The Global Rapid Results Initiative



Strong foundational skills, fast: a one-time, 45-day boost that children use for life, tested in a simple A / B study in your own schools and shared in a South-to-South Exchange

Study. Scale. Sustain. Learn from each other.

DIGNITY EDUCATION VISION INTERNATIONAL
DEVI Sansthan

RRI RAPID RESULTS INITIATIVE
FLN Foundational Literacy & Numeracy
STUDY → SCALE → SUSTAIN

REAL
Research for Equitable Access and Learning

CMS CITY MONTESSORI SCHOOL

PART A



The Proposal

Foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) are improving far too slowly. In the most recent assessments, from 2021 onwards, even the fastest-improving countries in our sample gain fewer than three percentage points a year: Egypt about 2.8 in reading, and Bangladesh about 1.0 in maths. At that pace Egypt would need about 16 more years, and Bangladesh about 50, to bring 90% of children to the minimum level. Most others would need half a century or more, and in several, including India, Peru, South Africa and Pakistan, results are below their pre-COVID levels (Section A1).

Many known interventions are already in place, among them structured pedagogy, teaching at the right level and teacher coaching (**GEEAP, 2023**). This proposal asks governments to try something vastly different: Accelerating Learning for All (ALfA), a pedagogy designed to raise FLN levels quickly, with strong results so far. In India, ALfA has grown from 10 schools four years ago, the intervention arm of a 10 + 10 school randomised trial documented by **Harvard researchers**, to about 30,000 schools implementing it today.

The initiative is led by **Dignity Education Vision International (DEVI Sansthan)**, with partner organisations the **REAL Centre (Research for Equitable Access and Learning), University of Cambridge**, and City Montessori School, Lucknow, the '**worlds largest school**, which hosts the Global Learning Lab convened by the **Global Education & Training Institute (GETI)**.

THE QUESTION THIS PROPOSAL ASKS

Can gains that usually take years be made in weeks?

If the usual pace cannot close the gap for decades, test something dramatically different now (Section A1).

We invite you to join a short, 45-day global **Rapid Results Initiative (RRI)**: Study, Scale, Sustain. Begin with a proof of concept in your own country with just eight schools: an A / B research design in which four schools continue as usual (Arm B, control) and four use ALfA for 45 working days (Arm A, intervention). ALfA is both fast and holistic: children learn in pairs through the day. It works as a supplement, a booster and a catch-up within the existing government system, with one goal: every child literate and numerate, rapidly. Its thin FLN booklets are available in 33 world languages and can be adapted quickly into others.

We invite ministries and departments of education to run this as a research study. Forty-five days are enough to build a proof of concept and your country's own evidence, and to compare results with other countries in a South-to-South Exchange. The next steps are to scale it and then embed it in your own curriculum for long-term sustainability. **Dignity Education Vision International (DEVI Sansthan)** will provide the full know-how.

DONE ONCE, USED FOR LIFE

This is a one-time intervention with returns that last. A child who can read and work with numbers keeps those skills and uses them every day, in every subject, for the rest of her life. That is why foundational learning deserves to be treated as an emergency: close the gap once, early and fast, and every later year of school pays off.

A1. Why treat FLN as an emergency

An estimated 70% of 10-year-olds in low- and middle-income countries cannot read and understand a simple text (**World Bank et al., 2022**). Children who fall behind early tend to fall further behind: early reading advantages compound (**Stanovich, 1986**), and early maths skills strongly predict later achievement (**Duncan et al., 2007**). Learning lost during the pandemic has largely not been recovered (**Betthäuser et al., 2023**).

How long at today's pace? A simple way to see it: if 40% of children reach the minimum level and that share rises by one percentage point a year, it takes 50 years to reach 90%. Even the fastest-improving systems rarely gain more than about three points a year, a pace UNESCO describes as very difficult to achieve (**UIS, 2021**). The tables compare each country's latest result, collected in 2021 or later, with its level before COVID, from best to worst pace.

Reading

Country	Assessment, grade, measure	Before COVID (collected)	Latest (collected)	Points a year	Years to 90%
Egypt	PIRLS, Grade 4, % at or above Low benchmark	31% (spring 2016)	45% (April 2021)	+2.8	16
Brazil*	National literacy indicator, Grade 2, % literate	55% (Saeb 2019)	66% (state tests 2025)	+1.8	13
Morocco	PIRLS, Grade 4, % at or above Low benchmark	36% (spring 2016)	41% (Oct 2021, start of Grade 5)	+1.0	49
Uganda	NAPE, Primary 3, % proficient in English literacy	49.9% (2018)	53.9% (Aug 2023)	+0.8	45

Country	Assessment, grade, measure	Before COVID (collected)	Latest (collected)	Points a year	Years to 90%
Bangladesh	National Student Assessment, Grade 3, % at grade level (Bangla)	47% (2017)	51% (Dec 2022)	+0.8	49
Peru	ENLA, Grade 4 census, % satisfactory	34.5% (Nov 2019)	32.8% (Nov 2024)	Falling	
South Africa	PIRLS, Grade 4, % at or above Low benchmark	22% (late 2015)	19% (Aug –Nov 2021)	Falling	
India	NAS / PARAKH, Grade 3, average % correct (language)	68% (NAS, Nov 2017)	64% (PARAKH, Dec 2024)	Falling	
Pakistan	ASER rural, Grade 5, reads an Urdu story	59% (2019)	50% (2023)	Falling	

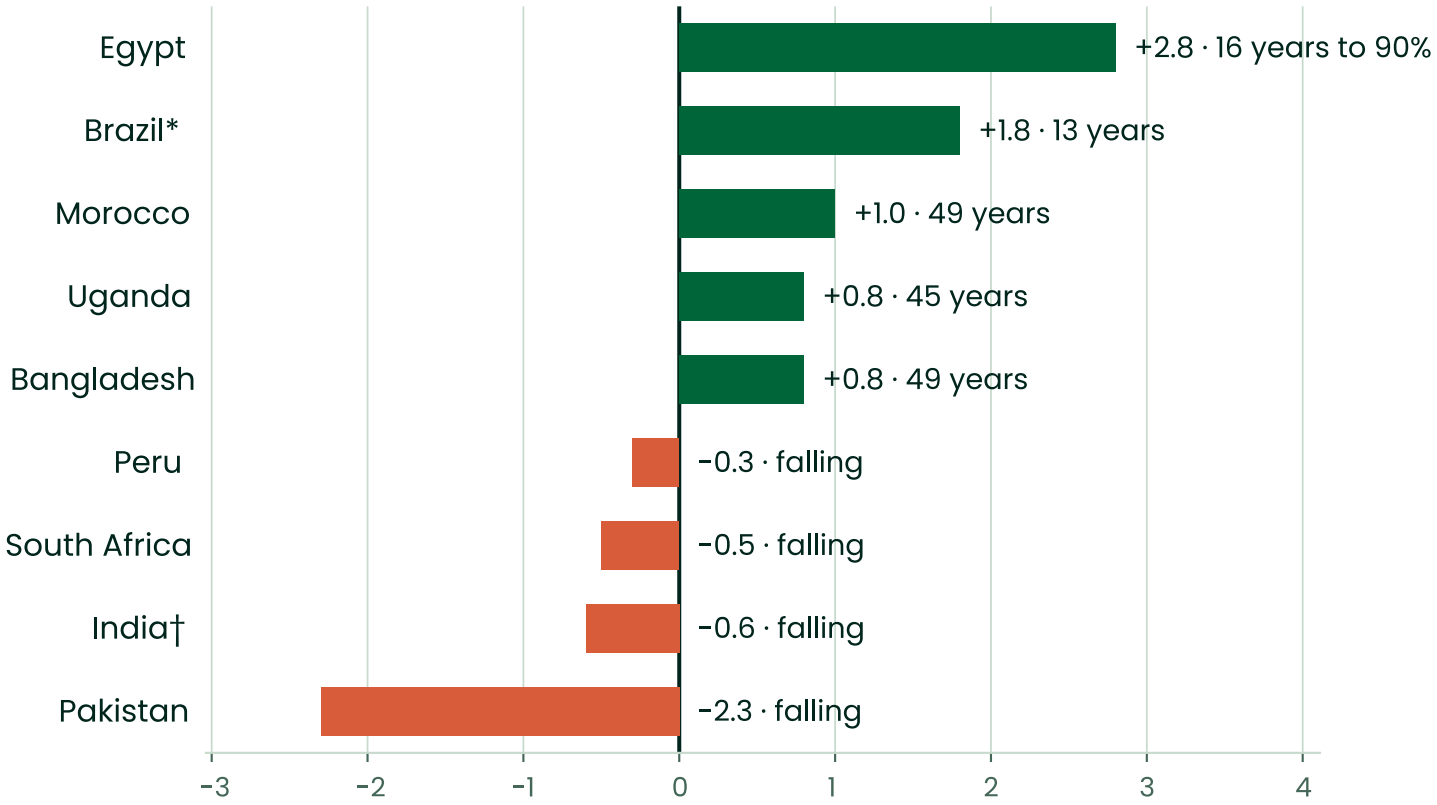
Mathematics

Country	Assessment, grade, measure	Before COVID (collected)	Latest (collected)	Points a year	Years to 90%
Bangladesh	National Student Assessment, Grade 3, % at grade level	34% (2017)	39% (Dec 2022)	+1.0	51
Morocco	TIMSS, Grade 4, % at or above Low benchmark	43% (spring 2019)	46% (spring 2023)	+0.8	59
Uganda	NAPE, Primary 3, % proficient in numeracy	55.2% (2018)	57.5% (Aug 2023)	+0.5	71
South Africa	TIMSS, Grade 5, % at or above Low benchmark	37% (2019 cycle)	35%(Aug–Nov 2023)	Falling	
India	NAS / PARAKH, Grade 3, average % correct (maths)	64% (NAS, Nov 2017)	60% (PARAKH, Dec 2024)	Falling	
Peru	ENLA, Grade 4 census, % satisfactory	34.0% (Nov 2019)	29.5% (Nov 2024)	Falling	
Pakistan	ASER rural, Grade 5, two-digit division	57% (2019)	46% (2023)	Falling	

