



Mission Foundation Literacy and Numeracy Yet To Be Achieve

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Abstract-This review paper examines the state of foundation literacy and numeracy (FLN) in Indian classrooms, highlighting the learning crisis and the government's response through the National FLN Mission. Literature review and personal reflection on the state of FLN in Indian classrooms. Highlights the learning crisis in India, where many students lack basic skills like reading and numeracy, and the government's efforts to address this through the National Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) Mission. I used my observations as a teacher intern, where I observed a lack of emphasis on storytelling and meaningful text in early literacy education, and how. Also how the implementation of the FLN mission in some schools shows that weak students are segregated and ignored, creating a disconnect with their peers. Despite good intentions, the mission's implementation is flawed, prioritizing primers over meaningful text and stories. This paper draws on a literature review and structured interviews with 8 teachers and educators to explore the effectiveness of the FLN mission and the underlying assumptions that shape its implementation. The interviews revealed that the deficit model, which locates the problem of learning in the individual student rather than the education system, is a pervasive framework that influences teachers' practices and perceptions of students' abilities. The findings suggest that this deficit model perpetuates a focus on remediation rather than enrichment, and limits the potential of the FLN mission to support inclusive and meaningful learning. This paper argues for a more holistic approach to education, prioritizing inclusivity, critical thinking, and creativity to address the challenges and limitations of the FLN mission and improve early literacy outcomes in Indian classrooms.

Index Terms- Classroom, Early literacy, Education, Foundation literacy and numeracy .

I. INTRODUCTION

In India, over 1.5 million schools and 260 million students face a learning crisis. Despite attending school, many children lack basic skills. Many facts highlight the demand to shed some light on the early foundation years of our education system. If we take a look at ASER 2022, 80% of Grade 3 students in rural India cannot read Grade 2 text, and 74% cannot perform subtraction. Similarly, the World Bank's report highlights that 56.1% of Indian children in late primary age suffer from learning poverty. All these reports depict the tension "Learning Gap" or "Learning Crisis".

In response to the poor FLN performance of early learners, India announced a National Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) Mission on July 5, 2021, intending to achieve FLN by the completion of grade 3 by 2026-27. FLN Mission 2023 is a Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Mission under NIPUN BHARAT. This is an important first step on a national scale. UNESCO defines literacy as the 'ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute and use printed materials associated with varying contexts. (Education for All; Global Monitoring Report, UNESCO, 2006). While Numeracy is the ability to understand, reason with, and apply simple numerical concepts. The vision for foundational literacy and numeracy, therefore, is to enable children to become independent and engaged readers and writers who can transition from 'learning to read' to 'reading to learn' and from 'learning to write' to 'writing for academic success and pleasure'.

Despite the importance of FLN, over 50% of Class 3 students in India were unable to read a simple paragraph in their native language in 2019. The COVID-19



pandemic had significant repercussions on efforts to ensure that every child acquired strong foundational skills in literacy and numeracy, with a significant decline in FLN proficiency.

Foundation literacy and numeracy are the essential skills that form the basis of all future learning. They are the building blocks upon which all other learning is constructed. Literacy skills include reading, writing, speaking, and listening, while numeracy skills encompass mathematical concepts such as numbers, patterns, and shapes. Mastering these fundamental skills in the early years of education is crucial, as they pave the way for success in all areas of the curriculum. Literacy enables students to communicate effectively, access information, and understand various texts, while numeracy empowers them to solve problems, analyze data, and make informed decisions.

A strong foundation in literacy and numeracy also boosts confidence, creativity, and critical thinking. It opens doors to new experiences, fosters a love for learning, and prepares students for an ever-changing world. Educators and parents play a vital role in nurturing these skills through engaging instruction, supportive environments, and opportunities for practice and application. Foundation literacy and numeracy are designed to be reinforced in early grades. Literacy-related researchers work with the title "Early Literacy". Early literacy is nurtured through positive, literacy-rich experiences in early childhood, including interactions with books, stories, and other literacy materials. Teachers, family members, and peers all contribute significantly to supporting emergent literacy in early childhood education settings.

Many pieces of research show that language exists as a whole but unfortunately, the majority of our classroom is more dependent on unnatural language-based primers that focus on letter recognition; and bottom-up approaches that create a hierarchy in language acquisition without actual oral language as well as children's literature exposure. For early learners, it is difficult to feel motivated towards the written language due to the uneasy bottom-up approach towards language in early childhood while through using their oral language in storytelling engagement we can grab their interest towards the written text. We can explore many resources and ways to present an integrated form of oral Language and written language to our students because language does not exist in isolation. Storybooks and engaging storytelling are good ways to bring language as a whole to our classrooms.

