

# Foundation Programme for Early Literacy and Learning - 2014-15: A Pilot Study

*Keerti Jayaram*

## Introduction

In July 2014, the Organisation for Early Literacy Promotion (OELP) piloted a two-year foundation programme for early literacy and learning in 15 rural government primary schools situated in the Silora block of Ajmer district, Rajasthan. The programme covered 381 children from class 1 and 414 children from class 2. This report presents a brief overview of the first year of its implementation.

## Conceptual Understanding Underlying the Programme

Becoming literate learners means:

- Being able to think independently
- Being able to make sense of what one sees, hears or reads
- Being able to share one's ideas, thoughts or feelings through spoken, pictorial, written or other forms

## Program Focus

This foundation program addressed knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to the foundation skills of schooling. These are:

1. The code of written language, i.e. phonological awareness, knowledge of phoneme-grapheme relationships, word knowledge and recognition including awareness of spellings.
2. Meaning-making from written texts through use of background knowledge, knowledge

of vocabulary, language structure, print concepts and strategies to obtain or convey meaning through different forms of written texts.

3. Ability to analyse and respond to texts thoughtfully and with a critical awareness.

## Teacher Preparedness

Through monthly review and planning meetings, teachers / OELP workers were equipped to:

- Understand the developmental processes and natural learning behaviours of the learners
- Be aware that learners construct meaning by drawing upon their socio-cultural and linguistic knowledge and daily life experiences at home and school.
- Recognize the importance of making connections with the skills and interests of individual learners.

## Objectives

1. To equip young children for school-based learning
2. To develop enabling and responsive classroom learning conditions
3. To support young learners from diverse backgrounds to become active, thinking and engaged readers and writers
4. To develop an effective and developmentally appropriate framework for

early literacy and language learning towards strengthening the mainstream programme.

## Focus

The program focused on three skill sets:

- Foundation skills for school based learning (home to school transitions)
- Foundation skills covering five aspects of language learning and literacy—speaking, listening, reading, writing and thinking
- Higher order thinking skills / cognitive processes

*These were taken up simultaneously and not sequentially.*

## The Program Components

### 1. Responsive and Active Learning Environments inside Classrooms

Planned spaces were created with low cost resources for using the classroom walls for meaningful learning. Children were encouraged to engage with all these spaces and print elements in a variety of natural ways through games and planned activities. Attention was paid to classroom management techniques and ways of addressing differences so that each child felt accepted and learning occurred in an environment of mutual trust and respect.

### 2. Classroom Pedagogies and Practices

These included pedagogies for facilitating:

- Foundation skills for schooling.
- Meaningful conversations and classroom talk: Children were encouraged to question, predict, connect with their own experience, retell in their own words and use new words in a variety of planned ways. They learned to listen attentively and respond appropriately. Teachers were equipped to use open and closed questions to make

conversations meaningful and motivate children to connect with the deeper aspects of books through read aloud or book talk.

- Reading: This included contextualized and adapted pedagogies for read aloud; guided, shared and independent reading; skill-building activities for building phonological awareness; word recognition and vocabulary; and lastly comprehension strategies such as retelling, reasoning, predicting, summarizing, etc.
- Writing and creative expression: This included linguistically controlled experience based writing, shared writing, guided writing; and skill-building through structured tasks and practice worksheets.

A chunk of time was made available on Saturdays for free reading and creative or outdoor activities such as making books; role play or puppet shows; and *akshara* walks or clay modelling based on stories.

### 3. Implementation Framework

Four Blocks Framework was used as a delivery framework for classroom interventions across classes 1 and 2 while adhering to the MHRD “Padhe Bharat Badhe Bharat” guidelines.

