Pratham

Report on implementation and impact of Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) program in Salma Public School, Baghpat, Uttar Pradesh

Report submitted by

Pratham Education Foundation

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Contents

1. Background

ASER Centre is the measurement and assessment wing of Pratham Education Foundation. Every year since 2005 to 2014, and then every alternate year since 2016, ASER Centre has conducted the nationwide citizen-led Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) survey which provides a snapshot of children's schooling and foundational learning status in rural India. Beyond the ASER survey, ASER Centre uses simple yet rigorous methods to generate evidence at scale on the impact of social sector programs and policies, focusing primarily on the education sector.

In April 2024, ASER Centre facilitated a baseline assessment to understand the foundational learning levels of students in the Salma Public School (SPS) in Baghpat district of Uttar Pradesh. For this, ASER Centre staff trained 10 teachers from the school on the basic reading, arithmetic, and English ASER tools, who then went on to assess almost all of the 371 students of the school from grades 1 to 5 on these three domains.

Findings from the assessment revealed a gap in the foundational learning levels of students, with a large proportion of children not at grade level. To address the gaps that were identified, two actions were planned and implemented with Pratham:

1. Teachers of grades 1 and 2 were trained on play-based pedagogy to enhance their learning and understanding.

2. For grades 3 to 5, the flagship "catch-up" and remedial program called Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) was implemented by training teachers of the school on delivering instruction using the TaRL methodology.

After the program was implemented, all children were tested in an endline assessment to gauge changes in their foundational learning levels as compared to their performance in the baseline assessment in April 2025.

Only 354 children assessed in the baseline could also be assessed at the endline, with about 17 children who could not be tracked.

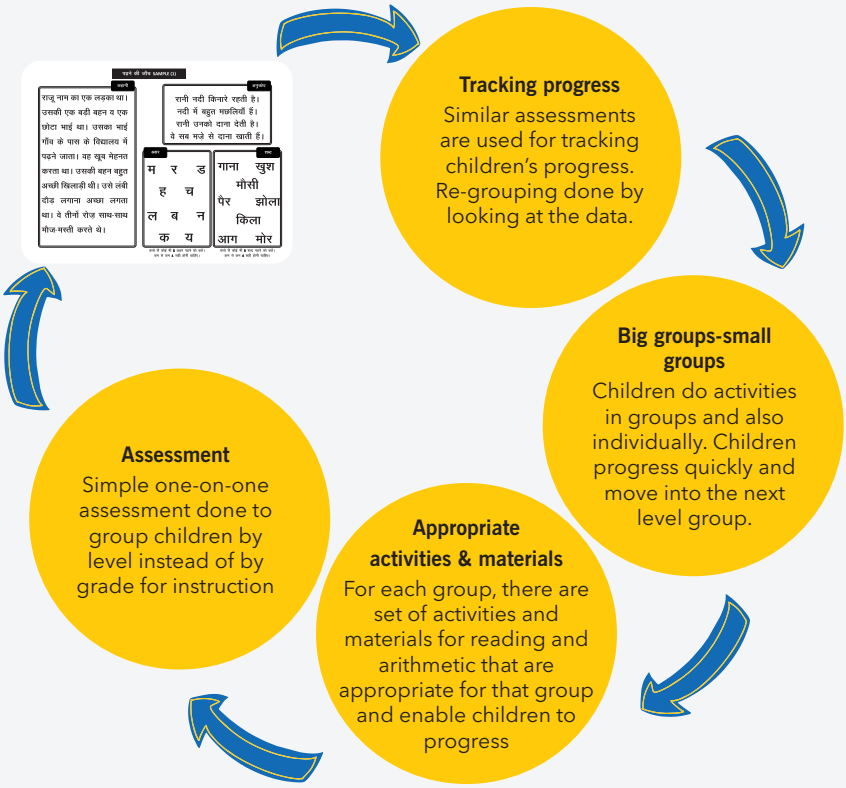
2. About Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL)

Pratham pioneered the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) methodology in the early 2000s as an effective, low-cost strategy to provide a solution to the foundational learning crisis. In the TaRL methodology, regardless of age or grade, teaching starts at the level of the child. Children are grouped according to their learning levels either across grades or within the same grade. The approach breaks away from the "chalk and talk" practices common in most classrooms, employing simple, engaging, and creative daily learning activities appropriate for each learning level/group.