The debate surrounding foundation literacy and numeracy centers on whether prioritizing these skills is essential for lifelong learning and economic growth, or if it may lead to an overemphasis on basic skills at the expense of other subjects and critical thinking. While some argue that strong foundation skills are crucial for academic success, employability, and social mobility, others believe that an excessive focus on literacy and numeracy may result in a narrow approach to education, perpetuate inequalities, and overlook individual differences. However, proponents counter that a balanced curriculum can accommodate both foundation skills and other subjects and that inclusive approaches can ensure equal access to quality education, ultimately leading to a more equitable and prosperous society.

Weak foundation literacy and numeracy skills have far-reaching consequences, limiting education and career opportunities, reducing employability and earning potential, and leading to social isolation and exclusion. These skills deficits also impede civic engagement, exacerbate poverty and inequality, and hinder economic growth. Moreover, individuals with low literacy and numeracy skills face challenges in managing their health, navigating the healthcare system, and fully participating in society. Ultimately, this can result in a lower quality of life, reduced autonomy, and decreased personal fulfillment. Addressing these skills gaps is crucial for promoting inclusive and sustainable development. In this *review* paper, we will try to understand the Mission FLN as a practical policy and in classroom practice. Also, have a look at the Vision and implementation of FLN are lacking.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW .

Foundation Literacy means "The ability to read, write, and communicate effectively." While Foundation Numeracy refers to "The ability to solve everyday mathematical problems with confidence." These definitions emphasize the practical applications and essential nature of these skills, highlighting their importance in daily life and future learning.

A large number of Indian children grow up in a non-print environment with little or no access to contextual reading materials in their mother tongue/first language. Classroom organization and pedagogies adopted in the schools do not acknowledge and appreciate the multilingual diversity that forms the basic fabric of Indian society. Classroom pedagogy does not ensure continuity between oral and written language and between mother tongue/first language and medium of instruction. The availability/usage of comprehensive



diagnostic assessment systems related to early literacy to inform classroom instruction remains negligible. There is a lack of system-level composite initiatives to influence reading culture both at community and school level (CAREIndia, 2017)

Usually, we conceptualize FLN with early literacy. So, we are taking the initiative to achieve a good percentile of FLN in our classrooms to improve early literacy which can lead to an increase in literacy rate. The report on the *State Of Foundation Literacy and Numeracy in India by IFC* has unfolded prominent key findings that the State performed particularly worse in the governance pillar because over half of the states have a score below the national average i.e., 28.05 and another finding that Some states may serve as role models for others in certain aspects, but they too need to learn from other districts while tackling their challenges. These findings and The index on foundation learning have relied on the latest NAS learning scores and ASER data for analysis.

In January 2023 The *Indian Express* printed the statement of An official from the department that said, “Even as the ASER 2023 report highlighted Nanded district, the situation is expected to be similar across the state. Serious cognizance is taken of the concern and it is decided to strengthen the supervision system, which will keep teachers and schools on their toes.” The way assessments of FLN are conducted, is another matter to think about

The National Education Policy (NEP) in 2020 prioritizes the attainment of foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) for all children in India as an “urgent national mission”. Subsequent guidelines for the same were laid out in India’s Ministry of Education’s NIPUN Bharat program in 2021. While to many, this might seem to be an objectively ‘good’ reform, its framing and operationalization entail several issues that need scrutiny. FLN is broadly conceptualized as a child’s ability to read ‘basic’ texts and solve ‘basic’ math problems (such as addition and subtraction). Despite the rhetoric of “FLN for all”, the push for attaining these basic skills is almost exclusively directed at children from rural and marginalized communities who have historically received a substandard education. (Hindustan Times, 2022) .Somewhere we prefer primers over meaningful text or stories to achieve decoding skills.

The above evidence shows how much FLN is for us and what steps we are taking to improve our FLN performance. While FLN performance assessment measures are also a point of concern. In the intro, we

shed light on Early literacy, and now all focus comes on FLN. From a shallow perspective, these both are the same but from deep insight these both are different.

In this review paper, we will try to explore the scope of storytelling regarding the literacy impact of the conventional teaching approach to Early literacy and the current status of the Indian classroom in this context of early literacy.

What is FLN doing?

