

NCF 2022 Compliant Kinesthetic Phonetic Reading Kit: A Shift From Teaching Traditional Content-Based Reading To Competency-Based Reading

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Abstract:

Literacy refers to an individual person's ability to read and write. Reading is a skill that many of us take for granted, but it is a privilege that millions of children are deprived of. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER, 2011) reveals that "despite the rise in the average national literacy rates, about one-third of India's population is functionally illiterate (i.e. cannot read or write) while literacy rates among the youth (19%) and adults (37%) remain alarmingly high" (<https://uil.unesco.org/case-study/effective-practices-database-litbase-0/early-literacy-project-india>).

India has been struggling for decades to promote literacy amongst its citizens and the school going children. The **National Literacy Mission** started by the Government of India in 1988, is perhaps one of the earliest programs that recognised the need for promoting literacy. It mainly focused on the age group of 15-35 years. Soon, the **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan** was initiated and it focussed on compulsory education of children between 6-14 years (mainly elementary years). To improve this literacy crisis the government started another initiative for Primary Years called the **Early Literacy Project in 2006**. Finally, in 2020, the **National Education Policy** established a National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (NIPUN) and gave due importance to learning literacy skills in **early years** (Foundation Stage 3-7 years).

The **Let's Read Program** is designed to **teach English as a foreign language** and provide a solution to the learning crisis in India through its 5 years **Whole School Approach**. It has a **structured flow** for implementation. It is a simple plan that can be easily duplicated. The Let's Read Program encompasses the following:

- **The Reading Diagnostic tool** is phonetic and levels are decided according to universally accepted levels of language development.
- **Let's Read Kinesthetic Kit** that has games and hands-on activities that have been designed to enable intervention and the learner to be engaged according to their competency level.
- **An Educator's Handbook** that has comprehensive content for teachers to revise taxonomy, spelling rules and resources like reading lists for every level, list of sight words and high frequency words, sentences and leveled stories. The Educator's handbook also has the Let's Read (LR) per week curriculum, pre literacy games, the 44-phoneme chart along with spelling alternatives, related grammar vocabulary, and assessment rubrics for every level (that are compliant with learning outcomes suggested by NCF 2022 and NIPUN).
- **Learner's Handbook** has reading lists and rubrics, along with assessment rubrics for reference of parents and students.
- **School Reader and Writing Workbook** (published by Jeevandeep Publishers)

This research paper aims to establish the **compliance of the Let's Read Kit with guidelines given by NCF 2022 and NIPUN and its effectiveness in significantly raising reading levels in foundational year students, primary school students and middle school students**. (Although establishing competency in comprehension is not the objective of this research paper, it is achieved simultaneously through the program in children).

The Let's Read program is being used as a **whole school approach** to improve reading in Focus High School Hyderabad. The Let's Read Reading Age Diagnostic tool was used to assess the progress in reading of 100 students of various age groups. A pre-test, post-test approach was used to note down changes in Reading Age in all the classes. For this study, Class 1 (25 random students), Class 4 (25 random students), Class 7 (25 random students) and Class 9 (25 random students) were selected. The objective is achieved if maximum children attain age-appropriate Reading Levels.

Keywords- phonics, primary reading skills, reading intervention, kinesthetic reading, structured reading program, leveled reading, leveled phonics, Reading Diagnostic Tool, Reading Age, reading and comprehension, age-appropriate reading

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I. Introduction

Education is the most influential weapon which can change the world. Education has the capacity to reduce gender inequality, poverty, helps to create a more sustainable planet, needless death and illness, and is a symbol of hope and brings confidence in the future of mankind. (Nelson Mandela, 2000)

The most powerful tool for education is having literacy skills (namely reading and writing). Literacy is vital for education and for life. It is not a privilege for the elite but the right of every citizen. Early childhood education aims to teach children to read fluently and comprehend a text. Reading is also a necessary skill to have mastered in primary years for later achievement in school. (Hulme and Snowling, 2011)

