Development Management in Practice

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4 Enhancing Literacy and Livelihoods: A Practical Framework for Primary Education in Resource-Constrained Settings

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Abstract

This study evaluates the effectiveness of the para-teacher model implemented by the One Billion Literates Foundation (OBLF) in enhancing teacher development and improving student outcomes in resource-constrained settings. By employing rural women as para-teachers and providing them with rigorous training in English proficiency, pedagogy, and student-centred teaching methods, the program aims to address educational deficits in under-resourced schools. Data collected from the study demonstrates significant improvements in student proficiency, particularly in speaking and writing, with para-teacher-led classrooms consistently outperforming non-intervention schools. Additionally, the program empowers women by fostering financial independence and challenging traditional gender norms within their communities. The findings highlight the success of bilingual and interactive pedagogies in promoting student engagement and critical thinking. The study concludes with recommendations for scaling the model, emphasising the importance of continuous teacher training, technology integration, and community involvement to sustain and expand the program's impact.

Keywords: Foundational Literacy, Para-teacher, Primary Education, Rural Women's Skilling, Education, Women's Livelihoods

4.1 Introduction

In India, education in resource-constrained and rural settings face significant challenges that hinder access to quality learning opportunities. Despite the government's efforts to improve educational infrastructure and increase enrolment rates, many rural schools struggle with inadequate resources, poorly trained teachers, and high dropout rates. These challenges are compounded by socio-economic factors, such as poverty and cultural norms, which can limit educational aspirations, especially for girls. In such contexts, innovative models like the para-teacher framework have emerged as effective solutions to bridge the educational gap.

4.2 Literature Review

4.2.1 Teacher Shortages and Innovative Approaches to Addressing Them

The issue of teacher shortages, particularly in rural and underserved regions of India, has long been a critical barrier to achieving universal primary education. In response, innovative models such as the para-teacher scheme have emerged, aiming to address the dual challenges of inadequate staffing and constrained financial resources. According to Pandey (2006), initiatives like the Shiksha Karmi Project and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) were instrumental in embedding the para-teacher model within the national education framework. These programs provided a framework through which local, under-qualified individuals could be recruited and trained to take on teaching roles, thereby expanding the education workforce and improving pupil-teacher ratios (PTRs) in remote areas. States like Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh were early adopters of the model under programs such as Shiksha Mitra, which specifically aimed to improve staffing ratios in regions where the dearth of formally trained teachers was most severe (Snehi & Nath, 2004).

The para-teacher model, however, was not only a response to teacher shortages but also a solution that was largely driven by cost-effectiveness. Kingdon and Sipahimalani-Rao (2010) argued that one of the principal advantages of the para-teacher system was its ability to maintain PTRs while minimising costs. By employing individuals on contractual terms at significantly lower wages than regular teachers, the government was able to reduce financial pressure on the system while continuing to provide access to education across vast and underserved rural landscapes. This strategy allowed for an affordable expansion of the teaching workforce, a critical consideration for states operating within limited budgets.

However, while the cost-efficiency of the para-teacher model has been lauded, it has also sparked significant debates around educational quality. Critics, including Kingdon and Sipahimalani-Rao (2010), point out that many para-teachers, recruited from within local communities, lack the formal qualifications or comprehensive training typically required for primary educators. This disparity has raised concerns about whether para-teachers are equipped to deliver the same quality of education as their fully trained counterparts. These concerns are particularly relevant in subject areas like mathematics and science, where weaker teaching foundations can have a lasting impact on student achievement. As the para-teacher model continues to evolve, the tension between cost-effectiveness and educational quality remains at the forefront of policy discussions.

4.2.2 Quality Primary Education and the Role of Para-Teachers

While para-teachers have contributed to improved student enrolment and reduced absenteeism, their expanding role has raised concerns

about educational quality. A key issue is their limited professional training. Although effective in boosting engagement, many lack the pedagogical foundation needed to manage classrooms or implement sound instructional strategies—particularly in multigrade settings where innovation is essential. As Pandey (2006) notes, their effectiveness is constrained by the absence of both pre-service education and continuous professional development.

These challenges are exacerbated by difficult working conditions, including low wages, job insecurity, and limited access to teaching materials. Such constraints dampen morale and restrict the ability of para-teachers to improve and practice, even when highly motivated. Without adequate support and resources, the drive to expand access is not always matched by a commitment to ensure instructional quality—a gap that risks undermining the long-term promise of the model.

The para-teacher model is highly relevant to the linguistic and cultural diversity of rural India. In many regions, students speak local dialects not represented in formal instruction, creating barriers to learning (Sridhar, 1996). By recruiting local educators fluent in these dialects, the model bridges the language gap, making education more accessible and relatable for first-generation learners. Beyond language, para-teachers' deep cultural familiarity enables them to connect meaningfully with students and families. They adapt curriculum to local contexts, fostering inclusive, engaging classrooms that improve retention and promote community involvement.