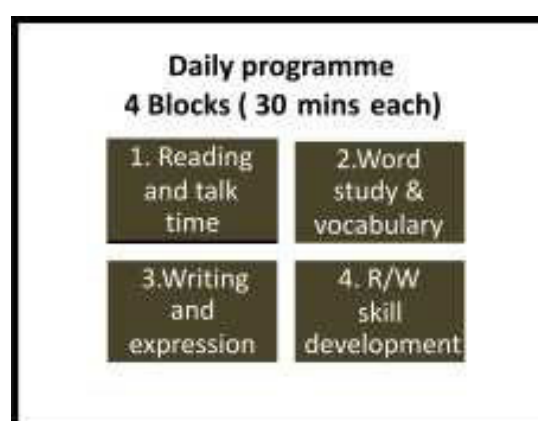


Figure 1. OELP's Four Block Framework

Class 1 program: This was based on thematic units which drew upon the children's experience, their literature and / or some curricular resources. In Class 1, the framework in Figure 1 was found to be suitable for mainstream schools as it provided a simple structure with adequate time for oral work, read aloud, word activities and vocabulary building, writing and creative expression, while addressing the developmental needs of young learners.

Class 2 program: This was based on a greater engagement with curricular materials, children's literature and experience-based learning. The reading and writing pedagogies attempted to involve learners with reading, writing, meaning-making and critical thinking at greater levels of complexity. Due to time constraints, a three block approach was found to be more feasible, and time was distributed between the textbook and use of children's literature and other reading materials.

#### 4. Assessment and Learner Tracking

##### Competencies and Indicators

Learning indicators based on seven broad competencies were used for mapping children's learning progressions at six measurement points at the end of each trimester, spanning a two-year period.

Assessments included:

1. A baseline evaluation
2. Summative, competency based evaluations
3. Formative, observation based checklist
4. Individual profile folders

##### Summative Assessments

Learner progressions were mapped through summative assessments at six measurement points, i.e. at the end of each trimester. This enabled us to level each child based on his / her performance.

##### Formative Observation-based Checklist

A qualitative observation-based checklist based on a five point rating scale was developed to track the progression of competencies that were not being assessed within the summative assessment, every three months.

##### Profile Folders

A profile folder was maintained with the background of each learner. In addition, all the assessment sheets (from the summative and formative assessments) were filed along with one or two pieces of written work each week. This enabled us to track a child's progress over a period of time. A rubric was designed to assess each child's progress in different dimensions of learning.

##### Levelling

The children were grouped into three levels, i.e. A, B and C, with level 'A' being the lowest performance level. The learning progression and shift across levels were tracked over two academic years, and the data from the assessments was fed into the monthly planning and review meetings for identifying the focus areas for each trimester

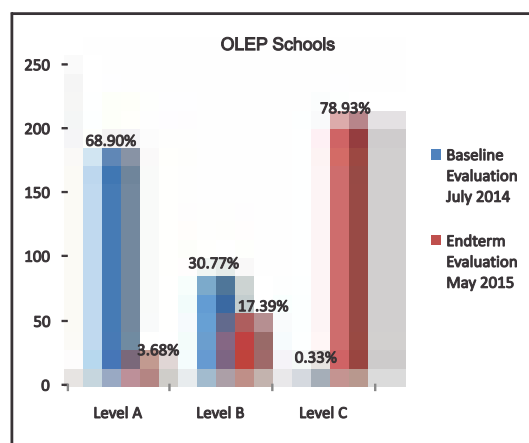


Figure 2. Percentage shift in Class 2 students' performance levels from baseline to end-term evaluations in OELP intervention schools in 2014

Figure 2 shows the shift in the performance levels of class 2 students in the 15 OELP intervention schools during the academic year 2014-15. The results of the end term evaluation for class 2 in May 2015 indicate that 96.32 % children had moved to a higher level as compared to the baseline evaluation in July 2014. Further, 78.33 % of these class 2 children were performing at proficiency level C. We are looking at these initial results as broadly indicative. Further, this group at the class 2 level had one year of exposure as against the intended two years.

### **Feedback and Challenges**

The initial response from the government school teachers and the State Education Department was fairly positive. OELP was appointed as a resource organization in July 2014. Alignment with the changing demands of existing mainstream framework was challenging and required a fair amount of negotiations. The chronologically structured CCE framework also created challenges as we were not able to entirely engage the regular teachers and were compelled to fall back on our own education workers.

**Keerti Jayaram** is Director of the Organisation for Early Literacy Promotion. More details are available on the OELP website ([www.oelp.org](http://www.oelp.org)).

*oelpliteracy@yahoo.in*