Pace is the average change per year between the two collections shown; years to 90% assume that pace continues, and a dash means the share is not rising. Tests, grades and thresholds differ, so compare pace rather than levels across rows. * Brazil: the 2025 figure comes from state assessments; on the national Saeb test alone, the share fell from 55% (2019) to 49% (2023). † India: national averages from NAS 2017 (government and aided schools only) and PARAKH Rashtriya Sarvekshan 2024 (all school types); the instruments are not formally equated. Peru's 2019 values are derived from the Ministry of Education's reported changes. Uganda's changes are not statistically significant. Results for 14 Francophone African countries from PASEC 2024, with a trend against 2019, are due to be launched on 22–23 October 2026.
Sources: **PIRLS 2016**, **PIRLS 2021**, **TIMSS 2019**, **TIMSS 2023**, **Brazil**, **Uganda NAPE 2023**, **Bangladesh NSA 2022**, **Peru ENLA 2024**, **PARAKH 2024**, **NAS 2017**, **ASER Pakistan 2023**.

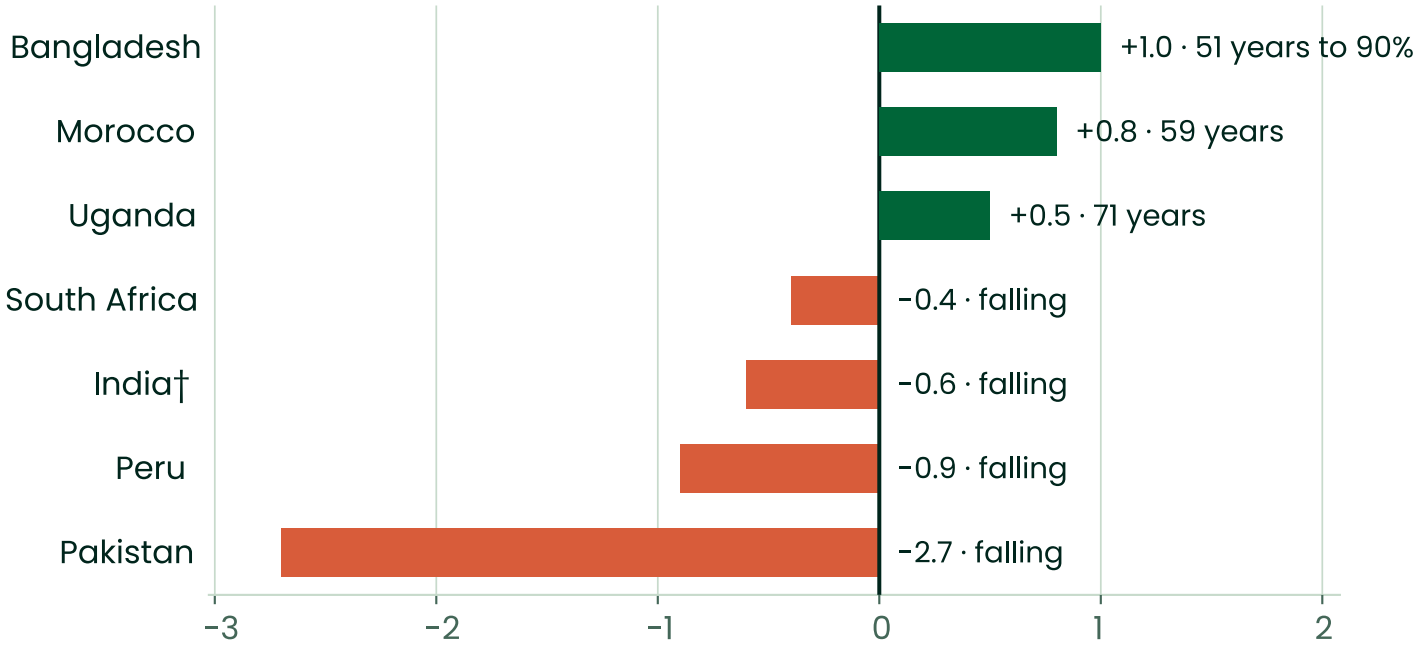
What the charts show. In reading, only Egypt gains more than two points a year, and four of the nine countries are below their pre-COVID level. In mathematics, no country in the sample gains more than one point a year, and four of the seven are falling. At these speeds, universal foundational skills are generations away.

READING: BEST TO WORST PACE



Change per year, percentage points (latest result vs before COVID)

MATHS: BEST TO WORST PACE



Countries are investing heavily. Ghana's Accountability for Learning Outcomes Project (GALOP), approved in 2019, brought more than $200 million of World Bank and partner financing (**World Bank, 2023**), with a further $117 million added in 2025 (**Citi Newsroom, 2025**). India allocated more than ₹6,000 crore to its NIPUN Bharat mission over three years from 2021–22 (**Central Square Foundation, 2024**). Nigeria's HOPE-EDU, approved in 2025, adds about $550 million, including support for foundational learning (**World Bank, 2025**).

Spending is not the same as learning. The World Bank's World Development Report found that the relationship between public spending on education and learning outcomes is weak, and that shortages of inputs explain only a small part of the learning crisis (**Filmer and Rogers, 2018**). Spending on inputs without changes in teaching is rated a "bad buy" (**GEEAP, 2023**). Enormous expenditure is not, by itself, producing higher returns in FLN learning gains: rural India's Grade 3 reading level was about the same in 2024 as in 2018 (**ASER, 2025**), despite major new investment.

Policy is in place. Pedagogy is hardly debated. Foundational learning is now a top priority almost everywhere. Dozens of governments have endorsed the global **Commitment to Action on Foundational Learning**, and many have made FLN a national mission, from India's NIPUN Bharat to Brazil's National Commitment to Literate Children and Nigeria's HOPE-EDU. Yet the question of pedagogy, what actually happens between teacher and learners, and between learners themselves, is hardly debated.

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Much reform changes what surrounds the classroom: materials, training, monitoring and data. These are often incremental changes, when the need is a paradigm shift: gains ten times faster and better than existing approaches. That means looking at what happens where learning is actually transacted, between learners, minute by minute. This is where ALfA has found a new way forward (Section A2).

THE CASE FOR TESTING SOMETHING FASTER

If progress at the usual pace cannot close the gap for decades, approaches that are dramatically different deserve to be tested now.

The RRI asks one simple question: can gains that usually take years be made in weeks, within your own system?

A2. What ALfA is, and what the evidence says

ALfA is a supplement, not a new curriculum. It differs from existing approaches at three levels:

1. Random pairs. Children work one-to-one in pairs chosen at random each day, rather than in groups of any other size or in groups sorted by level. Pairing unequal partners is a deliberate design feature: it is meant to build equity and inclusion, and to improve learning and build 21st-century skills such as communication and collaboration at the same time.
2. Mini pair routines. Simple routines of three or four steps that teachers and children grasp quickly. They multiply student-to-student learning and give children the agency to learn by themselves. The same few routines create countless learning opportunities, which keeps the system intuitive and sustainable.

   A new scaffold. Every skill moves from the known to the unknown: from a familiar picture to a sound to a new word, from the body to objects to symbols (Section B2). This scaffold makes all the difference.

In the classroom

The teacher spends about three minutes demonstrating a mini pair routine with a buddy, a child chosen at random from the class: they take turns to ask and to answer. Then the teacher steps back. The class, already sitting in random pairs, uses the same routine, taking turns, so that each child is both teacher and learner in every routine. This is the Model, Apply, Transfer (MAT) process; Section B2 explains it through the simple image of learning to ride a bicycle.

From facilitator to Galvanizer

A facilitator guides and leads each activity, so most exchanges still pass through the teacher. A Galvanizer sets the whole class in motion with a short model, then steps back, so that every pair runs its own learning, while the teacher observes, diagnoses, steps in only where needed and stretches those who are ready. Teachers become Galvanizers.

The evidence so far

- **A Harvard-documented RCT in Shamli**, India, found effects of 0.23 SD in Grade 3 and 0.89 SD in Grade 5 after 40 days.
- An independent synthesis of data from all sites, by the **Busara Center for Behavioral Economics**, Nairobi, Kenya (**2026**), judged literacy effects of 0.23 to 0.90 SD defensible, found numeracy positive but more variable, and identified implementation fidelity as the main moderator.
- In Uttar Pradesh's own government test data, Grade 3 results in the four ALfA-supported districts rose by 13 percentage points in language and 14 in maths

between NAS 2021 and PARAKH 2024, more than any other NGO-supported cluster (+8/+9 and +6/+7), the state (+10/+10) and India (+2/+3) (**ALIGN-FLN, 2025**).

