Findings from Read to Kids
India Digital Reading Program

Executive Summary

2018-2019
Project Overview

From April 2018 to April 2019, Worldreader in collaboration with Society for All-Round Development (SARD) designed and deployed a Read to Kids digital reading program for Pre-K, Grades 1 & 2 for public schools and preschools in Delhi State. Funded by Pearson’s Project Literacy Initiative, the program is focused on improving early reading development for young children ages three to eight years old with an emphasis on increased teacher, parental, and caregiver engagement in shared reading and reading aloud both in classrooms and homes. The program was piloted in seven primary schools (including four pre-primaries within those schools) and five Anganwadi centers during the 2018-2019 school year.

In partnership with the Central Institute of Educational Technologies and the Delhi Women and Children Welfare Department, the program focused on leveraging institutions, influencers (teachers, parents) and technology to improve access to reading, changing parental attitudes about reading, and introducing new reading practices to teachers and caregivers by providing them with digital access to high-quality, age-appropriate, locally relevant books and educational materials. Teacher capacity building was done on the basics of Early Childhood Development, importance of reading, program alignment with national policies and guidelines, learning outcomes, SDGs, 21st-century skills, lesson plans and worksheets. Demo storytelling sessions were done by expert storytellers using BookSmart stories. Specific sessions were conducted for parental engagement and alignment with the school curriculum and time table. These tools, which included lesson plans, worksheets, and low-cost projectors, supported a story-based and two-directional approach to teaching, which eventually merged into the national curriculum.
In order to reach the three most critical influencers on early childhood learning, including early childhood centers, parents, and ECD policymakers, the program employed **three key strategies**:

1. **Supporting teachers to enhance school reading**
2. **Helping parents improve the home reading & learning environment**
3. **Advocacy to achieve early childhood goals through digital programs**

**View the Read to Kids anganwadi programme in action here:**
- [https://youtu.be/zm4MvWGQ_aE](https://youtu.be/zm4MvWGQ_aE)

**View perspectives from parents and caregivers in these story videos:**
- Father’s Story- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hyRmCKv2UwU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hyRmCKv2UwU)
- Mother’s Story - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kNIRKS6w0ss](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kNIRKS6w0ss)
Research Design

The Read to Kids endline assessment surveyed public primary school teachers, Angandwadi workers (AWWs/ preschools), parents and children to capture changes related to the following outcomes during the program period:

- Pedagogical shifts from rote learning to activity-based learning in the classroom environment.
- Improvements in the vocabulary development of children ages 3-6 in anganwadi centers.
- Changes to the home literacy environment and the knowledge, awareness, and practices of parents and caregivers.

Data Collection and Sampling Strategy

Read to Kids (R2K) covered seven primary schools, including both Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) schools and Kendriya Vidyalaya (KV) schools, with a total coverage of 555 enrolled children and 14 teachers. The project also covered five anganwadi centres (AWCs) with five anganwadi workers and 128 enrolled children. Additionally, educators encouraged parents to download the Worldreader Kids app to read with their children and complete worksheets together at home. The following table (Table 1) summarizes the data collection and sampling strategies.
Table 1. Evaluation Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome No.</th>
<th>Data Collection Tool</th>
<th>Sampling</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Key informant surveys with anganwadi workers and teachers</td>
<td>Census Sample</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 11 primary school teachers in 7 primary schools</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 3 AWWs from 3 of 5 participating AWCs</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Home literacy and vocabulary development assessments with AWC children</td>
<td>Disproportionate stratified random sample in intervention and control groups</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 45 children in the intervention group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 46 children in the comparison group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Note: Primary school children were not surveyed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Key informant surveys with parents</td>
<td>Purposive convenience sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 8 mothers and 3 fathers of primary school students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 2 mothers and 4 fathers of AWC children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key Findings

Use of Digital Learning Tools Before and After R2K

- **While some schools utilized educational technology before R2K, the program noticeably increased technology usage in the classroom.** Most parents (n=9) reported that their children did not use e-materials at school a year ago. However, all primary school parents reported that their children currently use e-materials at school, most commonly referring to the tablets provided by R2K and government smart classes.

- **Of the interviewed AWWs, none had educational technology prior to R2K.** Additionally, the R2K-provided digital tools were the only educational technology used by at least two of the three AWWs interviewed.
• **Teachers had better internet access during R2K.** Almost half (45%) of teachers said that they used mobile data (provided by R2K) to connect to the internet. Prior to R2K, only 18% of teachers reported having good internet access.

• **Teachers received support through Quarterly Learning Labs, training events, program coordinators, and colleagues.** The initial Learning Lab workshops were organized in Delhi at the NCERT campus. Later, the project schools and Aanganwadi centres volunteered to be the venue for the quarterly learning lab. The primary objective of these workshops was to bring together all the participants together, in order to:
  ○ Learn from their experiences
  ○ Share best practices, as well as challenges,
  ○ Strengthen project design for the next academic year
  ○ Introduce new storytelling tools
  ○ Expand the impact of BookSmart App involving parents and communities

• Program implementation support from their colleagues included sharing ideas for storytelling, sharing the tablet, conducting class exchanges, helping each other to use the worksheets, and sharing other resources.
Changes in Classroom Environment

- **R2K increased digital learning tools usage in the classroom.** Of the teachers interviewed, 91% used the e-Reader tablets at least once per week, with over half of them using it twice per week.

