



# EMPOWERING *Women & Girls*

**EDUCATION: THE HEARTBEAT OF COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION**

# Rise, Women

## Crafting a Powerful Future

### **Women's Crucial Role in Literacy**

Women are crucial to community development. Our research on 1.5 million adults, published in the peer-reviewed *Economic and Political Weekly of India*, shows that women generally have lower literacy rates. However, when women lead literacy campaigns, they significantly impact both community dynamics and literacy results. In our Karauni Village Experiment, 22 women effectively used the ALfA method to teach all the women in their village to read and write.

### **Multi-generational and Societal Benefits**

Educating women boosts not only their literacy but also the education of their children. When women are educated, they tend to have smaller, healthier families and are more active in civic activities, providing benefits that reach across generations. They play a vital role in advancing societal progress and stability.



**Sunita Gandhi**

Former Economist, The World Bank, USA  
PhD, Physics, Cambridge University, UK  
Founder & CEO, DEVI Sansthan, India  
Dignity Education Vision International

### **Expanding Our Impact Through Strategic Partnerships**

Our initiatives have expanded through collaborations with organizations and government initiatives, significantly boosting female literacy. For instance, our pilot in West Bengal, with IIMPACT Foundation, led to broader state-level initiatives, showcasing the scalable impact of empowering women in literacy programs.

### **Looking Ahead: New Partnerships and Opportunities**

Our upcoming collaboration on the ULLAS: Nav Bharat Saaksharta Karyakram or the New India Literacy Mission by India's Ministry of Education underscores our commitment to enhancing women's roles in literacy.

Our three-year MOU with the Department of Secondary Education in Uttar Pradesh mobilizes secondary students to teach literacy to their own parents. We believe that by engaging young students, we can achieve substantial, lasting change in literacy and community engagement.

If the women of the world unite, there's nothing we can't achieve. Come, let's join hands in a mass movement for literacy!

# THEORY OF CHANGE

Literacy is a fundamentally intergenerational issue: literate girls become literate women, who in turn are more able to provide a good education for their own children. At DEVI Sansthan, we seek to break the cycle of illiteracy, investing in both women and girls' education.

Hundreds of millions of girls and women around the world are not able to read, write and do basic arithmetic. Despite the best efforts of many NGOs and governments, numerous roadblocks remain, including ineffective & slow pedagogy, lack of community ownership, and poor coordination between different stakeholders.

At DEVI Sansthan, we are bringing literacy a step closer to being solved by adopting a pedagogical approach, a pedagogy that allows women to become literate and numerate in days, not months or years. They also learn digital and financial literacy. The learning builds on what the women already know and uses cognitive mind connections to construct learning. This means the learning lasts and, instead of being lost, is kept alive.



## Pedagogical Innovation

Accelerating Learning for All uses a groundbreaking paired-learning pedagogy. With modules designed to foster gender equality and social inclusion, it fosters collaborative learning.

## Community Ownership

Our literacy work is not just programs, but rather is run by the community, for the community. This often means women take leading roles.

## Speed of Learning

Many literacy programs take more than a year to teach foundational skills. This demotivates many adult learners. In contrast, ALfA requires just 30 instructional hours.



## Mobilising Volunteers

We mobilise students for the Each One Teach One literacy campaign.

## Partnerships with NGOs

We run online & offline training workshops and provide literacy materials to boost the impact of our partners' work.

## Working with Governments

We collaborate with local, state and national governments to help them refine and scale up literacy programs.



# WOMEN'S LITERACY

## The Numbers Tell a Story

$\frac{2}{3}$

Two thirds of all illiterate people are women. Around the world, 16% of women cannot read. **UNESCO**

19%

The women's literacy rate in Chad is the lowest in the world. Other such countries include: Mali (22%), Afghanistan (23%) and C.A.R (26%). **World Bank**

10%

Each additional year of schooling boosts a girl's lifetime income by an average of 10%. **Save the Children**

5X

Girls in sub-Saharan Africa are 5 times more likely to be married by the age of 18 if they cannot read. **Save the Children**

## NEW EDUCATION POLICY

### Prioritising Adult Literacy

Literacy and basic education open up whole new worlds of personal, civic, economic, and lifelong-learning opportunities for individuals that enable them to progress personally and professionally.

At the level of society and the nation, literacy and basic education are powerful force multipliers which greatly enhance the success of all other developmental efforts.

Extensive field studies and analyses demonstrate that volunteerism, community involvement and mobilization are key success factors of adult literacy programmes, in conjunction with political will, adequate financial support, and high-quality capacity building of volunteers.

Strong and innovative government initiatives for adult education - in particular, to facilitate community involvement and the smooth and beneficial integration of technology - will be affected as soon as possible to expedite this all-important aim of achieving 100% literacy.



# LITERACY MATTERS



**Being a non-literate member of a community, has innumerable disadvantages, including the inability to:**



do basic financial transactions



compare the quality/quantity with the price



fill out forms to apply for jobs, loans, services, etc.



comprehend public circulars and articles in the news media



make use of the internet and other technology



comprehend safety directives on medicines, etc



help children with their education



be aware of rights and responsibilities as a citizen of India



pursue employment in medium or high-productivity sectors that require literacy



**Source: India's New Education Policy, Chapter 21**

# RESEARCH ADULT LITERACY

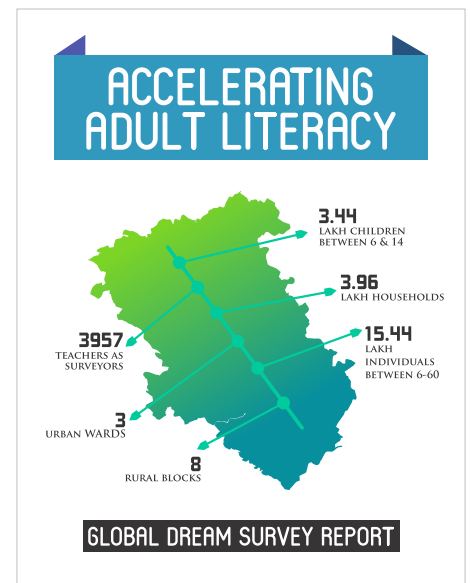
Our groundbreaking research directly testing the reading ability of 1.06 million adults in Lucknow district to throw light on the literacy crisis.

## Key Findings

- Literacy rates are substantially lower than Census estimates (65% vs 77%)
- There are major caste, gender, age and geographical inequalities in literacy rates.
- Sociodemographic factors interact with each other powerfully, to create compounding effects. For instance, our survey found that just 10% of rural SC/ST 51-60 year old women could read.



## Published in two journal articles and an in-depth report:



The Inconvenient Truth of Illiteracy Inequality.



**Economic & Political Weekly**

The Inconvenient Truth of Indian Illiteracy Inequality.