The model is also cost-effective. Para-teachers are hired on contractual terms at lower salaries, allowing states to expand the workforce without overburdening public finances (Alderman et al., 2001).

This affordability is critical for sustaining access in low-resource settings. Crucially, para-teachers act as community connectors, building trust and ownership around local schools. Their presence strengthens parental engagement and helps create a supportive learning environment. While the model's accessibility and affordability are clear strengths, ensuring quality education and ongoing professional development remains essential to fully realise its potential in transforming rural education.

4.2.3 Impact of Para-Teachers on Student Outcomes

The relationship between para-teachers and student outcomes remains complex and contested. On the one hand, para-teachers have contributed significantly to reducing teacher absenteeism and increasing student attendance, particularly in remote areas where regular teachers are often unwilling or unable to serve. However, questions persist about whether these gains translate into improved academic performance. Kingdon and Sipahimalani-Rao (2010) highlight concerns about lower achievement levels in classrooms led by para-teachers, particularly in subjects like mathematics, where foundational understanding is crucial for long-term student success.

In many cases, the instructional methods used by para-teachers are heavily reliant on textbook-based teaching, which tends to be more passive and less engaging for students. As Pandey (2006) points out, such methods fail to incorporate the activity-based, interactive learning approaches that are increasingly recognised as essential for effective teaching and learning. This lack of learner-centred methodologies not only limits student participation but also affects their ability to grasp and retain key concepts.

Despite these challenges, there are avenues through which the performance of para-teachers can be improved. Raval et al. (2010) propose that embedding on the job learning opportunities, such as continuous lesson planning, reflection, and peer mentoring, could significantly enhance the pedagogical skills of para-teachers and improve student outcomes. By incorporating professional development into their daily routine , it is possible to create a cycle of reflection and improvement, which could help mitigate the weaknesses associated with limited formal training. This cyclical model of development encourages para-teachers to assess their classroom performance, adjust their teaching strategies accordingly, and develop more interactive and engaging lesson plans.

4.2.4 Women's Livelihood and Empowerment through Educational Roles

In addition to its role in addressing teacher shortages, the para-teacher model offers significant benefits in terms of economic empowerment for marginalised women, particularly in rural areas. Integration of education with livelihood has been shown to not only improve access to education but also provide a means of economic resilience for women who are typically excluded from formal employment opportunities. Reddy and Rao (2003a) emphasise that programs like the para-teacher model have been instrumental in improving household incomes, as they allow women to contribute financially to their families while simultaneously fulfilling vital roles in their communities. This dual focus on education and livelihood has proven to be a powerful tool in fostering economic stability in some of India's most impoverished regions.

Moreover, the para-teacher model also offers women a platform to gain financial independence, which in turn elevates their social standing within traditionally patriarchal communities. As women take on the role of educators, they are increasingly seen as contributors to the intellectual and economic fabric of their communities, which helps to shift gender norms. For many women, the para-teacher role represents a break from the traditional expectations placed upon them, providing opportunities for professional growth and personal agency that were previously inaccessible.

Khare (2002) argues that by offering women the chance to become para-teachers, these programs actively challenge traditional gender roles. Women who step into these positions not only serve as educators but also as role models for the next generation, particularly young girls.

The visibility of women in these roles creates a ripple effect, inspiring girls to pursue education and view themselves as capable of participating in the workforce. By disrupting the narrative that confines women to domestic roles, the para-teacher model facilitates a broader societal transformation, positioning women as agents of change within their communities.

This aspect of the para-teacher model highlights the intersectional benefits of integrating education with women's empowerment. Not only does the model address immediate educational needs in underserved regions, but it also promotes long-term social change by challenging the gendered division of labour and fostering female leadership. As women gain experience and respect in their roles as para-teachers, their influence extends beyond the classroom, contributing to community development and altering perceptions of women's capabilities in the public sphere.

4.2.5 Teacher Professional Development for Non-Specialists

A persistent challenge associated with the para-teacher model is the lack of adequate professional training provided to these educators. Unlike formally trained teachers, para-teachers often enter the classroom with minimal pre-service preparation, which limits their capacity to manage complex educational environments effectively. As highlighted by Snehi and Nath (2004), and Pandey (2006), para-teachers in most states receive limited pre-service training, typically ranging from 7 to 37 days depending on the region. This training is often insufficient to equip them with the skills needed to handle multi-grade classrooms—a common feature in rural and remote areas where para-teachers are primarily employed.

The lack of comprehensive training has significant implications for the ability of para-teachers to adopt and implement innovative teaching techniques that go beyond traditional, textbook-driven approaches. Without the necessary pedagogical foundation, para-teachers may struggle to engage students in interactive and learner-centred activities, which are critical for fostering deeper understanding and critical thinking among primary school children. As a result, classrooms led by para-teachers may lag behind in terms of educational quality, despite the improvements they bring to enrolment and attendance rates.