- Many more results, from district and state rollouts across India and from Ghana, the Maldives and Peru, are summarised in Section B10. A study in your own schools adds your own evidence to them.

A3. The design: simple A / B testing

RRI STUDY: SIMPLE A / B TESTING IN 8 SCHOOLS

ARM A 4 SCHOOLS	ARM B · 4 SCHOOLS
ALfA	**CURRENT PRACTICE**
45 working days: one hour of literacy and one of numeracy every day.	Business as usual. No disruption. Shows what would have happened anyway.
What changes with ALfA?	**What would have changed anyway?**

Same tests, same children sampled, same 45-day window. Schools drawn at random.

1. **Agreement**
   The government and DEVI Sansthan sign an MoU. A senior official issues a letter introducing the RRI to schools and setting expectations for teachers and principals.
2. **Random selection**
   From a list of government primary schools in one area, ideally near the district headquarters, eight are drawn at random.
3. **Random allocation**
   Four are drawn at random to use ALfA (Arm A); four continue as usual (Arm B).
4. **Baseline**
   A random sample of about 30% of children in the study grades is tested in all eight schools.
5. **Training and materials**
   Arm A teachers attend two three-hour online sessions, one for literacy and one for numeracy, and a refresher after two weeks. Children receive thin booklets, one shared by two children.
6. **Implementation**
   One period of literacy and one of numeracy every day for 45 working days. Teachers meet weekly in a GROW Circle. Pair learning continues after the 45 days.

7. **Supervision**
   District and block education officers and other middle-level leaders visit regularly, using the ALfA classroom checklist as provided.
8. **Endline and report**
   The same test items are used again in all eight schools. DEVI Sansthan and the government analyse the results together, comparing the change in Arm A with the change in Arm B.
9. **Decision**
   The government decides the next steps: scale and sustain.

Optional Arm C.
A country that wants to see how an alternative approach performs over the same period can add a third arm: four more schools using that approach for the same 45 working days, with the same daily time, one period for literacy and one for numeracy, and the same tests. The comparison then becomes head-to-head.

Why A / B, and why eight schools?
A / B is the simplest fair comparison: Arm B shows what would have happened anyway. Eight schools are enough for a clear first picture in your own context, at low cost and with little disruption to the system. Where a government wants extra rigour, the assessors need not know which schools are A or B (trained college students can do this), and the analysis can be **registered in advance**. Because pair learning continues after the 45 days, testing again at 90 and 180 days shows whether gains last.

A4. The South-to-South Exchange and the Global Learning Lab

Several countries run the same A / B design in the same window, with the same instruments, so results can be compared and pooled rather than read as single-site stories. Ministries meet at the **Global Learning Lab**, Lucknow, 8 to 10 February 2027, to visit classrooms in Lucknow, where all 1,400+ government schools in the district follow ALfA, and where ALfA is also practised at City Montessori School, the '**worlds largest school**, by 22,000 pre-primary to Grade 2 students. In a single day you can walk into both government and private classrooms. Studies completed before February 2027 can be presented there; others go back empowered to undertake their own. The step-by-step playbook is the **RRI South-to-South Exchange**; a short **RRI brochure** is also available.

An invitation to the Lab
The Lab's theme is FLN: Policy is in Place. Now, Pedagogy. At heart it is a South-to-South Exchange, and the place where the RRI is launched worldwide. Government

policymakers, researchers and international bodies are invited to see a living laboratory: a new and very different approach to FLN, running at scale in one city. It is also an all-round opportunity to learn about other approaches to FLN, not only ALfA, which is why we are bringing everyone together in one global learning experience. Professor Eric A. Hanushek of Stanford University has consented to be our Distinguished Presenter. The Lab is convened by **GETI**, with Dignity Education Vision International (DEVI Sansthan) as partner and City Montessori School as host. See the **programme** and the **Lab brochure**.

Present your own work

We look forward to everyone's participation. To present a paper, write to us or propose a session through the **call for sessions**.

Hospitality

For invited participants, we cover all costs within Lucknow, including accommodation and meals.

STAY ON FOR THE TAJ MAHAL

Stay two more days after the Lab and travel with us to Agra, about three hours from Lucknow by road, to visit the Taj Mahal, one of the New Seven Wonders of the World. It is a breathtaking masterpiece of shifting marble light that must be experienced firsthand to truly feel the profound poetry of eternal love carved into its stones.

REGISTER FREE

Register at globallearninglab.events/register. The same form lets your government tell us that it would like to run an RRI.

A5. After the study: Scale and Sustain

STUDY → SCALE → SUSTAIN

STUDY	SCALE	SUSTAIN
4 + 4 schools for 45 working days. Is there a clear signal?	Hundreds of schools across a district or state. Does the effect hold?	Materials, routines and training built into the system. Does it last?

Each stage ends with a government decision. Evidence comes before scale.

If the study shows a clear signal, the government can expand to hundreds of schools, ideally with a properly powered design, and then build the materials, routines and training into its own curriculum and system. Sustaining it means that every new cohort receives the same one-time boost in the early grades, so that the system stops producing children who reach upper grades unable to read. Governments may move from Study to Scale, or straight to Sustain, when the evidence is clear.

A6. Cost

Training, soft-copy materials, assessments, apps and up to 500 student toolkits are free. The government or its partner meets the cost of shipping and distributing printed toolkits, inexpensive concrete materials, monitoring, and third-party assessment (for example, by a local university or trained college students), plus staff involvement in implementation and monitoring. At scale in India, ALfA costs $4 per child for literacy and numeracy. The outcome evidence so far comes from closely supported delivery at scale, the model an RRI study uses, at $1.91 to $3.75 per child across districts (**Busara, 2026**). Because the boost is given once, its cost is paid once per child, while the skills are used for life.

A7. How to join

Register on the **Global Learning Lab form** and indicate your interest in the RRI, or write to **sunitag@dignityeducation.org** with the name of the district or region, a contact officer and a preferred start date. You can also use the **partner form**. We will send a draft MoU, the letter template and the playbook. WhatsApp or call +91 94 150 150 31.

> **THE OFFER IN ONE LINE**
>
> Eight schools, 45 working days, free materials and training, a fair comparison, a decision based on your own evidence, shared with other countries facing the same challenge, and, if it works, a one-time boost that children use for life.

A8. The proposal in tables

At a glance

What	Test ALfA (Accelerating Learning for All), a paired-learning approach to foundational literacy and numeracy, against current practice.
Design	Simple A / B testing. Four schools use ALfA (Arm A); four continue as usual (Arm B). Schools are drawn at random. An optional Arm C tests another approach under the same conditions.

Duration	45 working days, one period of literacy and one of numeracy every day. An intensive 30-day, full-day model is also possible.
Measurement	Baseline and endline in all schools, on a random sample of about 30% of children, using the same test items; repeat tests at 90 and 180 days.
Cost to government	Staff involvement, distribution of printed materials, inexpensive concrete materials, monitoring and third-party assessment. Training, materials, assessments and apps are free.
Exchange	Countries run the same design in the same window and compare results at the **Global Learning Lab**, Lucknow, 8 to 10 February 2027, and in the online South-to-South Exchange Hub.
Decision	At the end, the government decides the next steps: scale and sustain.

Who does what

DEVI Sansthan provides, free	The government, or its partner, provides
• Online training in English or Hindi, or training of a master trainer who trains locally in the local language • Soft copies of all materials: teacher guides, student booklets, assessments and apps • Printed thin ALfA booklets for language and mathematics, enough for up to 500 children • A standard literacy and numeracy assessment, with help to translate it • A supervisory app • Classroom videos, an online refresher and a learning app Joint analysis and a full report	• An MoU between the government and Dignity Education Vision International (draft provided by DEVI Sansthan, if needed) • Random selection of schools, permissions, and orders to attend training and implement ALfA in the 4 schools • Supervision visits by district and block education officers • Third-party assessment at baseline and 45, 90 and 180 days later (college students can be trained) • Shipping and distribution of printed toolkits (this can be done through the diplomatic pouch, via the country's Embassy in India)

DEVI Sansthan provides, free	The government, or its partner, provides
	• Procurement of inexpensive concrete materials (matchsticks or equivalent small sticks, ice-cream sticks, rubber bands, cheap wooden spoons), in quantities DEVI Sansthan provides • A designated officer for coordination with Dignity Education Vision International (DEVI Sansthan) • Sharing results in district or national reviews and community events, and in the South-to-South Exchange

Timeline

Step	When
MoU and official letter	Weeks 1 to 2
School selection and baseline	Weeks 2 to 3
Training	Two three-hour online sessions before the start
Implementation	A clear 45 working days, about 10 to 12 weeks or one term, with ALfA every day
Endline, analysis and report	Within 2 to 3 weeks after the last day
Exchange	Global Learning Lab, Lucknow, 8 to 10 February 2027, and the online South-to-South Exchange Hub

Study, Scale, Sustain

Stage	What happens	Decision question
STUDY	A / B testing in 8 government schools for 45 working days.	Are children reading and calculating better than in the comparison schools?