As Albert Einstein said, "Education is not the learning of facts, but the training of the mind to think". And what better way to expand a mind than reading! Children who don't read by the age of 10 years are unlikely to continue education in later years of life. (<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/brief/learning-poverty>) Various studies reflected that academic performance of the students in later grades is directly proportional to mastery in reading in the early years of schooling (Qiu & Fang, 2019; Walsh & Rísquez, 2020). According to Wexler, (2018), the first years of schooling of children must be devoted to developing basic skills of reading. Trained teachers should focus on components of reading like reading phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary in early years (Cimmiyotti, 2013). Research showed that better opportunities for reading in early grades enable children to cope with reading problems in higher grades.

II. Importance Of Reading In Early Years

Primary school is the entry point for learning foundation literacy skills which will empower a child to pursue higher education with ease. The ability to speak, understand, read and write becomes increasingly difficult as we grow up because functional language is most easily learnt between 1-6 years. This period is also called the period of Symbolic Development and is the best time to learn other languages or to become bilingual or multilingual. (*Child Care and Education*, Bruce and Meggitt, 2005). This is especially true for bilingual children who are learning to speak and read in another language. The next period of language development is from 4-8 years when language is enhanced, articulation becomes better and children become confident in talking with context using conventional grammar patterns. (*Child Care and Education*, Bruce and Meggitt, 2005). This is the time when reading habits are set in and a child can either gain confidence and improve or lose confidence and run away from books.

Acquisition of early reading dexterity is an integral part of children's education and second language learning. It is an effective source of drawing out meaning from the printed material and a way of foreign and 2nd language learning (Uchidiuno et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2017; Beltrán-Planques & Querol-Julián, 2018; Schneider, 2019).

Reading skills require effortless coordination of lexical and perceptual skills that need to be integrated with higher cognitive abilities. Effortless and efficient reading fluency frees up cognitive resources for the higher-level and demanding comprehension processing of the text (Fuchs et al., 2001)

III. Objectives Of The Study

- To establish that Let's Read intervention program and the Reading Kinesthetic Kit improve English reading proficiency in all school children.
- To establish that Let's Read is compliant to NCF 2022 and NIPUN
- To establish that Let's Read is a Competency Based Program

IV. Rationale Of The Study

During the study, the researcher came across many studies that showed **gaps** in reading fluently in India.

- ASER research
- Pratham Research
- Objectives of the National Education Policy that talks about gaps in reading
- Blogs, workshops or conference topics that talk about reading issues in foundation years.

V. Research Design

Simple pre-test, posttest assessment to establish improvement in Reading Age in students. All teachers involved were trained in using the Let's Read program before it started. A baseline test was done to divide children into ability groups. Reading Age was recorded from a random sample of 25 students in each class. Intervention was then done for two months according to reading ability of students and the Reading Age was once again recorded. The researcher took care to record the progress of the same students that were randomly selected.

VI. Let's Read: A Program For Second Language English Learners

After years of first-hand experience, a system of learning to listen, speak and read in English has been self-developed and documented in the name of 'Let's Read Program'. It starts with listening and speaking activities in mother tongue along with phonological awareness in the reception stage (3 years) and focuses on systematic building of reading skills for the next four years. The unique feature of the program is the correct combination of hands-on activities, complimentary school readers and workbooks, educator's guide, exposure to print rich classrooms and exposure to a variety of genres of books for gazing and flipping through. The program starts in the mother tongue in Nursery, and a relationship is nurtured with the teacher. Students are introduced to English through instructions, classroom routines, keywords in storytelling, 'Show and Tell' and in playing games. Towards the end of the year, students are comprehending and beginning to speak in English. As children progress to the next class the medium of instruction remains English. Through this method we have been observing significant improvement in reading skills in early years in our school. Teacher training is a key element of this program.