**Journal of New Economics, Glasgow University**

Accelerating Adult Literacy.



**DEVI Sansthan Report**

# PEER REVIEWED ARTICLE

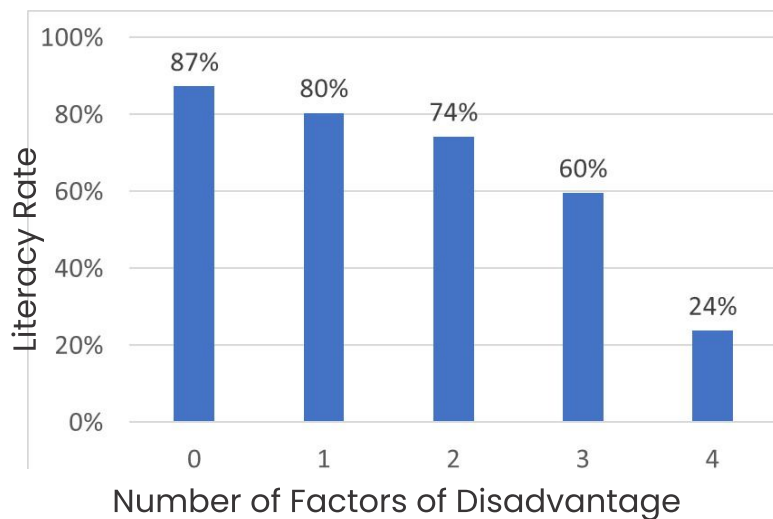
## Quotes from EPW & Journal of New Economics

“ Much as the impacts of climate change disproportionately affect the disadvantaged around the world, so too there are severe inequalities in literacy rates between different geographical regions, castes, age groups and genders. Strong political will is urgently needed to increase literacy equity and climate resilience. ”

“ Demographic factors have substantial impact on literacy, and also interact strongly: people who experience multiple factors of disadvantage have disturbingly low literacy rates. Rural, 51-60 year old SC/ST women in Lucknow district have a literacy rate of just 10%, far lower than we would expect if the dimensions of disadvantage operated independently. ”

“ This study shows the urgent need for programmes to increase adult literacy, with a focus on underprivileged populations, and particularly those with multiple disadvantages: minorities, oppressed-castes, older and rural women. ”

“ A large body of literature suggests that increasing adult literacy rates boosts school enrolment (Chudgar 2009). Investing in adult literacy thus has intergenerational benefits, as helping adults become literate also catalyses literacy improvement for the next generation. ”



**DEVI's groundbreaking research showed that factors of socio-demographic disadvantage - including age, gender, caste, and geography- compound each other.**



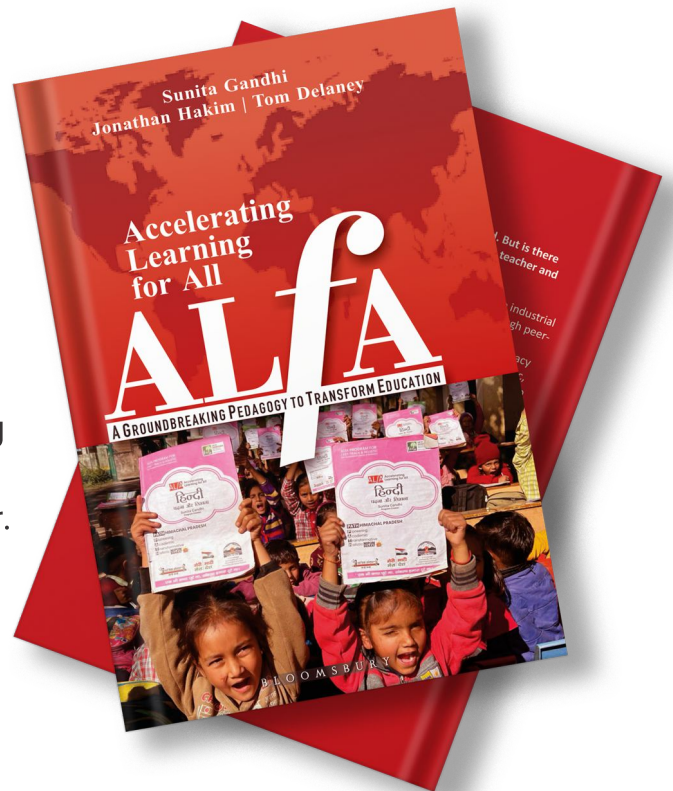
# A GROUNDBREAKING PEDAGOGY

## Accelerating Learning for All

**Published by Bloomsbury**  
**January 2024**

AlfA: Accelerating Learning for All breaks the shackles of the industrial education system, revolutionizing the school experience through peer learning and hands-on activities. The AlfA program enables children and adults alike to learn foundational literacy and numeracy in months rather than years. Beyond reading, writing and arithmetic, AlfA builds the crucial life skills of collaboration, creativity, citizenship and character.

Both a classroom guide for teachers and an implementation roadmap for policymakers, this book explores a transformative approach to teaching and learning. Sprinkled with anecdotes from teachers, principals & students, Accelerating Learning for All inspires and equips us to build a better education system."



*"All students should be able to learn to read quickly so that they can maximize their academic potential and AlfA does that."*

**Jon Corippo**

Founder of EduProtocols

*"This book provide some insightful and unique ideas about creating a pedagogy of possibility. It will undoubtedly create the conditions for a better world."*

**Sigamoney Naicker**

Professor, University of the Western Cape



# MANY CONTEXTS, ONE CAUSE

Across India and around the world, DEVI Sansthan is partnering with NGOs and governments to help thousands of women and girls learn to read, write and do basic numeracy.

## Peru | Maldives | USA

Hear the testimonies of women teachers using ALfA to transform lives around the world, **on page 35.**

## Karauni Village, Uttar Pradesh

DEVI's first community-based adult literacy program empowered 22 volunteers to teach hundreds of women in their village how to read. **Hear the remarkable story on page 8-13.**

## From Lucknow to Nation-wide

Our literacy journey began with student volunteers teaching illiterate neighbours and family members, from 2014 onwards. **Explore the power of young volunteers on page 14-17.**

## Haryana Rajasthan Uttarkhand

In 2023-24, IIMPACT women's literacy program expanded to over 5000 women across north India, using the ALfA toolkits. **Read more on page 20-21.**

## West Bengal

A mother literacy pilot partnership with IIMPACT Foundation has helped 1000 women become literate in 2022-23. **Explore the results on page 18-19.**

## Mizoram

An adult literacy program implemented in partnership with the department of education reached 300 learners in 2022-23. **Check out the difference it is making on page 31.**





# KARAUNI

## THE POWER OF COMMUNITY LITERACY PROGRAMS

Can twenty-two people make a whole village literate? Can the power of commitment overcome a lack of material resources? We were surprised by the answers as a reading revolution took hold in the sleepy hamlet of Karauni. Read on to discover how.