In my own experience of teaching in an internship that I did in Ndmc School during the final year of Beled, I observed that they do not consider books, stories, songs, etc to be part of learning in early Grades. However, after making an initiative by Beled trainees to involve story books and picture talk in our classroom culture, we observed that students love to see pictures, build their own stories, and try to guess the written text according to their story flow prediction. Which improved their pronunciation, participation motivation towards handwriting, visualization, and vocabulary. This school took an initiative towards the early literacy foundation by creating the remedial session-based FLN (foundation literacy and numeracy) room. But students have labeled that classroom as “Kamzor Bachon ki class ”, while some teachers called it “Remedial class ”. Where they always practice going on Barakhadi and word formation. FLN room students have no access to the library as well as they are not allowed to bring their grade books. Some students showed progress by becoming able to read without comprehending the text (even when Hindi is their mother tongue.



Mission Buniyaad.

This is my observation during Aug '2022 of Sarvodaya Vidyalaya. In mission Buniyaad struggling students are sitting in the same classroom as other students. While the teacher is more focused and plans their lesson

differently, it's difficult to manage both levels at the same time in the same classroom. That's why a single teacher can't give attention to both. Additional needs students are mostly ignored inside the column. I felt that the Mission was not functioning as it should, this



mission failed in itself and created an illusion of the education system moving towards betterment .

Mission Buniyaadi gives birth to Two new worlds in the same classroom. Two bench columns are only for those students who are capable in terms of literacy and Numeracy. Her column is for weak students on the same scale and then one more column is for students who don't even know the alphabet but they are in 5 classes. Friendship-breaking breath under column division. Disconnection with others. If someone tries to sit by himself, the teacher points them out as well as monitors and checks the bench column.

III. METHODOLOGY .

Ethical considerations: consent and confidentiality.

I take permission from the school principal to conduct research. For classroom Observations and teacher interviews, I consulted with respective teachers for permission. To maintain confidentiality, I used pseudonyms for all the participants throughout the data collection. Only necessary and unavoidable background information is used in the data.

Interviews are a qualitative research method used to collect primary data by asking one or more people about their opinions, experiences, or perspectives on a particular topic or subject matter. This is a qualitative tool of data collection

INTERVIEW BASED DATA.

Interviewee's Background :

All Participated Teachers are teaching in the same school environment.

Name	Position and experience.
Naseema	She is a class teacher of 5th standard and also taught Hindi in 1st standard. She has 6 years experience including 3 years experience in upper primary.
Vandana	She is a class teacher of 4th standard and has one year experience in teaching. Also practicing

	her skill in teaching English in 1st standard.
Kashaf	She is a 3rd standard class teacher. She has 10 years of experience in teaching.
Mansi	She is a class teacher of 2nd standard and has one year's experience.
Vikas	He is a class teacher of 1st standard with an assistant helper and has 1.5 years experience of teaching including upper primary experience as well. In 5th and 4th, he taught Mathematics specifically.
Sandhya	She is working with Radha who is an assistant helper at the combined nursery and k. G classes. Sandhya Ma'am has 37 years of experience with early childhood students.
Farha	A few months before she was a class teacher of 1st standard but currently taking remedial sessions in the special FLN classroom. She has two years of experience.
Anupam.	She is a principal of a respective school and has 30 years of teaching experience.

Table: Interviewee's Background Information.

Interview Responses.

1. What is reading for you?
 - Anupam: Reading is a skill where we decode the message. Reading is only possible when you can recognize the alphabet.



- Naseema: Reading is a meaning-making process. Reading should work on both the aspect of enjoyable learning and cognitive development.
- Vandana: Reading is about comprehension. Reading is a new door of information. Readers should be independent in selecting a text and to read as well.
- Kashaf: Recognition of words is reading. Able to comprehend if they are in 4th and 5th.
- Mansi: Reading to me is going beyond your imagination. It allows you to look into things with a new perspective and learn a lot.
- Vikas: For students- Reading is essential for students as it fosters language development, expands vocabulary, and enhances critical thinking skills. It opens up new worlds, promotes empathy, and provides a foundation for academic success across various subjects.
- Sandhya: Reading is recognition for preschool. Drawing numbers and alphabets and being able to associate them with the drawing is recognition.
- Farha: Reading is the third language skill that you learn in your native language. For me, reading is a medium for developing emotional skills, critical thinking, and boosting confidence

2. How do you encourage students to read?

- Anupam: By using the library as well as students should read chapters before starting a class.
- Naseema: I prefer to take students to the library. Where they have the freedom to pick any book, even picture books.
- Vandana: By introducing interesting literature. I used to act out stories during storytelling to generate an interest in Reading.
- Kashaf: Storybooks, flash book stories, and guessing story by picture.
- Mansi: We can encourage students by
 - Model Reading (Role model)
 - Games (puzzles, etc)
 - Engaging story books
 - Reading Corner
- Vikas: by creating a positive reading environment, offering a variety of interesting books, and allowing them to choose reading materials based on their interests when they visit the library. Incorporate reading into class activities, discuss books, and set aside dedicated time for independent reading.