VII. Let's Read Program

Although the contribution of literacy in the mother tongue remains unchallenged, it is also a fact that English retains its importance as the global medium for communication in the 21st century. Small children are capable of learning and absorbing multiple languages easily (Bruce and Meggitt; 2005), this research has been designed to support our National Mission and aims to establish that children can attain age-appropriate literacy (reading) skills in English without any undue stress, if they are given a structured, phonetic leveled program that includes kinesthetic activities, in the Early Years when the mind is absorbent and ready to learn languages.

The Let's Read Diagnostic Test is designed according to the increasing phonic difficulty that children are expected to overcome by a certain age. It gives the teacher a starting point, for reference and gives the approximate Reading Age of the child, which can be compared to the Chronological Age of the child. Example: Child X is 5.8 years but Reading Age before intervention is 4.9 yrs.

After 6 months of intervention, the study will focus on the same test to see what the students have achieved. So, for Example: Child X is 6.2 years and Reading Age is now 5.11 years. Thus, the Diagnostic test allows us to see progress that the child has made (even if s/he has not reached age-appropriate reading level).

This test also helps us to identify the "Zone of Losing Confidence" a term that has been self-coined to identify areas where the emotional barrier of "I might fail" mindset overtakes the ability to stumble and read. This zone is mostly found at the point when:

- A child is confronted with too many unfamiliar words and has not learnt the skill of blending sounds
- In text where a child demonstrates the ability to read individual words but is suddenly asked to read a paragraph.

Let's Read Kinesthetic activities enhance student attention by improving attentive body language, encouraging physical movement, and giving opportunity for verbal interactions. Cawthorn et al.,(2011) states that student engagement can be identified and recognized as active participation and on-task behavior in the classroom. Engagement takes place when students' experience the significance of learning or a connection to the material provided by the instructor (Martin & Bolliger).

The existing literature shows us that reading gaps in children start in the early years and only accumulate as the child grows older (Gallagher and Chingos). Additionally, the existing literature also focuses on several groups such as engineering students, elementary students, and even primary students, but there is a gap in the research for pre-primary students. *All the studies conclude by saying that language skills and reading should start in the early years.* (Brown) Research shows that *strategic, focused, kinesthetic reading works better than typical learning engagement strategies to improve reading skills* (Valdez).

As discussed before, India has worked on several projects to raise literacy skills, but none of them were focused on Early Years. This research (using Let's Read Kinesthetic Kit) fills that gap by focusing on pre-primary children and filling the reading gap by introducing reading earlier as well as examining their literacy skills from an earlier age. **If Let's Read Kits prove to accelerate the reading fluency and comprehension of first-generation learners, then it will solve the problem of the nation and contribute towards future economic growth and quality of human capital. Let's Read is then a tangible solution that contributes towards the suggestions of NIPUN BHARAT POLICY and NEP 2020.**

Let's Read Program:

BUILDING CULTURE OF READING WITH JOY AND FOR PLEASURE NIPUN BHARAT POLICY - KEY COMPONENTS					
	Phonological awareness, Concept about Print & Oral Lang Dev	Vocabulary, Concept about Print, Decoding activities	Sight Words	Phrases/ Sentences - Vocabulary, Reading Comprehension	Stories - Reading Comprehension & fluency
NURSERY (3yrs) LEVEL 0	Games and stories to improve PA	ORAL - break and join CVC pics	XXX	XXX	XXX
L.K.G (4yrs) LEVEL 1	Games and stories to improve PA	CVC words eg. net, wax	a, the, is	a big mat	CVC stories (with NO new words)
U.K.G (5yrs) LEVEL 2	Games and stories to improve PA	Blends and digraphs (sh,ch,th,ng,nk), double consonants, past tense -ed words	30 sight words acc to High Frequency word list	Sentences with blends and digraphs respectively	stories with blend and digraph (sh/ch/ th) words respectively (prev vocab only; NO new words)
CLASS 1 (6yrs) LEVEL 3	XXX	Magic e Long vowel families A,E,I,O, U	50 new sight words	Sentences from each family group	Stories of each group
CLASS 2 (7yrs) phonics for half year	XXXX	Long sounds- S, J, F. Phonograms- sion, ear, oi, silent letters	50 new sight words	Sentences from each family group	Stories of each group (prev vocab with NO new words)

