

FLN
Special Issue

March 2025 www.thegoodsight.org

The Good Sight



Image Credit: Reach to Teach

45 Days to Literacy by Flipping the Script

Education should be a catalyst for change, not a slow process. In a world where traditional education often takes years to yield results, ALfA is the spark that ignites literacy and numeracy in just 45 days, proving that learning can be both rapid and revolutionary.

The ALfA (Accelerating Learning for All) program by Dignity Education Vision International (DEVI Sansthan) has revolutionized literacy and numeracy education by achieving foundational skills in just 45 days. Despite skepticism by some, ALfA's innovative approach—using cognitive processes like visual recognition and paired learning without differentiation by ability—has shown remarkable results. In India, ALfA has grown exponentially, going from 20 government schools in RCT design in August 2022, to 35,000 with recent sign-ups in the first quarter of 2025.



In an ALfA class, teachers 'galvanize' students but do not teach.

Randomized Control Trials have been completed in 1117 government schools. Internationally, UNICEF-backed implementation in the Maldives and Rapid Results Initiatives in Ghana and Peru have also demonstrated significant literacy

Journey of Growth

Dignity Education Vision International (DEVI Sansthan) began implementing its revolutionary ALfA (Accelerating Learning for All) program in schools in 2022 after eight years of active research. The non-profit was convinced that traditional approaches were failing children worldwide despite decades of investment in traditional methods, and a fundamentally different pedagogical approach was needed.

DEVI Sansthan designed revolutionary learning materials that are highly visual and intuitive, allowing completely illiterate children to recognize 10 letters and read 6 meaningful words in their language on the very first day. The ALfA approach normalizes student-to-student learning through random daily pairing, creating a one-to-one learning environment rather than the traditional one-to-many or group learning model. Since DEVI Sansthan's initial implementation in 2022, the organization refined and expanded the approach, adapting it into 34 languages (15 Indian and 19 international) to ensure its applicability across diverse contexts.

gains, leading to strong support from the governments. In India, two states have signed agreements to embed the ALfA pedagogy at zero costs in state curriculums—the ultimate direction of DEVI's efforts. Backed by a Harvard Graduate School of Education

report showing substantial effect sizes, immediate adoption of ALfA could revolutionize India's literacy progress, allowing the nation to reach India's FLN (NIPUN Bharat) targets sooner than expected, and redefine the country's educational trajectory.

From the initial Randomized Control Trial in Shamli, Uttar Pradesh in the fall of 2022, ALfA has expanded rapidly with MOUs for implementation in 35,000 government schools spanning several states of India.

