

# Teachers' Experiences with Pakistan Reading Project's Three-Pronged Teacher Development Model

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## DESCRIPTION OF CRISIS-SPECIFIC CHALLENGE

In recent years, multiple national reading assessments in Pakistan have shown that an alarming number of primary school students are not learning to read. According to the 2013 ASER, 49% of third grade children could not read sentences in their language of instruction (LOI) and 45% of fifth grade children were not able to read a second grade story. These surveys demonstrate a full-blown literacy crisis in Pakistan. Learning to read can be challenging for children in the best of circumstances, but many school children in Pakistan experience complications in their daily lives that leave them at a disadvantage when it comes to their education, particularly in boundary provinces such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). In these areas, security challenges resulting from the Afghan War and terrorist activity are especially acute and work against efforts to provide Pakistani children with safe and high quality education. In many border schools, classes are comprised of internally displaced (IDP) students and students from low-income families. In addition to struggling to meet the needs of diverse learners in large classes, teachers often face challenges communicating with displaced families from language backgrounds different than their own. Moreover, cultural gender norms often make it difficult for girls and female teachers to access schools. Additionally, children find themselves in classes with teachers who do not have sufficient training.

**Prior to Pakistan Reading Project (PRP) interventions, one third of teachers and half of coaches interviewed in KP had not received pre-service and in-service training** (Pakistan Reading Project 2018).

Consequently, the vast majority of Pakistan's rural and urban school teachers have had little to no exposure to early grade reading methodologies, either as

students themselves or in their pre-service training. In-service professional development opportunities for Pakistani teachers are highly limited, underfunded, and hindered by logistical challenges. Against this challenging backdrop, high rates of illiteracy amongst Pakistani children is a problem in and of itself and has repercussions in other realms of their education. Research shows that if children struggle with basic reading skills in the early grades, they are significantly more likely to have trouble with other key academic skills in the future (Abadzi et al. 2005).

PRP is addressing this challenge via a holistic approach that aims to improve literacy outcomes by elevating support for reading in classrooms, education systems, and communities in KP and six additional regions across Pakistan: Balochistan, Gilgit Baltistan (GB), Sindh, Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), and the Federal Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

## BRIEF OVERVIEW

Since 2014, PRP has reached 26,623 teachers and 1.6 million students in Grades One and Two, with the specific goal of improving the students' literacy skills and teachers' instructional practices. Teacher professional development (TPD) is a core pillar of PRP's approach. Teachers participate in a three-pronged model during a two-year intervention cycle. PRP's TPD model includes face-to-face trainings (FtF), monthly Teacher Inquiry Groups (TIGs) and school support visits.

Teachers from the intervention areas begin with one five-day FtF session, followed by a refresher three-day session during those teachers' second year in the program. FTF sessions focus on healing classroom techniques used to address vulnerable populations as well as developing the discrete skills of teachers with an emphasis on how they should use the teaching and learning materials provided by PRP.



Photo credit : Sidrah Amin, Communications Officer-KP

TIGs are made up of groups of four to eight teachers who meet once per month to discuss reading instruction modules, share classroom experiences, and reflect on successes and challenges they have encountered. These sessions allow teachers to collaborate around best practices and identify aspects of the daily lesson plans that are particularly effective or challenging.

School support visits foster application of training from the FtFs and TIGs by providing coaching from school support associates, mentors, and government academic supervisors. During these visits, mentors observe, give feedback, support teachers with reading instructional practices, and assist with assessments of the needs and progress of students.

TPD is particularly important given the on-going obstacles confronting the entire Pakistani education system. By establishing a new standard for TPD in Pakistan, programs like the PRP fill a critical gap in teacher support.

## EVIDENCE AND OUTCOMES

The impact of PRP on student reading outcomes and teacher instructional practices has been documented via a quasi-experimental study that compared reading outcomes of two cohorts of students who received PRP intervention in Cohorts 1 and 2 (treatment) with the outcomes of students who had not participated in the program, but were waiting to receive the intervention in Cohort 3 (wait control).

