

READING, THINKING, LEARNING: USING READ-ALOUDS FOR COMPREHENSIVE LITERACY INSTRUCTION



Reading is a foundational skill for success in the classroom and in life. By improving their reading abilities in the early grades, young children will be equipped with the skills to become lifelong learners.

Comprehensive and balanced literacy instruction builds foundational skills through explicit phonics instruction, interactive read-alouds, and opportunities to practice independent reading. Phonics, when coupled with interactive read-alouds and critical-thinking exercises, gives students the tools to learn to read, to access new information, and to make sense of ideas and concepts. From a young age, children not only learn the necessary skills to become readers, but they also learn to approach texts as a medium through which to access new information and become independent learners and thinkersⁱ.

Comprehensive reading programs equip students with the ability to learn to read, while also providing opportunities for authentic learning to take place through methods such as interactive read-alouds. With interactive read-alouds, teachers can highlight new themes and structure opportunities for learning. By watching teachers and listening to them, young children acquire foundational skills related to the concepts of print, nuances of language, and the value of reading. ⁱⁱ In Pakistan, the Sindh Reading Program uses interactive read-alouds in its comprehensive approach to improve reading-instruction quality. SRP is providing contextually relevant interventions to improve instructional practices and to increase student access to quality Sindhi-language learning and reading materials.

The Sindhi Context

In 2014, SRP conducted a baseline Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) in the Sindh province. Using 70 randomly selected schools in eight SRP districts, the baseline assessment measured student performance levels on tasks related to phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. The data suggests that overall, Sindhi students struggle to acquire foundational reading skills. While students tested in the baseline



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assessment had some levels of prior knowledge in vocabulary and listening comprehension, the scores in phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency were particularly low, indicating the need for explicit instruction in these areas.

Learning to Read, Reading to Learn

In response to the baseline assessment data, SRP developed a comprehensive, phonics-based approach to reading instruction to meet young students' current needs. The program is working to develop a sustainable and contextually appropriate approach by building upon pre-existing learning materials and teaching practices. This provides opportunities for direct instruction, explicit practice, and authentic classroom reading experiences.

The program supplements the existing Sindhi curriculum and aims to foster a culture of reading within Sindhi primary schools. By providing weekly scripted read-alouds aligned with the scope and sequence of the Sindhi curriculum, the program links the content in Sindhi textbooks and the lessons provided by SRP seamlessly.

To encourage a culture of reading and critical thinking in classrooms, SRP uses the “reading is thinking” approach that embeds elements of critical thinking into weekly read-alouds. These weekly sessions incorporate a variety of different genres, themes, and topics. SRP provides the necessary materials to support “interactive reading,”



which encourages students to play an active role in whole group read-alouds.ⁱⁱⁱ By focusing on a variety of genres, these lessons give students additional opportunities to make meaning from texts, broaden their vocabulary skills, and deepen their understanding of the ways in which written language can serve as a conduit for learning new information.

The weekly interactive read-alouds foster rich class discussions. Students engage in conversations where they learn to make predictions and connections between and across texts, and to infer — a challenging, yet essential skill for higher-level learning and thinking. Through active discussions

about word choice, illustrations, and characters, students become active participants and drivers of the learning process. These SRP-provided lessons, while not explicitly focused on decoding and phonemic awareness, support the broader development of fluent and active readers by modeling for students the ways in which readers can learn from and enjoy texts. SRP not only teaches children to read, it equips them with broader literacy skills to become independent learners and critical thinkers.

Moving Forward

The Sindh Reading Program will implement regular, wide-ranging formative assessments to measure student learning and to test program approaches to learning. Through these assessments, teachers, school administrators, and project implementers will have access to more up-to-date information, allowing them to continually learn and adapt to better meet all student and teacher needs.

ⁱ Wiseman, A. (2011). Interactive read alouds: Teachers and students constructing knowledge and literacy together. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 38(6), 431-438

ⁱⁱ Roskos, K. A., Christie, J. F., & Richgels, D. J. (2003). The essentials of early literacy instruction. *Young Children*, 58(2), 52-60.

ⁱⁱⁱ Fountas, I. C., & Pinnell, G. S. (2006). Teaching for comprehending and fluency: Thinking, talking, and writing about reading, K-8. Heinemann Educational Books.