The assessment tool has five proficiency levels in reading and arithmetic; it helps to identify the highest level that each child is able to reach. This helps instructors in grouping children by their current level, regardless of the grade in which they are enrolled. Regular, time-bound assessments are conducted and data for each child is analysed to track progress. Based on this progress, children are re-grouped as they advance.

The data produced through this process is aggregated, displayed, and discussed, making it readily understandable for instructors, teachers, and parents. The approach facilitates accelerated learning, aiding the child to catch up with the foundational skills in a short time.

Key elements of approach



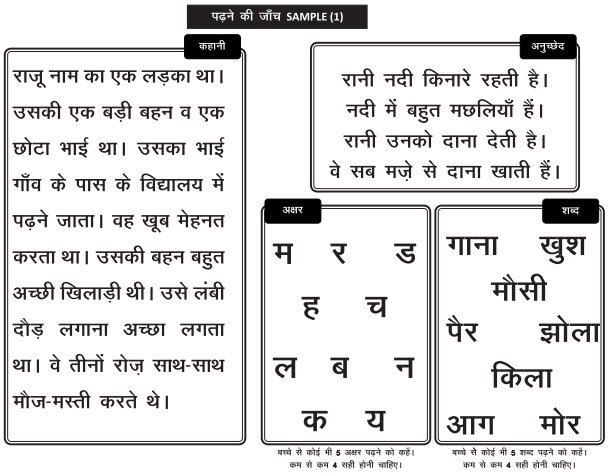
3. Assessment

The ASER tool is progressive and each child is marked at the highest level that she or he can reach comfortably. Children are tested one-on-one and given the time they need to do each task on the assessment. The testing process is adaptive to the child's ability so that she does not have to attempt all levels. The following pages outline the basic reading, arithmetic and English ASER tools.

Reading tasks

The reading test has 4 tasks:

- Letters: Set of commonly used letters.
- Words: Common, familiar words with 2 letters and 1 or 2 matras.
- Std I level text: Set of 4 simple linked sentences, each having no more than 6 words. These words (or their equivalent) are in the grade 1 textbooks.
- Std II level text: Short story with 7-10 sentences. Sentence construction is straightforward, words are common and the context is familiar to children. These words (or their equivalent) are in the grade 2.



**Note: While the ASER reading tools are available in 19 regional languages, for the purpose of this assessment and intervention, the Hindi ASER reading tool was deployed.*

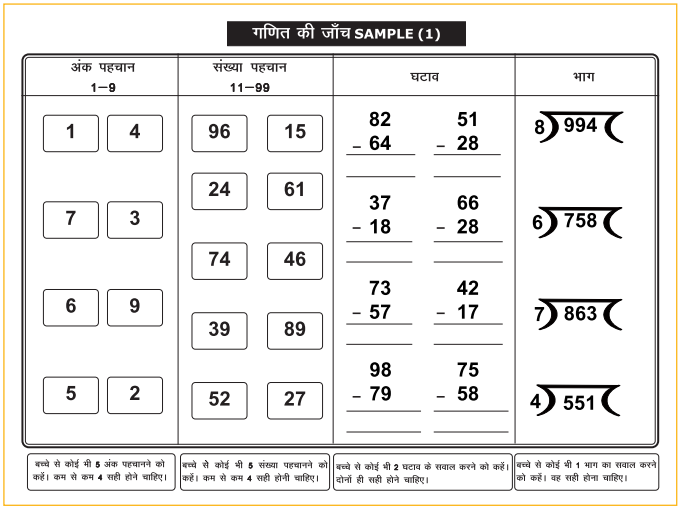
Alignment of ASER reading tasks with grade-level learning outcomes

