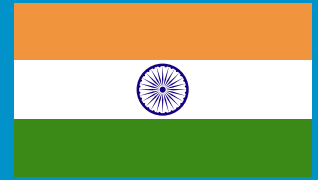


# What Works to Improve Learning at Scale?



KEY FINDINGS FROM **LEARNING AT SCALE** AND THE **READ INDIA (ODU KARNATAKA) PROGRAM\***

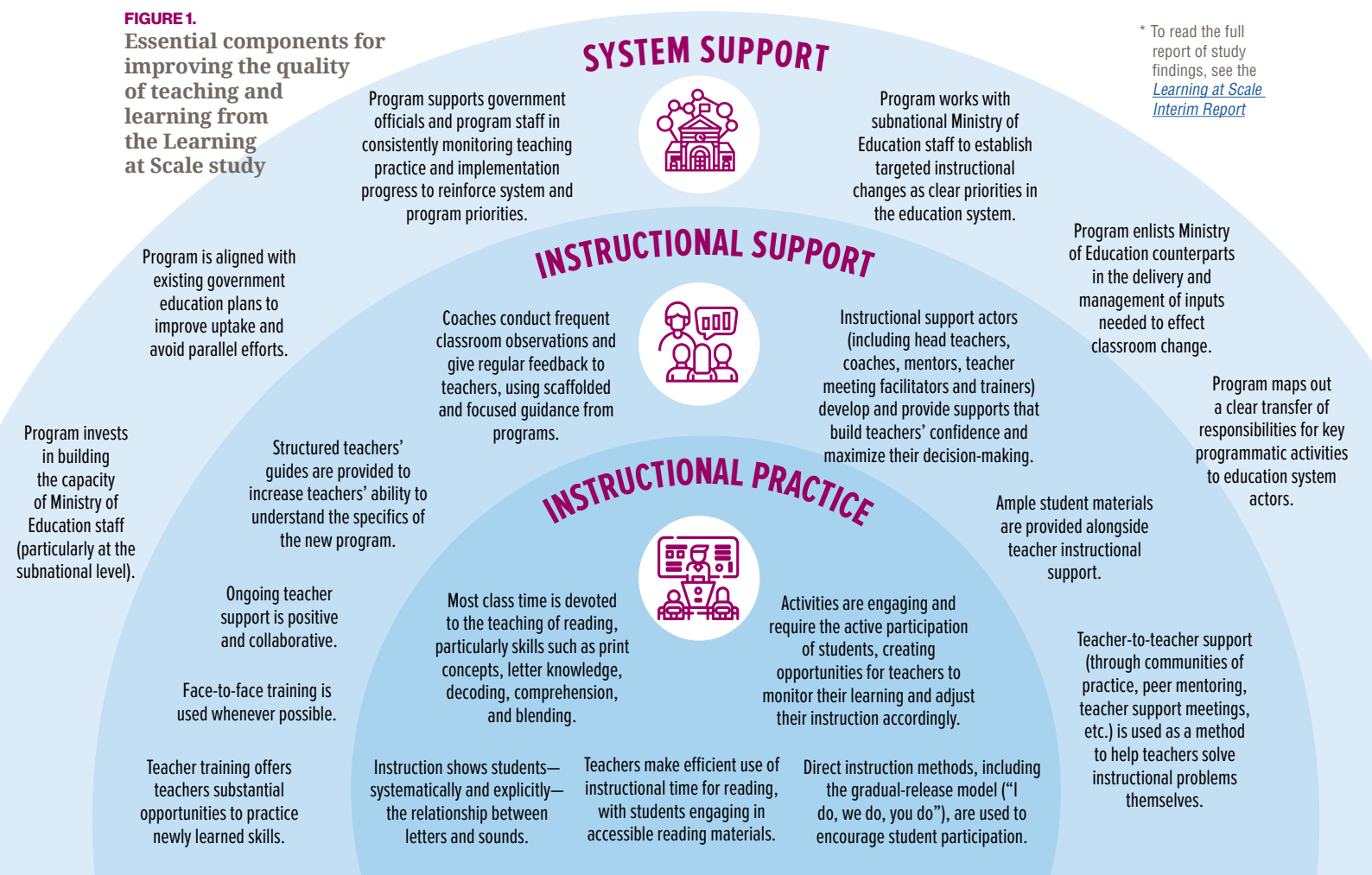
OCTOBER 2023

The findings presented in this brief were generated as part of the Learning at Scale study, conducted by RTI International with the Center for Global Development and funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The study overall examined eight of the most effective large-scale early grade education programs in low- and middle-income countries.<sup>1</sup> The Read India program described here was implemented as a partnership between Pratham and the State Government of Karnataka and called Odu Karnataka (“Read Karnataka” in the Kannada language).

The Learning at Scale study team organized its overall findings into three categories: instructional practice, instructional support, and system support. The eight programs evaluated in the literacy component of this study showed commonalities in how they approached implementation to maximize program success. The researchers identified five essential components for improving instructional practice, eight essential components for improving instructional support, and six essential components for system support (FIGURE 1). Many of these elements were core to the success of Odu Karnataka. Now—as education systems across the globe look for ways to recover from COVID-19 disruptions to schooling—investing in these elements is more important than ever.


**FIGURE 1.** Essential components for improving the quality of teaching and learning from the Learning at Scale study


\* To read the full report of study findings, see the [Learning at Scale Interim Report](#)




## Learning at Scale Study at a Glance

The Learning at Scale study asked three overarching questions:

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What **instructional practices** lead to learning in programs that are effective at scale?
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What **methods of instructional support** lead to teachers adopting effective classroom practices?
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What **system support** is required to deliver effective training and support to teachers and to promote effective classroom practices?

Due to COVID-19 disruptions, the research team was unable to visit schools to observe classrooms and interview teachers during the implementation of Odu Karnataka (2016–2022). Instead, in March 2023, the team interviewed district, state, and program officials in person to obtain retrospective information related to the third research question. **TABLE 1** summarizes the instruments used and the respondents.

