

ENHANCING LITERACY AND LIVELIHOODS: A PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR PRIMARY EDUCATION IN RESOURCE-CONSTRAINED SETTINGS

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Abstract

This study evaluates the effectiveness of the para-teacher model implemented by the One Billion Literates Foundation (OBLF) in enhancing teacher development and improving student outcomes in resource-constrained settings. By employing rural women as para-teachers and providing them with rigorous training in English proficiency, pedagogy, and student-centred teaching methods, the program aims to address educational deficits in under-resourced schools. Data collected from the study demonstrates significant improvements in student proficiency, particularly in speaking and writing, with para-teacher-led classrooms consistently outperforming non-intervention schools. Additionally, the program empowers women by fostering financial independence and challenging traditional gender norms within their communities. The findings highlight the success of bilingual and interactive pedagogies in promoting student engagement and critical thinking. The study concludes with recommendations for scaling the model, emphasizing the importance of continuous teacher training, technology integration, and community involvement to sustain and expand the program's impact.

Keywords: para-teacher, primary education, rural women's skilling, education, women's livelihoods

In India, education in resource-constrained and rural settings faces significant challenges that hinder access to quality learning opportunities. Despite the government's efforts to improve educational infrastructure and increase enrollment rates, many rural schools struggle with inadequate resources, poorly trained teachers, and high dropout rates. These challenges are compounded by socio-economic factors, such as poverty and cultural norms, which can limit educational aspirations, especially for girls. In such contexts, innovative models like the para-teacher framework have emerged as effective solutions to bridge the educational gap.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teacher Shortages and Innovative Approaches to Addressing Them

The issue of teacher shortages, particularly in rural and underserved regions of India, has long been a critical barrier to achieving universal primary education. In response, innovative models such as the para-teacher scheme have emerged, aiming to address the dual challenges of inadequate staffing and constrained financial resources. According to Pandey (2006), initiatives like the Shiksha Karmi Project and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) were instrumental in embedding the para-teacher model within the national education framework. These programs provided a framework through which local, under-qualified individuals could be recruited and trained to take on teaching roles, thereby expanding the education workforce and improving pupil-teacher ratios (PTRs) in remote areas. States like Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh were early adopters of the model under programs such as Shiksha Mitra, which specifically aimed to improve staffing ratios in regions where the dearth of formally trained teachers was most severe (Snehi & Nath, 2004).

The para-teacher model, however, was not only a response to teacher shortages but also a solution that was largely driven by cost-effectiveness. Kingdon & Sipahimalani-Rao

(2010) argue that one of the principal advantages of the para-teacher system was its ability to maintain PTRs while minimizing costs. By employing individuals on contractual terms at significantly lower wages than regular teachers, the government was able to reduce financial pressures on the education system while continuing to provide access to education across vast and underserved rural landscapes. This strategy allowed for an affordable expansion of the teaching workforce, a critical consideration for states operating within limited budgets.

However, while the cost-efficiency of the para-teacher model has been lauded, it has also sparked significant debates around educational quality. Critics, including Kingdon & Sipahimalani-Rao (2010), point out that many para-teachers, recruited from within local communities, lack the formal qualifications or comprehensive training typically required for primary educators. This disparity has raised concerns regarding whether para-teachers are equipped to deliver the same quality of education as their fully trained counterparts. These concerns are particularly relevant in subject areas like mathematics and science, where weaker teaching foundations can have lasting impacts on student achievement. As the para-teacher model continues to evolve, the tension between cost-effectiveness and educational quality remains at the forefront of policy discussions.

Quality Primary Education and the Role of Para-Teachers

Para-teachers have indeed contributed to important achievements in the education sector, including increased student enrolment and reduced absenteeism. However, as their role in education has expanded, concerns about the quality of education they deliver have come to the forefront. At the core of these concerns is the limited professional training provided to para-teachers. While they have demonstrated success in enhancing student engagement, their lack of formal training often hinders their ability to effectively manage classrooms and

implement pedagogically sound teaching practices. Pandey (2006) argues that while para-teachers play a critical role in filling gaps left by teacher shortages, their classroom effectiveness is compromised by a lack of both pre-service teacher education and ongoing professional development. This is particularly concerning in classrooms where teachers are required to handle multi-grade environments and adopt innovative teaching techniques that go beyond basic textbook instruction.

This gap in professional capacity is further compounded by the working conditions under which para-teachers operate. Many face significant challenges, including low wages, limited job security, and insufficient access to teaching materials. These factors not only reduce morale but also limit the resources para-teachers can use to improve their teaching practice. Without adequate support and resources, even the most motivated para-teachers struggle to maintain the standards necessary for delivering quality education. As Pandey (2006) highlights, such conditions create an environment where the ambition to expand education access is not matched by efforts to ensure the quality of the education being delivered.

Impact of Para-Teachers on Student Outcomes

The relationship between para-teachers and student outcomes remains complex and contested. On the one hand, para-teachers have contributed significantly to reducing teacher absenteeism and increasing student attendance, particularly in remote areas where regular teachers are often unwilling or unable to serve. However, questions persist about whether these gains translate into improved academic performance. Kingdon & Sipahimalani-Rao (2010) highlight concerns about lower achievement levels in classrooms led by para-teachers,

particularly in subjects like mathematics, where foundational understanding is crucial for long-term student success.

In many cases, the instructional methods used by para-teachers are heavily reliant on textbook-based teaching, which tends to be more passive and less engaging for students. As Pandey (2006) points out, such methods fail to incorporate the activity-based, interactive learning approaches that are increasingly recognized as essential for effective teaching and learning. This lack of learner-centred methodologies not only limits student participation but also affects their ability to grasp and retain key concepts.

Despite these challenges, there are avenues through which the performance of para-teachers can be improved. Raval, McKenney, & Pieters (2010) propose that embedding on-the-job learning opportunities—such as continuous lesson planning, reflection, and peer mentoring—could significantly enhance para-teachers' pedagogical skills and improve student outcomes. By incorporating professional development into the daily routines of para-teachers, it is possible to create a cycle of reflection and improvement, which could help mitigate the weaknesses associated with limited formal training. This cyclical model of development encourages para-teachers to assess their classroom performance, adjust their teaching strategies accordingly, and develop more interactive and engaging lesson plans.

Women's Livelihood and Empowerment through Educational Roles

In addition to its role in addressing teacher shortages, the para-teacher model offers significant benefits in terms of economic empowerment for marginalized women, particularly in rural areas. The integration of education with livelihoods has been shown to not only improve access to education but also provide a means of economic resilience for women who

are typically excluded from formal employment opportunities. Reddy & Rao (2003) emphasize that programs like the para-teacher model have been instrumental in improving household incomes, as they allow women to contribute financially to their families while simultaneously fulfilling vital educational roles in their communities. This dual focus on education and livelihoods has proven to be a powerful tool in fostering economic stability in some of India's most impoverished regions.

Moreover, the para-teacher model goes beyond economic empowerment by offering women a platform to gain financial independence, which in turn elevates their social standing within traditionally patriarchal communities. As women take on the role of educators, they are increasingly seen as contributors to the intellectual and economic fabric of their communities, which helps to shift gender norms. For many women, the para-teacher role represents a break from the traditional expectations placed upon them, providing opportunities for professional growth and personal agency that were previously inaccessible.

Khare (2002) argues that by offering women the chance to become para-teachers, these programs actively challenge traditional gender roles. Women who step into these positions not only serve as educators but also as role models for the next generation, particularly for young girls. The visibility of women in these roles creates a ripple effect, inspiring girls to pursue education and view themselves as capable of participating in the workforce. By disrupting the narrative that confines women to domestic roles, the para-teacher model facilitates a broader societal transformation, positioning women as agents of change within their communities.

This aspect of the para-teacher model highlights the intersectional benefits of integrating education with women's empowerment. Not only does the model address immediate educational needs in underserved regions, but it also promotes long-term social change by challenging the gendered division of labour and fostering female leadership. As women gain experience and respect in their roles as para-teachers, their influence extends beyond the classroom, contributing to community development and altering perceptions of women's capabilities in the public sphere.

Teacher Professional Development for Non-Specialists

A persistent challenge associated with the para-teacher model is the lack of adequate professional training provided to these educators. Unlike formally trained teachers, para-teachers often enter the classroom with minimal pre-service preparation, which limits their capacity to manage complex educational environments effectively. As highlighted by Snehi & Nath (2004) and Pandey (2006), para-teachers in most states receive limited pre-service training, typically ranging from 7 to 37 days depending on the region. This training is often insufficient to equip them with the skills needed to handle multi-grade classrooms—a common feature in rural and remote areas where para-teachers are primarily employed.

The lack of comprehensive training has significant implications for the ability of para-teachers to adopt and implement innovative teaching techniques that go beyond traditional, textbook-driven approaches. Without the necessary pedagogical foundation, para-teachers may struggle to engage students in interactive and learner-centered activities, which are critical for fostering deeper understanding and critical thinking among primary school children. As a result, classrooms led by para-teachers may lag behind in terms of educational quality, despite the improvements they bring to enrolment and attendance rates.