VIII. Compliance To National Education Policy And Nipun Bharat Policy

The National Education Policy 2020 states that “Our highest priority must be to achieve universal foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) in primary school and beyond by 2025. The rest of the policy will be largely irrelevant for such a large portion of our students if this most basic learning (reading, writing, and arithmetic at the foundational level) is not first achieved.” Grade 3 is the inflection point by which children are expected to “learn to read” so that they can “read to learn” after that.

(<https://static.pib.gov.in/WriteReadData/specificdocs/documents/2021/jul/doc20217531.pdf>)

English as a second language is taught in the Let's Read program through the **Four Block Approach** suggested by NCF. When children are learning decoding, they listen to oral stories, use imagination to make up their own stories, write/draw in response to text given in the activity kits. The letters are taught in clusters instead of a string of words so that reading can start immediately instead of waiting to learn all the alphabet. Let's Read covers **three** components thoroughly- **oral language development, word recognition and reading along with comprehension**. Writing however is a totally different set of skill learning that is not covered completely. In this program we focus on copywriting and answering comprehension questions but not independent writing (pg. 98, NCF 2022).

IX. Curriculum Goals Of National Curriculum Framework That Let's Read Fulfills

DOMAINS	CURRICULUM GOALS	LET'S READ ACTIVITIES	LET'S READ SCHOOL BOOKS	LR EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

<p>Physical Development</p>	<p>CG1- Children develop habits that keep them healthy and safe. CG2- Children develop sharpness in sensorial perceptions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tangle Mangle - Activity instruction cards - Recipe reading cards - Tactile tracing - Blindfold games - Sand tray 	<p>Nursery Book- Theme 1- My body- safe and unsafe touch Nursery Book- Theme 2- Things I like to eat and drink. Activities- using stickers, tracing over dots, spot the difference, find the objects.</p>	<p>Story - Cheese Story- Leaves Story- Lost Song- Brush your teeth everyday</p>
<p>Social, Emotional and Ethical Development</p>	<p>CG4- Children develop emotional intelligence CG6- Children develop a positive regard for the natural environment around them</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alphabet scene (imaginary stories- confidence/ self worth) - Emotions - game cards - level 3 - Taking turns in play with LR materials - Natural objects Sorting baskets - Nature wheel Game- L-3 	<p>Nursery- Theme- I share the planet. Song - I might become a fireman Theme- Community helpers (+Role Play)</p>	<p>Story- Bats Poem- Sparrows Story - The moon Story- Tarun the King Story - The Window Poem- Did you know? Story- At the farm</p>
<p>Cognitive Development</p>	<p>CG7- Children make sense of the world through observation and logical thinking</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a-z scene cards- hidden letters -Coding with animals (HOTS) - Coding with symbols - Level 3 board games- Rolling with dice - Words of a set (HOTS) - CVC Puzzle cards - Homonym cards - Picture word with control cards - Sequencing a story 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nursery book has themed based approach and focuses on cause and effect in many units. - Nur- placing stickers logically in the activity books -Nursery, Jr.KG and Sr. KG Activity workbooks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Story- Will it float or sink? -Non fiction story- Plants -Sentences and passages for reading
<p>Language and Literacy Development</p>	<p>CG9- Children develop effective communication skills for day-to-day interactions in two languages CG11- Children begin to read and write in Language 2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a-z scene cards- storytelling progresses from mother tongue to English - action cards (dumb charades) - Building vocabulary- CVC picture cards - Read it, Write it, Build it - Rhyming words - Question word cards Reading Sentence cards - Story sequencing - Phase strips and reading lists - sentence cards - phonogram games of Level 3 -BINGO 	<p>Nursery book- Practise speaking in every unit. -Building up fluency and speed in reading -Life Skill activities that require following of oral instructions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - list of words in every level for practicing and reading - levelled list of sentences - levelled and planned story passages for building skills gradually
<p>Aesthetic and Cultural Development</p>	<p>Positive Learning Habits CG13- Children develop the habit of learning that allow them to engage actively in formal environments like a school or classroom</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The kit has only 1 set of games, waiting for your turn and developing patience. -as children grow the activities progress from individual to collaborative in nature -Following multiple instructions through Barrier games, monster games, I spy games - Follows norms of group games - Spelling games 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Greeting activity in Nursery books - Life Skill activities - Using textbook and activity book in the classroom, taking responsibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -prepares the child for being an independent and confident reader - prepares the child for using communication skills