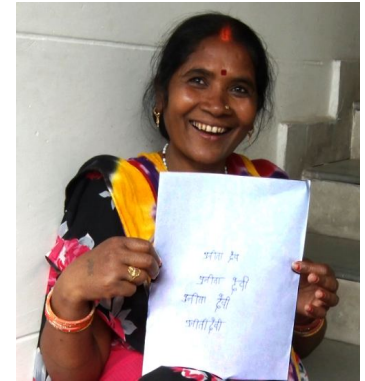


Literacy volunteers in Karauni village were trained and given literacy materials to run their community classes



## NAME LITERACY

Women in Kurauni were inspired to learn how to write their names, as the first step towards literacy. Come, join the name literacy challenge today and give someone the gift of a lifetime!

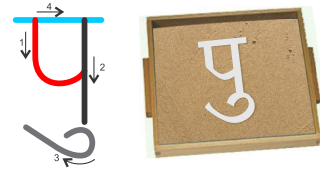


Ask the learner's first name.  
Encourage them to break it into syllables, for instance:

**Punita = Pu + ni + ta**



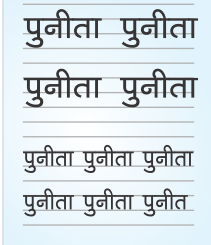
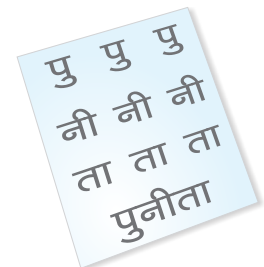
Make cards and write each syllable on it. Ask the learner what sound each card makes. Mix up the syllable cards, and have them arrange in the correct order.



Use a tray with sand or flour filled in it. Show them how to write their name in it. Ask the learner to trace their name, large size.



Give a newspaper or chart paper and a marker pen, ask them to write their name on it, large size.



Give a sheet of lined paper, have them practice writing their name neatly - first between 3 sets of lines, then 2 sets, then between a single set of lines.



Repeat the above steps for the surname, if any.



Practice writing the whole name until they can sign it fluently, the same way each time.



Click or scan the QR to watch a video of **Punita learning** to sign her name.

# A COMMUNITY-BASED READING REVOLUTION

Karauni is a small village around 30 kilometres southwest of Lucknow's city centre. Out of a population of 4,365, our survey revealed that 1,211 people aged 7–70 were illiterate in their mother tongue, Hindi; two-thirds of them were women.

With our modest financial and human resources, it was clear that a conventional approach—renting literacy centres, paying tutors, heavily structuring and supervising a program—would not work to reach this large group of people. We started wondering: is it possible for people of all ages and qualification levels to become literacy tutors? Would people be willing to volunteer without a payment?

To begin, we knew we had to motivate people and generate interest. We organised songs and marches for literacy, tapping into local art forms and folklore to mobilise

potential learners and volunteers. This culminated in a village level meeting, gathering curious people to explain the program. It is crucial for literacy movements to generate and harness the power of social momentum.

We found 22 women who were willing to become mentors—and give their time to this cause, without payment. The group was quite diverse: some of them were college graduates, whereas others had only passed Grade 5. Many were young and unmarried, but plenty of older, married women were also there.

We conducted a four-hour training for this group of mentors on how to teach literacy. We provided each with a Literacy Box containing enough materials to teach 20 people: mats, chalk and slates, and the literacy booklets. This tiny group then set forth with a big mission: to make the village literate.



*Village leaders, volunteers and government officials pose with the ALfA Literacy materials in front of Karauni school*

The mentors, whom we had drawn from several hamlets across the village, started spreading the word amongst their neighbours, relatives, and friends. Quickly and organically, small groups of women started meeting in open spaces or in the mentors' houses, typically for an hour or so each afternoon, to learn how to read and write. Along with learning literacy, these groups provided a conducive environment for socialising and building community networks.

These 22 literacy mentors reported that the first batch of 180 women had become literate in just two months. In August 2015, these women sat the National Literacy Mission test. For some of them, this monitored exam was their first time inside a school! 135 formerly illiterate women passed the test on their first attempt. The women were delighted to receive certificates of literacy from the Government of India—certificates which they could now read.

In subsequent batches, hundreds more have become literate. Many of the neo-literates have continued meeting to further their education, including some learning English and a few pursuing formal qualifications. Some have formed self-help groups and built livelihoods together, running small pickling or craft-making businesses. Most have felt the impact of literacy in multiple spheres of life, from greater domestic dignity to empowerment in broader society.

Karauni stands as a powerful example of what community mobilisation for literacy can achieve. With minimal expenditure and limited external inputs, hundreds of women learnt to read and write within a short period, which ultimately led to greater social and gender equality.

## Learners speak



**Ms. Shanti Devi**

When I go to the hospital I can sign and get the registration slip immediately and this is convenient for me.



**Ms. Nirmala**

Previously I was not able to read and write and use to give thumb impression, but now I can sign.

## HT Hindustan Times

Sunday, September 8, 2019

A week ago, 40-year-old Gudiya, a native of Karauni village in Lucknow's Sarojini Nagar block, went to a nationalised bank to inquire about the balance in her savings account. The bank staff told her a figure, but Gudiya insisted he recheck it. When the staff refused, she told him that only that morning she had

received a text message, according to which ₹15,000 had been credited into her account. The staff rechecked and found her to be right. He apologised. 'I told him I wasn't illiterate. I learned how to read and write ever since the Global Dream Literacy Mission started in my village,' Gudiya told HT.



See more  
news reports



Lucknow | By Rajeev Mullick

## International Literacy Day: Turning uneducated women into literacy champs

Sixty-year-old Shiv Kanti of Karauni village, on the outskirts of Lucknow, was an illiterate woman till a few years ago. She even did not send her children to school, engaging them in farm work instead, and was against the idea of her granddaughter attending school, which she thought was a waste of time.



A villager told her that the other women were attending a literacy camp at a nearby location. Curiosity won over her and, covering her face, she reached the camp. On peeping inside through an open 'window', she was shocked to see her acquaintance, Savitiri, 55 -- who had also been an illiterate like her -- writing on a sheet of paper.

The 'window' proved to be the proverbial 'window of opportunity'.

The next day, Shiv Kanti got herself enrolled in the camp. She was quick to learn the Hindi varnmala (alphabets) and other basics being taught at the camp.

"My parents made a big mistake by not sending me to school. I too never sent my children to school. It was a crime. And it would have been suicidal if we hadn't sent our granddaughter to school, as well," said Shiv Kanti, now armed with a better understanding of the importance of education.