- Sandhya: Showing picture books, crafts, and picture books helps to encourage them.
- Farha: Guide students to ask questions before heading and they connect to their prior knowledge by visiting the school library and showing them different interesting books

3. As per your observation and experience, do students show enthusiasm to read?

- Anupam: Yes 80% show interest.
- Naseema: Sometimes, some students are mostly ready to read aloud while others are not. On average students show more interest in books of stories.
- Vandana: Yes, they show interest in reading if they can read. They want to know more and more interesting poems, comics, and stories.
- Kashaf: Yes, if we use books apart from the curriculum textbook and they have confidence for reading.
- Mansi: Yes, they do especially picture books, rhymes, and stories books which have attractive fonts and good-quality paper
- Vikas: Yes they do, as it brings them joy and opportunity to expand the horizon of their understanding about the environment around them.
- Sandhya: Yes, 3 to 5 year old children are very much interested. Audio Visual Aid is helpful like flashcards and TV. Demonstration of stories also brings attention.
- Farha: Students are enthusiastic to read. They show an energetic interest in reading story books etc.

4. What do you think about the reason behind the Poor performance Of FLN in Indian classrooms?

- Anupam: I don't agree with reports that show poor FLN performance. It's a foreign conspiracy against the Indian education system. While in reality, we have the strongest system, 50 -60-year-old men can calculate things on their fingers.
- Naseema: Online classes are a major reason behind the poor performance of FLN in Indian classrooms. Many Students are not exposed to early literacy material.
- Vandana: Reasons could be :
 - First Generation learner.
 - Education Could be an activity for a learner.



- **Lack of parental support.**
- **Kashaf:** Lack of parental support, irregularity in school and lack of practice at home could be responsible reasons
- **Mansi:** Reasons according to me :
 - Home Environment
 - Low attendance
 - 1st generation learners
 - Multilingualism
 - lack of interest and motivation.
- **Vikas:** The following are the reasons:
 - Inadequate focus on Educational development.
 - Low budget for education
 - Lack of awareness about its importance
 - Orthodoxical thinking
 - Patriarchal societies
 - Lack of education infrastructure
 - Poor Teacher-student ratio
 - Discrimination (caste, religion, gender, Class)
- **Sandhya:** lack of aids in MCD school, irregularity, and lack of concentration.
- **Farha:** The following the reasons :
 - High Dropout rates.
 - Poor learning
 - Uninteresting classes.
 - Lack of motivation.

5. What are Important aspects of early literacy in your opinion?

- **Anupam:** Activity-based, learning by doing and play way methods should be used.
- **Naseema:** Effective method should be used. More and more activities can make a real impact at an early age. The joyful journey of the reader should be encouraged.
- **Vandana:** Exposure to good literature is needed. Able to write and read. Early literacy should not include English. Early literacy starts from Alphabet recognition.
- **Kashaf:** Early ages are more important than other parts of schooling as it is the base of the future.
- **Mansi:** The following are the crucial aspects of early literacy according to me :
 - Based on Real-life situations
 - Real objects
 - play way method (learning by doing like visiting to post office etc)

- **Role Modeling:** playing characters and situations
- **Vikas:** Important aspects of early literacy include fostering a love for reading, building vocabulary, developing phonemic awareness, and promoting comprehension skills. Activities that encourage language play, storytelling, and interaction with books contribute significantly to a child's early literacy development.
- **Sandhya:** Practice Basic manners, teamwork, and friendship as well as sitting practices. We can enhance their interest in preparation for further schooling.
- **Farha:** Exposure to literacy at a young age leads to improved linguistic skills.

6. What Reading Habits does your classroom have?

- **Anupam:** Guided Reading, read-aloud, Shared Reading, and Interactive Reading (interaction should be limited).
- **Naseema:** Choral Reading for 1st class, Shared Reading in the library, and Interactive read-aloud in class.
- **Vandana:** Self Reading, Read Aloud, and Interactive Read Aloud
- **Kashaf:** Self Reading, Shared Reading, and Interactive Read Aloud.
- **Mansi:** Self Reading, Shared Reading, Read Aloud, Guided Reading, etc.
- **Vikas:** Guided, self, Read aloud, and Shared reading.
- **Sandhya:** Choral Reading, Guided Reading, shared Reading, and Interactive Read Aloud.
- **Farha:** Shared Reading

