substantial difference between the learning gains of the coached (C) versus un-coached (uC) school students. The effect size scores for the un-coached schools are small, which reflect a poor learning gain between the pre and the post-test scores. Whereas the effect sizes of the coached-schools are moderate in the first two skills of understanding capital and small letters, and large in the remaining skills, which indicates an impressive learning gain.

Table 3: Learning gains of students for the LRW program conducted in Grade 3

ESL items	Baseline		Post-C		Post-uC		Gain-C	Gain-uC
Questions	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Cohen's d	Cohen's d
Identifying Capital Letters	3.30	1.19	3.94	0.24	3.67	0.79	0.66	0.39
Identifying Small Letters	3.08	1.25	3.79	0.50	3.04	1.35	0.67	0.03

Identifying First Letters	1.80	1.47	3.12	0.91	2.55	1.43	1.01	0.13
Identifying Last Letters	1.73	1.44	3.23	1.11	2.41	1.57	1.12	0.32
Identifying Middle Letters	1.00	1.13	2.42	1.19	1.75	1.46	1.24	0.36
Identifying Correct Word	1.40	1.14	2.92	0.99	2.28	1.25	1.39	0.46
Matching Picture with Word	1.92	1.23	3.19	1.24	2.29	1.50	1.03	0.35
Matching Picture with Sentence	1.31	1.12	2.70	1.22	2.03	1.46	1.20	0.30

Similarly, the outcomes for the WLE program (Table 4) indicate that the learning gains of the coached (C) and un-coached (uC) schools are negligible for the question on listening skills. This is likely due to a ceiling effect, as the pre-test scores for this skill were high. However, in the more complex skills for production, which include answering the question in a partially correct, and fully grammatically correct form, the learning gains of the coached skills are visibly better as reflected in the large effect size.

Table 4: Learning gains of students for the WLE program conducted in Grade 4

Skills	Baseline		Post-C		Post-uC		Gain-C	Gain-uC
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Cohen's d	Cohen's d
Listening Skill	7.51	2.39	7.95	2.49	7.41	2.50	0.02	-0.04
Speaking: Full sentences	1.27	1.53	2.70	2.14	1.46	1.78	0.77	0.11
Speaking: Broken sentences	1.30	1.76	2.51	1.39	1.93	1.61	0.76	0.37
Speaking: Single words	3.62	2.74	2.53	1.81	3.66	2.50	-0.47	0.02

From external domain to domain of practice to domain of consequence

Forty percent of the teachers expressed that the coach had inspired them to adopt the new method and that had led to various improvements in student learning. Teachers voiced feelings such as, *"I had a student who learnt how to spell words phonetically, she could read the long passages from the LRW book. This was because the coach guided me about how to teach those lessons, and even corrected the limitations in the way I was teaching the lesson."* A commonly echoed sentiment was, *"With their help our teaching skill has improved and children's English (has improved)."*

From external domain to domain of consequence

Forty percent of the teachers expressed that their students experienced direct benefits as a result of the coach's visit. Teachers shared vividly how they saw this happen by explaining that, *"They ask children questions, and children feel enthused by the fact that someone from outside is coming and asking questions."* And, *"When children took lead in participating during the coach's visit, it encouraged other children, for e.g. some children go up and read from the book, then those children who were slow in reading also got encouraged to do so and they felt that I should also know how to read and get appreciation from a visitor. The coach once appreciated four students and that got 8 other kids motivated."* Some more teachers expressed similar experience expressed in this reflection, *"As a result of the coach's visits, because she used to conduct good demonstrations, children really got interested in the language."*

Conclusion and implications

This paper presents powerful evidence of how coaching support elevated the quality of ESL practices and outcomes within a short period of six months. A substantial number of teachers in the coached schools adopted desirable pedagogical practices with the help of the coaching support and also exhibited more engaged learner responses over a period of time. Learner outcomes in the coached schools, especially in the more complex skills were better than those in the un-coached school. Teachers' perceptions not only validate this direct evidence but also help nuance it further by explicating how coaching as the external stimulus triggered a variety of interactions across the various domains, and resulted in an experience of growth and learning. They candidly admitted that the coach motivated them to direct their focus from administrative tasks to teaching ESL regularly. It is important to note that in a context such as Indian schools where teacher absenteeism and inactive teaching time are pervasive (Kremer, Murlidharan, Nazmul, Hammer, & Rogers, 2005), an intervention like coaching may have a substantial contribution to make towards regularizing teaching. Further, where teachers themselves do not speak English, the

challenges of implementing an innovative ESL program are multiplied. While on one hand they themselves do not speak the language, they are faced with the challenge of fostering interaction in the classroom sensitively, so that students can develop the language skills necessary for confident expression (Kapur, 2013). The teachers in this study illustrate how coaches helped them meet these challenges in real time, which eventually led to improved ESL outcomes of students. Such a situated instructional focus is considered an important attribute of good quality professional development (Raval, Mckenney, & Pieters, 2010; Putnam & Borko, 2000). Finally the study also illustrates that besides offering tangible knowledge and skills to teachers, coaching also has the potential to support the development of their efficacy while they are implementing the new program (Cantrell & Hughes, 2008). Even more noteworthy are teachers' reflections about how, by experimenting with new teaching methods and encountering varied student learning, teachers start believing in new ways of teaching ESL. Consistent with the description of Clarke & Hollingsworth (2002), teachers shared vivid examples of exploring a new teaching strategy, reflecting on the consequences of that exploration and identifying notable outcomes, in turn beginning to believe in the value of that strategy.

Evidence on the effects of coaching is relevant for Indian schools (and other under-resourced countries) as they confront the paradox of declining educational outcomes, low teacher attendance and efficacy in spite of large investments in infrastructure and teacher training. While resolving this stalemate will involve paradigm shifts in terms of pedagogy and governance (Murlidharan, 2013), this paper highlights the contribution of professional support solutions like coaching which offer situated learning opportunities for teachers, and thus, not only have motivational value, but also lead to enhanced teaching and learning. Much of the existing research base on Indian primary education focuses on the current gaps in policies and practices. This paper emphasizes the need for more widespread research on promising professional development interventions, their benefits, the manner in which they are implemented and the challenges that they encounter.

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