Stage	What happens	Decision question
SCALE	Expansion to hundreds of schools across a district, region or country, ideally with a properly powered design. Training moves online.	Do effects, equity and cost hold under wider government conditions?
SUSTAIN	Materials, routines and training built into the curriculum and system; outside support steps back.	Does it become normal government practice without losing what made it work?

PART B



Concept note

Part B sets out the thinking behind the RRI: what ALfA is and why it is designed as it is, how it reaches classrooms, the research questions a study can answer, what is known so far, and the policy choices that follow. It is written for officials, researchers and partners who want to go deeper.

B1. Why turn the question around

Foundational learning is an emergency (Section A1), and ALfA is a dramatically different response (Section A2). It empowers children to learn by themselves, facing each other in random one-to-one pairs and using simple mini pair routines that give them the agency to learn with each other; the teacher is empowered differently, to galvanize the class into action rather than to lead it. This process changes the minute-to-minute dynamics of the classroom: who talks, who practises, who corrects. So the first questions are about time. How long does it take children to read and calculate? How is each minute of class used?

Large-scale assessments mostly measure literacy and numeracy. Yet the **OECD Learning** Compass 2030 frames education around well-being, agency, knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, and UNESCO's work on **sustainable development** and **global citizenship** goes further still. Most studies of foundational learning still stop at a test score.

We ask four implementation questions. What if fidelity became pull? What if time-on-task became learning density? What if average impact became last-child impact? What if engagement became agency? And one more: what if "Did they learn?" became "What else did the way they learned build?"

We usually ask	Turn it around	The harder question
Did test scores rise?	Did children grow?	Did confidence, agency, motivation, resilience and relationships also change?
How long did it take?	How fast, given the emergency?	How many days or periods until children read and calculate at a set threshold?
How was class time spent?	Did every minute count?	How much of each period was active learning for every child? Did the learning carry home?
Were children taught everything?	Did they learn how to learn?	Did routines give children the agency to learn by themselves, faster and with more joy?

We usually ask	Turn it around	The harder question
Did children learn?	Did they enjoy it?	Was the process joyful? Did it support the well-being of children and teachers?
What was the average gain?	Who gained?	Did the weakest learners gain most, or least?
Were children engaged?	Did they belong?	Did they feel safe to try, be wrong and ask for help? Did they come to school more?
Did pair work happen?	Was it two-way?	Were both children truly learner and teacher, or did one dominate?
Were children grouped by level?	Were they labelled?	Did any child come to believe they are less capable because they learn differently?
Did children sit together?	Did they mix?	Did daily rotation create real contact across ability, gender, language, disability or social group?
Were values taught?	Were values practised?	Did fairness, empathy, responsibility and care for the planet show up as behaviour?
Did teachers comply?	Do they choose it?	Does the practice continue, and do teachers ask for it, when outside support is withdrawn?
What did it cost?	What did it buy?	How much learning, and how much well-being, per dollar spent?
How was home time spent?	Did learning stretch home?	Can learning stretch home on its own? Can children teach parents and siblings, because they learned how to learn and not just what to learn?

MEASURE THE SOCIAL CURRICULUM

Classrooms teach social lessons as well as academic ones. In Delhi, mixing richer and poorer children in the same classes made children more generous and less likely to discriminate (**Rao, 2019**). What does a paired, rotating classroom do to status, voice and belonging, compared with a teacher-fronted one?

B2. The design to be tested

ALfA is similar to explicit, systematic instruction (**GEEAP, 2025**; **Rosenshine, 2012**): skills are modelled, sequenced and practised. It differs in the details. Practice happens in reciprocal pairs rather than mainly with the teacher. Lessons move from the known to the unknown and from the concrete to the abstract, an approach recommended in mathematics guidance (**EEF, maths**). And short routines hand children the process, so that they can learn by themselves. The teacher becomes the Galvanizer (Section A2), rather than carrying every exchange from the front.

The MAT process



SPARK · MODEL

The teacher and a buddy, a child chosen at random, demonstrate a mini pair routine for about three minutes.



STEP BACK · APPLY

The teacher steps back. Every pair uses the same routine, taking turns to ask and to answer.



SOAR · TRANSFER

The same routine carries pairs on to new words, numbers and problems.

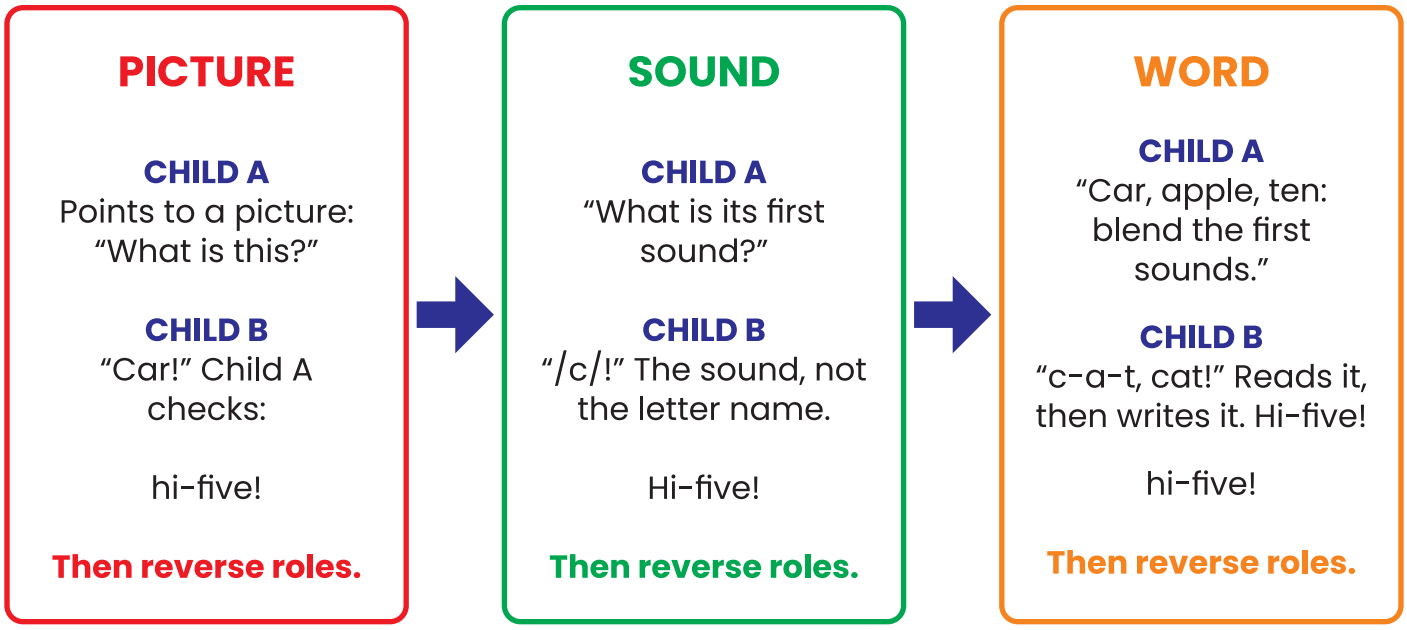
Like learning to ride a bicycle. Someone shows a child how to ride, once, holding the seat (Model). Then they step back and let go, and the child rides, wobbly at first, getting steadier with every try (Apply). Soon the child rides on roads she has never seen (Transfer). In the classroom, these are the three-minute demonstration with a buddy, the step back, and the pairs at work described in Section A2.

MAT is a process, not a repeat-after-me script. It relies on Vygotsky's zone of proximal development: with a model and a partner, a child can do what they cannot yet do alone (**Vygotsky, 1978**; **Wood et al., 1976**). It also relies on transfer, so that children do not need to be taught everything: success depends on using the skill on examples they have not seen before, not on imitation (**Barnett and Ceci, 2002**). In reading, once children can decode, every new word becomes a chance to teach themselves (**Share, 1995**). Like the science of reading, ALfA is explicit and systematic; it differs in several details, for example in unleashing a pair process of learning and in pairing children at random. Does the pair process stretch what each child can do? Does transfer happen without every step being taught?

Mini-routines and thin booklets

Each skill is practised through a short routine of three or four steps, easy for teachers & children to remember, that carries pairs through the pages of a very thin booklet. The same few routines create countless learning opportunities, which keeps the system intuitive for teachers and sustainable for schools. Limiting what must be held in mind is a core principle of cognitive load theory (**Sweller et al., 2019**), and teaching children to plan, monitor & check their own learning has strong effects (**EEF, metacognition**). Do short routines make the method easier to learn & more faithfully used? Do they let children learn by themselves, in less time & with more joy? Does the learning carry home?

Literacy in pairs: Picture → Sound → Word



Tomorrow, a new partner.

Reading starts with a child naming a familiar picture (the known), saying its first sound (a cognitive activity, not rote), and blending the first sounds of two or three pictures into a new word (another cognitive activity, not rote): car, apple and ten give c-a-t, cat, a meaningful word. The child derives new words from language she already speaks, attending to the sounds that pictures and words make rather than to letter names, then reads and writes the new word. In alpha-syllabic scripts such as Hindi, children build words from aksharas, and vowel signs (matras) are introduced as familiar letters in a new form.

