

Improving learning outcomes

Addressing the learning deficiency in India – Pratham

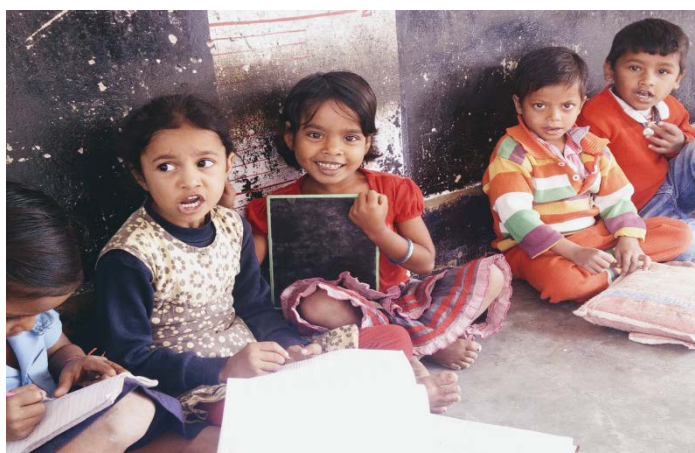


Photo Credit: Pratham

The problem

According to the Annual Status of Education Report 2016 (ASER) 97% of all children aged 6–14 years in India are enrolled in school.¹ Despite a rise in enrollment rates, basic reading and arithmetic levels of children in primary grades remain poor due to lack of quality education.

More than 50% of children in grade 3 are unable to read grade I level texts, and only 28% can do simple subtractions.¹ With basic learning levels so low, children are left ill-equipped for life.

Pratham's solution

Pratham's flagship Read India program aims to bring about a significant improvement in learning outcomes. This is done indirectly through partnerships with the government and directly through learning camp programs run by Pratham.

The programs focus on urban and rural areas to strengthen the basic literacy and numeracy skills of children aged 3–14 through innovative teaching and learning techniques. Children are grouped by learning level rather than age, and each group is taught using appropriate methods and materials. The learning camps, which last 5–10 days each, help children to move up by one or two learning levels each time.

While the interventions in primary grades seek to bridge the gaps in learning, work in early years focuses on building strong foundations to eliminate such gaps in the long term. Pratham's Early Years program focuses on improving learning in pre-school years and has previously been implemented on a smaller scale. It is now being tested in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Delhi for national implementation.

Successes to date

In Bihar, teacher-led interventions ran successfully in both rural and urban areas. In addition, monsoon camps were conducted in July-August with upper primary grade students, which is an expansion of the primary grades scope. The learning camps in Uttar Pradesh led by Pratham staff have produced results beyond targeted outcomes, while teacher-led interventions have been showing progress. In Delhi, the Early Years program led by Pratham teams progressed well in both school-based and community units, while a focused intervention with children in primary grades has been introduced through the school-based library program.

Read India Program

- **48,987** children reached through directly implemented learning camps and **373,730** through partnerships
- Outcomes for targeted children:
 - Uttar Pradesh
 - **64%** (partnership) and **84%** (direct) children in grades 3–5 are now able to read at least a grade 1 level text
 - **68%** (partnership) and **93%** (direct) children in grades 3–5 are able to do subtractions
 - Bihar (entirely through state partnership)
 - **54%** (rural) and **79%** (urban) children in Grades 3-5 able to read at least Grade 1 level text
 - **49%** (rural) and **80%** (urban) children in Grades 3-5 able to subtract

Early Years Program

- **2,470** children reached directly by Pratham's early years intervention, and **14,200** reached through partnerships across three states – Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Delhi
- Outcomes for targeted children:
 - Uttar Pradesh
 - **82%** children in Grades 1-2 able to read letters and **89%** able to recognize single-digit numbers

Bihar

- Rural: **71%** of children in Grades 1-2 able to read letters and **82%** able to recognize single-digit numbers
- Urban: almost 100% children in Grades 1&2 able to read letters and recognize single-digit numbers

Delhi

- Average number of children borrowing books: 26,360 each month
- Focused intervention with 2,954 children resulted in **99%** of children in Grades 1-2 able to read letters and **99.5%** able to recognize single-digit numbers

Focus in 2017

Pratham's future work will involve scaling up and intensifying both of their Read India and Early Years programs. Pratham will also look to implementing technology to further aid their work, including equipping Pratham staff with tablets to facilitate and enhance the delivery of learning content.

While there is still more work to be done, building partnerships with the government remains a top priority. These can be extremely helpful in reaching out to thousands of children quickly. Whether at block, district or state level, partnerships help expand reach using only limited resources. And Pratham will continue to work to nurture these relationships in order to have the greatest impact possible. Despite temporary setbacks such as change in government etc., the level of collaboration with government remains key to effective scaling up of the program nationally and internationally.

Pratham's learning improvement innovation will continue to be targeted strategically at persuading governments to focus on learning outcomes as a matter of long term sustainable policy on a state-wide scale.



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Optimus Outlook

The program is on track to deliver on targets despite challenges faced, which Pratham has been very open about. In Uttar Pradesh, for example, the team faced setbacks due to a change in government after elections. In the district of Kannauj, it is worth noting that the recently transferred district magistrate was extremely supportive of Pratham's work and had encouraged officials to make the program a success. With a number of transfers, the team has had to rebuild relationships with new officers. A great success for Pratham has been their ability to create awareness amongst officials and shift their focus from inputs to learning outcomes in education.

A recent partnership with paid government volunteers in Bihar to support Primary grades is also a very positive development in light of which Pratham will be revisiting their strategy in the state. Additionally, preschool advocacy in Bihar resulted in their theme based curriculum being used by Bihar Government Integrated Child Development Services for 70,000 Anganwadis (centers) across the state.

New Partnerships & Funding: guided by learnings from UBSOF supported programs, Pratham has entered a three year partnership with the state government of Karnataka to launch a similar program and is in conversation with two corporate donors to extend support to their partnership interventions in both Early Years and Primary Grades.

¹ Annual Status of Education Report 2016. ASER Centre. <http://www.asercentre.org/#cvtxk>

*Reporting period is July 2016 to April 2017

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