Reading Tasks	Grade
Letters	Pre-primary
Words	1
Std I level text (paragraph)	2
Std II level text (story)	3

Arithmetic tasks

The arithmetic test has 4 tasks:

- Number recognition 1 to 9
- Number recognition 11 to 99
- Subtraction: 2-digit numerical subtraction with borrowing.
- Division: 3-digit by 1-digit numerical division with remainder.



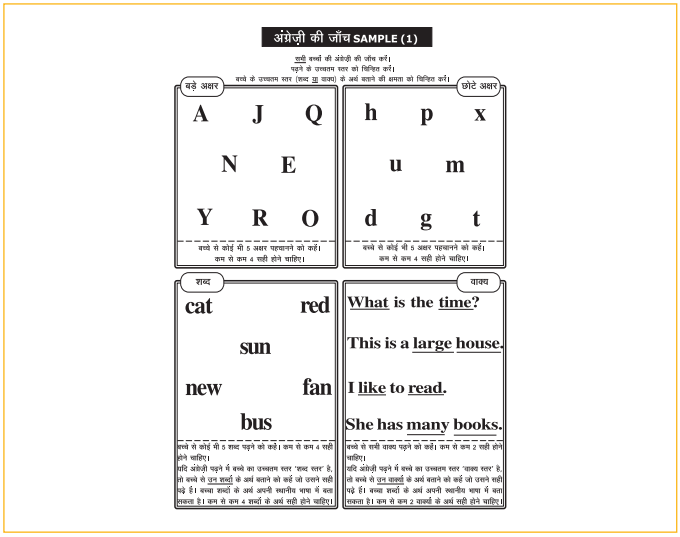
While developing the arithmetic tool for the ASER age group, care is taken to ensure compatibility with the learning outcomes defined for number recognition, subtraction (with borrowing), and division (3-digits by 1-digit) in state textbooks for grade 1, 2 and 3/4, respectively.

Alignment of ASER arithmetic tasks with grade-level learning outcomes

Arithmetic Tasks	Grade
Number recognition 1-9	Pre-primary
Number recognition 11-99	1
Subtraction: 2-digit numerical subtraction with borrowing	2
Division: 3-digit by 1-digit numerical division with remainder	3 and 4

English tasks

The English test has two parts. The reading section is administered first and the highest level at which the child can read is marked. The children who are marked at word or sentence level in the English reading section are administered the meaning test. The English reading test has 4 tasks:



- Capital letters: Set of commonly used capital letters.
- Small letters: Set of commonly used small letters.
- Words: Common, familiar 3 letter words. After reading, the child is asked for the meaning of the words in her local language.

- Simple sentences: Set of 4 simple sentences, each having no more than 4-5 words. These words (or their equivalent) are in the introductory English textbooks of the states. After reading, the child is asked to say the meaning of the sentences in her local language.

Alignment of ASER English tasks with grade-level learning outcomes

English Tasks	Grade
Capital letters	Pre-primary
Small letters	1
Words	2
Simple sentences	3

4. Overview of activities

April 2025	A total of 10 teachers were trained to assess students using ASER tools. The baseline assessment covered all students in grades 1 to 5. Students were assessed in language, arithmetic, and English.
August 2025	Training of teachers: Grades 1 and 2 teachers were trained on play-based teaching methods developed by Pratham and grade 3 to 5 teachers were trained on TaRL. A total of 9 teachers were trained on language and mathematics.
September - October 2025	Remedial classes were conducted during this period, with students grouped according to their learning levels as identified in the baseline assessment conducted in April.
October - November 2025	After the program ended, an endline assessment of the students was conducted, allowing for child-wise tracking of the learning levels and identification of the further learning needs of the students.