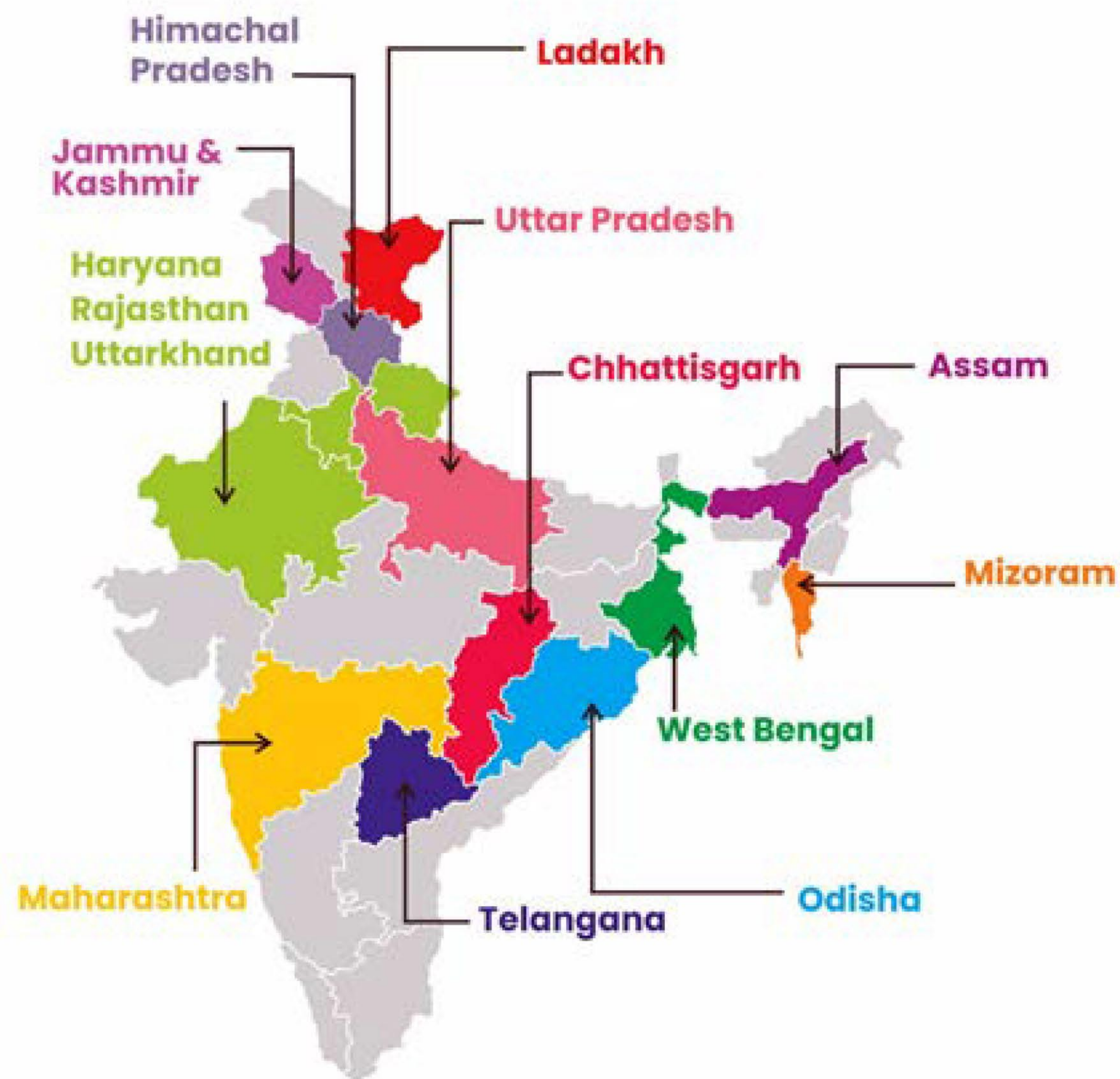
Internationally, DEVI Sansthan has conducted successful implementations in the Maldives through UNICEF support, as well as Rapid Results Initiatives in Ghana and Peru, among others.



Instead of a teacher-child transaction, in ALfA the transaction of learning is from child to child in 1:1 settings. The pairs are changed daily and randomly. Teachers demonstrate the tasks to be carried out by the pairs of children. They read out the prompts provided on each page. These prompts serve as ready-guide for the teacher. This process has opened new windows to teacher and student creativity. Children learn the 21st century skills naturally. Daily random pairing nurtures greater inclusion and equity.



From 20 to 35000 schools in 3 years



The Real Impact

DEVI Sansthan's work has been particularly effective in challenging educational environments. In Shamli, previously one of India's 10 lowest-performing educational districts, ALfA implementation led to 36% of schools reaching NIPUN status in UP government's own NIPUN Assessment Test (NAT) in which UP tested 68,352 schools across its 75 districts. Shamli went up to Rank 18 of 75 districts.

In Unnao, 47% of schools became NIPUN-compliant as per NAT,

compared to Unnao district's average of 15%. These macro-level results, captured by government's own tests after just 30-45 days of implementation, demonstrate ALfA's transformative potential. Learning to read or to understand the basics of operations with ALfA is like learning to ride a bicycle which, in of itself, does not take much time. Once they have acquired these foundational skills, children move to a new trajectory of learning, developing greater confidence, speed and proficiency through time.

When children can read, it is well known, they can learn faster and better. When they develop the number sense and understanding of place values and operations, they grow in their mathematical ability through time. FLN is just a starting point, not the culmination of all learning. Children continue to grow with time, and lifelong, as they engage with new text.