However, there are potential solutions to mitigate the challenges posed by insufficient training. Raval, McKenney, & Pieters (2010) propose a cyclical model for professional development, which integrates on-the-job learning into the daily routines of para-teachers. This model emphasizes continuous lesson planning, teaching, and reflection, allowing para-teachers to progressively refine their teaching practices over time. By embedding professional development into their day-to-day activities, para-teachers are given the opportunity to reflect on their performance, receive feedback from peers or supervisors, and make adjustments to their teaching strategies based on real-world classroom experiences.

This approach aligns with the broader understanding of adult learning theory, which suggests that professionals learn best when they can apply new skills and knowledge directly within their work environment. The cyclical nature of planning, reflection, and adjustment fosters a culture of ongoing professional growth, where para-teachers continuously improve their pedagogical competencies without relying solely on formal training sessions. Additionally, this model helps to address the challenges of multi-grade teaching by encouraging para-teachers to develop adaptive strategies that respond to the diverse needs of their students.

By focusing on continuous professional development rather than limited pre-service training, this model offers a practical solution for improving classroom outcomes in contexts where para-teachers are a vital component of the educational workforce. It highlights the importance of creating structured opportunities for reflective practice and peer collaboration, which can support para-teachers in becoming more effective educators, even in resource-constrained settings.

Contextual Relevance and Cost-Effectiveness of Para-Teacher Models

The contextual relevance of the para-teacher model lies in its ability to respond to the unique linguistic and cultural dynamics of rural India. One of the key challenges in India's education system, particularly in rural and remote regions, is linguistic diversity. In many areas, students speak languages or dialects that are not formally represented in the education system, which often relies on standard languages like Hindi or English. Sridhar (1996) notes that this mismatch between the language of instruction and the local vernacular has historically created barriers to effective learning, particularly for young children in primary education. The para-teacher model addresses this challenge by recruiting local educators who are fluent in the regional dialects spoken by students. This allows para-teachers to bridge the language gap, making education more accessible and culturally relevant for students in their communities

Beyond language, para-teachers often bring a deeper understanding of the social and cultural contexts of the communities they serve. This familiarity enables them to build stronger connections with students and their families, fostering a more inclusive educational environment. By aligning the curriculum with local knowledge and customs, para-teachers can create more engaging and relatable learning experiences for their students, which contributes to higher retention rates and greater community involvement in education.

In addition to its contextual relevance, the para-teacher model is also recognized for its cost-effectiveness. As noted by Alderman et al. (2001), employing community-based educators like para-teachers presents a financially sustainable solution for resource-constrained education systems. Para-teachers are typically hired on contractual terms and are

paid significantly less than regular teachers, which allows state governments to expand the education workforce without placing excessive strain on public finances. This approach is particularly valuable in regions with limited budgets, where the need for cost-efficient solutions is critical to maintaining access to primary education.

Moreover, the community-based nature of the para-teacher model enhances community engagement and ownership of local schools. Since para-teachers are often drawn from the same communities as their students, they act as a link between the school and the community, encouraging greater participation from parents and local stakeholders in the educational process. This engagement not only helps to ensure that children attend school regularly but also fosters a supportive learning environment, where the community actively contributes to the success of the school. This synergy between para-teachers and the community represents a significant advantage of the model, reinforcing its relevance in rural and underserved regions.

The cost-effectiveness of the para-teacher model, combined with its ability to leverage local knowledge and community engagement, makes it a viable solution for expanding access to education in resource-constrained environments. However, while the model offers significant advantages in terms of accessibility and affordability, it remains crucial to address the ongoing challenges related to educational quality and professional development to ensure that these benefits are fully realized in the long term.

Research Gap

Despite the significant contributions of the para-teacher model in addressing teacher shortages, improving access to education, and empowering marginalized communities, several critical gaps remain in the existing literature and practice. Firstly, while there is ample evidence of

the cost-effectiveness and contextual relevance of para-teachers in rural and underserved regions, questions persist about the quality of education they deliver. Studies such as those by Kingdon & Sipahimalani-Rao (2010) and Pandey (2006) highlight concerns about the limited training para-teachers receive and the subsequent impact on student outcomes, particularly in core subjects like mathematics. However, there is a lack of comprehensive research on how specific training interventions and professional development models tailored to para-teachers could enhance their classroom effectiveness and address these shortcomings.

Additionally, while the economic empowerment of women through para-teacher roles is well documented, as noted by Reddy & Rao (2003) and Khare (2002), there is insufficient research on the long-term impacts of this empowerment on gender norms and community dynamics. Existing studies primarily focus on the immediate benefits of employment, but more research is needed to understand how these roles influence women's decision-making power, mobility, and their ability to advocate for broader social changes within patriarchal frameworks. Furthermore, little is known about how these positions could be expanded or transformed to offer more sustainable career growth for women beyond their contractual roles as para-teachers.

A third gap emerges in the integration of technology and innovative teaching practices in para-teacher-led classrooms. While much of the literature acknowledges the para-teachers' reliance on traditional, textbook-based instruction, there is a lack of exploration into how technology-enhanced learning tools or blended learning models could be adapted for use by para-teachers to improve student engagement and learning outcomes. Furthermore, how such innovations could be introduced without extensive formal training or significant additional resources remains underexplored.

Lastly, the cyclical professional development model proposed by Raval, McKenney, & Pieters (2010) offers a promising approach to supporting para-teachers in resource-constrained settings, yet there is limited empirical evidence on its scalability and effectiveness across diverse educational contexts. More research is required to assess how such on-the-job training frameworks can be implemented at a larger scale and how they impact both teacher retention and student success over time.

METHOD

Research Question

The general objective of this study is to evaluate whether the teaching deficit in semi-urban and rural government schools can be addressed through innovative approaches that build teacher capacity among non-specialist, semi-educated para-teachers. The study seeks to address the following key questions:

1. Can locally hired para-teachers, without formal teaching credentials, become effective educators in rural government schools when supported by continuous professional development and contextualized training?
2. How effective is the Teacher Professional Development (TPD) model designed for non-specialist para-teachers in improving both student outcomes and teaching quality in resource-constrained settings?
3. What is the impact of the para-teacher model on the socio-economic empowerment of marginally-educated rural women, particularly regarding their financial independence, household income, and their agency and influence within their communities?

The hypothesis for the study is that OBLF's para-teacher model, which emphasizes continuous professional development, an integrated state curriculum that is activity-based, and pedagogical capacity building, leads to significantly better English language proficiency and foundational literacy among learners in primary rural government schools.

Study Design

This study employs a longitudinal mixed-methods design, leveraging the extended operational history of the para-teacher model at One Billion Literates Foundation, which has been in place since 2010. By examining the program over a prolonged period, this research provides insights into the long-term impacts of the intervention on both literacy outcomes among students and the socio-economic empowerment of community women employed as para-teachers. The longitudinal approach allows the study to capture the evolution of para teachers' skills, professional development, and empowerment over time, as well as track changes in student performance across multiple years. The extended duration of the program enables a comparison between early cohorts of para-teachers and more recent participants, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the program's sustained effects.

Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in Anekal Taluk, a peri-urban area located on the outskirts of Bangalore, Karnataka, India. Anekal spans approximately 530 square kilometres and comprises over 227 villages, with a diverse population of over 850,000 people. The area is characterized by a mix of rural, agricultural, and migrant communities, making it a strategic location for assessing the impact of educational interventions aimed at marginalized

populations. The study locale is further limited to 120 rural government primary schools where OBLF's education program Elevate is deployed using a para-teacher model.

The One Billion Literates Foundation (OBLF) has been operational in Anekal since 2010, focusing on uplifting marginalized communities through educational programs. OBLF's literacy initiative centres around empowering semi-educated rural women by providing them with continuous training in English language skills and pedagogical methods, enabling them to work as para-teachers in local government schools.

Sampling and Participant Details

This study employs two distinct samples: one focused on measuring student learning outcomes and the other on evaluating social transformation among community women employed as para-teachers.

For the para-teacher sample, a purposive criterion-based sampling technique was used to select 120 women currently engaged with the One Billion Literates Foundation (OBLF). The selection criteria included women who had completed the OBLF Kickstart women's skilling program and are actively employed as para-teachers within the foundation's educational intervention. The participants primarily belong to marginalized communities, including Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST), and they range in age from 21 to 55 years. The majority of the participants come from low-income or below-poverty-line backgrounds. Prior to their involvement with OBLF, many were unemployed, engaged in agriculture, or working in small businesses. Their engagement with OBLF varies from 2 to 13 years, offering a range of experiences and commitment levels to the program. Many of the women initially joined OBLF with the primary goal of learning English, as it is perceived as

a pathway to better employment opportunities. Currently, all 120 women serve as para-teachers, providing a diverse base from which to explore both their educational contributions and the social transformation they experience through their roles.