5. Sample description

Table 1: Distribution of students by grade

Grade 1	
Number of students	97

Grade 2	
Number of students	84

Grade 3	
Number of students	54

Grade 4	
Number of students	72

Grade 5	
Number of students	47

Total	
Number of students	354*

**Note: For data analysis, the baseline assessment conducted in April has been considered, and the sample includes only those students who were present in both the baseline and the endline assessments.*

6. Findings

6.1 Grade 1

Table 2: % Students in grade 1 who can read at least words at baseline and endline

Baseline	Endline
57.7	77.3

Table 3: % Students in grade 1 who can recognise at least 2-digit numbers at baseline and endline

Baseline	Endline
58.8	79.4

Table 4: % Students in grade 1 by reading level in English at baseline and endline

Can read at least small letters		Can read at least words	
Baseline	Endline	Baseline	Endline
62.9	79.4	28.9	63.9

Key findings: Grade 1

- **Improved word-level reading:**

  The proportion of grade 1 students who could read at least words increased from **57.7% to 77.3%.**

- **Gains in numeracy:**

  Recognition of at least **2-digit numbers** improved from **58.8% at baseline to 79.4% at endline.**

- **Progress in English reading:**

  Students able to read **at least small letters in English** increased from **62.9% to 79.4%,** while those able to read **at least words in English more than doubled,** from **28.9% to 63.9%.**

6.2 Grade 2

Table 5: % Students in grade 2 who can read at least a Std I level text at baseline and endline

Baseline	Endline
59.5	78.6

Table 6: % Students in grade 2 by arithmetic levels at baseline and endline

Can recognise at least 2-digit numbers		Can do at least subtraction	
Baseline	Endline	Baseline	Endline
69.0	83.3	23.8	52.4

Table 7: % Students in grade 2 by reading level in English at baseline and endline

Can read at least small letters		Can read at least words	
Baseline	Endline	Baseline	Endline
81.0	88.1	47.6	69.0

Key findings: Grade 2

- **Improved grade-appropriate reading:**

  The proportion of grade 2 students who could read at least **Std I level text** increased from **59.5% at baseline to 78.6% at endline,** indicating substantial progress towards grade-level reading proficiency.

- **Gains in arithmetic:**

  Recognition of at least **2-digit numbers** improved from **69% to 83.3%,** while the ability to perform **at least subtraction** more than doubled, increasing from **23.8% at baseline to 52.4% at endline.** This reflects significant movement from basic number recognition to operations.

- **Progress in English word reading:**

  The proportion of students who can read **at least small letters rose from 81% to 88.1%;** whereas the share of students who could read **at least words in English increased from 47.6% to 69%.**

6.3 Grade 3

Table 8: % Students in grade 3 by reading levels at baseline and endline

Can read at least a Std I level text		Can read Std II level text	
Baseline	Endline	Baseline	Endline
74.1	77.8	55.6	53.7

Table 9: % Students in grade 3 who can do at least subtraction at baseline and endline

Baseline	Endline
42.6	48.1

Table 10: % Students in grade 3 by reading level in English at baseline and endline

Can read at least words		Can read sentences	
Baseline	Endline	Baseline	Endline
53.7	74.1	20.4	27.8

Key findings: Grade 3

- **Grade-level reading in Hindi remains almost the same:**

  While the share of grade 3 students who could read a **Std II level text** declined slightly from **55.6% at baseline to 53.7% at endline,** the proportion able to read a **Std I level text increased from 74.1% to 77.8%.**

- **Improvement in arithmetic level:**

  The share of students who could perform **at least subtraction** increased from **42.6% to 48.1%.**

- **Substantial gains in English reading and comprehension:**

  The proportion of students who could **read words** but not sentences in English **increased from 53.7% at baseline to 74.1% at the endline,** and the proportion of students able to **read sentences** in English increased from **20.4% to 27.8%.**

