



Good teacher vs bad teacher: What learning impact does a good teacher have?

Teacher quality is one of the most important things in education. Here's how a good teacher can change our lives.



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Countries around the world are committing immense resources to middle and elementary school reform and education outcome improvements. The US government has spent over a billion dollars on 'No Child Left Behind' since the programme's roll-out a decade ago.

Globally, a trillion dollars have been spent on education reform in the last 10 years. The focus of such reform has been variables such as student incentive, school accountability, charter schools movement, standardised testing, smaller classrooms, curriculum development, technology in classrooms, etc.

Yet, any school reform would be a futile exercise without emphasis on one of the strongest variables on student outcomes -- [teacher quality](#).



(Photo: PTI)

Impact of a good teacher on educational outcomes

Research indicates that a teacher with high value-add over years has a high correlation of conceptual understanding of her/his students (Gates Foundation, 2010).

A bottom quartile teacher and a top quartile teacher can create a lead of 10 percentile points in an average student in a single year (Gordon et al, 2006).

A good teacher also has tremendous impact on the economic value that can be earned by a student. By removing the bottom quarter of bad teachers, there would be a 14-percentile jump in student achievement scores.

And after 12 years of schooling, the student has an additional earning potential of \$72,000 to \$169,000 (Gordon et al, 2006).



Good teacher vs. bad teacher

Traditionally, a good teacher was identified as one with the right qualifications, educational credentials and requisite certifications. This credential-centred approach is based on the premise that teacher effectiveness is directly correlated to paper qualifications.

However, a landmark study in over 9,400 classrooms and 150,000 students over three years showed that there was no significant difference in student achievement between students of certified and non-certified teachers (Gordon et al, 2006) despite statistically controlling for base line scores, socio-economic category, race, ethnicity, etc.

But significant student achievement differences were found within certified teachers and also within uncertified teachers. In fact, the difference between a 75th percentile teacher and a 50th percentile teacher in any group of teachers (certified or non-certified) is five times as large as the difference between the average certified and non-certified teacher.

Thus, a teacher's effectiveness is not correlated to his/her paper qualifications but rather to traits and competencies the teacher possesses.



How to predict if a teacher will be good or not

There is no simple way to predict a teacher's effectiveness. As per the Gates Foundation, a teacher's past years 'value-add' is one of the strongest predictors of student achievement gains in other classes and academic years.

Gordon et al. (2006) also propound that the teacher's performance (in terms of value add/student achievement) in the first two years more accurately predicts the teacher's performance in the subsequent years.

There are also interesting studies of some traits that enable teachers to exhibit higher value-add in the first two years. Gladwell (2008) indicates that high performing teachers have some unique classroom management traits.

Doug Lemov (feels that a good teacher has three strong traits that sets her/him apart from an average teacher subject understanding, methods of teaching (classroom management) and subject knowledge for teaching (subject-specific classroom management).

In a two-year study of classrooms across the USA, Lemov identified 49 key classroom management traits that enable a teacher to provide better value-add to her/his students. These traits are not subject specific.

Thus, a teacher with average domain/subject understanding but superior classroom management techniques can deliver superior value-add as compared to a teacher with superior domain understanding but average classroom management techniques.

Thus, the only accurate way to assess teacher effectiveness is to measure the value-add of teachers in the first two years and not before hiring (Gordon et al, 2006).

A better approach would be to have an open system where any college degree graduate with a pulse for teaching is allowed to teach; she/he should be observed and mentored for the first two years before being awarded tenure (Gladwell, 2008).

The current system of awarding tenure to all teachers irrespective of their value-add should be slowly phased out. The top quartile of teachers must be rewarded while the bottom quartile teachers must be moved out of the schooling system in the interest of children and the society at large.

- Article by Vishnu Karthik Ramani, CEO of Xperiential Learning Systems, Director of The Heritage Group of Schools