For the student sample, random sampling was employed within schools where OBLF interventions were implemented. A total of 4,486 students were selected from an available population of 5,300, based on matched baseline and endline assessments. The students were categorized into three grade levels: Grades 1-3 (40% of the sample, or 1,788 students), Grades 4-5 (36% of the sample, or 1,540 students), and Grades 6-8 (26% of the sample, or 1,425 students). Two distinct baseline-endline studies were conducted: one to assess how students performed over time in terms of English language proficiency and overall student performance, and the second to compare student outcomes between those who participated in OBLF's para-teacher model and those who did not.

In the second study, a control and comparison group design was used to evaluate the effectiveness of the para-teacher model. A comparison group of 358 students from schools that did not have any OBLF intervention was included, alongside a treatment group of 323 students from schools where the para-teacher program had been implemented for at least one year. This design allowed for a robust comparison of learning outcomes between students who benefited from the para-teacher model and those who did not. The study was conducted with a 95% confidence interval and a 5% error rate, ensuring the statistical significance and representativeness of the findings. This comparison was key to determining whether students in OBLF schools outperformed their counterparts in non-OBLF schools.

Data Collection

The study incorporates four distinct points of study and data collection, with two studies conducted internally by the research team and two external studies conducted by Socioven, an independent Bangalore-based research organization. These studies focused on assessing the effectiveness of the intervention through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, providing a comprehensive evaluation of both measurable outcomes and experiential insights. The research design and data collection is structured as follows:

Quantitative Data:

To measure student performance and learning outcomes, a baseline-endline assessment was conducted during the academic year 2023-2024. This assessment was developed in line with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), covering four key competencies: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Additionally, ed-tech-based learning was evaluated as part of this assessment.

During the 2022-2023 academic year, a treatment and comparison group study was conducted to assess the learning outcomes between students in OBLF and non-OBLF schools. Both groups were evaluated using an assessment aligned with the state syllabus and the CEFR framework, developed by external investigators, and student performance was mapped accordingly.

A quantitative teacher assessment was conducted with para-teachers in the academic year 2023-2024 to evaluate their English language proficiency, pedagogical skills,

and curriculum mastery. This assessment was carried out using a baseline-endline tool designed specifically for this purpose.

Additionally, a quantitative survey was developed to examine the impact of the program on the para-teachers' financial well-being, decision-making capabilities, and social transformation. The survey collected data on various aspects, including monthly household income, employment status (current and past), sources of income (salary, small business, agriculture), and the participants' financial independence. Furthermore, the survey gathered family details, including the number of dependents, family structure (nuclear or extended), and educational background of family members to contextualize the participants' support systems. It also covered the participants' occupational history, exploring their previous employment experiences, current occupations (including roles within OBLF), and the duration of employment.

Qualitative Data:

Qualitative insights were gathered through seven Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and 25 in-depth interviews with para-teachers. These discussions explored the impact of the program on para-teachers' agency, empowerment, and professional development. In addition to para-teachers, in-depth interviews were conducted with a trainer, a headmistress in a school, and the Director of Academics and Training at OBLF. These interviews provided a deeper understanding of the development of para-teachers over the years and the broader impacts on both the individuals and the community.

This design enables the triangulation of data, ensuring both depth and breadth in the evaluation of the program's overall efficacy. The combination of quantitative and qualitative

data allows the study to address not only the immediate improvements in student literacy but also the lived experiences of para-teachers, focusing on the broader community context and long-term social transformation.

Analysis

The analysis of data in this study employed two primary tools: SPSS for quantitative data analysis and Nvivo for qualitative data analysis. These tools facilitated a comprehensive examination of both numerical data and narrative insights, enabling a triangulated evaluation of the program's impact.

For the quantitative data, gathered from student assessments and para-teacher surveys, SPSS was used to conduct statistical analyses. Descriptive statistics were generated to summarize the demographic and performance data, while inferential statistics were applied to test for significant differences between the treatment and comparison groups. This helped evaluate the effect of the para-teacher model on student literacy outcomes and para-teacher development.

In the case of qualitative data, collected through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews, Nvivo was utilized to manage, code, and analyze the transcribed data. The analysis followed a deductive coding approach, using pre-determined themes to guide the coding process. The primary themes included teacher professional development, pedagogy, curriculum mastery, English proficiency, student outcomes, and attendance. After the coding process, thematic maps were created to illustrate the relationships between these pre-determined themes. This process helped to visually represent

shifts in teaching practices, student performance, and the broader outcomes related to the para-teacher model's implementation.

Ethical Considerations & Reflexivity

Ethical considerations were integral throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained verbally from adult participants, ensuring clarity regarding the study's purpose, data use, confidentiality, and anonymity. Given the varying literacy levels among participants, consent was provided verbally, and pseudonyms were used to protect identities. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point.

For student safety and participation, written consent was secured from both schools and parents prior to data collection. A school teacher was present at all times during interactions with the students to ensure their safety and provide oversight throughout the process.

To minimize power dynamics, interviews with adult participants were conducted by individuals unaffiliated with the participants, in secluded, safe spaces to ensure privacy and comfort. The data collected was securely stored, and no identifying information was used in the final analysis.

The research team acknowledges their positionality as organizational leads and the potential for bias due to their involvement in the program. To mitigate this, external investigators were employed to allow participants to share their experiences freely. The relationship between the researchers and participants, while fostering openness, was carefully managed to ensure that the findings reflected authentic narratives.

While this study provides valuable insights, several limitations must be acknowledged. Time constraints restricted the ability to fully capture long-term student progress and the cumulative impact of the para-teacher model. Additionally, the use of purposive sampling may have introduced bias, as participants were selected from those already engaged in the program, potentially limiting broader representation. The findings, specific to Anekal Taluk, may not be fully generalizable to other rural or semi-urban areas in India due to the unique socio-cultural context.

Moreover, while the study spans several years, limited longitudinal data on the long-term effects of the para-teacher model on both student outcomes and para teachers socio-economic empowerment means additional follow-up studies are necessary to fully assess the program's sustainability. Despite these limitations, the study provides a foundation for model building, offering a structured approach to teacher capacity-building that could be adapted and scaled in other resource-constrained settings.

ANALYSIS

The OLB model para-teacher model is designed to empower rural women through a comprehensive approach that integrates a rigorous selection process, continuous professional development, in-field coaching, performance management, and efforts to incorporate para-teachers into the broader school culture.

The OLB model emphasizes a rigorous approach to teacher selection and hiring, beginning with a comprehensive process designed to identify candidates who meet specific criteria. Community campaigns play a crucial role in this process, where rural women educate their peers about the opportunities and requirements at OLB. Candidates undergo assessments of

their English language proficiency, evaluated through listening, speaking, reading, and writing tests benchmarked against the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). Additionally, candidates participate in demo classes and interviews to assess their teaching mindset, growth potential, and motivation—qualities essential for the intensive training and coaching that follow.

A cornerstone of the OBLF model is its comprehensive professional development framework. This framework focuses on enhancing English language proficiency, pedagogy, curriculum understanding, and teacher well-being. Drawing from established frameworks like CEFR and CENTA Teacher Standards, it is tailored to meet the needs of para-teachers who often enter the program with minimal formal training. Teachers start with an average proficiency level of CEFR A1 and are expected to progress to CEFR B2 during their training. With up to 80 hours of direct instruction annually, along with continuous practice through quizzes and interactive content, para-teachers steadily build their language skills.

The pedagogical training covers four key domains: classroom culture and relationships, instructional planning, instructional execution, and instructional leadership. Para-teachers learn to create safe learning environments while designing effective lesson plans for diverse student populations. The program promotes continuous improvement through goal-setting and reflective practices, with teachers receiving feedback based on a four-point rubric.

Understanding curriculum implementation is also vital in the OBLF model. Teachers are trained to recognize how language acquisition occurs in children, particularly first-generation learners in under-resourced schools. This understanding enables them to implement the curriculum effectively while considering home languages and cultural contexts.

Moreover, the OBLF program prioritizes teacher well-being by incorporating initiatives focused on financial literacy, mental health, reflective practice, and sexual and reproductive health. This holistic approach ensures that para-teachers are supported both professionally and personally, fostering sustained motivation and job satisfaction.

A distinctive feature of the OBLF model is its emphasis on on-field coaching. Each para-teacher is assigned a coach who observes their teaching practices and provides constructive feedback through reflective discussions. With 40 hours of field coaching per year, para-teachers continuously refine their instructional practices, ensuring they can effectively apply their training.

The assessment framework for para-teachers is multi-dimensional, evaluating them across three main components: English language proficiency, curriculum understanding, and pedagogy. Teachers undergo classroom observations and receive real-time feedback alongside an annual pen-and-paper assessment. Each teacher receives a comprehensive report detailing strengths and areas for growth. Based on performance, they may receive peer support or be placed on a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) designed to address challenges.

Integration into the existing school culture presents challenges for para-teachers working alongside government-appointed teachers who may have received formal education. To facilitate this integration, the OBLF model focuses on creating an inclusive environment by raising awareness among school stakeholders about the quality of training para-teachers receive. Annual stakeholder meetings update school leaders on program progress and student outcomes while fostering mutual respect and collaboration.