6.4 Grade 4

Table 11: % Students in grade 4 who can read a Std II level text at baseline and endline

Baseline	Endline
83.3	90.3

Table 12: % Students in grade 4 by arithmetic levels at baseline and endline

Can do at least subtraction		Can do division	
Baseline	Endline	Baseline	Endline
86.1	93.1	52.8	72.2

Table 13: % Students in grade 4 by reading and comprehension level in English at baseline and endline

Can read sentences		Of those who can read sentences in English, % who can tell the meaning	
Baseline	Endline	Baseline	Endline
59.7	77.8	55.8	80.4

Key findings: Grade 4

- **Nearing to universal acquisition of foundational reading:**

  A high proportion of grade 4 students could already read **Std II level text** at baseline **(83.3%)**, which increased further to **90.3% at endline.**

- **Gains in arithmetic:**

  The share of students who could perform **at least subtraction** increased from **86.1% to 93.1%,** while the ability to do **division** showed a substantial improvement from **52.8% at baseline to 72.2% at endline.**

- **Improvement in English sentence reading:**

  The proportion of students who could read **sentences in English** increased from **59.7% to 77.8%.**

  - **Gains in English comprehension:**

    Among students who could read sentences in English, comprehension improved substantially, from **55.8% at baseline to 80.4% at endline.**

6.5 Grade 5

Table 14: % Students in grade 5 who can read a Std II level text at baseline and endline

Baseline	Endline
93.6	100.0

Table 15: % Students in grade 5 who can do division at baseline and endline

Baseline	Endline
55.3	85.1

Table 16: % Students in grade 5 by reading and comprehension level in English at baseline and endline

Can read sentences		Of those who can read sentences in English, % who can tell the meaning	
Baseline	Endline	Baseline	Endline
70.2	93.6	69.7	88.6

Key findings: Grade 5

- **All children can read Std II level text:**

  By endline, **all grade 5 students (100%)** were able to read at least a **Std II level text,** up from an already high **93.6% at baseline,** indicating full consolidation of foundational reading skills.

- **Substantial gains in division:**

  The proportion of students who could perform **division** increased sharply from **55.3% at baseline to 85.1% at endline.**

- **Significant improvement in English sentence reading:**

  Students able to read **sentences in English** increased from **70.2% to 93.6%.**

  - **Marked gains in English comprehension:**

    Among students who could read sentences in English, the ability to tell the meaning improved from **69.7% at baseline to 88.6% at endline.**

7. Way forward

The focused intervention using play-based pedagogy and level-based instruction (rather than grade-based) using Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) can substantially bridge foundational learning gaps, particularly for children in the primary grades. Substantial gains were observed in language, arithmetic, and English reading and comprehension for most grades. At the same time, learning patterns across grades highlight opportunities for strengthening implementation and deepening instructional support.

First, the improved foundational learning levels among grade 1 and 2 students suggest that exposure to play-based instruction, and continuous assessment can build strong foundations before learning gaps widen and reduce the need for remedial interventions in later grades.

Second, NIPUN Bharat aims for universal acquisition of foundational literacy and numeracy by the end of grade 3. The findings for grade 3 indicate that while arithmetic and English levels improved, the reading levels declined slightly. This suggests the need for targeted support in grade 3 to consolidate foundational learning skills.

Third, although learning levels of students in grades 4 and 5 were already quite high at baseline, the learning gains show that remedial or catch-up models embedded in level-based instruction remain relevant beyond early grades to bridge the learning deficits.

Moving forward, drawing from the findings, following recommendations are suggested:

- Assessing children at frequent intervals to identify learning deficits early on.
- Embedding level-based (instead of grade-level), child-centric, and play-based teaching learning practices inside classrooms.
- Providing targeted support to the grade 3 cohort in 2025-26 for the rest of the academic year, with continued reinforcement when they progress to grade 4 next academic year.
- Building capacity of teachers through training and structured feedback loops to reinforce child-centric pedagogical practices.

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