Research supports phonemic awareness, systematic phonics, and picture-based letter–sound learning (**NRP, 2000**; **Ehri, 2014**). ALfA builds on these principles through child-led sound discovery and pair practice. The table shows alignment with six core reading skills, not proven outcomes.

Core reading skill (GEEAP, 2025)	How ALfA is designed to address it
Oral language	Random paired talk, explanation and questioning give every child sustained speaking and listening practice.
Phonological awareness	Picture-to-sound activities build awareness of the sounds within words.
Systematic phonics	Explicit, sequenced picture–sound–word instruction, from known to unknown, simple to complex.
Reading fluency	High-volume paired reading and repeated practice build accuracy and speed.
Reading comprehension	Children question, explain and discuss with a partner, making meaning rather than only decoding.
Writing	Children write the words they derive, reinforcing letter formation and spelling.

Does deriving sounds from known pictures speed up decoding, compared with letter-first phonics? Does it work equally well in alphabetic and alpha-syllabic scripts?

Numeracy in pairs: Kinesthetic → Concrete →Abstract

KINESTHETIC

CHILD A
Shows 134: one shoulder tap, three claps, four snaps.

CHILD B
Guesses: "134!" Child A says "Good job!" Hi-five!

Then reverse roles.

CONCRETE

CHILD A
Builds 134 under a number strip: 1 bundle of ice-cream sticks, 3 ice-cream sticks, 4 matchsticks.

CHILD B
Checks it and gives Child A a hi-five.

Then reverse roles.

ABSTRACT

CHILD A
Writes 134 in a notebook or on a digital slate.

CHILD B
Checks it and gives Child A a hi-five.

Then reverse roles.

Body: shoulder tap = 100, clap = 10, snap = 1.
Objects: bundle of ten ice-cream sticks = 100, ice-cream stick = 10, matchstick = 1.
Tomorrow, a new partner.

Number work moves from the body, to objects, to symbols. A snap is one, a clap is ten and a shoulder tap is a hundred, and a further action stands for thousands, so place value is felt before it is written. One simple routine runs through all three stages: I make a number, my partner tells me what it is or checks it, we give each other a hi-five, and we reverse roles. With hundreds, tens and ones, pairs can make any number up to 999, and with thousands up to 9,999, without the routine ever changing. That makes it easy for a teacher to run in a whole class.

Partners give each other numbers, rather than waiting for the teacher to ask every question, and that changes the classroom. Children are empowered to make numbers by themselves and with each other, and can spend long stretches doing so. They then build the same numbers at home with objects such as potatoes, beans, sticks, leaves or spoons, assigning each a place value, write them in digits, and make up questions for their partner to solve the next day. The learning stretches home, to younger and older siblings, parents and grandparents, so joyful practice continues outside school and time on task rises far beyond what teacher-led questioning allows.

Mathematics guidance recommends manipulatives and representations as a bridge to abstract ideas (**EEF, maths**), and early number skills strongly predict later achievement (**Duncan et al., 2007**). Busara's synthesis finds ALfA's numeracy results positive but more variable than literacy, and treats numeracy as a separate pedagogical challenge (**Busara, 2026**).

FROM THE RESEARCH

In Germany, first-graders who trained on a number line by walking along it improved more than a control group doing the same training without whole-body movement, and some gains carried over to skills that were not trained (**Link et al., 2013**).

Does learning place value through the body first build number sense faster? Why are numeracy results more variable than literacy, and what would close the gap?

THE PAIRING PROCESS

PAIR
A new one-to-one partner every day, across abilities and backgrounds.

→

SWAP
Both children teach and learn. A asks, explains and checks; B responds and explains. Then they swap.

→

ROTATE
Tomorrow, new partners. Over time, every child learns with many classmates.

Same moment: each child learns and teaches. **Over time**: no fixed partner or label.

Each child asks and answers, explains and listens, checks and is checked. Tomorrow the partner changes. Peer tutoring benefits both tutors and tutees in many studies (**EEF, peer tutoring**); ALfA tests a specific form of it: same-age or mixed-age, reciprocal and rotating daily. We ask researchers to treat pairing as a named construct in its own right, alongside MAT.

This is where the design differs most on equity. Grouping by level separates children; ALfA keeps them together and changes partners daily, so on any day a child may work with someone at their level, someone ahead or someone still catching up. A common concern about cross-ability tutoring is that the stronger partner gains less; reviews find benefits for both tutors and tutees, though the size varies (**Topping, 2005**). In ALfA every child plays both roles. Do children at the top, in the middle and at the bottom all gain? Studies can show how each group benefits.

How does it feel from the child's side? Classwide peer tutoring improved on-task behaviour and accuracy for children with ADHD in an early study (**DuPaul et al., 1998**). Do children with attention difficulties settle more in a short, active, one-to-one routine? Do quieter children find their voice with one partner rather than the whole class? Do children who are still catching up feel included rather than singled out?

THE BIG QUESTION

What if the strongest equity intervention is not a separate inclusion programme, but an everyday rule that no child is permanently the helper or the helped, the "strong one" or the "weak one"?

Growing up without ability labels

Ability groups, seating by rank and public comparison can teach children who is "clever" and who is "slow". The **Education Endowment Foundation** finds that setting and streaming tend to harm lower-attaining pupils, and that those in lower groups often lose confidence that effort can improve their attainment.

ALfA has no fixed groups and no permanent helpers. Every child teaches and every child is taught, every day, with a different partner. Its design premise is that no child should grow up believing they are less capable because they learn differently, or at a different pace. Beliefs about ability can be shaped (**Yeager et al., 2019**), and persistence can be measured, though grit's predictive power is debated (**Duckworth et al., 2007**; **Credé et al., 2017**).

FROM THE RESEARCH

A short online growth-mindset programme, tested in a national experiment in the United States, improved grades among lower-achieving students (**Yeager et al., 2019**). Beliefs about ability can change, and the change can show up in results.

Does a label-free classroom protect children's beliefs about their own ability? Does the confidence gap between high and low attainers narrow? Do children come to see ability as something that grows, bounce back from mistakes and keep going when work gets hard?

Ground Zero and stretchability

Classes are rarely at one level. In Delhi, the highest and lowest achievers in the same grade typically spanned five to six grade levels (**Muralidharan et al., 2019**), and curricula that move faster than children can follow leave many behind (**Pritchett and Beatty, 2015**).

ALfA treats foundational reading and number like a new language. Whatever their grade, every child starts at Ground Zero, including those who can already read. Many children have learned by rote: they can recite letters or tables, but lack a process for reading or calculating on their own. Starting again, from the known to the unknown, gives them a new scaffold. The aim is that this builds speed later: once decoding is automatic, attention is freed for meaning (**LaBerge and Samuels, 1974**), and children can teach themselves new words (**Share, 1995**). Some children read a newspaper and their own textbooks within 10 to 15 days; most take the full 45 days, or longer still. A few may still find it hard, perhaps because they attend school irregularly, or face a disability or other difficulties that make learning harder for now; they need further, gentle support.

ALfA also builds in stretchability: once a pair masters a level, they can keep going, beyond their grade, for example on number charts that do not stop at a grade limit. Mastery approaches raise a known concern, that faster pupils wait while others catch up (**EEF, mastery learning**). Does starting everyone at Ground Zero help or hold back children who already read? Does stretchability keep the fastest learners growing?

See it for yourself. The pedagogy is set out in full in **Accelerating Learning for All** (Bloomsbury, 2024). The **Numeracy Impact Report** shows the numeracy sequence. Classroom routines are on **video**, and the **DEVI FLN Presentation** gives a short overview.

B3. How ALfA reaches the classroom

A review of teacher professional development worldwide finds that training linked to a specific subject, with materials and follow-up in the classroom, is associated with larger learning gains than general training (**Popova et al., 2022**). ALfA's delivery model pushes these ideas further. Each element below is a design choice that can be tested.

Common practice	ALfA design
Teacher handbook	A single model-school wall chart sets out ALfA's essential principles, with QR codes that show exactly how to implement each step, reducing the need for external

Common practice	ALfA design
	training or long handbooks that often go unread. A review of teachers' guides across 13 countries found that long, heavily scripted lessons were hard for teachers to use, and that simplified, structured guides worked better (**Piper, Sitabkhan et al., 2018**).
Separate lesson guides	Guidance on every page of the children's book: what the teacher does, step by step, with notes at the foot of each page.
Training away from school	QR codes on pages and charts open **real classroom videos**, for learning inside the school.
Multi-day training per subject	Three-hour training sessions, one for literacy and one for numeracy, then a refresher after two weeks. At scale, training is often online, designed to be short and highly interactive.
Individual lesson planning	A weekly one-hour GROW Circle where teachers plan next week together.
Inspection visits	Supervisors use an ALfA classroom checklist and a quick collective assessment of the children.

What do teachers learn, and does it last? ALfA's model assumes that learning on the job, from the page, the video and the GROW Circle, stays longer than learning in a training hall. Classroom coaching has larger effects on practice than most training (**Kraft et al., 2018**). Do teachers retain what they learned? Do they carry it to other classes? Does on-the-job learning have more staying power than training sessions?