**TABLE 1.** Data collection tools and respondent counts, Odu Karnataka

INSTRUMENT	RESPONDENT COUNT
Central system interviews	Interviews with 2 Karnataka state education officials
District system interviews	Interviews with 7 district-, block- and cluster-level officials from Bengaluru Urban, Bengaluru Rural, Chikkaballapur, and Rama-nagara Districts
Program interviews	Interviews with 3 Pratham program officials

## Odu Karnataka at a Glance

As noted above, Odu Karnataka was Karnataka State's version of the Read India program. It used Pratham's Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) methodology, implemented through the state system. The main components of the TaRL approach under Odu Karnataka were:

1. Cascade training of the District Resource Group, the block and cluster resource coordinators (BRCs and CRCs), and teachers. Each person who was trained conducted 15–20 days of practice classes, with baseline and endline assessments.
2. The intervention began by organizing students in grades 4 and 5 into groups based on learning levels determined by an assessment of early reading ability based on the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) used by Pratham across India.
3. Teachers used a child-friendly approach to instruction known as Combined Activities for Maximized Learning (CAMaL) in a 60-day cycle, supported by engaging materials.

### Criteria for programs to be considered for inclusion in the Learning at Scale study

**Effectiveness:** Evidence of causal impact at scale or at pilot with evidence of effective scale-up

**Scale:** Operating in most or all schools in at least two administrative subdivisions

**Subject:** Includes a literacy component

**Geography:** Located in a low- or middle-income country


**Type of program:** Program aims to improve classroom teachers' effectiveness


**Data available for analysis:** Impact evaluation data and raw data on cost

**Time frame:** Active through 2019

**Sector:** Public sector, civil society, or private sector

### Program features

 Renewed annually 2016/17 - 2021/22

 Funded by Karnataka State Government, with personnel and monitoring support from Pratham

### GOALS:

To enable children to read basic text fluently, with understanding; and to confidently understand numbers and do basic operations, especially for children who have reached grade 4 without these skills.

To ensure that children can express themselves, write simple sentences on their own, and solve basic problems.