ALfA's disruptive pedagogy has shown that learning these skills can be more natural than the DEVI Sansthan team had thought and that acquiring foundational

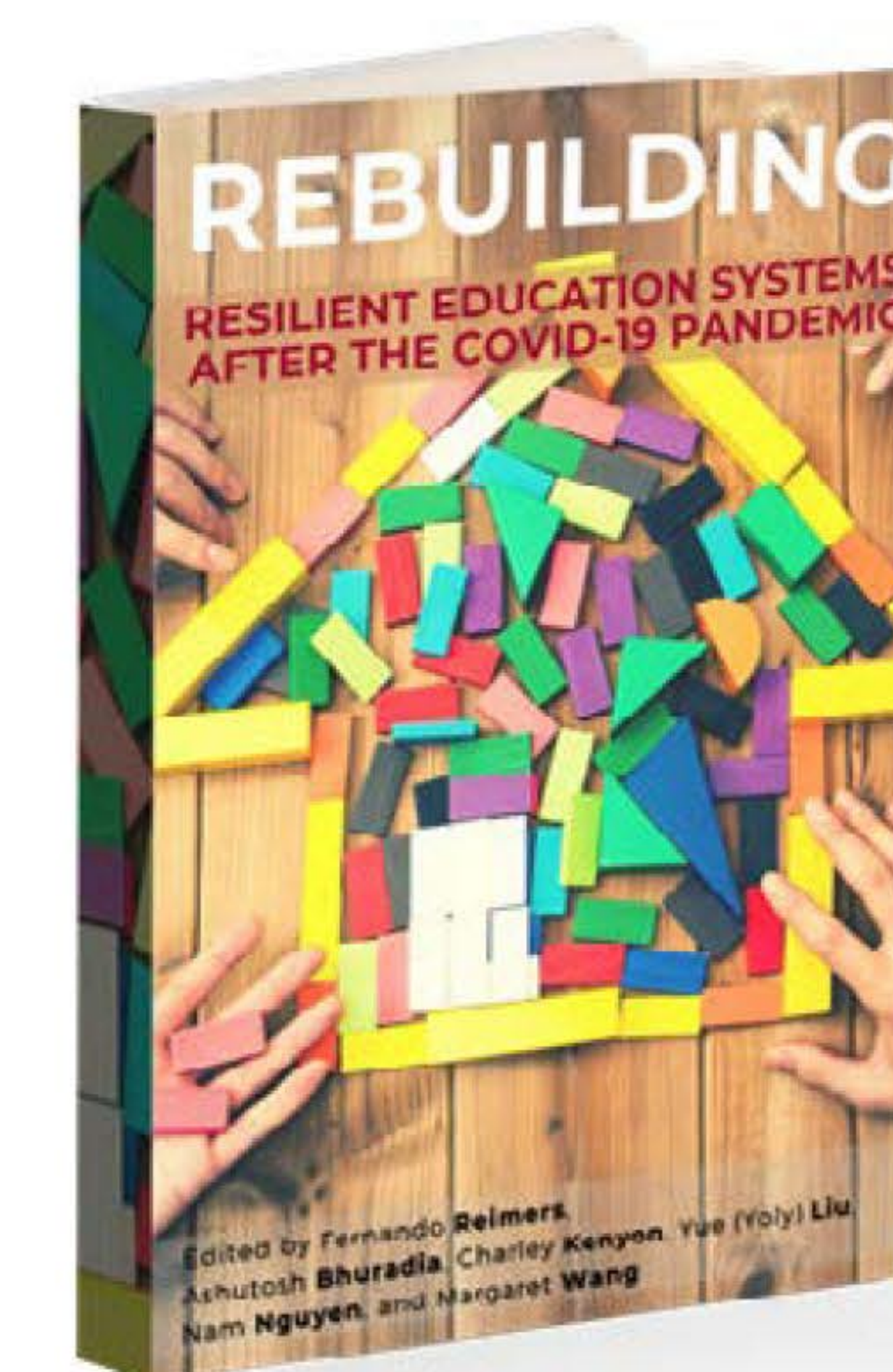
skills need not be a long, arduous, or cumbersome process. Instead, the reverse engineering in ALfA utilizes cognitive powers of the mind to construct new learning on the foundation of these skills, instead of teacher-led, or even child-centric methods, that rely on a mix of approaches. Further, the paired learning approach enhances inclusion and equity as children work with different partners daily, developing broader social skills across socioeconomic boundaries. Beyond academics, higher attendance rates have been reported as children are more engaged in ALfA's interactive learning environment which makes learning child-led.