- **R2K positively affected primary school classrooms.** Nine out of eleven teachers (82%) said that, during the past year, the children's approach to reading had undergone a good or very good change, and seven out of eleven (63%) said that the conduciveness of the school environment for reading had undergone a good or very good change. Teachers also reported qualitative changes in the classroom environment (shown above).

- **R2K also positively impacted the AWWs.** All of the AWWs interviewed (n=3) described the change in children's approach towards reading over
the past year as “good”. Moreover, of the AWWs interviewed (n=3), all of them reported using the tablet in combination with the R2K app twice weekly. AWWs also said that they used tablets and projectors to show YouTube videos to their classes.

**Literacy and Vocabulary Improvement**

- **Primary school children’s literacy and reading habits improved from the program.** When asked to recall their child’s reading and writing one year in the past, all parents (n=11) reported that their child could not read and write properly. However, most parents (n=9) reported that their child could presently read and write.

- **Based on short literary assessment, R2K participants scored an average of 2.78 points higher than those in the comparison group** with 9.76 out of 22 possible points on the literacy scale. This difference was found to be statistically significant, meaning participation in the program improved children’s literacy scale scores.

**Home Literacy Environments**

- **AWC children described R2K positively impacting their home literacy environment.** 22% of children in the R2K program reported that someone reads storybooks to them at home compared to just 2% of children in the control group.

- **R2K increased access to reading materials at home for primary school students.** Over half (n=6) of parents reported their children did not have access to good reading materials a year ago. Almost all parents (n=9) said their children had access to good reading materials at home at the end of the programme, most commonly mentioning storybooks.

- **Parents are more engaged with their children’s at-home literacy after R2K.** Many parents of primary school children said that they had either no interest (n=7) or a low level of interest (n=1) in their child’s
reading a year ago, but they currently take interest after a year of the program (n=11).

- **Children are more interested in discussing and sharing readings with R2K.** While most parents reported their children did not discuss stories that they had read with anyone a year ago (n=7), all parents reported their children currently talked about stories with other people, most commonly with siblings, their mothers, or with friends.

- **Mobile phones allowed for increased access to digital materials.** All parents reported their children currently having access to digital reading materials at home via mobile phone. However, over half (n=8) reported their children not having access to digital reading materials a year ago, with many (n=5) attributing that to having no smartphone.

- **Digital reading influenced mobile plans for their device.** The average reported cost of a mobile plan for a household in a typical month was 245.5 INR and the cheapest plan reported 99 INR a month with the most expensive costing 499 INR per month. Most parents (12 of 17 interviewed) reported that the R2K app used up around \( \frac{1}{4} \) of their available data each month, a cost they were willing to incur considering the benefits for their children.
Challenges and Suggestions

- **The number one challenge cited by teachers participating in R2K was an insufficient quantity of worksheets.** The parents saw the worksheets as homework, and more worksheets were seen as more learning by the parents.

- **There were multiple difficulties reported from the AWWs.** They commented that the R2K project plan is not aligned with the AWC annual plan (n=1), general time constraints (n=1), difficulties charging the tablets (n=1), and difficulties engaging parents as they did not see AWWs as places of learning (n=1).

- **Over half of the teachers interviewed (n=5) requested more frequent training.** When asked what suggestions they had for the tablets and the R2K app, teachers requested audiovisual content (n=3), the resolution of issues with charging (n=3) and connectivity (n=2), that the teachers in other sections be covered under the program as well (n=2), the provision of small speakers (n=2), larger tablets (n=1), the regular servicing and maintenance of the tablets (n=1), and an improved search function. Teachers particularly liked exposure and capacity building through joint training activities, frequent learning labs, and inter-school storytelling competitions.
Recommendations

After reviewing the evaluation findings, the external evaluation team provided the following recommendations to improve future phases of Read to Kids programming:

- Explore potential avenues to support parental engagement with their children's literacy development. While educators reported some success for engaging parents, both parents and educators indicated barriers to engaging with children due to material poverty. Creating opportunities for more structured parental support and modeling of successful parental reading behavior may improve parental engagement.
- Undertake gender analysis to inform approaches to better engage fathers in their children's learning and improve mothers' access to mobile phones.
- Conduct focus groups with parents organized around improving and developing features for the Read to Kids mobile app and understanding parents' requests for print books including ways to improve their children's home access to reading materials.
- Work with teachers to identify and resolve logistical challenges to program implementation based on their needs. Teachers valued the support they received through R2K but experienced some challenges, including a lack of administrative support, issues with charging and maintaining the tablets, varying levels of support from the program team, and difficulties engaging with parents. Working with teachers to better understand the root of these challenges will improve programmatic implementation.
- Better integrate monitoring, evaluation, and learning into the program model from baseline.

The above recommendations will be used for future phases of the R2K programming to drive further parental and teacher engagement in digital reading.