### REACH (BY 2020):

**22,173** schools in **20** districts, serving **564,166** students in Karnataka.

4. The reading assessments were administered at baseline, midline, and endline of the 60-day cycle.
5. Cluster resource coordinators supported teachers with three or four visits during the cycle, guided by data from the reading assessments and classroom observations.

## What system supports did Odu Karnataka draw on to deliver effective training and support to teachers and to promote effective classroom practices?<sup>1</sup>

The eight programs evaluated in the Learning at Scale study had commonalities in how they used system-level support to maximize their success. For Odu Karnataka, the researchers analyzed findings from the program document reviews, discussions with program leaders, and interviews with system-level actors to identify six components essential to such success. **TABLE 2** outlines the evidence for each of these components, as noted by the key informants from the Odu Karnataka program.

**TABLE 2. Essential components of system support: Findings profile for Odu Karnataka**

ESSENTIAL COMPONENT	EVIDENCE OF COMPONENT IN ODU KARNATAKA
Program invests in building the capacity of Ministry of Education staff (particularly at the subnational levels).	Odu Karnataka capacity building focused on making sure staff understood the program, with less attention to developing capacity for monitoring and managing the program. Read India, including Odu Karnataka, takes the unique approach of training subnational staff at all levels to be able to deliver the TaRL intervention. Training was provided to staff at the district, block, and cluster levels, as well as to teachers, all of whom were required to teach practice classes after completing training. One block resource person (BRP) said: <i>“At first I did not have any interest. Once I took the training and did the classes, I found it very essential.”</i>
Program is aligned with existing government education plans to improve uptake and avoid parallel efforts.	Odu Karnataka was not explicitly aligned with existing government plans, but it did meet a need recognized by the state. The program began with a presentation on TaRL given by Pratham’s Chief Executive Officer, in which the Karnataka Principal Secretary participated. Together with the director of the Department of State Educational Research and Training (DSERT), they spent three days with Pratham planning the program implementation. The director explained: <i>“We were facing 30%–40% learning gaps. We were searching for a method to close the gap.”</i>
Program works with subnational Ministry of Education staff to establish targeted instructional changes as clear priorities in the education system.	Communication about priorities came directly from the state office to lower levels of the system through platforms such official circulars, orientations, and meetings. The communications emphasized the implementation of Odu Karnataka, rather than specific instructional changes. The process was described by a high-level state official: <i>“We sent circulars to accept this program in their job charter. After that, we conducted a meeting orientation to explain contents and objectives. First with districts, then with block, cluster, schools.”</i>  A district official explained: <i>“There was an order from the state office, therefore you implemented.”</i>

<sup>1</sup> For more findings on systems support, see the brief System Supports for Effective Large-Scale Reading Interventions.