The GROW Circle

Once a week, for an hour, teachers meet in a GROW Circle, working from the pages and teacher notes of the supplement:

G	R	O	W
Good practices strategies that worked this week.	**Reflection** where children struggled, and why.	**Opportunities** next week's focus and activities, planned together.	**What's next** trackers updated, teaching aids prepared, mini planner completed.

This is a form of professional learning community. A review of such communities found links to changes in teaching practice and student learning (**Vescio et al., 2008**). The R in GROW asks of teachers what metacognition asks of children: to plan, monitor and evaluate their own practice (**EEF, metacognition**). The EEF's guidance on effective professional development highlights mechanisms such as goal setting, feedback, action planning and self-monitoring (**EEF, effective PD**). Does the GROW Circle raise fidelity, teacher well-being and collegiality? Does it outlast the project?

EdTech and AI

DEVI's apps reach beyond the classroom. **LiteracyNow** lets any volunteer, including a family member, teach a person who cannot read, so that a whole family can become literate through one app. Other apps support teacher education, classroom use, learning sent home, and community engagement with schools. Teachers have **assessment tools** to see how each child is doing, and supervisors combine the ALfA classroom checklist with a quick collective assessment of the class. AI is being integrated into these tools.

Related research: literacy classes for mothers in India were tested for effects on their children's learning (**Banerji et al., 2017**), and a low-tech approach to reaching families in Botswana is described below. Does teaching a family through one app spill over to children's learning? Do tool-based readings agree with independent assessment? Does AI feedback change what teachers do the next day?

FROM THE RESEARCH

In Botswana, during school closures, weekly text messages plus a short phone call to families raised numeracy by 0.12 SD and cut innumeracy by 31%; text messages alone had no effect (**Angrist et al., 2022**).

The middle tier

Block-level education officers in India have been found to spend much of their time on administrative compliance rather than academic support (**Aiyar and Bhattacharya, 2016**). International work describes the “middle tier” of district and block officials as potential instructional leaders (**EDT and UNESCO, 2023**). Who delivers also matters, as the Kenyan example below shows, and Teaching at the Right Level needed several redesigns, including engaging officials, before it worked in government schools (**Banerjee et al., 2017**).

FROM THE RESEARCH

In Kenya, the same contract-teacher programme was tested under two implementers. Run by an NGO, it raised test scores; run by the government, it had no overall effect (**Bold et al., 2018**). Who delivers can matter as much as what is delivered.

ALfA's implementation raises questions in this space. In Uttar Pradesh, India, government academic resource persons and supervisors, oriented by DEVI Sansthan, make the classroom visits. Coaching research suggests the quality of classroom feedback matters (**Kraft et al., 2018**).

- Does the personal engagement of the district's chief administrator, the District Education Officer or the Block Education Officer change fidelity, beyond a government order?
- Do visits by government supervisors change practice more than visits by NGO staff, whom teachers may treat as substitutes or as outsiders?
- Can officer engagement be measured as an exposure, not left as a footnote?

Fidelity is not pull

Implementation research treats fidelity, acceptability, adoption and sustainability as distinct outcomes (**Proctor et al., 2011**), and finds that the level of implementation shapes results (**Durlak and DuPre, 2008**). We propose measuring fidelity and pull separately.

	Fidelity: are teachers doing it?	Pull: do teachers want it?
Possible drivers	Orders, clear goals, supervision, checklists.	Teachers seeing children learn, lighter load, enjoyment.
Measured by	Observed core steps, daily dosage, correct pairing.	Voluntary continuation, demand for materials, peer recommendation, principled adaptation, government budget and staff after support ends.
Possible risk	Compliance without belief; fades when pressure lifts.	Enthusiasm without fidelity; drift from the mechanism.
The question	Did it happen?	Would it survive without outside support?

B4. Beyond the foundational years

ALfA began as a way to get every child reading and counting. But the design itself (model, practise in rotating pairs, transfer) is not tied to one subject or one age. It is now used:

- **In government primary schools**: current MoUs cover about 159,000 schools across India. ALfA is being rolled out in stages and reaches about 30,000 schools in 14 Indian states today, with toolkits in 33 world languages, 15 of them Indian (**India report**). This is a research opportunity: studies can be designed from the outset in areas where the programme has not yet rolled out, with government agreements already in place, avoiding bureaucratic hurdles.
- **In a budget private school at scale**: City Montessori School, Lucknow, from pre-primary to Grade 2 (see Section B11).
- **In middle-school subjects**: Grades 6 to 8 science, maths, languages and social sciences through **HiPATH**.
- **With adults and families**: in women's and adult literacy programmes (**Empowering Women & Girls**) and through the LiteracyNow app.
- **Internationally**: in Ghana, the Maldives, Peru, the USA and elsewhere (**International report**).

This breadth raises questions FLN studies alone cannot answer. Does the design work as well for a Grade 7 science concept as for a Grade 1 letter sound? For adults as for children? In a fee-paying city school as in a rural government one? Scale is not evidence, but it does make the evidence question urgent.

B5. Twelve research areas

Keep literacy and numeracy primary, and report each separately, never as one pooled score. Then widen the lens. Look for harm as well as gain: embarrassment, exclusion, domination, conflict and fatigue.

Area	The harder question	What to measure
A. Learning		
Academic learning	How fast, how much, and for whom? How long to reach a threshold?	Scores on new tasks; time to proficiency; active learning time; gains among lowest-performing students.
Transfer, retention and trajectory	Is a 45-to-60-day booster a one-time shot that lasts, or does it fade? Does it change a child's learning trajectory?	New texts, numbers and problems; tests at 45, 90 and 180 days, then at 12 and 24 months and beyond; longitudinal follow-up of the same children; self-correction without prompting.

Area	The harder question	What to measure
The pairing mechanism	What do role-switching and daily rotation add?	Role balance; explanation turns; quality of correction; dominance; stable vs random vs mixed vs matched pairs.
B. The child as a person		
Equity and inclusion	Who speaks, teaches, gets help and crosses social lines? Do children at the top, middle and bottom all gain?	Participation and gains by baseline level, gender, disability, home language and social group; social-network maps, not seating charts.
Confidence, resilience and motivation	Do confidence, agency, intrinsic motivation, resilience and grit grow? Is learning joyful? How do quieter children and those with attention difficulties feel? Do children grow up free of ability labels? Do they come to school more?	Validated scales for self-efficacy, motivation, belonging and fear of mistakes; persistence on hard tasks after failure; beliefs about own ability, by prior attainment; children's own voices on enjoyment; attendance from registers and unannounced headcounts.
Collaboration and communication	Do listening, explaining and feedback improve?	Observed turn-taking, clarity of explanation, question quality, resolving disagreement.
Critical thinking and creativity	Do children question, justify and create more on their own?	Count and rate child-made questions, strategies, reasons and new solutions.
Character	Do empathy, fairness, patience and respect become behaviour?	Behavioural tasks and structured observation, not self-report alone.

C. The child as a person

Area	The harder question	What to measure
Climate and global citizenship	Can ordinary lessons build care for people and planet?	Resource awareness; systems thinking; use of local and reused materials; respect for difference. Align with **SDG 4.7 learning objectives**.

D. Teachers, families and systems

Area	The harder question	What to measure
Teacher agency, learning and well-being	Do page-level guidance and the GROW Circle free teachers to use judgment, and do they enjoy teaching more? Does learning on the job last longer than learning in training?	Self-efficacy, workload, enjoyment, collegiality, quality of diagnosis, retention of practice over time; well-being as framed by **Viac and Fraser, 2020**.
Fidelity, pull and the middle tier	Do teachers follow it because they are told to, or because they want to? How much do officers matter?	Fidelity and pull measured separately (Section B3); officer engagement; supervision by government vs NGO staff; family and community engagement through apps.
Cost, time and public value	What did the system buy, per dollar and per SD gained?	Full economic cost, including materials and their environmental footprint; LAYS per $100 with equity weights; benefit-cost ratio; days to literacy (Section B8).

Related reading: **Literacy for Climate Change** (low-carbon learning materials) and **Maximising Learning Gain** (ipsative assessment: compete with yourself, not with others).

ONE PRINCIPLE FOR EVERY OUTCOME

Measure what we say we care about. If the claim is inclusion, measure who takes part. If it is collaboration, watch it happen. If it is pull, remove the push and see what remains.

B6. Deeper studies, for those who want to go further

The RRI shows what ALfA does in your own schools. For governments and research partners who want to go further, these studies ask why it works, for whom and at what cost, so that each country can shape the approach to its own needs.

