

From Universal Schooling to Learning for All: Building a strong foundation for every child in India

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

Recent figures for rural India indicate that over 96% of children are enrolled in school. With almost all children in school, the critical question facing the country is - are they learning?

Since 2005, ASER - the Annual Status of Education Report has attempted to answer this question. Facilitated by Pratham, ASER is a nation wide household survey that reaches a representative sample of children in every rural district of India. ASER reaches over 600,000 children from more than 300,000 households every year. A set of basic reading and arithmetic tasks are administered one on one to each sampled child. In 2018, ASER covered 596 districts across the country.

SAMPLE: ASER READING AND ARITHMETIC TOOL

Std. II level text

राजू नाम का एक लड़का था। उसकी एक बड़ी बहन व एक छोटा भाई था। उसका भाई गाँव के पास के विद्यालय में पढ़ने जाता। वह खूब मेहनत करता था। उसकी बहन बहुत अच्छी खिलाड़ी थी। उसे लंबी दौड़ लगाना अच्छा लगता था। वे तीनों रोज़ साथ-साथ मौज-मस्ती करते थे।

Letters

म र ड
ह च
ल ब न
क य

Std. I level text

रानी नदी किनारे रहती है। नदी में बहुत मछलियाँ हैं। रानी उनको दाना देती है। वे सब मज़े से दाना खाती हैं।

Words

गाना खुश
मौसी
पैर झोला
किला
आग मोर

Number Recognition/ अंक पहचान 1-9	Number Recognition/ संख्या पहचान 11-99	Subtraction/घटाव (2 digit with carry over)	Division/भाग (3 digit by 1 digit)
3 7	65 38	52 - 24 76 - 47	6) 919
1 4	92 23	48 - 29 75 - 37	7) 869
8 9	47 72	46 - 38 31 - 15	5) 583
5 2	56 87	65 - 18 23 - 14	3) 512
29 11			

Ask the child any 5 numbers, out of which 4 must be correct.
बोध पूर्ण, जिनमें 4 सही होने चाहिए।

Ask the child any 5 numbers, out of which 4 must be correct.
बोध पूर्ण, जिनमें 4 सही होने चाहिए।

Ask the child to solve any 2 subtraction problems. Both must be correct.
दो करो। दोनों ही सही होने चाहिए।

Ask the child to solve any 1 division problem, which must be correct.
एक करवाओ जो सही होना चाहिए।

ASER uses tools in 20 languages

Over ten years of data from the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) point to three key facts:

- ➔ First, at every grade level, basic learning levels are unacceptably low. The All India figures from ASER 2018 suggest that only about half of all children enrolled in Std V can read at least at Std II level. A similar proportion of children are able to do a two-digit subtraction problem (with borrowing) correctly. This suggests that at least half of all children in Std V in India need immediate support.
- ➔ Second, data from recent years shows small increases especially in lower grades, but much higher improvements are needed to bring children up to the level of grade level expectations.
- ➔ Third, learning trajectories over time are flat. This suggests that if children do not acquire foundational skills in the primary school years, it is unlikely that they will pick them up later.



GOING BEHIND THE HEADLINES OF ASER

Here is a table from ASER 2018 that shows reading levels for Std III to V. Not only do we see a large proportion of children at low levels of reading, but the variation in each grade is wide. For example: In Std V, while 50% of all children can read Std II level text (or even higher), the rest are not yet at Std II level. Close to 18% children are only able to recognize letters or yet to acquire that skill. 13% can read simple words but not sentences and another 19% are just about reading text at Std I level. This situation presents a huge challenge to any teacher. What should a teacher teach? And to whom? In a typical Indian classroom, the Std V teacher teaches from the Std V textbook and thus only the “top of the class” benefits from her teaching.