The study collected baseline, midline, and endline data from a cross-sectional sample of 192 schools (132 treatment, 60 control), 344 teachers (233 treatment, 111 in control), and 5,523 students (3,767 treatment, 1,756 in control) in five provinces of Pakistan using an Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) to measure students' reading skills and a classroom observation tool to capture teachers' instructional practices. Researchers used a difference-in-differences approach to identify the learning gains observed in students and teachers in the treatment (Cohorts 1 and 2) and control (Cohort 3) groups, which could be attributed to the intervention.

The data indicated that PRP had positive, statistically significant effects on students' reading outcomes. Students in first grade who received one year of intervention showed small non-significant gains on their reading skills, but second graders who received two years of intervention showed statistically significant, moderate-to-large learning gains. The study also found that PRP had positive, moderate-to-large, and statistically significant effects on teachers' instructional practices in the classroom.

Currently, PRP is conducting a mixed-methods experimental design with four treatment arms to understand the cost and effect of different ingredients of professional development on students reading outcomes and teachers' instructional practices: 1) face-to-face trainings, 2) TIGs, and 3) on-site mentoring (vs. full treatment). A baseline qualitative study that was conducted as part of this impact evaluation in November 2018 in KP, collected data from three focus groups discussions with 13 coaches, six FGDs with 23 Grade Two teachers and 81 FGDs with 484 second grade students.

The analysis of data from teachers and coaches indicates that while no participant recalled negative early experiences reading at home, few actually reported positive experiences and feelings. Teachers and coaches' early reading experiences were mostly associated to male figures who read the Quran or helped with Urdu lessons, but not with female figures or recreational materials. Teachers also reported that when they were children, they had limited exposure to recreational reading materials, and learned to read with the help of instructors who used traditional methods such as writing on the board and asking students to repeat the lesson after them without focusing on letter sounds or word recognition. Other findings:

- **Beliefs about how to support students to read:** Teachers and coaches believe that to effectively promote reading, students need to be exposed to active pedagogical techniques and have access to recreational reading materials that will develop their interest in reading. They also believe in the importance of providing students with differential supports to promote learning according to their needs. Teacher and coach respondents were able to effectively identify some strategies to support students with different needs.

- **Beliefs about supporting teachers to effectively teach reading:** Coaches believe that the best way to support teachers in their work is to ensure they use materials and lessons plans, and to provide them with on-going, individually tailored feedback about their instruction. However, coaches did not reflect on the importance of using a variety of questions to encourage self-reflection and growth among teachers.

In addition, preliminary findings from the midline quantitative study show that the provision of on-site coaching is the only component that is having positive effects on student reading outcomes and teachers' instructional practices. IRC is currently analysing midline qualitative data. By November, we will have richer information on teachers' and coaches' experiences and the way in which access to these professional development supports influenced their engagement with the program.

## LIMITATIONS, CHALLENGES, AND/OR LESSONS LEARNED

Research findings demonstrate that PRP is effective and low cost, can be implemented at scale, and has sustainable effects. Despite the encouraging results, Pakistani teachers need more help with TPD and mentoring. Primary educators need opportunities for training that, in addition to providing guidance in how to teach foundational reading skills, help them better understand and address the needs of vulnerable populations such as IDPs, those who face tenuous security contexts, multilingual learners and the challenges of gender biases in education. Mentors need additional skills in guiding teachers in self-reflection about how to improve the quality of instruction.

Carrying out interventions and collecting the necessary data to assess and enhance programming has also posed a significant challenge in far-flung districts of Pakistan. In these areas, educators and project staff face long travel times and security risks. In addition, difficulties involved in obtaining permission from the relevant authorities to carry out implementation in the field have complicated project efforts.

A crucial lesson has been learned in cultivating trust, collaboration, and ownership for reading reforms and research at all levels of the system - national, regional,

provincial, and district education officials. The efforts of PRP staff in continuously engaging stakeholders through consultation meetings and capacity building throughout the life of the project has bolstered the capacity and confidence of stakeholders to invest in continuing reading reforms.

## REFERENCES

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