In summary, the OBLF model's rigorous selection process combined with a comprehensive professional development framework equips para-teachers with the necessary skills and support to thrive in resource-constrained settings. Through ongoing coaching and assessment mechanisms, as well as strategic integration into school culture, OBLF ensures that para-teachers are not only effective educators but also valued members of their educational communities.

TEACHER ROLE, CAPACITY BUILDING AND DEVELOPMENT

Evolving role of the 'teacher'

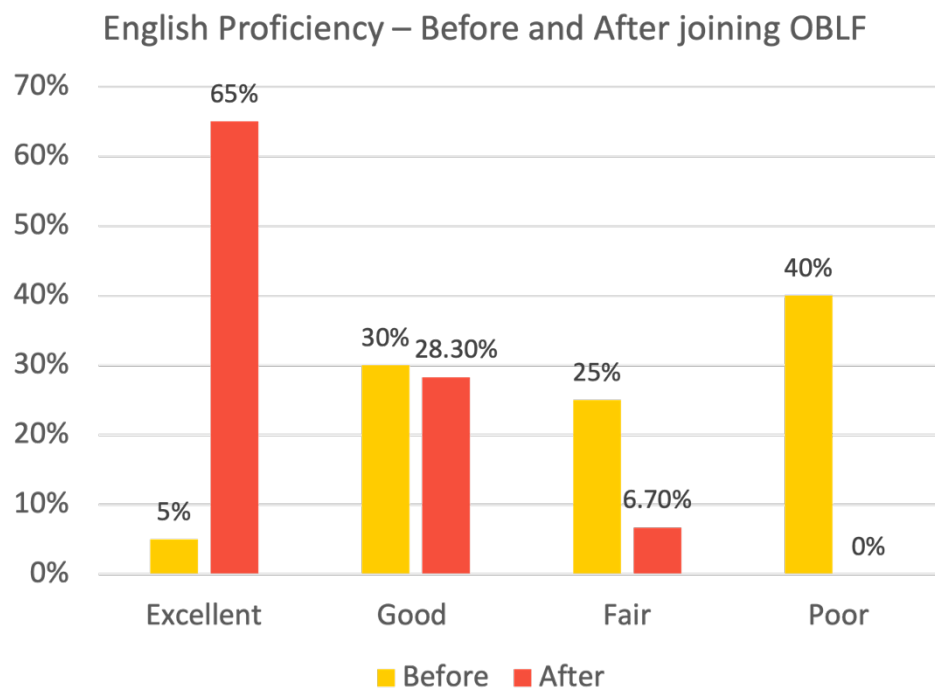
The OBLF para-teachers have undergone a transformative shift in how they perceive their roles as educators, largely influenced by the interactive and student-centred approach embedded in the program. This evolution marks a departure from traditional, rigid teaching methods toward more engaging and inclusive pedagogical practices. For many para-teachers, the role of teaching has transitioned from merely delivering content to becoming mentors and facilitators of learning. One participant articulated this change: *"I used to think being a teacher meant giving answers and making students memorize them, but now I see my role as helping them ask the right questions and discover the answers on their own."* This perspective highlights the increasing recognition of inquiry-based learning, where teachers cultivate curiosity and critical thinking rather than simply imparting knowledge. Central to this redefined role are the respectful and trust-based relationships para-teachers build with their students. As one para-teacher explained, *"I've learned that the more I listen to my students, the more they feel comfortable to express themselves. It's not just about teaching them; it's about making them feel valued in the classroom."*

This student-first approach reinforces the idea that education is a collaborative process, where students actively contribute to their own learning journey. The interactive techniques taught in the OBLF program have not only enhanced academic outcomes but also empowered para-teachers to see themselves as agents of change in their students' lives. One participant noted, *“When I see my students becoming more confident, speaking up more, and asking questions, I feel like I’m doing more than teaching—I’m shaping their future.”* This sense of responsibility extends beyond academics; para-teachers recognize their influence on students' personal growth, empowering them to become more self-assured individuals. Moreover, the shift toward inclusive education has prompted many para-teachers to reflect on their role in creating supportive environments for all students, especially those from their own communities. One teacher reflected, *“In our schools, many children from my village. I have seen them grow up and know their family. I feel like it’s my job not just to teach them English but to give them a space where they feel safe and understood.”* This narrative underscores how para-teachers’ roles have expanded to encompass a holistic approach to education that prioritizes emotional and social well-being alongside academic success.

As a result of these changes in teaching practices and relationships with students, para-teachers now view their roles with greater purpose and pride. They no longer see themselves merely as facilitators of academic content but as mentors, role models, and advocates for their students’ overall development. One para-teacher encapsulated this sentiment by saying, *“Being a teacher now means more than just lessons; it means being a guide in every sense—someone who helps students grow, not just in knowledge but in character.”*

Assessing English Language Proficiency & Pedagogical Skills

The OBLF para-teacher program has led to significant improvements in both English proficiency and pedagogical skills among its participants. Before joining the program, 40% of the teachers rated their English proficiency as "poor," while only 5% rated their skills as "excellent" and 30% considered them "good." Following the comprehensive training, these figures changed dramatically: 65% of teachers now rate their English proficiency as "excellent," and no teacher reports their skills as "poor." This striking improvement highlights the effectiveness of the program in elevating English language skills, particularly among those who entered with limited proficiency.

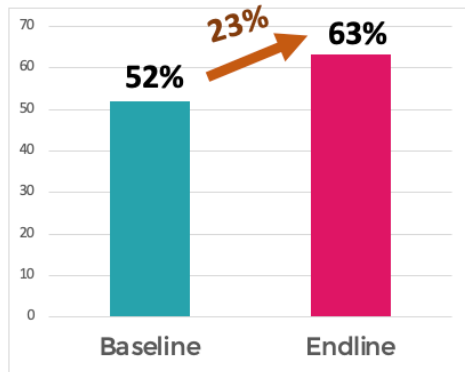


Several teachers have shared how their improved language skills have benefited not only their students but also their families. Many have begun teaching English to their children at home, demonstrating the broader impact of the program. One participant shared, *“My daughter, who studied at one of the OBLF schools, not only helped me learn English but also urged me to join the OBLF program as a teacher.”* This example underscores how the para-teacher model enriches both teachers and their families.

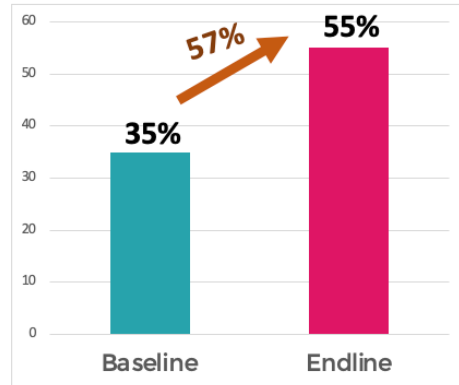
Teachers in the OBLF program have achieved various levels of English proficiency as assessed by the CEFR scale. The overall improvement in the teacher cohort for 2023-2024 shows a 23% increase in proficiency, with all para-teachers advancing by at least one level on the CEFR scale. Currently, 63% of the teachers are proficient at CEFR B1, while 5% have reached CEFR B2 (the highest two proficiency levels). In the Pre-A1 category, teachers scored an average of 50%. For those at the A1 level, the average score was 61%, while teachers at A2 scored 63%. Similarly, teachers at the B1 level also scored an average of 63%. The highest proficiency level, B2, saw teachers scoring an impressive 81%. These results highlight the diverse proficiency levels within the cohort, with many teachers demonstrating significant progress in mastering the English language.

In addition to language proficiency, para-teachers have also shown notable improvement in pedagogy. Throughout the year, teachers received targeted training on two core concepts: Classroom Culture and Instructional Planning. Their progress was tracked using a rubric, and by the end of the year, teachers had achieved a 57% improvement in their pedagogical understanding. This development has allowed them to create supportive and engaging classroom environments, fostering better relationships with students and improving overall classroom participation. Training in instructional planning has equipped teachers with the skills to design rigorous, research-based lesson plans that cater to diverse learning needs. As a result, teachers are now more confident and capable of executing lessons that are both effective and inclusive, ensuring that all students are given the opportunity to succeed.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY



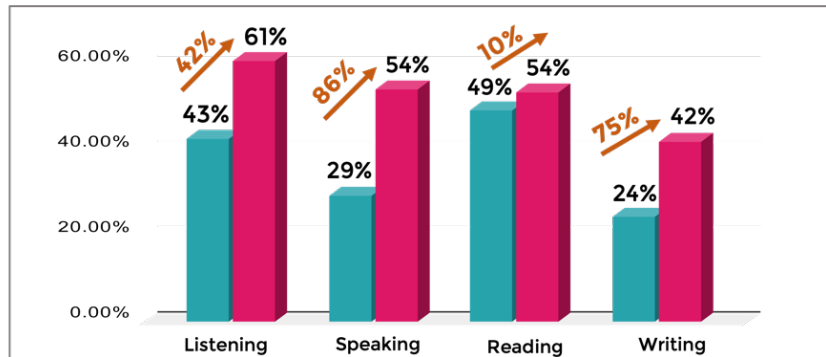
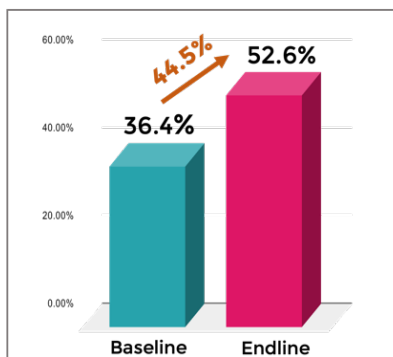
PEDAGOGY



STUDENT PROFICIENCY, PERFORMANCE & FOUNDATIONAL LITERACY

Building English Language Proficiency

The findings from this study strongly affirm the hypothesis that a combination of learner-centric curriculum models and significant investment in teacher proficiency results in substantial improvements in student performance. The overall student proficiency increased by 44.5%, with scores rising from a baseline of 36.4% to an endline of 52.6%. This significant improvement reflects the effectiveness of a comprehensive approach to education that includes targeted curriculum revisions and teacher training. Notably, the structured, learner-focused environment has fostered improved outcomes across all language skills, with the most considerable gains observed in speaking and writing.