Proof in Action

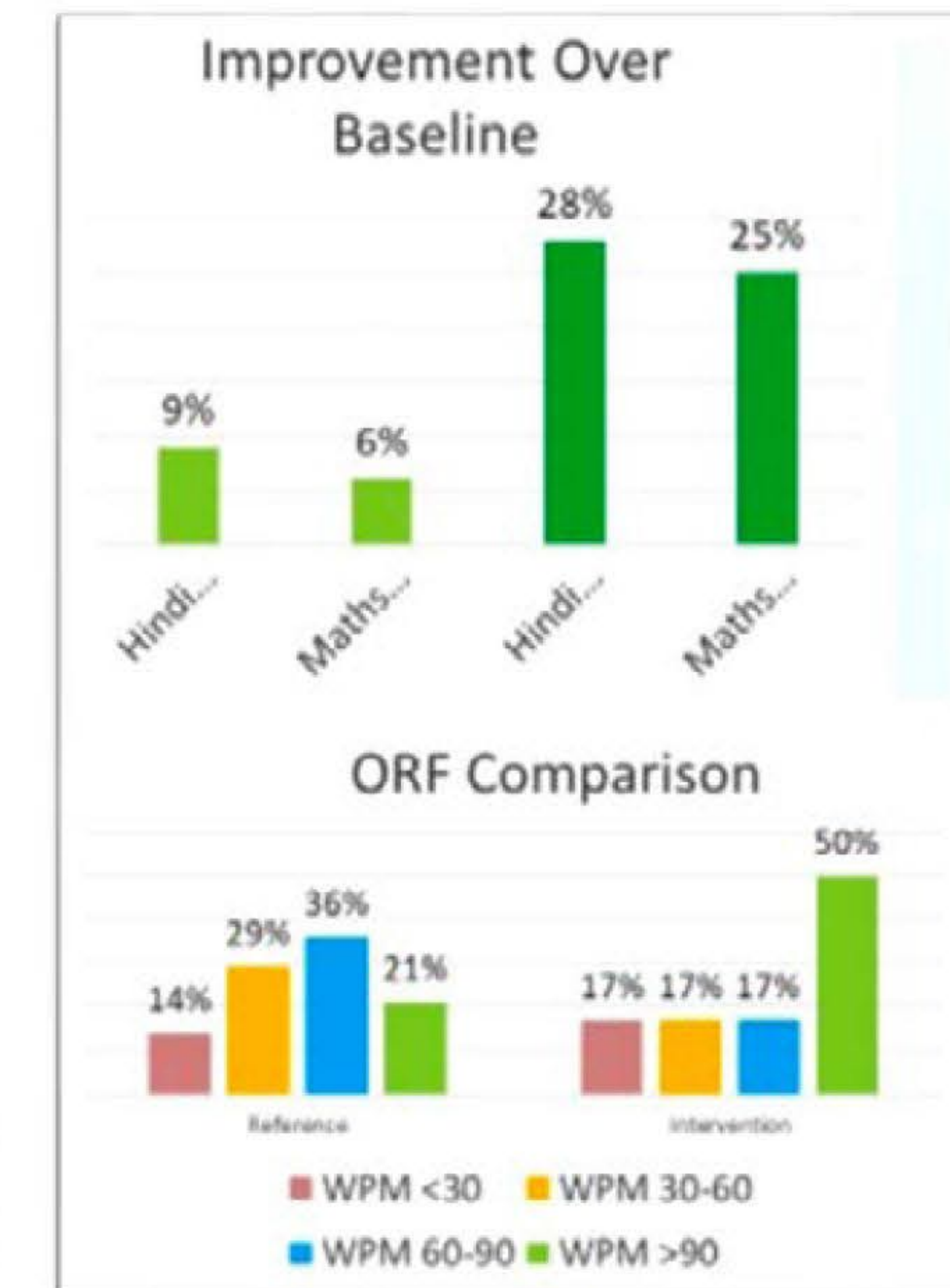
The Harvard Graduate School of Education documented a Randomized Control Trial in the fall of 2022 in Shamli, Uttar