ASER 2018: % Children in primary school who can read at different levels

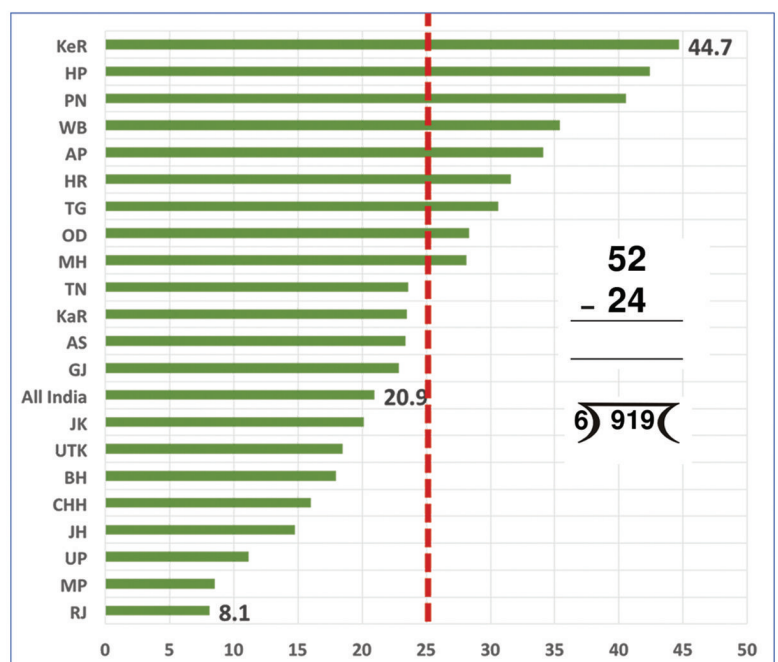
All India all rural districts:

Representative sample of all children from household survey

Example	Cannot recognize letters yet	Can recognize letters but cannot read word	Can read words but cannot read sentences	Can read Std I level text but not higher	Can read Std II level text & maybe higher	Total
Std III	12.1	22.6	20.8	17.3	27.2	100
Std IV	7.6	15.9	16.6	19.3	40.7	100
Std V	5.9	11.7	13.0	19.1	50.3	100

% CHILDREN IN GOVT SCHOOLS IN STD III WHO CAN AT LEAST DO SUBTRACTION: SELECTED STATES ASER 2018

The ASER 2018 graph on the right shows the proportion of Std III children enrolled in government schools who can at least do a numerical two digit subtraction problem with borrowing. (This kind of problem is usually found in Std II math textbooks in states). The All India figure indicates that approximately 21% of children can do this task correctly. However, there is wide variation across the country with states like Kerala, Himachal Pradesh or Punjab where more than 40% children can do this correctly to states like Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh where this figure is lower than 15%. If we consider these levels as a proxy for the proportion of children who are at grade level in Std III, we can see that a substantial jump is required to help children get close to grade level expectations.



A POSSIBLE SOLUTION FOR ACQUIRING FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS : TEACHING AT THE RIGHT LEVEL

Over the last fifteen years, Pratham has evolved a solution called Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) which enables children to acquire foundational skills, like reading and arithmetic quickly. Regardless of age or grade, teaching starts at the level of the child. This is what is meant by “Teaching at the Right level”. The TaRL method, developed by Pratham, was originally designed keeping in mind children who have already reached Std. III, IV or V but still have not acquired basic skills. The focus is on helping children with basic reading, understanding, expressing themselves as well as arithmetic skills. These are foundational building blocks that help a child to move forward. Studies have shown that once acquired these capabilities endure over time. TaRL is an effective and low-cost strategy that helps children to “catch up” in a short period of time. Children, who are 7 or 8 and older and have been in school for a few years, can “pick up” quickly.

KEY ELEMENTS OF THE APPROACH



2. Children's groups are made according to the basic assessment. Available teachers or instructors allocated to facilitate group activities and to guide children's work.

1. Simple one-on-one assessment done to group Std. III, IV and V children by level rather than by grade.

4. Similar assessment used for tracking children's progress, periodically and to guide onsite monitoring.



3. For each group there are a set of activities and materials appropriate for their level.

Children learn in groups and also individually. Teachers or instructors do activities with groups.

As children make progress they move into the next group.



To be effective, the “Teaching at the Right Level” approach needs to be embedded in a larger ecosystem whose elements are aligned to support and ensure learning for all children. Here are the main features of the school system that need to be changed to ensure that learning for all is possible.