■ Baseline ■ Endline

The proficiency increase across language skills showcases the success of this model in enhancing core areas of language acquisition. Listening proficiency improved from 43% to 61%, a 42% increase, which underscores the focus on auditory learning and comprehension. Similarly, speaking skills exhibited the most pronounced growth, with proficiency nearly doubling from 29% to 54%, an 86% improvement. Writing skills also showed a substantial increase from 24% to 42%, marking a 75% improvement. Although reading proficiency saw a relatively modest gain of 10%, rising from 49% to **54%, the cumulative impact across all skills is indicative of a well-rounded improvement in student performance.

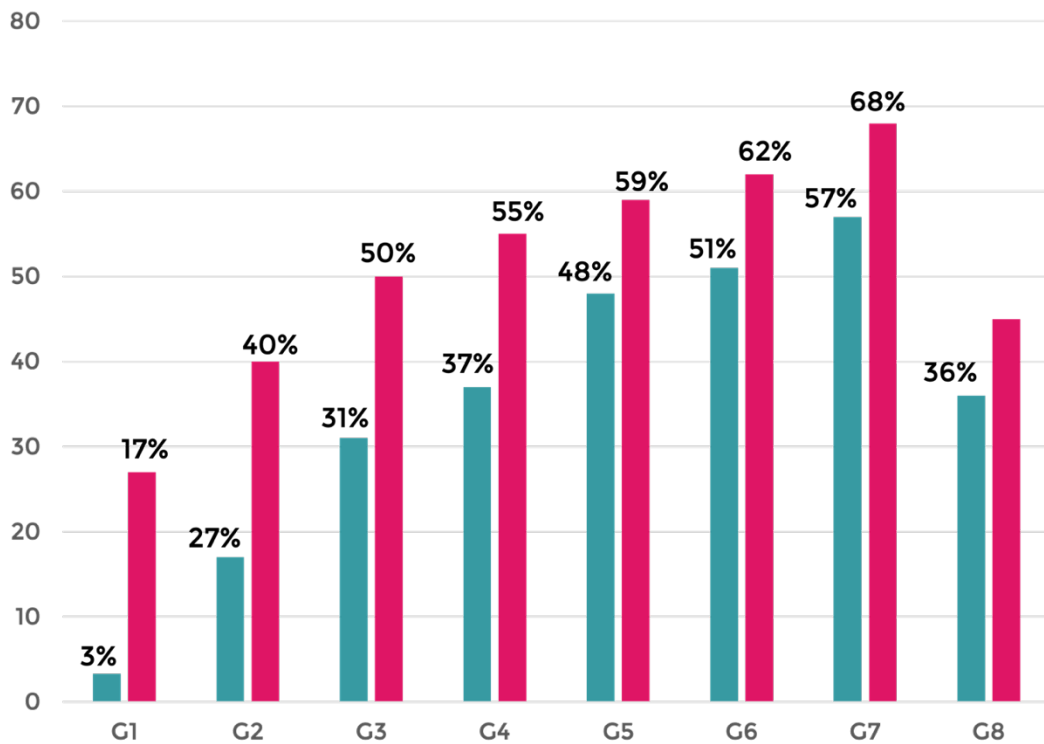
A critical factor in these outcomes is the substantial impact of para-teachers, who play an essential role in delivering an innovative and engaging curriculum. Selected from local communities, these para-teachers undergo rigorous training in English language pedagogy. Their approach is enhanced by the strategic use of both English and Kannada, allowing them to bridge linguistic gaps effectively and ensure that students feel comfortable and confident in their learning. This bilingual method aids comprehension and fosters an inclusive environment where students can transition smoothly between languages as they build their English proficiency.

One of the most effective elements of this program is how para-teachers contextualize the curriculum, utilizing local examples and references that resonate with students. This relevance makes lessons more engaging, helping students connect classroom learning to real-life experiences. The curriculum is entirely activity-based, emphasizing hands-on learning and interactive engagement. This approach facilitates a dynamic learning experience where students are actively involved rather than passive recipients of information. Para-teachers

employ a diverse array of instructional tools, including ICT-based materials such as worksheets, flashcards, and audio files, to reinforce learning and enable students to practice and apply language skills across multiple formats. In addition to traditional tools, para-teachers integrate visual storytelling techniques—such as puppets, skits, and role-playing—to bring language to life and make abstract concepts more concrete. These methods effectively engage younger students and those who may struggle with conventional teaching approaches. The use of books, audio files, and visual aids accommodates various learning styles, supporting a more inclusive educational environment.

Moreover, para-teachers follow an integrated curriculum that emphasizes daily lesson planning, bringing structure and rigor to the classroom. This meticulous planning ensures that lessons are carefully scaffolded, building on prior knowledge while introducing new material coherently. The rigorous preparation of lesson plans, combined with activity-based learning, guarantees that each class is well-organized and engaging, fostering a deeper connection between students and the material. The continuous professional development of para-teachers equips them with the skills necessary to execute these activity-based lessons effectively. Their ability to engage students through diverse instructional methods—including audio-visual tools and storytelling—has significantly contributed to improvements in student proficiency, particularly in speaking and reading. By blending local context, bilingual instruction, and engaging activities, para-teachers have created a learning environment that is both rigorous and enjoyable, resulting in substantial improvements in student outcomes across all key areas of language acquisition.

Grade-Wise Student Performance



The

data from the student baseline-endline assessment of 2023-2024 indicate that 85% of the student population is concentrated in Grades 1 and 2, highlighting a significant need to focus on foundational literacy at these early stages. Students in these grades require increased attention to basic literacy skills, including phonics, pre-writing exercises, and other early pedagogies that establish the groundwork for language acquisition. This underscores the necessity for targeted training interventions with para-teachers that address the unique developmental needs of younger learners in this critical phase.

Across the sample, there is a relatively even distribution of students across all grades, with a minimum of 400 students per grade. As students advance through the grades, there is a gradual increase in both baseline and endline scores, **suggesting that proficiency naturally rises with progression.** For instance, Grade 3 students' scores improve from 31% to 50%, while Grade 4 students show an improvement from 37% to 55%. This pattern indicates that

higher grades tend to start with a stronger baseline, reflecting the cumulative effects of prior learning. Despite these baseline differences, the percentage improvement remains proportional across most grades, generally ranging from 25% to 60%. This indicates that OBLF's learning interventions are effectively calibrated to ensure that students at varying levels of proficiency benefit equally from the program, regardless of their starting point.

An important observation is that students in Grades 4 and 5—who received additional support through specialized ed-tech interventions—demonstrated a higher margin of improvement compared to other grades. This suggests that targeted support at these critical junctures, particularly with an emphasis on deeper engagement and structured learning interventions, can significantly accelerate language acquisition and overall student outcomes. The gradual improvement across grades reinforces the effectiveness of this model in ensuring consistent learning gains as students progress through their academic journey.

Accelerating Learning through Ed-tech Investment

As part of this assessment, we also examined the students who received ed-tech support through a weekly, in-classroom English language session conducted on a tablet. In these sessions, students played interactive games designed to help them practice key language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These students, who had sustained access to this gamified curriculum in addition to their daily OBLF English classes, were part of the program for at least two years. A sample size of 1343 students was selected based on their participation in this intervention.