Beyond Anecdotes-Third Party Reviews

The UNICEF Maldives Annual Report (2023) documented significant improvements in reading fluency and comprehension following ALfA implementation. The National Achievement Test (NAT) results from Uttar Pradesh show a direct correlation between ALfA implementation and improved NIPUN compliance rates, with ALfA schools consistently outperforming non-ALfA schools by 2X to 3X in achieving NIPUN status. Independent evaluations from Ghana and Peru



Chapter 8 of this 600-page book by Prof. Fernando Reimers and his team at Harvard GSE shows impact from the very first implementation of ALfA in India's low-performing district of Shamli. When Oral Reading Fluency was measured, 50% (intervention) versus 21% (control) group students could read at 90 words per minute or more. The program in Shamli grew from 20 (10+10) to 290 (210 intervention + 80 control) schools within three months, and led to MOU for four complete districts with 7,000 schools.

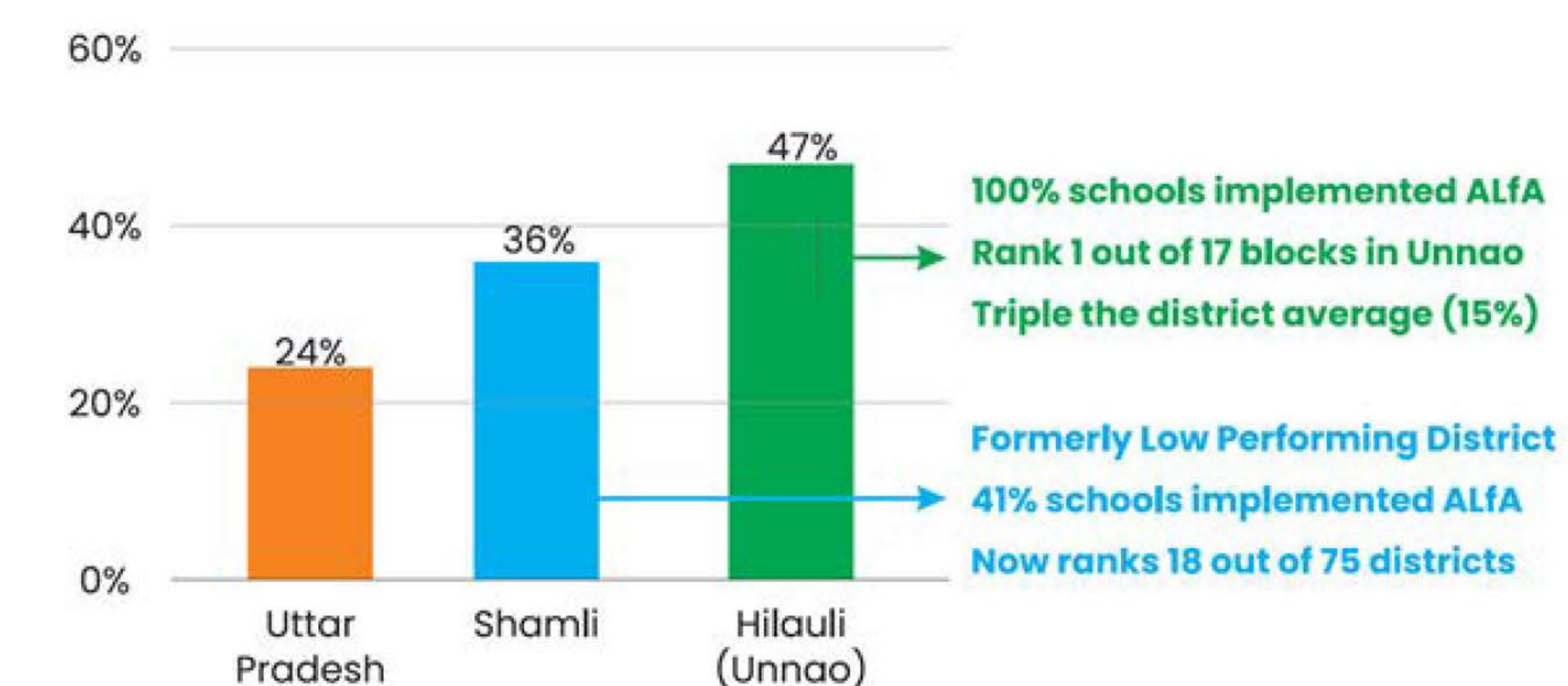


Pradesh, which demonstrated remarkable effect sizes after just 40 days of implementation: 0.23 for Grade 3 and 0.89 for Grade 5. These results were published in their 2023 book "Rebuilding Resilient Education Systems After the COVID-19 Pandemic."

The effect size of 0.89 is particularly significant in educational research, indicating the average student in the treatment group performed better than approximately 81% of students in the control group.

implementations show rapid improvements, with students demonstrating remarkable

progress in letter recognition, word reading, and comprehension skills within 45 days.



Besides international testimonies from HGSE, Maldives (UNICEF), Ghana and Peru, the results from Uttar Pradesh government's own NIPUN Assessment Test (NAT) in which 68,000 schools were tested, showed ALfA schools doubled or tripled the percentage of non-ALfA schools declared NIPUN, that too after swift, short-term interventions alongside textbooks of the government.

Closing the FLN Gap

At current improvement rates, India would likely achieve near-universal foundational literacy and numeracy only between 2045-2050. ALfA's contribution is potentially transformative. By achieving significant improvements in just 45 days, DEVI Sansthan offers the possibility of accelerating this timeline dramatically. If all states and Union Territories were to adopt ALfA immediately, India could achieve the NIPUN Bharat goals before the 2026/27 deadline, a revolutionary acceleration from the current trajectory.

Lessons from the Struggle