The **NIPUN Bharat for Literacy**, the ‘National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy’, is being set up by the Ministry of Education. The goal of the NIPUN Bharat is to “achieve the goal of proficiency in foundational literacy and numeracy for every child by the end of Grade 3”. The Key Components of Foundational Language and Literacy established by NIPUN are fulfilled by the Let’s Read (LR) program as follows:

1. **Oral Language:** includes improved listening comprehension; oral vocabulary and extended conversation skills. *Enabled by picture cards and scenic cards in Level 0 of LR.*
2. **Reading Comprehension:** Involves constructing meaning from a text and thinking critically about it. *LR-Enabled through small leveled reading booklets.*
3. **Concept about print:** “Children need exposure to different kinds of print rich environments to enable skill of comprehension.” *LR has a variety of print rich material ranging from individual to group games, reading strips, genre of literature and small booklets which add variety and flavor to reading.*
4. **Phonological Awareness:** involves understanding of sound structure. *Enabled by toys and I spy games, a-z scene cards, CVC pic cards, Pegging cards of Level 0 and Level 1.*
5. **Decoding:** Understanding the relationship between symbols and their sounds. *Enabled by CVC pic cards, matching 2D and 3D alphabet cards and blend cards in LR*
6. **Reading Fluency:** Reading a text with accuracy, speed, expression, and comprehension that allows children to make meaning from the text. Many children recognize the letters of the alphabet, but read them one-by-one. *In L.R it is enabled by phrase strips, jumbled sentences, sequencing a story and small reading booklets.*
7. **Reading Comprehension:** Involves constructing meaning from a text and thinking critically about it. *LR-Enabled through short leveled reading booklets, reading comprehension examples in LR Educator’s guide and in textbooks.*
8. **Vocabulary-** This domain includes competencies of oral vocabulary, reading writing and morphological analysis of words. *Enabled by all LR material of Level 2 and Level 3*
9. **Writing -** This domain includes letter formation and expression of thoughts.
LR material motivates children to write in a stress-free manner by asking them to build and write words, phrases, stories.

These two policies, along with the ASER report, show a need for the improvement in reading skills in Indian children. As shown above, Let’s Read (LR) program is in complete alignment of guidelines given by NCF 2022 and NIPUN policy for literacy and language.

X. Let’s Read Kinesthetic Kit As A Competency Based Pedagogy

In a classroom every child has access to all levels of the Let’s Read program. These are displayed as activity material on the shelf and children have the freedom to choose them during the literacy class.

According to NIPUN policy, competency-based learning has 3 goals; and Let’s Read fulfills all the three criteria.

Development Goal 1 - Health and Well Being (Kinesthetic activities help children to develop fine motor skills, enhance concepts of self-esteem and sense of self-worth.) Let’s Read kinesthetic activities help children with special needs to read as well.

