

SUCCESS STORY

Reading Assessment: Bringing Teachers and Children Closer Together

As teachers learn to assess reading in child-friendly ways, they become closer to their students. Children enjoy this one-on-one time.



In 2015, READ trained 3,020 teachers in 44 upazilas on reading instruction and assessment. More than 158,000 children have been assessed across 1,510 schools.

“This is an excellent method for professional development of teachers and it increases Bangla reading skill among the students of Grade 1 to 3 in our country.”

Mr. Firoz Alom
Bangla subject teacher,
Datiadah

In Bangladesh, learning to read is a challenging task, as is teaching reading. The Bangla script is complex, with many letters and conjunct letters. Writing conventions and pronunciation are not always standardized. The ‘whole language approach’ which the government uses for Bangla instruction requires highly skilled teachers to implement effectively. However, there is no pre-service teacher training enabling teachers to do this well at the outset; there is only on-the-job training leading to qualification.

Contact hours in the classroom are too limited to allow children to *practice* reading much, and there are few supplementary reading materials that attract children to reading. In general, there is a culture of only reading textbooks and memorizing them in order to do well on examinations. Teachers receive little support that would help them on site to identify the aspects of reading that children are struggling with or to apply strategies to address those lags quickly.

Due to reasons such as these, there is consistently a large group of children in grades 1-3 who cannot read or who read far below their grade level. For example, in a recent midline measurement of 1,002 grade 2 children in newly nationalized schools conducted by SCI in October 2015, 45% (nearly half) could not read at all. Since this assessment took place at the *end* of grade 2, it raises a real concern whether these children can catch up in time in order to productively study in grade 3.

As the Bangla curriculum advances quickly, students and teachers have very little time for remedial lessons. If these children do not catch up, they will either repeat a grade, or eventually drop out, or may join second chance education if they remain motivated to read. The reality is that if a child cannot read at the end of grade 2, he or she will not succeed at *any* of the school subjects.

Against this backdrop, the importance of formative assessment cannot be stressed enough. Formative assessment is not an examination. It is a child-friendly review of what the child can read. If gaps are detected, it pinpoints where the child is stuck and the teacher still has time to address the problem before examinations take place. If detected early and accurately, these lags can be addressed efficiently before they become major obstacles to learning.

For these reasons The READ project developed a formative assessment tool in conjunction with the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) and the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB). This instrument is known as the Instructional Adjustment Tool (IAT). The

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IAT is a tool to measure reading skill in the early grades. It also provides strategies for teachers to help struggling students in their instructional practices - hence the name Instructional Adjustment Tool. Teachers conduct the assessment three times a year, guided by the READ's Reading Instruction and Assessment Manual. Based on the findings, teachers identify strategies to support children where they are faltering. After assessment, READ generates a reading report card for every child, depicting the child's progress over time. The report card is discussed at 'Mother Gatherings' held at school on a regular basis, together with School Management Committees.

Teachers are now conducting formative assessment among nearly 160,000 grade 1-3 students. This is a groundbreaking process, together with the report cards which spark a discussion between schools and communities about reading results. SCI holds a Sharing Workshop after every assessment with district and upazila education authorities, often attended by national DPE officials. A number of stakeholders attend these workshops. At the end of every school year, READ holds a Reflection Workshop with a sample of teachers in every region to hear their experiences of using IAT. The instrument and process are improved based on that feedback.

Mr. Firoz Alom is a Bangla subject teacher who started his career in 1992 in Datiadah newly nationalized primary school in Magura district. As a dedicated teacher, Firoz followed the traditional procedures to assess children in the classroom. Over time, he was trained on assessment methods but in his experience, they had little impact on student learning. Moreover, he found it difficult to gauge the ability of each student so the weak ones were often overlooked or neglected. IAT training changed his mind-set and gave him some ideas of how to teach differently for these struggling students.

Firoz says that he is able to distinguish weak students and keep notes about their progress in the IAT register. He prepares his lesson plans based on the IAT findings, keeping in mind the students who are struggling as well as the ones who are excelling. In his observation of the class, Firoz perceives this his attention to weak students has helped

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them to regain their interest in school and their confidence to succeed. Class attendance has also risen since he started making some changes.

Firoz expects that if he continues assessing and supporting students, he will achieve 100% class attendance and improved reading results among his students. Other teachers have also commented on the positive difference they see in terms of student attendance, student confidence, and an increased closeness among teachers and students since they started using IAT.

In a context of limited contact hours and an ambitious Bangla subject curriculum, teachers struggle to find time to conduct formative assessment. This is an even greater challenge where class sizes are very large. Yet continuing with business as usual when 45% percent of the class cannot read is a poor use of resources. Time and resources must be found for formative assessment if we believe that at a minimum, education should enable children to read.

READ has trained 3,020 teachers on IAT in 18 districts and 44 upazilas in Bangladesh on reading instruction and assessment. Around 74% of teachers have reported changing their practices in response to IAT assessments. A total of 158,944 children were assessed across 1,510 READ-supported schools in seven regions. Among the assessed children, the ratio between boys (49%) and girls (51%) is almost equal.

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