DEVI Sansthan faced significant skepticism from educational experts who find it difficult to believe that foundational literacy can be achieved in just 45 days. This resistance to revolutionary ideas mirrors historical patterns where innovations like the telephone or light bulb were initially dismissed. The non-profit overcome this by focusing on evidence, inviting third-party evaluations, and demonstrating results at scale, with Harvard's validation establishing crucial credibility.

DEVI Sansthan’s most successful innovation has been the paired learning methodology, supported by research showing peer learning among the most effective educational strategies. The highly visual, interactive materials enable children to discover concepts independently.



Dr Sunita Gandhi, Founder, DEVI, meeting with Shri Sandeep Singh, Hon. Minister of State for Basic Education, Uttar Pradesh.

One-to-one transactions help children naturally find their "common denominator". Overall learning is far greater than when differentiated learning is practiced.

The non-profit has learned that children are far more capable than education systems acknowledge; they learn better from each other than through teacher-led instruction. The power of cognitive transfer and abstraction—having children identify sounds of familiar pictures as symbols to make words—has been underutilized in

traditional education yet produces remarkable progress.

ALfA seamlessly integrates "4C Skills" (Collaboration, Communication, Critical Thinking, Creativity) and "4C Traits" (Character, Citizenship, Climate consciousness, Connectedness) naturally through paired interactions. This holistic approach develops not just academic skills but also essential social-emotional competencies.

Collaboration and Moving Forward

DEVI Sansthan has launched the

Rapid Results Initiative (RRI) to provide ALfA implementation support worldwide, offering a structured pathway for governments to rapidly adopt and integrate the methodology. The organization’s plan for India is to work with state governments to implement ALfA across their school systems. The approach's low cost and minimal resource requirements make it particularly suitable for scaling in resource-constrained environments. When integrated in the curriculum, it is a zero-cost proposition. (www.dignityeducation.org/rri)



Dr Sunita Gandhi, Founder, DEVI, meeting with Shri Yogi Adityanath, Hon. Chief Minister. He is holding Dr Gandhi's book on ALfA published by Bloomsbury, and Harvard Book which has an entire chapter on ALfA.