**TABLE 2 (CONTINUED).** Essential components of system support: Findings profile for Odu Karnataka

ESSENTIAL COMPONENT	EVIDENCE OF COMPONENT IN ODU KARNATAKA
<p>Program supports government officials and program staff in consistently monitoring teaching practice and implementation progress in order to reinforce system and program priorities.</p>	<p>Monitoring was a strong component of Odu Karnataka, mentioned consistently across all interviews. Monitoring included data from the reading assessments conducted at the beginning, middle, and end of the instruction cycle, as well as data on teaching practices collected by cluster resource persons (CRPs) visiting schools. A program official explained how a dashboard was used to collate and respond to monitoring data:</p> <p><i>“A block-level person entered data into the portal. Pratham conducted analysis on the data and disseminated the dashboard of progress. Schools were placed into three brackets of performance: high, medium, and low. [The] CRP organized three visits to low-performing, two to medium-performing, and one to high-performing in a month. The last iteration of the monitoring process produced an app [for use on teachers’ phones]—teachers filled in data for their school.”</i></p> <p>District officials helped block resource coordinators prioritize schools for additional support:</p> <p><i>“We went for the visits of schools [and asked:] ‘How are the schools doing? How are the children doing?’ We then gave a report to the BRC. We gave [them] statistics and progress, cluster- and block-wise. If they found any loopholes, they took action.”</i></p> <p>State education officials played a role in reviewing data and checking that monitoring data were available for all schools. One state education officer described the importance of monitoring for the program:</p> <p><i>“If you do not monitor a program, it will not be a success. There had to be hand-holding of teachers and CRPs. The dashboard helped a lot. We would monitor to see who had entered data.”</i></p>
<p>Program enlists Ministry of Education counterparts in the delivery and management of inputs needed to effect classroom change.</p>	<p>A strength of Odu Karnataka was that it was implemented and managed by government officials. Pratham provided an officer in each district to initiate the training cascade and to support monitoring, but government officials were involved at every level. A high-level state official explained:</p> <p><i>“DSERT created a separate wing to monitor the program. [Senior state official] was appointed as the nodal officer for the project. I gave one case worker to him. At the district level we gave training to the DIET [District Institutes of Education and Training] principal plus one officer per DIET for monitoring. They both got training with the teachers. The district staff were linked to the state nodal person and monitoring team. At the block level, the BEO [block education officer] and BRC were overall in charge to support [the] program. One BRP (out of four) acted as nodal officer. Training was given to each BRP.”</i></p> <p>Another official emphasized the state ownership of the program:</p> <p><i>“We internalized the program. We selected the best CRPs. They became convinced. We were employing our own people.”</i></p>
<p>Program maps out a clear transfer of responsibilities for key programmatic activities to education system actors.</p>	<p>Odu Karnataka was designed to be implemented on a rolling annual basis. There was no plan for transfer of responsibilities to the state in the long term. For example, a District Education Manager explained:</p> <p><i>“[The program concluded] after 60 days. There was no plan for continuation. There were no guidelines to integrate it into regular teaching.”</i></p> <p>However, program staff argued that sustainability was fostered by the involvement of governmental officials at all levels and by the teachers’ internalization of the program.</p>



## What major challenges did Odu Karnataka face?

Three main challenges were identified:

- Delays in providing materials for the program occurred at multiple points in the distribution chains. In some cases, materials arrived in schools after the scheduled 60-day implementation cycle had ended. This issue was mentioned by all interviewees. “Later [in the program],” said one high-level state official, “we got better at planning.”
- Many participants felt that the standard 60-day implementation period was not long enough. One district official said, “May/June is when children are admitted. The program should start then.” Others said that it should be implemented for the whole year. However, one participant in the study said that the 60-day period motivated teachers to show progress quickly.
- Teacher transfers also created a problem. This problem was noted for teachers who were transferred into a school after Odu Karnataka training had taken place, because individual training for them took additional time. The problem was also noted for teachers who were trained and then were transferred out of the school before the end of the 60-day period.



## What factors contributed to the success of Odu Karnataka, according to program stakeholders?

Program stakeholders mentioned many, diverse elements that contributed to the program’s success.

- One high-level state official said that the program success began with budget allocations—“that is the fuel,” he said—and with support from high-level officers.
- Many stakeholders appreciated the careful planning and clear timeline that enabled the implementation of a large, complex program. Pratham’s commitment and support were valued in this regard.
- The monitoring system, supported by Pratham’s web portal, was seen by many as a critical factor in the program’s success, because it allowed officials to “get information from the bottom.” One high-level state official admitted, however, that monitoring was a “heavy burden” and suggested that more subdivisional (i.e., block or cluster) training was required to support the monitoring effort.
- Several participants identified the pedagogical approach as critical. Children enjoyed the play-based methods employed in the classroom, which visibly promoted their engagement and motivation to learn. Similarly, the hands-on training approach, including the experience of practicing teaching TaRL lessons, convinced teachers and officials alike of the value of the program.
- The process of identifying student learning levels using the standard reading assessment was also important in convincing many stakeholders of the need for the program. There was also appreciation for how this assessment helped establish instruction at the right level and identify the right speed of instruction.
- Finally, several interviewees pointed to the government’s role in implementing the program—from the separate unit created in the state office to oversee the program, to the involvement of government-employed block- and cluster-level officials in implementation—as critical for its success.

Many aspects of the Odu Karnataka program offer lessons for others looking to improve learning at scale. Although Odu Karnataka remained a discrete program supplementing the work of the Karnataka education system, these lessons could be employed effectively in fully integrated system-improvement efforts.

*This brief was authored by Dr. Matthew Jukes.*