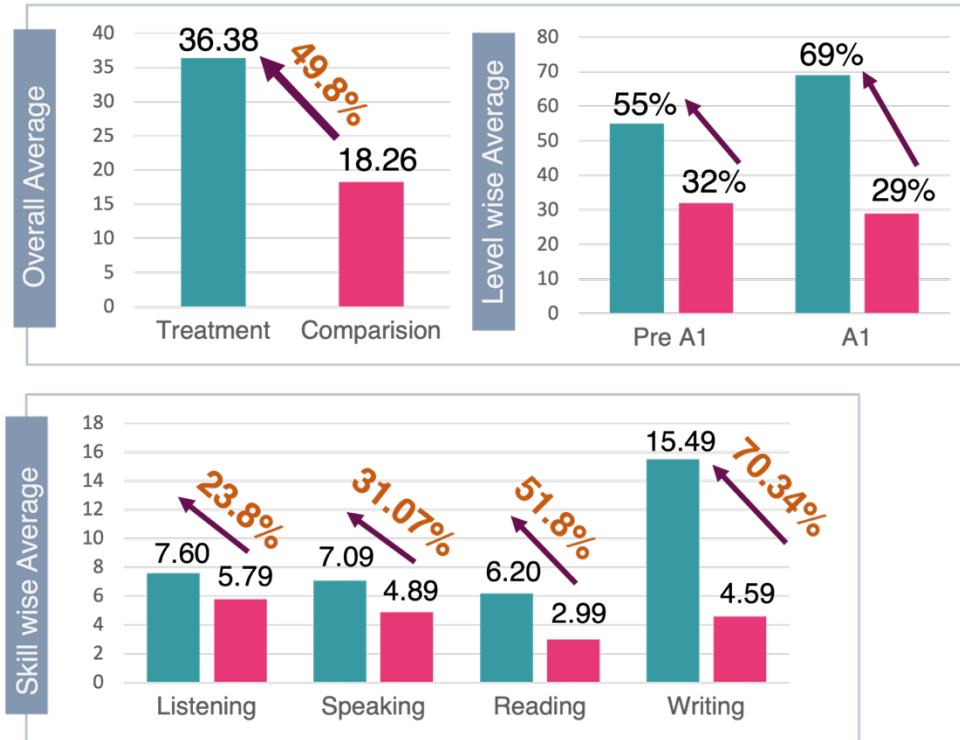
The results show that students who participated in the tablet-based English language sessions demonstrated a 44% improvement in overall proficiency, compared to the 30%

improvement among those in OBLF's program who did not receive the ed-tech support. These findings underscore the positive impact of integrating technology-based learning tools with regular classroom instruction.

The interactive games played during the tablet sessions were designed to reinforce critical language skills through real-time feedback and engaging exercises, making learning more immersive and dynamic. This method has contributed to significant improvements in speaking, reading, and writing skills. Of particular note is the 77% increase in speaking skills, highlighting the effectiveness of using interactive, gamified learning tools to enhance students' language proficiency, especially in areas that are more challenging to develop through traditional classroom methods alone. This approach not only complements regular teaching but also accelerates the learning process, demonstrating the value of technology-driven interventions in fostering greater student outcomes.

Evaluating Student Performance: OBLF's Intervention Model vs. Non-Participating Schools

In the 2022-2023 external evaluation study of OBLF's model, the research aimed to validate the hypothesis that learners exposed to OBLF's CEFR-based levelled syllabus, curriculum, and instructional model would demonstrate significantly better English language proficiency compared to learners in non-OBLF intervention schools. A treatment group (OBLF learners) and a comparison group (Non-OBLF learners) were established and given the same assessment to assess proficiency and performance. The study confirmed this hypothesis, with learners from OBLF partner schools scoring an average of 49.8% higher than their peers in non-intervention schools.



In particular, students in OBLF partner schools outperformed their non-intervention peers across all components of English language proficiency, with the most significant gains in speaking and writing—two of the most challenging aspects of language acquisition. The success of the OBLF model is largely attributable to the contextualized and student-centred approach employed by para-teachers, who integrate the local language (Kannada) alongside English to facilitate better understanding and engagement. Additionally, the continuous professional development provided to para-teachers has empowered them to effectively address key learning challenges, particularly in fostering speaking and writing skills, where OBLF students demonstrated the largest proficiency gains.

#	English Language Skills	Average % difference between Treatment Group & Comparison Group	
		Grades 1-3	Grades 4-7
1	Listening	16.05%	34.16%
2	Speaking	18.55%	46.45%

3	Reading	50.97%	54.49%
4	Writing	65.81%	75.97%
5	Overall	43.16%	57.98%

As exposure to the OBLF program increases, the gap in English proficiency between learners in the OBLF intervention and those in non-intervention schools widens. The longer students participate in the OBLF program, the greater their proficiency gains, particularly in writing and speaking. OBLF learners consistently outperform their non-OBLF counterparts, demonstrating cumulative benefits in language acquisition.

In both assessed levels, the writing and speaking performance of OBLF learners is significantly higher than that of students in non-intervention schools. These findings highlight the effectiveness of the OBLF model in enhancing language production skills, largely due to the efforts of para-teachers trained to emphasize these critical aspects of language learning. As students remain in the program, the integrated instruction provided by para-teachers continues to drive progress, ensuring that the proficiency gap between OBLF and non-OBLF students expands with each year of exposure.

The findings of this student evaluation provide a comprehensive analysis of the impact of the OBLF program on English language proficiency among learners. First, students in OBLF partner schools demonstrate significantly higher levels of English proficiency compared to their peers in non-OBLF schools. This advantage grows with the duration of participation in the program; as learners remain in OBLF, their language skills improve, resulting in an increasingly pronounced gap between OBLF and non-OBLF learners. Notably, proficiency in productive skills—specifically speaking and writing—is markedly higher among OBLF

students, suggesting that these areas benefit most from the program's focus. In contrast, listening and reading skills do not show the same level of improvement. Furthermore, the results validate OBLF's strategic approach and curriculum design, which emphasize functional and productive English components. This deliberate focus aligns with OBLF's transition to the CEFR methodology three years ago, reinforcing the effectiveness of its instructional framework in fostering language acquisition. Overall, these findings underscore the program's success in enhancing English language skills among its participants.

LIVELIHOOD AND TRANSFORMATION OF RURAL WOMEN

Income & Agency through Livelihoods

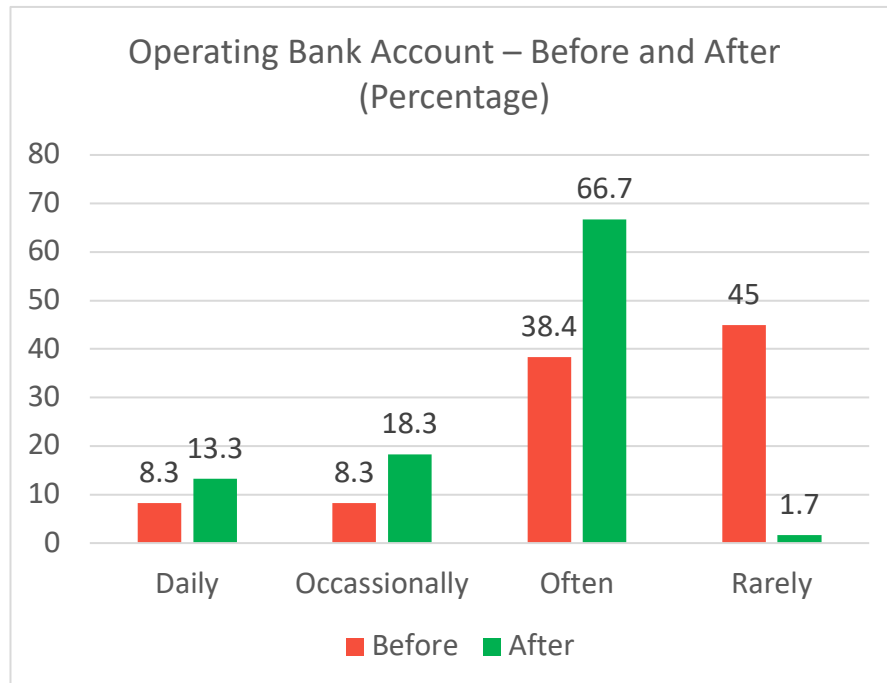
The OBLF para-teacher program has significantly transformed livelihood opportunities for the women involved. Before joining the program, 58.3% of participants reported having no source of income and relied on their spouses or guardians for daily expenses. The transition to financial independence has been pivotal, allowing these women to take control of their economic futures and contribute meaningfully to their households. A remarkable 83.3% of participants reported an increase in income since becoming para-teachers. Among them, 25% had held jobs before joining OBLF, yet even these individuals experienced a notable rise in earnings. The average income before joining OBLF was Rs. 3,975, while their current average income has surged to Rs. 10,985, representing a 176.4% increase. This substantial rise in income has greatly enhanced their financial stability and fostered a stronger sense of self-sufficiency. One participant shared, "Before joining OBLF, I didn't know how I could ever support my family financially. Now, not only do I bring home an income, but I've also learned how to manage our expenses and even save for the future." *Another added, "I never thought I'd be able to contribute to my household this way. My husband respects my decisions more now because I earn and manage things independently."*

The ripple effects of this financial empowerment are evident in other areas of participants' lives. For instance, 11.7% of the women run additional side ventures such as tailoring, working as NRLM officials, offering home tuition, and selling bangles, with an average income from these activities of Rs. 6,000. However, their primary source of income remains their teaching role with OBLF, which provides a monthly salary of Rs. 10,985. This secure income not only grants them financial independence but also earns them newfound respect within their communities. One participant remarked, *“I used to feel invisible in my village. But now, people come to me for advice; I’m known as a teacher and a role model. It feels empowering to be recognized for my work.”* Moreover, the positive social impact is reflected within their households. Many participants noted how their financial status has shifted power dynamics at home. One woman explained, *“I used to feel like my opinions didn’t matter, but since I started earning, I have a voice in family decisions.”* Another participant added, *“Being able to provide for my children has been life-changing. I can now afford to send them to better schools and buy things we couldn’t even dream of before.”*

