

Increasing Reading Comprehension skills in Patang classes

Since the beginning of Patang one of our key focus areas has been building up English proficiency levels for our children, especially considering the socio-economic and cultural backgrounds of the students. A 2003 study by University of Kansas, states:

*“A child from a high-income family will experience 30 million more words within the first four years of life than a child from a low-income family”.*¹

We recognised “Reading Comprehension” as one of the major areas of intervention within English as a Second Language for our classrooms. Keeping this in mind, we put in numerous efforts to come up with detailed approach for the intervention.

Through classroom observations, baseline assessment data and conversations with school teachers, the team sought to identify, the high need areas within English. Below is the Need Analysis, as discussed with the team.

English Objective	Seen as a problem area by:					Capacity of Team		
	Patang Teachers	School Teachers	Patang Team	Parents	Baseline Report	Patang Teachers	School Teachers	Patang Team
Reading Comprehension:								
Word Meanings	N	N	N					
Sequencing	N	N	N					
MCQ's	N	N	N					
True/False	Y	Y	Y					
Make Sentences	Y	Y	Y					
Answers with Sentence Structures	Y	Y	Y					

We realized that even though students were able to read, comprehension was a challenging area, especially in the lower grades (1 and 2). Hence, the team brainstormed on how to build strong lessons on reading comprehension, by developing a detailed approach. The team, as seen above, had the capacity within, to add value to the reading comprehension lesson.

As previously identified, the Patang teachers specifically struggled with using school texts during the Patang classes, because they were of a higher level than the current level of the students. The team decided to create lesson plans using school texts.

Instead of explaining classroom strategies, we felt it would be more useful for teachers to see them being used in their classrooms. The stories were done as a “read aloud”, where the teacher reads out the story. This is based on the fact that in primary grades, students’ ‘listening level’ often surpasses their ‘reading level’. Previously, the students in the Patang classrooms were focusing on reading and understanding the story, however, a step prior to that is listening and understanding. This is a skill that was well developed through the intervention and the students comprehension levels improved a great deal.

¹ [The Early Catastrophe, The 30 Million Word Gap by Age 3](#)

Two team members then modeled the lesson plans in each of the Patang classrooms over 2 days, and the teachers were to observe the lessons. On day 1, the first half of the lesson plan was modeled, and the teachers only observed. On day 2, the teachers carried out the second half of the lesson plan, while being coached by the team members. Hence, we were able to give them concrete and classroom-specific feedback on how to improve their Reading Comprehension lessons.

The teachers immediately felt the effectiveness of these lesson plans, and Vandana Ma'am mentioned –

“Introducing new vocabulary with drawings at the beginning of the lesson helped reinforce word meanings more effectively.” – Vandana, Grade 1 Teacher

The final step to the approach included, designing high-quality lesson plans to the teachers, similar to the ones created earlier. However, these lesson plans were created using storybooks based on Indian context. To get a diverse set of lesson plans, all team members created one lesson plan each. These lesson plans, along with the storybooks were provided to the teachers. The team, then conducted observations, where the teachers independently delivered the given lesson plans in their classroom.

Since then the classroom observations have shown a considerable improvement in the reading comprehension lessons. The teachers gave great feedback, where they mentioned that they learnt to carry out lessons a lot more effectively.

“I never thought of teaching critical thinking as part of reading comprehension lessons, and always dealt with them separately.” – Shikha, Grade 2 Teacher

The students' responses and participation also demonstrated growth of comprehension in the classroom. Students were more confident in answering questions, which reflects a good understanding of the texts.