Study	Design	What it tells us
Content × design trial	Keep content and objectives the same; vary delivery: teacher-led, grouped by level, or ALfA pairs.	Does the classroom design add value beyond the content?
Pairing trial	Vary the pairing rule and the role-reversal structure.	Which drives the effects: reciprocity, rotation or mixing?
Teacher-support trial	Page guidance, QR videos and wall chart, with or without the GROW Circle, against conventional multi-day training.	Can light, embedded support match or beat heavy training?
Supervision trial	Government academic resource persons and supervisors against NGO field staff; vary officer engagement.	Is the middle tier the active ingredient at scale?
Family and EdTech trial	Classroom ALfA alone, against ALfA plus home and family apps.	Do apps for families and teachers add learning, at what cost?
Equity and social-network study	Network mapping, observation and subgroup analysis over time.	Does daily contact loosen fixed status, or create new dominance?
Well-being and behaviour trial	Validated scales, behavioural tasks, structured observation, attendance headcounts.	Confidence, resilience, grit, motivation, belonging, peer trust and attendance.
Behavioural mechanisms study	Observe and measure reciprocity, peer norms, habit formation through routines, and intrinsic motivation, alongside learning gains.	Which behavioural mechanisms carry the effect, and do they hold at scale?

An invitation to behavioural science

ALfA's particular form of peer learning, in which every child teaches and learns with a new partner each day, rests on behavioural mechanisms: reciprocity, peer norms, habits built through short routines, and intrinsic motivation. Behaviour is shaped by social context and mental models as well as by information (**World Bank, 2015**); motivation grows when children feel competent, autonomous and connected (**Ryan and Deci, 2000**); and repeated routines can become automatic over weeks (**Lally et al., 2010**). Busara's synthesis notes that none of ALfA's behavioural mechanisms has yet been observed directly (**Busara, 2026**). We invite behavioural scientists to put them to the test, alongside academic learning gains.

B7. Deeper studies, for those who want to go further

Research on scaling has named the ways promising pilots disappoint. Each is a question ALfA should be put to.

Issue	What research shows	The question for ALfA
Voltage drop	Effects often shrink as programmes scale: the "voltage effect" (**Al-Ubaydli et al., 2021**).	Does the effect hold from 8 schools to 8,000? Where does it leak: people, places or fidelity?
Who implements	Results can differ when government rather than an NGO delivers (Section B3; **Bold et al., 2018**; **Banerjee et al., 2017**).	Does ALfA hold when government, not DEVI, delivers it?
Generalisability	Impact estimates vary across contexts more than expected (**Vivalt, 2020**).	Do effects transfer across languages, states and countries?
Fade-out	Many early gains shrink over time (**Bailey et al., 2017**).	Does the impact of a 45-to-60-day booster last?
Effect size and measurement	Typical education effects are small, and researcher-designed tests give larger ones (**Kraft, 2020**; **Evans and Yuan, 2022**).	Do results above one SD survive independent, standardised tests?
System effects	At scale, programmes interact with the whole system (**Muralidharan and Niehaus, 2017**).	What happens to teacher time, other subjects and other programmes?

Issue	What research shows	The question for ALfA
Implementation outcomes	Acceptability, adoption, fidelity, cost and sustainability are distinct (**Proctor et al., 2011**).	Are they measured separately, at each stage?
Being watched	Hawthorne and John Henry effects; **pre-registration** guards against selective reporting.	Do schools react to being studied? Are hypotheses registered first?
System coherence	Learning improves when the parts of a system align (**Pritchett, 2015**).	Is ALfA coherent with assessment, accountability and other programmes?

Measuring results, and measuring the drop

Voltage loss can only be seen if results are measured the same way at every stage (**Al-Ubaydli et al., 2021**). We propose:

- **Same instruments at every stage** The same tests, independently administered, in the RRI Study, Scale and Sustain stages, including standard tools such as ASER, EGRA and EGMA alongside programme tests (**Kraft, 2020**).
- **A random sample of scale-up schools**, assessed as rigorously as pilot schools, not only showcase schools.
- **A voltage ratio** Effect at scale divided by effect in the pilot, reported for each outcome and each group of children.
- **Dosage and fidelity logs** in every sampled school, so that any drop can be traced to people, places or practice.
- **A check against government data**, such as **PARAKH** or national assessments, for the same districts.
- **Pre-registration** of each stage's analysis in a public **registry**.

B8. Cost, time and value

Cost and value are not the same thing. The most cost-effective education programmes deliver the equivalent of about three additional years of good-quality schooling for $100 per child, while others deliver none (**Angrist et al., 2020**). Buying computer hardware without changing teaching is listed as a “bad buy”, and targeting instruction to children's learning level as a “great buy” (**GEEAP, 2023**). The question is what each dollar buys, and for whom.

Cost per child, and what it buys

ALfA's reported cost at scale in India is $1 to $4 per child for literacy and numeracy, depending on intensity. Busara's synthesis notes that all outcome evidence so far comes from closely supported delivery at district scale, costing $1.91 to $3.75 per child, while the $1 Light Touch model, which accounts for about 80% of projected reach, has not yet been evaluated (**Busara, 2026**). Pilots cost more per child, because training, materials and monitoring are spread over few schools. For comparison, Busara puts Teaching at the Right Level at about $20 to $27 per child and structured pedagogy at about $8, and the **Copenhagen Consensus** estimates that each $1 spent returns about $105 for structured pedagogy and $48 for teaching at the right level ($65 with technology). **Angrist et al. (2020)** compare programmes in learning-adjusted years of schooling (LAYS) per $100. Researchers at Cambridge's **REAL Centre**, including **Professor Ricardo Sabates**, also of the **RISE Programme**, add an equity weight: reaching the most marginalised costs more, but can buy more learning per dollar.

With ALfA's low cost and the gains seen so far, its benefit-cost ratio could be very high: DEVI's own estimate is about 800 to 1. Independent costing would test this: full economic cost, including teacher and officer time; pilot versus scale costs; LAYS per $100, with and without equity weights.

Thin booklets, materials and sustainability

ALfA uses very thin booklets, so material cost is a small part of the per-child cost. Low-carbon, reusable and locally sourced numeracy materials are part of the design (**Literacy for Climate Change**). Is the material model sustainable for governments to print year after year? What is its environmental footprint compared with thick workbooks? Is the whole process sustainable once outside support ends?

If one term is given to foundational learning, material costs are small and largely one-off: children master the foundational skills once and, if they stay in school, go on learning from the textbooks governments already provide. Are thick workbooks, often supplied by NGOs or external programmes, then needed year after year?

Turn the sustainability question around. Instead of asking only whether ALfA is sustainable, ask how sustainable current practice is. What does a typical FLN programme cost a government each year in training days, printed materials and external field staff? What remains when outside funding ends? Implementation research treats sustainability as an outcome to be measured, not assumed (**Proctor et al., 2011**).

Time to literacy

ALfA reports that, done daily for one period per subject, 45 working days are usually enough for most children to reach basic reading and number sense, extended to 60

where needed; done less often, it takes far longer. That is about 5% of a school year's timetable for each subject. It is designed as a supplement: a booster or catch-up given once, not a new curriculum. The programme does not stop at 45 days: pair learning and the routines continue, and teachers stay involved in pair learning throughout the year. The design intends the gain to last. Short, intensive learning camps produced large gains in Uttar Pradesh (**Banerjee et al., 2017**), but many early gains fade (**Bailey et al., 2017**). How many periods does each child need to cross a threshold? What survives at one, two and five years? Who needs a second dose?

A study could test children at 45, 90 and 180 days, then follow the same children longitudinally. This separates the effect of the intensive cycle from the year-round pair learning that follows it, and shows whether gains grow, hold or fade (**Bailey et al., 2017**). Busara's synthesis identifies longer-horizon evaluation as a priority (**Busara, 2026**).

Attendance: does learning pull children in?

School quality has been linked to children staying in school (**Hanushek et al., 2008**). In Nandurbar, programme data show attendance in ALfA schools rising from 40% to 80% during the pilot, against 44% to 50% in comparison schools (**Nandurbar Impact Report**). Register data can be unreliable. Is this "magnetism" real? Unannounced headcounts, over a full year, would tell.

THE VALUE QUESTION

What did the system buy, per dollar and per SD gained, for the children furthest behind? And did it last?

B9. Policy questions

The results so far point to choices that governments could consider.

Give foundational learning its own term?

Foundational learning is often taught in parallel with the full curriculum. What if one term, about three months, were given entirely to it? The expectation is that the return lasts a lifetime: children who can read and calculate learn more from their own textbooks in every later year. Reading fluency is closely linked to comprehension (**Fuchs et al., 2001**), and early reading advantages tend to compound (**Stanovich, 1986**). Early maths skills strongly predict later achievement (**Duncan et al., 2007**).

This is where form and structure can get in the way of learning. Foundational learning is now a stated priority almost everywhere, yet the space for it is rarely created. After COVID, fewer than half of countries put learning-recovery strategies in place at scale, and only 16% reported targeted instruction (**UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank and OECD, 2022**). In many systems the timetable is much as it was before COVID, and before FLN

was declared urgent. Curricula that move faster than children learn leave many behind (**Pritchett and Beatty, 2015**), and when Teaching at the Right Level was given a dedicated hour in Haryana's government schools, backed by mentoring, it raised learning where earlier in-school attempts had not (**Banerjee et al., 2016**).

POLICY NOTE: WHAT ALfA ASKS, AND WHAT GOVERNMENTS CAN CHOOSE

ALfA does not ask for three months given entirely to FLN. It asks for one hour of literacy and one hour of numeracy a day, replacing the regular language and mathematics periods with ALfA FLN, run alongside government programmes. Giving a full term of about three months to FLN is a further policy decision that governments can make, for the reasons above. It is a one-time shot with a lifelong benefit: once children can read and count, they engage with their own textbooks faster and with greater understanding, in DEVI's programme experience at twice the pace or more. If one term can do this, why not create that space, and why not now?