Financial Independence & Literacy

The OBLF para-teacher program has not only provided stable income opportunities for rural women but also significantly improved their financial literacy and promoted greater economic independence. Survey results indicate that 98% of participants have a bank account in their name, a crucial step toward financial autonomy. However, many women were not actively engaged with their accounts before joining OBLF. Specifically, 45% reported rarely using their accounts before the program, but this figure dropped dramatically afterwards, with only one participant continuing to report limited usage. This shift reflects how participation in the program has encouraged regular and informed financial engagement. One participant

noted, *“I never used to visit the bank, but now I go regularly to check my balance and make transactions. It gives me a sense of control over my own earnings.”*



Since joining the program, 66% of participants reported frequent usage of their bank accounts, while 18% stated they now use them occasionally. This increase in financial engagement is particularly notable when compared to the NFHS-5 state figure, where 88.7% of women have bank accounts but may not actively use them. Thus, the OBLF program has significantly contributed to improving the financial habits of its participants. In terms of financial planning, 73.3% confirmed they have implemented some form of household budgeting. However, 50-60% revealed they have not yet established short-term or long-term financial plans, indicating an area where further financial education could be beneficial.

While the program has encouraged women to take control of daily financial activities, there is still room for growth in future planning. One participant shared, *“I can now manage my household budget better, but I still don’t know how to plan for the long term. Saving for emergencies is something I need to learn more about.”* Additionally, 67% of participants

were unaware of flagship government programs aimed at supporting the underprivileged, such as financial inclusion schemes. Nevertheless, some participants mentioned they had started saving under the Sukanya Samridhi Yojana scheme, which provides savings options for the education and marriage of girl children. This suggests that while awareness of broader financial programs remains limited, some participants are beginning to explore government-backed initiatives

The survey also revealed that participants are now better able to manage household finances. Their earnings from OBLF are being used to cover small but essential expenses like electricity and mobile phone bills. For some, OBLF income has enabled them to pay EMIs on two-wheelers, enhancing both mobility and financial management. One participant remarked, *“Before, we were always behind on our bills, but now I can pay them on time, and we’ve even managed to buy a scooter, which I’m paying off with my earnings.”* This newfound capability showcases how the program instils practical financial skills that extend beyond basic literacy into everyday decision-making.

Enhanced Capability & Mobility

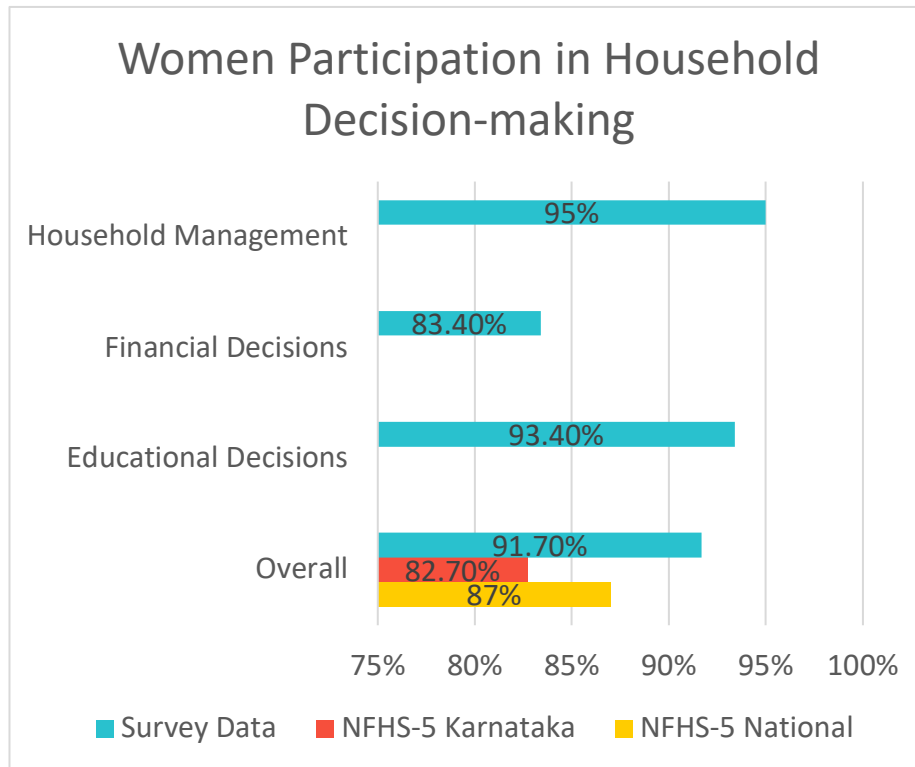
The women’s skilling survey data underscores the significant impact of OBLF’s para-teacher training program in upskilling rural women, empowering them to take on more capable roles within their communities. Among the participants surveyed, 60% reported receiving training in formal classroom settings, while 28.3% noted that their training occurred in both learning centres and classrooms. This structured approach has provided women with conducive learning environments that enhance their skill development and boost their overall confidence. The widespread use of digital devices during training was notable, with 98.3% of respondents affirming the use of tools such as computers, laptops, projectors, mobile phones,

and tablets. This incorporation of technology not only facilitated a modern learning experience but also equipped the women with essential digital literacy skills for today's educational landscape. Interestingly, 66.7% identified mobile phones as their preferred mode of learning, reflecting the flexibility and accessibility that digital platforms offer. Confidence emerged as a key outcome of the program, with 98.3% of the teachers reporting feeling "very confident" in their professional abilities. Many attributed this newfound confidence to the positive results stemming from OBLF's comprehensive training. One teacher shared her personal growth: *"I felt left out among other qualified women and wanted to be more qualified,"* highlighting how the program motivated her to pursue further education. Beyond professional skills, the program also facilitated the acquisition of practical life skills that positively impacted the teachers' personal and social lives. A commonly highlighted skill was learning to drive a scooter, which not only improved their ability to travel between schools but also became a symbol of independence and societal respect. As one teacher noted, *"Learning to drive a scooter not only eased conveyance to different schools but also is a symbol of success and respect in society."* This skill illustrates how the training has broadened empowerment for these women, enhancing their mobility and status within their communities.

Increased Autonomy and Decision-Making Power

The OBLF para-teacher program has significantly enhanced the autonomy and decision-making power of the women involved. According to NFHS-5 data, 82.7% of married women in Karnataka participate in household decision-making, with the national figure for rural women at 87%. In contrast, survey results from OBLF participants indicate an even higher level of engagement, with 93.4% stating they are actively involved in decisions related to

their children's education—either independently (31.7%) or in collaboration with their spouse (61.7%). This increased participation reflects their growing confidence and autonomy.



One participant shared how this newfound autonomy has enabled her to manage her children's schooling more effectively: *"I can visit my children's school regularly and speak with the teachers, something I never had the confidence to do before. Now, I can actively contribute to decisions about their education."* This proactive role empowers her to shape her children's academic futures. The data also reveals positive trends in decision-making regarding household expenses and management, with 26.7% and 33.3% of participants respectively reporting that they make these decisions independently. This marks a significant improvement in their financial and operational control within their households. One participant expressed her newfound independence: *"While earlier I had to beg in front of my husband, now that I earn on my own, I can manage things."* Her sentiment reflects a broader

trend among participants who feel more confident in contributing to their families' welfare, leading to increased self-esteem.

Perhaps the most significant finding is that 91.7% of participants reported feeling "very confident" about making key financial decisions independently. This confidence is a testament to the empowerment provided by the OBLF program, which equips these women with the skills and financial autonomy necessary to take charge of vital aspects of their lives. As one participant noted, *"Having control over the money I earn has changed how I think about myself. I feel stronger and more capable of handling my family's needs."* This shift in mindset, coupled with their financial independence, reflects the far-reaching impact of the program on both personal and familial levels.

Increased Awareness of Social Issues and Enhanced Community Engagement

The OBLF para-teacher program has significantly improved participants' knowledge about critical social issues, including **gender equality** and **safety**. Survey results show that **83.3%** of participants reported a substantial increase in their understanding of these topics after undergoing training. This newfound knowledge has positioned them as influential sources of information within their villages, as they help raise awareness on issues that were previously overlooked or misunderstood. As one participant shared, *"My mother-in-law was earlier sceptical about me working, but now she shares with our neighbours how proud she feels that I am working as a teacher."* This shift in attitudes illustrates a broader societal change, where women's roles and contributions are being increasingly recognized and valued.

Moreover, the program has empowered women to navigate their responsibilities more effectively, particularly in households where **traditional gender roles** often dictate domestic

duties. Many participants have had to adjust their lifestyles to balance work and home responsibilities, demonstrating their adaptability and commitment to both spheres. For instance, some participants mentioned making adjustments like waking up earlier to complete household chores before heading to work. This shift reflects their ability to manage multiple roles, highlighting the program's success in fostering resilience and capability in both professional and domestic settings.