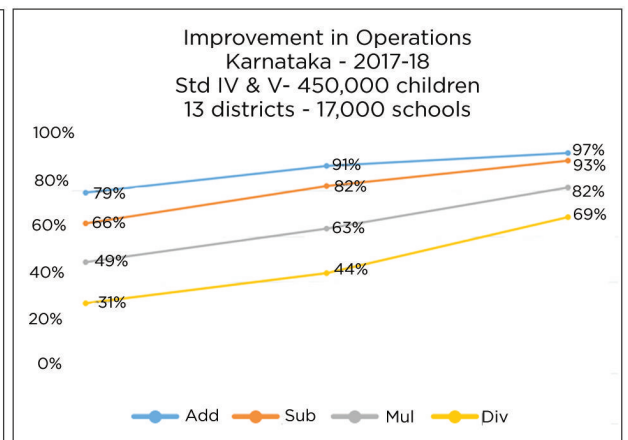
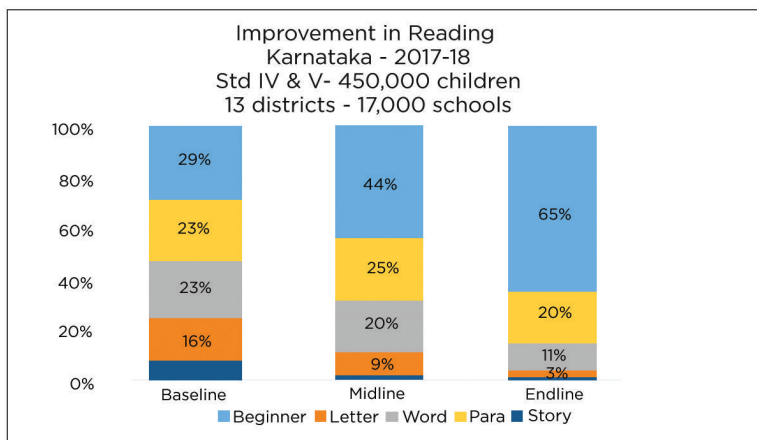
	BUSINESS AS USUAL	➔	KEY ELEMENTS OF PRATHAM'S TEACHING AT THE RIGHT LEVEL (TaRL)
GOAL	Goal is to complete the grade level textbook or curriculum	➔	Clearly articulated goals for basic reading and arithmetic. Goal is to ensure basic foundational skills for all.
ASSESSMENT	Pen-paper grade level test done at the beginning of a phase and at the end.	➔	Simple quick one-on-one oral assessment used at start for grouping. Helps teacher understand each child. Similar assessment used periodically to track progress.
TRAINING & MENTORING	Resource persons as master trainers. Usually not much follow up after training	➔	“Leaders of practice” created via “learning by doing. These are people from within the system who “practise” the approach daily for 20-25 days. They gain first hand experience and so they can train teachers and provide ongoing on-site support, monitoring and mentoring.
TEACHING & ACTIVITIES	Full class teaching with assumption that children are at grade level	➔	Simple framework of daily activities that can be adapted as children progress. Combination of activities for maximum learning. Children learn to work in groups. Activities in big groups, small groups and individually.
PERIODIC REVIEW	Occasional updates	➔	Data discussion and review at all levels. Aggregate school or class-level data used to propel program not child-wise data.

BIG CHANGE IS POSSIBLE

Today Pratham's "TaRL" approach is implemented in two ways - directly by Pratham instructors through "Learning Camps" or as part of a Pratham-government partnership program where government teachers implement TaRL as part of the school day. In the direct model, Pratham instructors run "Learning Camps", 30-50 days of instruction (3 to 5 camps of 10 days each), for about 3 hours a day. In the partnership model, government teachers use this approach over a longer period in the school year (four to six months) with dedicated time for 1-2 hours a day.



Here is an example of learning improvement seen in the 2017-18 Pratham-Government of Karnataka Partnership Program for Std. IV & V:



In the 2018-19 school year, Pratham partnered with several state governments to help children acquire foundational skills. These states and UTs include Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Jammu and Kashmir and some districts of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and West Bengal.

Contact details

B 4/58 Safadarjung Enclave, 3rd floor, New Delhi 110024
www.pratham.org