# KARAUNI VILLAGE

Today, she not only supports her son and daughter-in-law in sending her granddaughter to the nearby primary school, but also helps the child in her studies. She has become a literacy champion who helps educate other village women.

“Given her age, nobody thought she could become literate by attending a six-month camp. But recently, she surprised everyone when the main trainer of the literacy camp did not turn up on time. She started taking the class! This is what literacy has done to her confidence level. She is a good performer,” said camp supervisor Alpana Dixit while speaking about Shiv Kanti.

In a social experiment, a team from Global Dream (a voluntary organisation) trained and prepared 22 women volunteers of Karauni village in Sarojini Nagar area as literacy champions.

“A Global Dream Literacy Survey in Lucknow district helped identify people who could not read,” said Sunita Gandhi of Global Dream, a project of Target Plus Education and DEVI (Dignity, Education, Vision, International) Sansthan.

“It is an accelerated literacy program and one of the most effective tools to propagate literacy in India,” said Gandhi.

The women volunteers, said Gandhi, didn't have notable names or impressive titles. “But they have accomplished what many would have thought impossible –making nearly all the women in the village literate,” she said.



While Karauni does have a school, many people, especially women, did not attend it. “However, these determined women volunteers have been empowered and supported to set up ‘Dream Labs’ at their homes,” said Gandhi.

Mother of three, 33-year-old Usha Rawat, is another beneficiary of the program. “I took three months to learn how to read and another three months to write. For a very long time, I only worked in the field with my husband. But after going to the literacy camp, my world has changed. I have also passed its examination. Now, instead of going to the field, I help my children in their studies once they come back from school,” she said.



# STUDENT VOLUNTEERS

When passionate for a cause, young people can bring social transformation. So far, some 500,000 school and college students around India have taken part in DEVI's Each One Teach One Campaign, teaching both children and adults how to read. Many of our best volunteers have been girls. Read on to be inspired by their stories.



A young student helps her neighbour learn how to read using the ALFA books.





## Each One Teach One

The Each One Teach One Campaign is a home based solution where students of Grades 5 to 12 commit to make at least one child or adult literate. They adopt a learner in their homes or near their home's neighbourhood, and teach them using DEVI Sansthan's literacy materials.

In a 2023 agreement with the Department of Secondary Schools in Uttar Pradesh, up to 5 million student volunteers are set to use the Literacy Now App to teach illiterate relatives and neighbours in the coming year.



# INTERVIEW GARGI KUMAR, GRADE 8

TD: Hi Gargi, thanks for your great efforts in teaching others how to read. When did you first start this project?

GK: When I was in Grade 4, I went to a nearby slum and met a girl named Sanskriti. She was 14 years old, and didn't go to school, so couldn't read at all. I taught her how to read over the summer break.

TD: And you've kept teaching since then?

GK: Yes, I love it. I'm in Grade 8 now, and have taught 11 people how to read – 7 children, and 4 adults.

TD: That's fantastic! What has kept you motivated over all those years?

GK: The learners themselves!

TD: Were any of the kids you taught already in school?

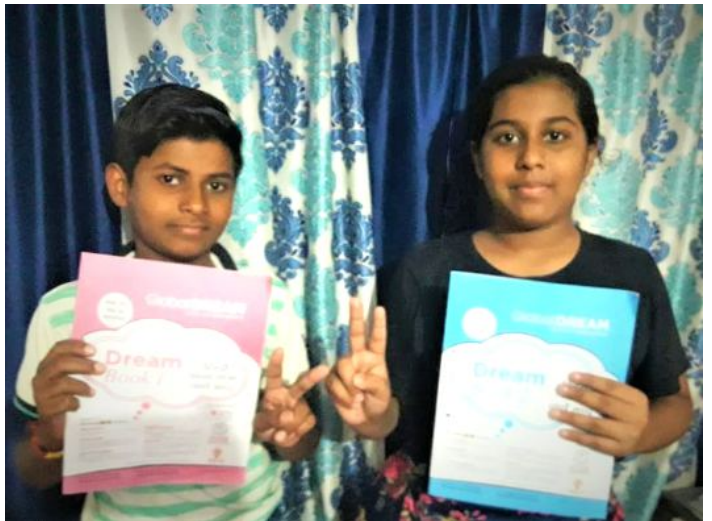
GK: No, all of them were out of school – some child labourers, others doing domestic chores, some families just too poor to afford an education. But of those 7 kids, three are now in school.

TD: Tell me about some of your adult learners.

GK: I taught one maid, a rickshaw rider, and two painters. Some of them – especially the men – were embarrassed initially. But when they saw me teaching their kids, they were also happy to learn.

TD: Do you teach during the summer holidays, or during the school term too?

GK: No, during the school term as well. I often teach a learner for 6 months or more – after learning to read Hindi, I start them on English and Maths too.



TD: So what does a typical day look like during school term for you?

GK: I get up at 6, get ready and go to school. When I come home at 2.30, I have lunch and a break. My learners arrive at 4 pm, and I teach them until 5.30. Then I have a short break and start my own studies.

TD: Does giving so much time to your learners impact your studies?

GK: Not really – I achieve a rank most years.

TD: Wow, that's incredible. So is your family supportive of you teaching literacy?

GK: Absolutely. My brother Sparsh, in Grade 5, has just started also teaching with me. When I got sick a couple weeks ago, my mum taught the learners instead!

TD: Thanks Gargi, I'm really impressed with your work. Any parting message you'd like to give our readers?

GK: Join me in helping to make India literate!



## TRANSFORMATIONAL TESTIMONIES STUDENT VOLUNTEERS

### **Gaurie Singh**

**Grade 8 | Study Hall School**

The person I taught was none other than my trusted maid. It was a great experience for me. We had a lot of fun together. She was a very keen and fast learner. After each lesson she used to ask for one more lesson and would extend the lesson 40-50 minutes sometimes.

### **Shivangi Kashyap**

**Grade 6 | Loreto Convent**

I found a girl called Gunjan who was very eager to study. But unfortunately her parents were not able to send her to school. Gunjan found it really tough in the beginning but she has learned so much that she can now read a newspaper. Through this experience I have got to know Gunjan and her family really well.

### **Vidushee Singh**

**Grade 11 | Canossa School**

I loved doing this project because I saw the joy and opportunities a person gets by doing this project. For simple things like making groceries list or reading something in the bill she was dependent on others. But now she can do these things on her own. It's not a big deal to spend 10-15 min of your time to help someone become literate.





# IIMPACT PARTNERSHIP

Literate women in turn pass on their education to their daughters, making an intergenerational impact. So it is fitting that IIMPACT Foundation partnered with DEVI to roll out ALfA in its Mother Literacy Program - starting in West Bengal, and since expanding to four more states. Read on to find out how it is changing women's lives.