Overall, the impact of the OBLF program extends well beyond the empowerment of individual participants; it fosters a culture of awareness and engagement around important social issues. Participants narrated incidents of how they questioned and challenged cultural norms within their households and communities. Many participants reported that the training has given them the confidence to speak out against long-standing traditions and practices that they now view as restrictive or harmful. For example, several women shared that they are now actively advocating for their children's right to pursue higher education, regardless of gender, which contrasts with earlier expectations of early marriage or limited schooling, particularly for daughters. As one participant explained, *"I've made it clear that my daughter will finish her education before we even think about marriage. She deserves to choose her own path."*

In addition to prioritizing education, many participants are beginning to insist on marriage with consent and choice for their children, challenging the norm of arranged marriages without the input of those directly involved. The training has also empowered some women to speak up against domestic violence and assert their right to live in safe, respectful environments. One woman noted how the discussions around gender equality in the program

gave her the strength to stand up against verbal and physical abuse, adding, *“Before, I thought it was just something I had to tolerate, but now I know I have the right to say no.”*

Another significant shift has been in the area of self-care—an often overlooked aspect in traditional rural households where women are expected to prioritize family over themselves. Several participants mentioned that they now feel more comfortable taking time for their own personal growth and well-being, which they believe is equally important to fulfilling their roles as mothers and wives. One participant shared, *“I’ve started setting aside time for myself, whether it’s reading or just taking a walk. It’s important for me to recharge so I can be there for my family in a healthier way.”*

DISCUSSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The success of the para-teacher model lies in its rigorous selection process, comprehensive training, and ongoing coaching, which have been pivotal in enhancing the professional skills of para-teachers. The participants reported significant improvements in their English proficiency, with many progressing from CEFR A1 to B2 levels. This language proficiency growth has translated into improved classroom practices, as para-teachers have moved away from rote learning methods and adopted more interactive, student-centred pedagogies. These new approaches promote critical thinking and encourage greater student engagement.

As one para-teacher reflected, *“I now guide students in discovering answers rather than just delivering information.”* This transformation in teaching methods not only improves academic performance but also redefines the para teacher’s roles, empowering them to see themselves as mentors and facilitators of learning. Through this shift, para-teachers are

better equipped to create inclusive and dynamic classroom environments, where students are active participants in their own education.

Beyond the academic improvements, the para-teacher model has had a profound impact on the social standing of women in their communities. The program has fostered increased financial independence, with 83% of participants reporting a rise in income. This economic empowerment has given women greater confidence and decision-making authority within their households. Many participants described how they now manage household expenses independently, leading to a shift in family dynamics. One participant shared, *“Before joining the program, I had to ask my husband for everything. Now I manage the household bills on my own.”*

This newfound autonomy has not only boosted their self-esteem but also positioned them as advocates for educational opportunities, particularly for their children. The para-teachers, now respected within their homes and communities, are using their influence to challenge traditional norms and promote the value of education, ensuring that their children, especially daughters, have access to greater opportunities for learning and personal growth.

An important outcome of the para-teacher program is the emergence of women as advocates for educational equity within their families and communities. As the program has strengthened their confidence and empowerment, many participants have begun to challenge traditional practices that limit their children’s opportunities, particularly regarding girls’ education. Women in the program are increasingly rejecting societal expectations such as early marriage in favour of ensuring that their daughters have access to continued

education. One participant expressed this shift, saying, *“Before, I thought my daughter had to marry young, but now I know she deserves the opportunity to study.”*

This advocacy reflects a broader outcome of the program, where women, empowered by their own educational and financial gains, have become champions of education for the next generation. By promoting their daughters’ right to pursue higher education and encouraging other women to do the same, these para-teachers are driving significant cultural shifts in their communities, advocating for long-term educational equity and challenging gender-based limitations.

The para-teacher model has resulted in notable improvements in student proficiency, particularly in the areas of speaking and writing skills. By integrating bilingual teaching methods and interactive techniques, para-teachers have created more engaging learning environments, fostering better student participation and outcomes compared to traditional approaches. The data indicates that students in para-teacher-led classrooms significantly outperformed their peers in non-intervention schools, especially in their ability to express themselves orally and in their written communication.

These gains demonstrate the effectiveness of the activity-based, learner-centred pedagogy that the para-teachers have adopted, which has made learning more accessible and engaging for students, particularly in under-resourced settings where traditional methods have often been insufficient. The incorporation of technology through tablet-based learning sessions has significantly accelerated student proficiency. Students who participated in these ed-tech interventions demonstrated a 44% improvement in language skills compared to those who did not have access to such resources. The use of gamified learning and real-time feedback mechanisms further enhanced student engagement, making learning more

interactive and enjoyable. These tools were particularly effective in improving speaking skills, where students showed a 45% improvement, highlighting the power of technology in complementing traditional classroom instruction and providing personalized learning pathways for students to progress at their own pace.

Recommendations for Scaling the Para-Teacher Model

To replicate the success of the para-teacher model, it is essential to implement a comprehensive teacher development framework that focuses on continuous professional growth. This framework should include rigorous selection criteria for para-teachers, ensuring that those chosen have the potential to benefit from intensive training and mentorship. The development framework should prioritize ongoing training in areas such as English proficiency, pedagogy, and curriculum mastery, with at least 80 hours of annual training. Alongside this, real-time in-classroom coaching and mentorship programs will help para-teachers refine their skills and confidence. Additionally, bilingual teaching methods and interactive, student-centred pedagogies should be a core part of the framework, making the model adaptable to local contexts and improving learning outcomes.

Community engagement is another critical area for scaling the model. Strengthening the involvement of the local community will enhance the program's effectiveness by fostering a supportive environment for both para-teachers and students. Community campaigns should be implemented to raise awareness about the value of education and encourage more women to participate in the program. These campaigns can also highlight the benefits of financial independence and professional growth, motivating more women to pursue teaching as a viable career. Regular stakeholder meetings, involving school leaders, government officials,

and community members, should be held to build awareness of the positive outcomes the program brings and ensure continued community support.

Expanding the use of technology is also essential for enhancing both teaching methodologies and student engagement. Ed-tech tools, such as tablet-based learning, interactive games, and digital instructional resources, have already demonstrated their effectiveness in improving student proficiency, particularly in speaking and writing. Scaling the model should involve providing para-teachers with access to these digital resources and training them in their use, enabling them to implement innovative teaching strategies that cater to diverse learning needs. Personalized learning through these tools will allow students to practice language skills independently, leading to better learning outcomes and accelerated progress.

A key aspect of scaling the para-teacher model is the emphasis on foundational literacy, particularly in the early grades. Students in Grades 1 and 2 require targeted interventions in areas such as phonics, pre-writing, and early reading comprehension to build the foundational skills necessary for long-term academic success. Prioritizing early literacy will set students on the path to greater proficiency in later grades, ensuring that they have the skills to succeed academically. The model should continue to emphasize these early interventions as a critical factor in sustaining positive educational outcomes.

To further support para-teachers' financial independence, financial literacy training should remain a central component of the program. Equipping para-teachers with the skills to manage their earnings effectively will not only foster their economic stability but also empower them to make informed decisions for their families and communities. The program

should offer additional financial mentoring, helping para-teachers with short-term and long-term financial planning, budgeting, and saving for future investments. This will ensure that the economic empowerment gained through the program is sustainable and long-lasting.

Additionally, gender awareness training is crucial to the broader social impact of the para-teacher model. Integrating gender awareness into the curriculum will empower para-teachers to challenge traditional norms and advocate for social change within their communities. By becoming leaders in promoting educational equity and gender rights, these women can act as role models for others, inspiring more women to pursue education and break away from restrictive gender roles. This focus on empowerment will enable the para-teacher model to drive cultural transformation beyond the classroom, fostering greater gender equality and educational opportunities.

Finally, the establishment of robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms is essential for scaling the para-teacher model effectively. By implementing regular feedback systems from teachers, students, and community members, the program can continuously assess its impact and make adjustments where necessary. Monitoring systems should focus on tracking student outcomes, teacher development, and the broader social impact of the program. This data will provide valuable insights into the program's effectiveness and ensure that it remains responsive to the evolving needs of the community, ultimately sustaining its success in improving education and empowering women.

In conclusion,

The para-teacher model at OBLF has demonstrated a transformative impact on both educators and students in resource-constrained settings. By equipping rural women with the necessary

skills, confidence, and pedagogical tools, the program has not only enhanced their professional and personal lives but also significantly improved student proficiency, particularly in critical areas such as speaking and writing. The integration of interactive, bilingual teaching methods and ongoing professional development has shifted classroom dynamics, fostering greater student engagement and participation. Moreover, the program's success in challenging traditional gender roles and advocating for financial independence underscores its broader social implications. These findings reinforce the value of scalable, community-driven education models that combine comprehensive teacher development frameworks with innovative, learner-centred approaches to address educational deficits and empower marginalized communities.

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