7. Why do students struggle with comprehension?

- **Anupam:** I observed that in my school students don't have such issues. The mother tongue is promoted by the NEP 2020 which helps in comprehension.
- **Naseema:** Might have difficulty in decoding. Students get real help in guessing the story through pictures where they substitute words.
- **Vandana:** Often students are not able to connect their existing schemas with the written text. But they have enough understanding of the oral language.
- **Kashaf:** Due to their lack of concentration.
- **Mansi:** Students struggle with Comprehension because of :
 - Rote memorization



- learning disabilities like dyslexia etc.
- Fewer encounters with words, and opportunities to express.
- limited vocabulary
- Language Barriers.
- **Vikas:** Students may struggle with comprehension due to various factors, including limited vocabulary, lack of background knowledge, difficulties with decoding words, insufficient focus, or a lack of engagement with the material. Addressing these challenges through targeted support, diverse teaching methods, and encouraging a love for reading can help improve comprehension skills.
- **Sandhya:** Learning shows the process and variety from one to one. Lack of parental support.
- **Farha : Reasons:**
 - Low reading motivation.
 - Inability to decode words
 - lack of interest or giving up quickly.
 - Lack of concentration

8. What do you think from which standards students should try self-reading and are books helpful for them?

- **Anupam:** Self-reading should start from 3rd standard and books should be just for teachers till 3rd.
- **Naseema:** From class 3rd they should be able to read short stories. Books should be just for teachers who are teaching in classes 1st and 2nd but should not be for respective classes.
- **Vandana:** Self-reading could be expected from class 3rd but students should have exposure to the text at each level.
- **Kashaf:** Self-reading and books both can begin with 1st class.
- **Mansi:** Yes, of course, it instills in them a sense of belongingness, and attachment and enhances their interest in books.
- **Vikas:** From class 3rd, yes books are helpful.
- **Sandhya:** From K. G., they should be able to read 2 alphabetic words. Books are helpful for every level but textbooks are not needed for K.G.
- **Farha:** I think, at an early age, we encourage students to read, self-reading should be tried in class from 3rd onwards and story books are helpful for them because students show high interest in stories.

IV. DISCUSSION .

Findings.

We all know theories and suggestive activities but results show that we failed in implementation of them. Still, in our education system, the Deficit model is prominent. If a student is not learning well, it might be because he/she is a first-generation learner, slow learner, lack of motivation, or Home environment. We locate a problem in a student instead of trying to do justice with our job to solve that problem or find a middle way like where it might not be supported at home but teachers provide that support in school. We talk a lot about comprehensive reading and meaningful learning but somewhere in some schools, early grades end up with the unnatural language-based primer. Where they don't have access to the learning and literacy resources to explore. Which does not positively affect the perception of reading, writing, and numbers for students.

How to work on Early literacy?

FLN as a mission has a good intended vision but somehow it's failing to serve the essence of early literacy. To make our efforts more effective in a classroom, what we can do:-

Goals.

Our goal should not be to teach decoding without comprehension. For instance, we need to answer “why” we are learning the alphabet in language . The goal should be to acquire language and develop the comprehension ability of learners

Training.

To ensure that teachers adopt skills, behaviors, and attitudes that drive success in the classroom, designing a comprehensive multi-year teacher professional program is essential. Such a program must utilize a blended and multi-channel approach to design a coherent learning journey for the teachers that is also aligned with all academic inputs provided to them (Central Square Foundation, 2022). Provide Training to the facilitators and teachers to upskill learning with learners.

Emergent literacy and resources.

A classroom based on an emergent literacy approach will differ considerably from a classroom based on a traditional approach (Shobha Sinha, 2001). There are numerous logical pedagogical tools based on emergent literacy like picture talk, stories, print-rich classrooms, environmental prints, toolkits, digital access to literacy, creative spelling, etc.



V. CONCLUSION

This review paper is on the state of foundation literacy and numeracy (FLN) in Indian classrooms. India faces a learning crisis, with many students lacking basic skills like reading and numeracy. To address this, the government launched the National Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) Mission. The approach to early literacy education is flawed, prioritizing primers over meaningful text and stories.

I used my personal experience as a teacher intern, where I observed a lack of emphasis on storytelling and meaningful text in early literacy education. Important to use storybooks and picture talk, which improve students' motivation. The situation raises important questions about the effectiveness of the FLN mission and the need for a more inclusive and engaging approach to teaching literacy and numeracy skills. They emphasize the importance of early literacy and numeracy skills, the role of storytelling and meaningful text, and the need to address individual differences and learning needs in the classroom. The text highlights the challenges and limitations of the FLN mission and the need for a more holistic approach to education that prioritizes inclusivity, critical thinking, and creativity.

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