Women in IIMPACT Rajasthan use the ALfA hands-on numeracy materials to learn key foundational maths skills.

# MOTHER LITERACY PROGRAM

## A Pilot Collaboration Between DEVI & IIMPACT

DEVI Sansthan has expanded its educational efforts by partnering with IIMPACT to introduce a Mother Literacy program. Implemented in villages hosting 50 Learning Centers, this initiative directly involves 1000 mothers of girls attending these centers. In each of these villages, a dedicated volunteer has conducted literacy classes over a 90-implementational-day period.

Classes have been conducted in various community-centric locations, through discussions with mothers and families to ensure accessibility. Sessions are typically scheduled between 3 p.m. and 5 p.m., accommodating participants' daily routines. The program began with pre-test evaluations to assess mothers' literacy and numeracy levels.

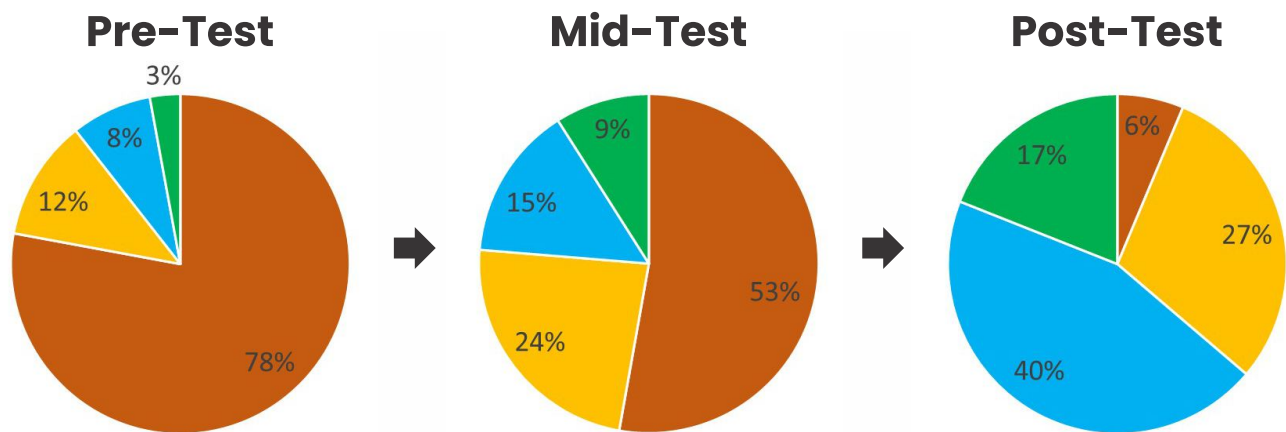
One-hour sessions were held from Monday to Saturday, covering literacy and numeracy together.

- 20 minutes for literacy
- 20 minutes for numeracy
- Final 20 minutes for felicitation activities and health discussions.



**Geography:**  
2 districts of West Bengal

“  
78% of learners scored less than 40% on the pre-test. By the time of the post test, it was only 6%!  
”



■ Below 40% ■ 41-60% ■ 61-80% ■ 81-100%

*Proportion of learners by different test score bins over the course of the program.*

# SCALING UP

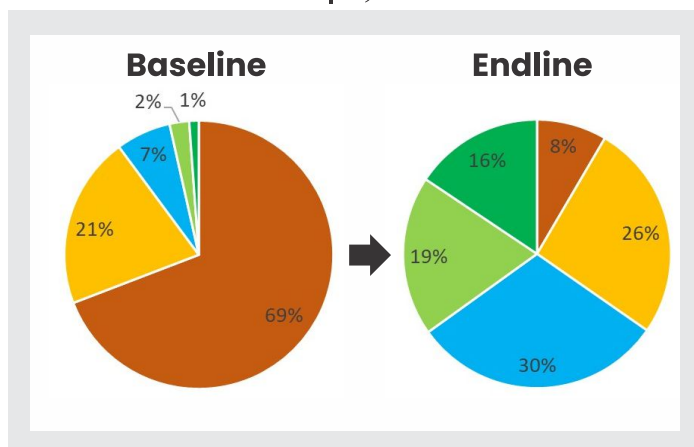
## Across 4 States, in Collaboration With IIMPACT

Following the successful implementation for one thousand learners in West Bengal, IIMPACT and DEVI collaborated in women's literacy programs across four states, covering over 5,000 mothers in July–November 2023. The results, collected by the IIMPACT Team, are shown below.