Development Goal 2 - Children become Effective Communicators (The I spy activities; games of different levels encourage children to have conversations in a stress-free environment.)

Development Goal 3 -Children become involved learners and connect with their immediate environment. (Games like coding and ‘words of a set’ help children to develop cognitive, logical, and reasoning skills)

Competency based learning is focused on student learning outcomes. Every Let’s Read activity has:

- 1) Explicit measurable outcomes. The materials have in-built control of error that helps children to correct mistakes and repeat the activity. The mastery of all activities/games of a particular level are an indicator for proficiency of that level .
- 2) The Let’s Read pedagogy is based on kinesthetic activities, experiences, integration of hands-on activities.
- 3) Children advance to the next reading level only upon achieving certain levels of proficiency at the current level.
- 4) Primarily formative assessments are used, and skills are assessed in multiple contexts to ensure understanding and comprehension of language.

XI. Conclusion

After three months of reading intervention, the following observations were made:

- About 60% Class 1 students showed progress towards age-appropriate reading (RA above 6.1 years)
- About 64% Class 4 students showed progress towards age-appropriate reading (RA above 6.6 years)

- About 46% Class 7 students showed progress towards age-appropriate reading (RA above 7.6 years)
 - About 48% Class 9 students showed progress towards age-appropriate reading (RA above 7.6 years)
- Although less percent of students reached “Age Appropriate” reading, there was an overall, significant improvement in reading amongst students.

Reference for Reading Age

Below 4 yrs. = learning alphabet sounds (phonic awareness)

4.0- 4.4 yrs. = merging CVC words e.g. peg, lip etc.

4.4- 4.5 yrs. = sight words (a, the, and) + CVC phrases e.g. a big bat

4.6- 5.0 yrs. = blends and blend phrases, e.g. stop, a silk bug

5.2- 5.4 yrs. = double letters and phrases e.g. bell, hill; Jill ran up the hill

5.5- 5.6 yrs. = digraphs - sh, ch, th; e.g. ship, chop; carrot; the red button

6.0 -6.5 yrs. = magic e words e.g. a snake in the cave

6.6 - 6.11 yrs. = ch /k/, /ea/, qua, ture sounds, e.g. bread, adventure

7.0-8.0 yrs. = phonograms- A, E, I family, complex words, and silent letter words e.g. wail, pail, toast, sheep, fault, listen, wrap

8.1- 8.6 yrs.- phonograms - aw, au, oi, silent letters

Above 9 years are non-phonetic words which fluent readers become familiar with

XII. Recommendation For Educators

Course Of Action That Can Be Duplicated

1. Teacher training was done so that teachers could use the program and kit effectively.
2. 20 Teachers were trained during Orientation days in last week of May before new academic year starts in June
3. In the first week of the new Academic Years, teachers did a 1-1 assessment for each child in the UKG class, to ensure that pre-requisites were met.
4. Teachers started teaching by stepping back and revising the alphabet and blending of sounds before they moved ahead to complex sounds.
5. Intervention started in July by using the Let’s Read program and using hands-on activity kits in the class.
6. Teachers were contacted to assess any challenges that they faced and modify teaching-learning manual according their feedback.
7. Intervention was done for eight months
8. Post test Reading Age Diagnostic test was done to document progress made by all the children.
9. As an experiment, Let’s Read Intervention was also done with older children (C3,C4,C5, C6,C7,C8) in school. After the pandemic, it was decided that the entire school would do forty-five minutes of remedial reading in the ZERO period (first thing in the morning). Because these children were older, they took less time and their progress was tracked over a period of 4 months. Their results also showed a significant improvement in reading and comprehension. 57% of the students in elementary school (C3-C8) reached age-appropriate reading level. 29% of the students were slightly below their reading level. About 5% of the students were discovered to have major learning difficulties.
10. The experimental remedial group proved that if remediation is done with LR program in higher classes, children are able to bridge the gap and improve reading levels within a short span of time.

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