Children in Nandurbar, Maharashtra, learn Marathi through ALfA, a method that emphasizes reading for understanding from Day 1. They take turns asking three simple questions about pictures, combining sounds to form meaningful words. This joyful exchange eliminates the need to learn alphabet letters first, thereby saving time.

The ALfA Pedagogical Shift: Why It Works in 45 Days

ALfA doesn't just teach literacy; it unlocks a child's potential to learn anything, anywhere, by flipping the script on traditional education.

ALfA's rapid results come from a fundamental shift in pedagogical approach. Unlike traditional methods that teach letters in isolation followed by combining them into words over months, ALfA introduces children to whole words immediately through visual recognition. This approach aligns with neuroscience research on how the brain processes language. The program leverages cognitive transfer by having children identify familiar pictures, derive their initial sounds, and immediately use these sound-symbols to form words. This

process activates multiple neural pathways simultaneously, creating stronger memory connections than sequential learning.

Random daily pairing creates what researchers call "productive failure" – the brief cognitive challenge of working with a new partner actually enhances learning by requiring adaptation and reinforcement. This practice, supported by Hattie's meta-analyses showing peer teaching with an effect size of 0.82, doubles the engagement time compared to traditional classrooms where

children are passive listeners for much of the day.

The visual materials bypass traditional literacy barriers by allowing comprehension before complete mastery, creating a positive feedback loop of success that maintains motivation. As neurologist Stanislas Dehaene notes, "The brain learns to read by creating connections between visual and language regions," a process ALfA accelerates through its integrated visual-auditory approach.



When children can be empowered with the skill to learn by themselves, learning explodes. When children are paired up, they learn more through interactions. When pairs are random, children learn to appreciate diversity. They learn cooperation and communication. When they make questions for each other, they learn critical thinking and become creative. With Tina and Toto puppets, learning becomes joyful and practice happens as a natural extension of classwork. With a new known-to-unknown process, there is no need to teach letters and letter sounds. This saves a year. Children learn to read real and meaningful words from the first day.

REFERENCES

- Johnson & Johnson. (2022). *Meta-Analysis on Cooperative Learning*.
- Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement*.

EVIDENCE

- 1. Harvard Graduate School of Education | Book Chapters | March 2023 | 68 pp**
Professor Reimers (ed) and his graduate students (authors) review ALfA implementations in Uttar Pradesh (Chapter 8) and the Maldives (Chapter 10).
Rebuilding Resilient Education Systems After the COVID-19 Pandemic.
- 2. Disruptive Literacy | Bloomsbury | Book | July 2022 | 212 pp**
Discover how to mobilise a people's movement for literacy, learning from famous historical examples and building a roadmap for the 21st century.
Disruptive Literacy: A Roadmap for Urgent Global Action
- 3. Accelerating Learning for All | Bloomsbury | Book | Jan 2024 | 188 pp**
Learn in depth about the Accelerating Learning for All pedagogy, with case studies of classroom implementation in India and around the world.
Accelerating Learning for All: A Groundbreaking Pedagogy to Transform Education
- 4. UP Impact Report | Jan 2025 | 56 pp**
Check out the data from ALfA implementations in over 7,500 schools in 4 districts of India's most populous state.
Literate Uttar Pradesh: Sab Padhen, Sapne Bunen
- 5. ALfA Numeracy Impact Report | Feb 2025 | 32 pp**
Explore the ALfA numeracy pedagogy, and understand the data & evidence for its impact through implementations in India and around the world.
ALfA Numeracy: Swift, Scalable, Structured
- 6. Rapid Results Initiative | Jan 2025 | 8 pp**
Understand how to conduct an ALfA research implementation, leading to scale-up and embedding in education systems.
Rapid Results Initiative: Explore, Expand, Embed