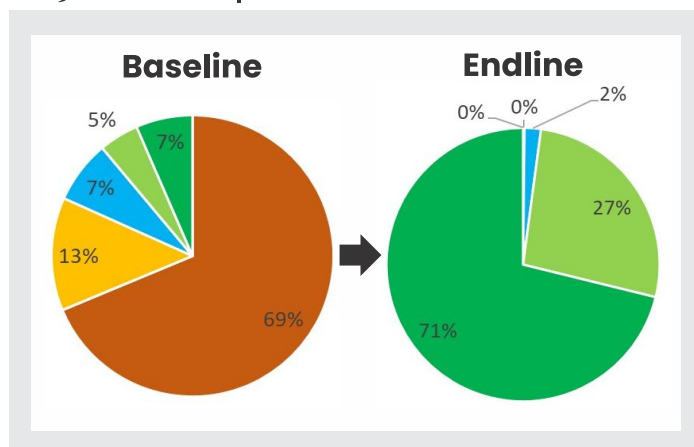


**On average, learner's test scores more than tripled.**

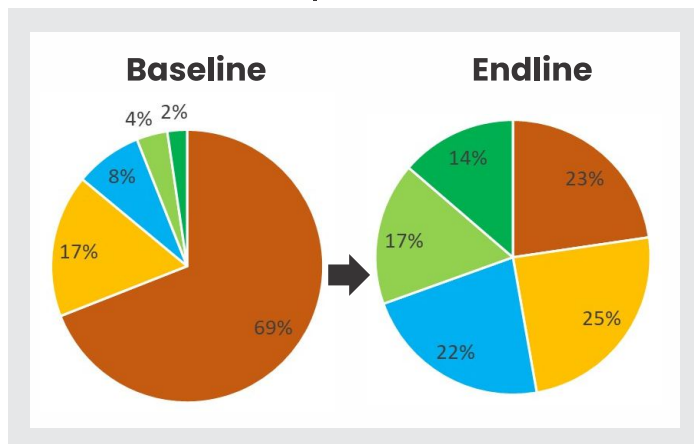
### UTTAR PRADESH | 1,997 MOTHERS



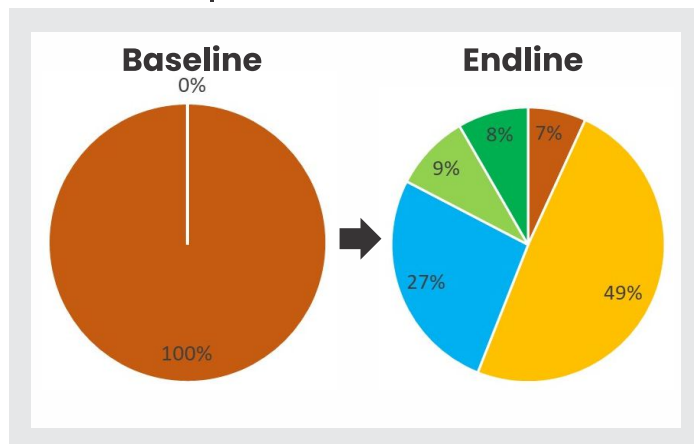
### RAJASTHAN | 569 MOTHERS



### UTTARAKHAND | 2,558 MOTHERS



### HARYANA | 466 MOTHERS



■ 0-20% ■ 20-40% ■ 40-60% ■ 60-80% ■ 80-100%

*Proportion of learners by different test score bins over the course of the program.*



## Mrs Praladi Devi sidri, Uttarakhand

“Being a part of the Mother Literacy Program tailored for rural women has been a true blessing in my life. Living in a remote village, access to education has always been a challenge. But this program brought the classroom to our doorstep. Learning alongside other women from my community has created a bond of solidarity and support that I never imagined to be possible. Now, I can read alphabet, understand numbers, and help to understand my children with their schoolwork. The skills I have gained have empowered me to actively participate in community meetings and advocate for the needs of our village. This program is not just about literacy, it is about unlocking doors to a brighter future for ourselves and our families.”



## Sayra Dhalipur, Rajasthan

“In the "Mother Literacy Program", we worked with the women of the community, teaching them to read and write. For this program, we were given training and a kit so that we could easily work with the women.

Sayra is a mother of 6 children. She remains busy in her household chores and sewing from 5 am to 10 pm. But when the 'Mother Literacy Program' started, she devoted some of her time

everyday for studying. Sometimes her mother-in-law also stopped her, saying 'What will you do by studying now', but when she saw our way of teaching, she liked it very much and was able to understand it easily. Before that Sayra did not know the meaning of words nor did she know how to write, but today she can sit with her children and help them in their studies. She is very happy with this program.”



# MASS MOVEMENTS

1989 was an iconic year for freedom, with the fall of the Berlin Wall. But on the other side of the world, a very different type of revolution was unfolding: a mass movement made Ernakulam the first fully literate district of India. Read on to explore lessons we can learn from this, and other remarkable campaigns, as we work towards literacy for all.



Abida learns to write her name, as part of a community literacy campaign in Lucknow.

## Mass literacy campaigns are defined by three key elements



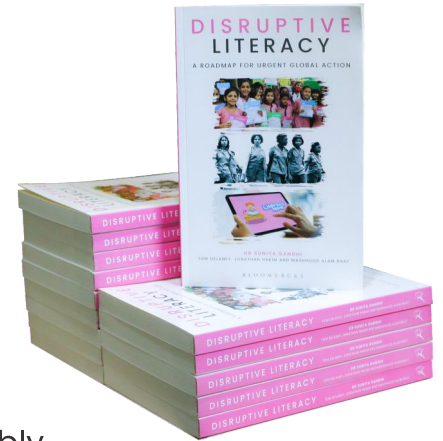
**Mission:** Strong commitment from the top, and across all levels and departments of government, to giving literacy top priority, setting ambitious goals, and taking rapid action.



**Mobilisation** of all sectors of society: community groups, schools and colleges, NGOs, corporations and individuals from all walks of life. Youthful energy, volunteerism and passion for the cause are crucial.



**Methods** that enable anyone with minimal qualifications to teach literacy efficiently and enjoyably with easy-to-use, learner-centred materials.



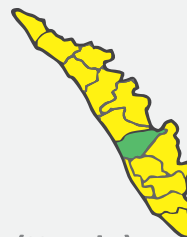
While there are many differences in how these movements played out across various times and places, there are also striking similarities and themes. Based on analysis of these landmark campaigns and our own experiences, we have created a ten-step roadmap for a mass literacy movement (overleaf). This draws from and updates our book, *Disruptive Literacy: A Roadmap for Urgent Global Action* (Bloomsbury, 2022).

### Some notable mass movements



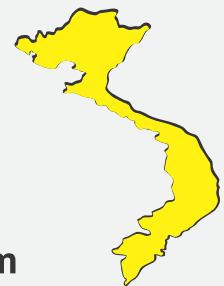
#### Cuba

In 1961, over 250,000 volunteers – including more than 100,000 students – ran an intensive literacy campaign throughout the country, achieving a literacy rate of 96%.



#### Ernakulam (Kerala)

Became India's first fully literate district thanks to a people's movement in 1989, led by a passionate local government partnering with all segments of society.



#### Vietnam

Even while fighting a war of independence, Vietnam went from 90% illiteracy to 90% literacy in the space of a decade thanks to dedicated leadership from the top.



# WHY A MASS MOVEMENT?



## Swift

unlock rapid gains in literacy rates in just a year. Tremendous energy can be harnessed when there's a concerted effort over a short period of time.



## Cost-effective

Volunteerism is a key success factor for a mass literacy movement.



## Uniting a nation

All segments of society – schools & colleges, NGOs, corporations, community groups – work together for a common cause, forging a greater national identity.



## Foundation for growth

Countries that achieve universal literacy then tend to go on to greater peace and prosperity – Singapore, South Korea and Vietnam are all powerful examples.

*Name Literacy: Learning to sign can be a powerful step in the journey of dignity and empowerment*



# ROADMAP FOR A MASS LITERACY MOVEMENT

## 1 Political Will



Liaise with top government officials to emphasize the importance of literacy for all.



## 2 Planning

Conduct stakeholder consultations, building coalitions for literacy.

## 3 Survey



Provide Target Population Survey App.



## 4 Mobilise

Create and share literacy promotional materials.

## 5 Training



Conduct online training for teachers, and empower master-trainers to conduct in-person trainings in local language.



## 6 Teach-Learn

Provide the ALfA materials, which enable FLN to be learnt swiftly, with just 90 instructional days.

## 7 Monitor



Share the ALfAway app, to be used for monitoring literacy classes.



## 8 Evaluate

Provide testing materials to check the progress of the learners. Analyse data & write reports.

## 9 Certify & Celebrate



Organise celebratory events, spread the word through national & international media.



## 10 Continue Learning

Give access to online platforms for further learning.



# HOW ALFA WORKS

ALFA provides a truly 21st century education. Beyond literacy and numeracy, the paired learning environment and taking turns helps children develop crucial skills and traits, including collaboration, critical thinking, citizenship and climate consciousness, among others.