- Once children understand carrying, borrowing, fair shares and equal division, do they master later concepts from their own textbooks more easily?
- Does a dedicated term change a child's learning trajectory over the following years, not just at endline?
- What does a term away from the regular syllabus cost in other subjects, and is it recovered?
- Should every child who cannot yet read, in any grade, start at Ground Zero?

Making space for the new

Governments face pressure to act. Are they creating space to test new approaches, or adopting the next programme at scale before the evidence is in? Promising programmes can weaken at scale (Section B7), and programmes adopted without testing may never be evaluated at all.

When evidence takes longer than the need

FROM THE RESEARCH

In medicine, research evidence has been estimated to take an average of 17 years to reach practice (**Morris et al., 2011**).

A child in Grade 3 today cannot wait that long. Designs exist that let governments act and learn at the same time: stepped-wedge rollouts, in which every school receives the programme but in random order (**Hemming et al., 2015**), and evaluation built into scale-up itself (**Muralidharan and Niehaus, 2017**). The RRI's Study stage is a short version of the same idea.

- Can short, government-run A / B tests give enough evidence to act, while longer studies continue?
- Should scale-up be staged so that each phase is also a test?
- Who decides when the evidence is good enough, and what is the cost of waiting?

B10. What the evidence says, and what comes next

The wider field

The Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel's **2023 Smart Buys** report highlights structured pedagogy and teaching by learning level. Its **2025 reading synthesis** stresses explicit, systematic reading instruction. These are families of evidence at different levels, not rival brands.

Evidence family	What it supports	What remains open
Explicit, systematic reading	Strong content principles: oral language, sounds, phonics, fluency, comprehension, writing.	Which classroom design gives the most practice, transfer and fair participation?
Structured pedagogy	Coherent materials, teacher guides, training and support can lift learning at scale.	How much support is enough? Can structure strengthen teacher judgment rather than suppress it?
Teaching at the Right Level (J-PAL)	Teaching to a child's current level works in many settings.	What are the learning and social costs of visible ability groups, compared with rotating mixed pairs?
Cooperative and peer learning	Structured peer work can improve academic and social outcomes (**Durlak et al., 2011, on SEL**).	Does daily same-age and multi-age pairing, with equal roles and rotating partners, have distinct effects?
ALfA	Promising short-cycle literacy results; numeracy positive but more variable; early district-scale signals.	Independent replication, fade at scale, which components matter, broader outcomes, long-run staying power.

ALfA so far

Everything below is public. The summaries are ours; the full reports are open to all.

Setting	What was done	What was found
Shamli, Uttar Pradesh (2022)	RCT documented by a Harvard Graduate School of Education team (Reimers, ed., 2023).	0.23 SD in Grade 3 and 0.89 SD in Grade 5 after 40 days; stronger oral reading fluency.
Uttar Pradesh, 2021 to 2024	Government test data: **NAS 2021** against **PARAKH 2024.**	Grade 3, NAS 2021 to PARAKH 2024. Four ALfA districts (Lucknow, Unnao, Shamli, Barabanki): +13 points language, +14 maths, the highest of any NGO-supported cluster (others +8/+9 and +6/+7). Uttar Pradesh: +10/+10. India: +2/+3. A comparison of districts, not a trial.
Uttar Pradesh NAT, 2023	Government NIPUN test data (**request access**).	ALfA schools were about twice as likely to be certified NIPUN as non-ALfA schools in the same districts.
Five aspirational districts, UP	4 + 4 school trials: **Bahraich**, **Balrampur**, **Siddharth Nagar**, **Sonbhadra**, **Chitrakoot**.	A report for each district, with ALfA and control schools compared.
Nandurbar, Maharashtra	Independent retention study by Savitribai Phule Pune University, six months after the pilot closed.	A third-party test of whether gains last. The pilot itself is in the **Nandurbar Impact Report**
Ghana, Maldives, Peru	Pilots with the Olinga Foundation (**Ghana**), the Ministry of Education and UNICEF (**Maldives**), and a local NGO (**Peru**).	Country reports published. In Ghana, the reported rate of learning more than doubled (**ADEA podcast**).

Evidence synthesis, all sites (2026)	Independent synthesis by the **Busara Center for Behavioral Economics**, Nairobi, Kenya (September 2026), of studies across India, Ghana, the Maldives and Peru.	Literacy effects of 0.23 to 0.90 SD judged defensible; numeracy positive but more variable; fidelity the main moderator; the low-cost Light Touch model not yet evaluated.

What this evidence is: one documented RCT, a set of small controlled district trials, an independent retention study, an independent evidence synthesis by Busara, and government data collected by the state, not by DEVI.

What comes next: independent, multi-country replication with standard measurement, which the South-to-South Exchange is designed to build. Some larger figures (above one standard deviation, listed in the **ALfA Evidence Repository** and RCT dataset) are best read alongside benchmarks: typical effects in education are small, and researcher-designed tests yield larger ones (**Kraft, 2020**; **Evans and Yuan, 2022**). Each country's own study adds to this picture.

FROM OUTCOME TO MECHANISM

The next frontier is not another headline effect size. It is knowing which mechanisms survive in ordinary government conditions, for which children, at what cost, and what else changes in the classroom besides test scores.

B11. Working with researchers, and the Global Learning Lab

The aim is a design that gives clear results that everyone can trust. Here is how you can help build one.

Independent evaluation	Serve as third-party evaluator on an RRI study, ideally from the design stage, with full freedom to publish.
Replication in new settings	Run a fresh trial in your own country or language, or with groups we have barely reached: middle-school subjects, adults, out-of-school and displaced children, children with disabilities.
Head-to-head comparison	Where a government wishes to compare another approach, add a third arm under the same measurement system, in one or several countries.
Cost-effectiveness	Independent costing, LAYS per $100 and benefit-cost ratios, with equity weights, at pilot and at scale.

Measuring the whole child	Bring validated instruments for well-being, resilience, collaboration, character and citizenship (Areas 4 to 9), the least well measured part of this agenda.
Scaling research	Track voltage drop, fade-out and implementation outcomes as ALfA moves from pilot to scale (Section B7).
Co-analysis and publication	Work with school-level data (**request access**). Co-author, or publish independently. We ask for no editorial approval over findings.
Student projects	Dissertations, fieldwork and placements in India or partner countries, including review of toolkits across 33 languages.

Meet us, or present your own FLN research, at GLL 2027

The **Global Learning Lab** (Section A4) is as much for researchers as for governments. Present your own research on FLN, on any approach, not only ours, through the **call for sessions**, and question the RRI findings that countries bring. Researchers who join as invited participants receive the hospitality set out in Section A4.

How to respond

Write to **sunitag@dignityeducation.org** with a line on what you would like to study or present, or simply a time for a short call. WhatsApp or call +91 94 150 150 31.

THE QUESTION TO TAKE FORWARD

Can one classroom design produce more learning, more agency, more equity and more human connection per scarce minute of school time, in every country that tries it?

Annex A. Evidence and resource library

All items are public. Every report cited in this note, and the full, regularly updated library, is on our **Impact & Evidence** page (dignityeducation.org/links/impact-evidence).

Research and independent evaluation

- **Harvard book chapter (Reimers, ed., 2023)** · the Shamli RCT
- **ALfA Evidence Repository** · consolidated results
- **ALfA RCTs and effect sizes (dataset)** · Indian and international trials
- **Nandurbar third-party study, 2026** · Savitribai Phule Pune University
- **Learning from Uttar Pradesh** · NAS 2021 vs PARAKH 2024, district by district
- **ALfA Evidence Synthesis, Busara Center for Behavioral Economics, 2026** · independent synthesis
- **DEVI Social Impact Audit, 2025** · independent audit
- **Bahraich 4 + 4 trial**
- **Balrampur 4 + 4 trial**
- **Siddharth Nagar 4 + 4 trial**
- **Sonbhadra 4 + 4 trial**
- **Chitrakoot 4 + 4 trial**

Country and state reports

- **India FLN Impact Report**
- **International FLN Impact Report**
- **Uttar Pradesh**
- **Himachal Pradesh**
- **Nandurbar**
- **Ranchi**
- **East Kameng**
- **Ladakh**
- **Ghana**
- **Peru**
- **Maldives**

Government data

- **PARAKH 2024 dashboard**
- **PARAKH 2024 national report**
- **NAS 2021 report cards**
- **UP NAT 2023 and school-wise ALfA data** · request access

The method and the wider programme

- **Accelerating Learning for All (Bloomsbury, 2024)**
- **Disruptive Literacy (Bloomsbury, 2022)**
- **Numeracy Impact Report**
- **RRI South-to-South Exchange playbook**
- **Fast Track to FLN Literacy Intensive**
- **Maximising Learning Gain (ipsative assessment, 2017)**
- **Massive Open Online Training report**
- **Empowering Women & Girls**
- **Peoples Movement for Literacy**
- **Literacy for Climate Change**
- **LiteracyNow app** • family and community literacy
- **Training video repository**
- **Knowledge hub (toolkits and books)**

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