Children in the Maldives develop their communication and collaboration skills by solving math questions together.

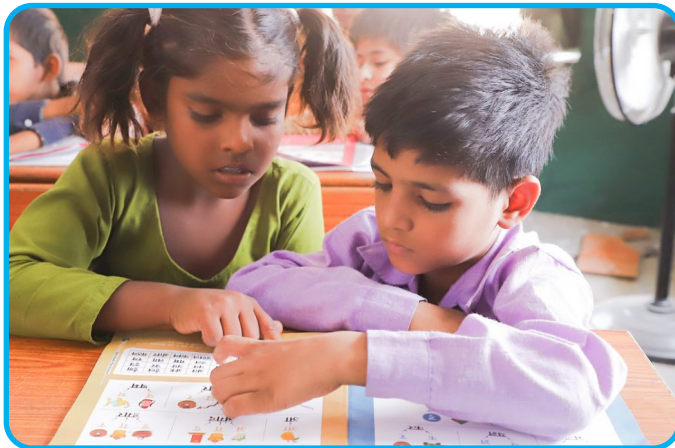


## A PROCESS-LED PEDAGOGY

Accelerating Learning for All (ALfA) is a groundbreaking structured pedagogy, designed to enable children to gain foundational literacy and numeracy skills in as little as 45 days. What makes ALfA so effective? It is the combination of learning materials, pedagogy, curriculum and teacher training.

### PAIRED LEARNING

The transaction of learning is not from teacher to student, but rather between two children.



### CURRICULUM

Books are simple, modular, and highly visual, enabling children to learn independently.



### PEDAGOGY

Children work from known to unknown: rather than 'a for apple', they derive the first sound from a picture.



### HOLISTIC EDUCATION

ALfA doesn't just develop children's academic abilities; it fosters 21st century skills including creativity, critical thinking and collaboration.



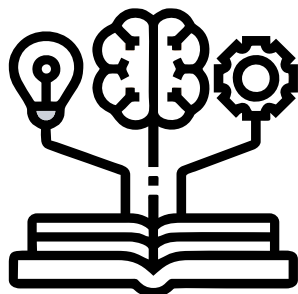
# WHY IS IT FASTER & MORE EFFECTIVE?

ALfA greatly speeds up and deepens learning for three reasons:

**'Known to unknown' pedagogy.** Drawing upon children's prior knowledge, ALfA uses cognitive connections to discover new learning.



**Designed for paired work.** Children learn and retain more when they interact with each other. ALfA creates a happier, holistic, and more inclusive classroom.



**A different scaffolding.** The thin ALfA booklets are designed for paired learning. They scaffold learning differently from the best of traditional books.



Click or scan QR to watch footage from Literacy Chicago's impressive program.

# FINANCIAL & HEALTH LITERACY

Accelerating Learning for All is an excellent resource not just for children but also for adults learning foundational literacy & numeracy. It includes modules on highly relevant topics including financial literacy, health & hygiene, diet and much more.

## Module 32 I understand my household income

### REGULAR INCOME



My husband runs a sewing shop.  
₹7,000 per month

My mother gets a pension.  
₹1,000 per month



Let me add up my household income.

### IRREGULAR INCOME



I sell eggs. Normally  
₹2,000 per month



I sell fruit from my orchard.  
Sometimes ₹3,000 per month

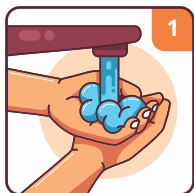
Click or scan QR code to access the numeracy book.



### Prompts: Pair up and...

- Note down your household's main sources of income. How much is each?
- Discuss with your pair: which sources of income are regular, which are irregular?
- Add together your sources of income to find your total monthly income.

## Module 61 Steps of Handwashing



1 wet your hands with water



2 put on soap



3 rub your hands



4 scrub your thumbs



5 rinse well



6 dry your hands

### Prompts: Pair up and...

- Practice washing your hands as shown above.
- Show your pair how you wash, and ask them to show you.
- Practice washing your feet, too.


Click or scan QR code to access the literacy book.





# MEDIA & TESTIMONIES

Thanks to its remarkable results, ALfA pedagogy has garnered a lot of media attention and video coverage. Many incredible educators have also endorsed this learner-led pedagogy.

A close-up photograph of a young girl with a joyful expression, looking slightly to the left. She is wearing a vibrant, multi-colored headscarf with stripes of blue, red, green, and yellow. The background is softly blurred, suggesting an outdoor setting. The image is framed with a rounded top-left corner.

A young girl smiles in the Lucknow summer, after her literacy class.



## TESTIMONIES OF LEARNERS

**Sufia, 40**, doubted that she would ever be able to learn to read at her age. We encouraged her to get through the struggle of the first few lessons, which was compounded by the embarrassment of others watching on. As it turned out, Sufia was one of our fastest learners – she went from unable to recognize letters, to reading sentences fluently in just one month. At the next parent-teacher meeting, the teacher offered her an inkpad to make a thumb impression, but Sufia reached instead for a pen, with a big smile on her face!



**Shaniya, 9**, was not enrolled in school when we first met her. Her father often drank, so family finances were tight. Shaniya's mother also doubted her ability to learn well in school. But Shaniya learnt to read swiftly with the ALfA learning materials – with just a 15 minute session several times a week over three months. Impressed with the improvement, Shaniya's mother enrolled her in a local school. Five years on, Shaniya is now a confident young woman in Grade 8.

**Rehana, 7**, is from a very poor family. She rarely gets the attention she needs, often skips school, and has terrible behaviour issues. However, when we started the literacy program with her, her attention was focused, even though she could only recognize two letters out of the whole alphabet. Though it took her three lessons to understand how to join letters together, today she is reading fluently.





# TESTIMONIES BY EXPERTS

## Former Minister of Education, Guinea Ms Aicha Bah Diallo

“

Dr. Sunita Gandhi's innovative ALfA method allows learners of all ages to quickly master essential foundational skills. It surpasses traditional methods, promoting holistic learning. Learning happens in pairs, embedding critical 21st-century skills into the curriculum. ”



Click or Scan the [QR code](#) to hear other prominent policymakers' views on ALfA



Click or Scan the [QR code](#) to hear Mary McCoolberry's talk

## Reading & Dyslexia Expert, USA Mary McCoolberry

“

Dr Sunita Gandhi's dream is brilliant, huge, ambitious and daring. What I love about the ALfA kits is that they accelerate the process for readers across the world. I have used them with students I teach. The toolkits meet the learners at their instructional level. I love the fact that kids are building on their background knowledge. ”

## Founder, World Climate School, Norway Inger Mette Stenseth

“

Dr Gandhi's educational pedagogy, ALfA: Accelerating Learning for All, is truly transformative. It is inclusive, scientifically rigorous, and capable of scaling to reach learners of any age. During my visits to India, I witnessed firsthand the profound impact of ALfA in government schools, slums, and among out-of-school children and illiterate adults. ”



Click or Scan the [QR code](#) to read Inger Mette Stenseth's letter



Click or Scan [QR code](#) to watch Robert Jenkins address the Global Policymakers Conclave

## Director of Education & Adolescent Development, UNICEF Mr Robert Jenkins

Acquiring foundational literacy and numeracy is key for children as they progress. Unfortunately, many schools systems around the world are failing very large numbers of children. We need a step change in the education sector, to reach children with access to quality education so they can realise their full potential.

# TESTIMONIES BY TEACHERS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

## MEDIA & TESTIMONIES

### Maldives | Ministry of Education



“ I believe in fostering independent learning and problem-solving, promoting peer collaboration and incorporating reflection opportunities. These strategies empower children to take ownership of their learning journey. ”

**Aysharth Sumaa, Teacher**

“ In my opinion, ALfA is a great opportunity for students to learn together in a collaborative, friendly environment. Students work together to complete the tasks and modules, as a result, they are very well connected with each other. ”

**Hawwa Lamsha, Teacher**

### Peru | Arca Beta NGO



“ When the students came first, they wrote scribbles; they didn't know how to read. The students began to pronounce the images and words from the communication book. They worked in pairs. They began to form simple words, then more complex words and small sentences. Now, 80% of the students are reading. It is engaging and exciting for the students. Thank you so much. ”

**Sheila, Grade 1A Teacher, Sachachorro school, Iquitos**

### USA | Literacy Chicago



“ This program is fun to teach, easy for students to follow, and creates community and quick, efficient learning. The organisation of the lessons and plans is clear and supportive. I recommend it. ”

**Alexandra Murman,  
Volunteer, Literacy Chicago**

“ A positive aspect of the ALfA reading program is that students can work at their own pace. Some students may go through the first five lessons quickly; others may need to work on them slowly, repeating some over and over. Everyone makes progress, and the beauty of the faces on those who achieve even a little success is inspiring. ”

**Marcia Banzuly, Volunteer, Literacy Chicago**

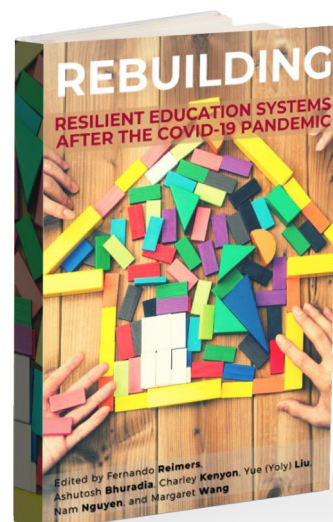


# GLOBAL ENDORSEMENT FROM HARVARD UNIVERSITY

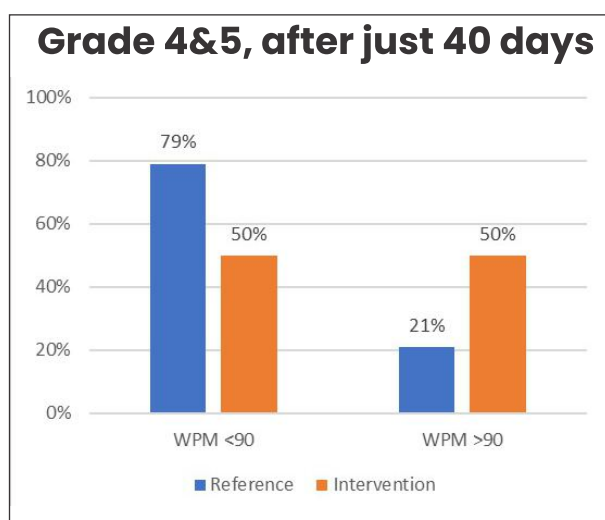
Chapter 8 of 'Rebuilding Resilient Education Systems After the Covid-19 Pandemic', published in March 2023, documents the ALfA program in Shamli, and recommends its widespread adoption.



Click or scan QR  
to check out the  
book



By Prof. Fernando Reimers et al,  
Harvard Graduate School of Education



“ Students in the intervention groups had **much higher oral reading fluency** than those in the reference group. For Grades 4-5, 50% of the intervention group students were able to read the passage at >90 words per minute compared to 20% of reference group students. ”

“ The effect size\* of the project was **0.23 for Grade 3** students and **0.89 for Grade 5**... the results suggest there is significant value in pursuing the ALFA model in other schools if implemented in a coherent, structured, and coordinated manner. ”

\***Effect size** is a statistical measure of an intervention's impact. A business-as-usual school year in developing countries typically raises literacy levels by **0.15 to 0.21** standard deviations. This means that the ALfA 45-day intervention raised learning levels by the equivalent of **2-4 years worth of school**.

Reference: Evans, David K.; Yuan, Fei. 2019. Equivalent Years of Schooling: A Metric to Communicate Learning Gains in Concrete Terms. Policy Research Working Paper; No. 8752. World Bank, Washington, DC.



“

*Accelerated Learning for All (ALfA), helps children quickly gain FLN competencies... students start with known words in the form of pictures, identify the sounds, and work backward to the letters.*

”

“

*We recommend the UP government incorporate the promising ALfA pedagogy developed by DEVI for the first 6 weeks to quickly establish a strong FLN foundation.*

”





# VIDEOS

### DEVI's Indian Women Literacy Projects



### Say No to Thumb Impression



### Literacy Chicago's First Learner



### CSR Box



### The Story of Karauni Village



### Each One Teach One Campaign



### ABP News Special



### ALfA launch in Mizoram News



## HERSTORY

### This physicist, former World Bank economist, and educationist is helping the illiterate become literate in a month

Sunita Gandhi, a physicist by education, worked at the World Bank for 10 years and has also been on a mission to transform education for over three decades...

Click or scan QR to read the whole article



### This Educationist Launches 'Global Dream Shaala' To Provide Free Lessons To Out-of-School Children, Adults

Click or scan QR to read the whole article



### Dr. Sunita Gandhi

The 'Edumonk from Lucknow' will begin the NAME LITERACY CHALLENGE this International Women's Day...

Click or scan QR to read the whole article



## FEMINA

### Transforming Education, Changing Lives

With the firm belief that imparting education is the least one can do to help improve an individual's standard of living, educator, author, innovator and researcher, Dr Sunita Gandhi has been implementing a transformative education...

Click or scan QR to read the whole article







## ALfA: Fast & Holistic FLN Today

DEVI Sansthan (Dignity Education Vision International) is an NGO with a big vision: to help India and the world achieve universal Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN). DEVI Sansthan is pioneering transformative pedagogy, empowering teachers, and leveraging policy change to enable rapid gains towards literacy for all.



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