However, there are potential solutions to mitigate the challenges posed by insufficient training. Raval et al. (2010) propose a cyclical model for professional development, which integrates on-the-job learning into the daily routines of para-teachers. This model emphasises continuous lesson planning, teaching, and reflection, allowing para-teachers to progressively refine their teaching practices over time. By embedding professional development into their day-to-day activities, para-teachers are given the opportunity to reflect on their performance, receive feedback from peers or supervisors, and make adjustments to their teaching strategies based on real-world classroom experiences.

This approach aligns with the broader understanding of adult learning theory, which suggests that professionals learn best when they can apply new skills and knowledge directly within their work environment. The cyclical nature of planning, reflection, and adjustment fosters a culture of ongoing professional growth, where para-teachers continuously improve their pedagogical competencies without relying solely on formal training sessions. Additionally, this model helps to address the challenges of multi-grade teaching by encouraging para-teachers to develop adaptive strategies that respond to the diverse needs of their students.

By focusing on continuous professional development rather than limited pre-service training, this model offers a practical solution for improving classroom outcomes in contexts where para-teachers are a vital component of the educational workforce. It highlights the importance of creating structured opportunities for reflective practice and peer collaboration, which can support para-teachers in becoming more effective educators, even in resource-constrained settings.

4.2.6 Research Gap

While the para-teacher model has shown promise in addressing teacher shortages, improving access, and empowering marginalised women, key gaps remain in both literature and implementation. First, despite strong evidence of the model's cost-effectiveness and contextual relevance (Kingdon & Sipahimalani-Rao, 2010; Pandey, 2006), concerns persist around instructional quality. There is limited research on how targeted training interventions and context-specific professional development could improve para-teachers' effectiveness, especially in core subjects like mathematics. Second, although the model has contributed to the economic empowerment of women (Reddy & Rao, 2003b; Khare, 2002), there is insufficient exploration of its long-term impact on gender norms, household dynamics, and community leadership. Most studies focus on immediate financial gain, with little attention on how these roles affect decision-making power, mobility, or potential for career progression beyond contractual para-teaching. Third, the potential of technology-enhanced instruction remains underexplored. While para-teachers often rely on traditional methods, there is a lack of research on how digital tools and blended learning models could be adapted for use without extensive training or added resource burdens. Finally, while the cyclical professional development model proposed by Raval et al. (2010) offers a promising framework for ongoing teacher support, there is limited empirical evidence on its scalability and impact on retention or student achievement across varied contexts. Addressing these gaps is critical to strengthening the para-teacher model and realizing its full potential in transforming education and gender equity in resource-constrained settings.

4.4.1 Research Question

The general objective of this study is to evaluate whether the teaching deficit in semi-urban and rural government schools can be addressed through innovative approaches, including para-teacher models, edtech-based classrooms, and gamified curricula to build teacher capacity among non-specialist, semi-educated para-teachers. The study seeks to address the following key questions:

1. Can locally hired para-teachers, without formal teaching credentials, become effective educators in rural government schools when supported by continuous professional development and contextualised training?
2. How effective is the Teacher Professional Development (TPD) model designed for non-specialist para-teachers in improving both student outcomes and teaching quality in resource-constrained settings?
3. What is the impact of the para-teacher model on the socio-economic empowerment of marginally-educated rural women, particularly regarding their financial independence, household income, and their agency and influence within their communities?

The hypothesis for the study is that One Billion Literates Foundation's para-teacher model, which emphasises continuous professional development, an integrated state curriculum that is activity-based, and pedagogical capacity building, leads to significantly better English language proficiency and foundational literacy among learners in primary rural government schools.

4.3 The OBLF Para-Teacher Model: A Program Overview

The OBLF para-teacher model is a holistic approach designed to enhance foundational literacy while empowering rural women as educators (Figure 4.1). The model integrates a rigorous recruitment process, ongoing professional development, classroom coaching, and structured performance management to support para-teachers in resource-constrained government schools. The program framework seeks to build an educational ecosystem covering recruitment and selection of teachers, their training, professional development, on-field coaching, to their integration as a core component within the educational institutions.

- **Recruitment and Selection:** Candidates—primarily semi-educated rural women—are recruited through community-led campaigns and assessed on English proficiency [benchmarked to Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)], teaching mindset, and growth potential. This ensures that para-teachers, while non-specialists, possess the motivation and aptitude for development.

Figure 4.1: Program Framework

Teaching & Classroom Pedagogy
Sexual Reproductive Health Education
Mental Health
Financial Literacy
First Generation Learner Focus
Bilingual Teaching

Scalability
Community Impact
Teacher Empowerment
Student Acheivement

Model Outcomes

Feild Coaching & Assessment

Pedagogy & Well-Being

The Education Program

Data-driven Improvement Strategies
Coaching Observation Checklists
Peer Coaching Sessions
Performance Improvement Plans
Annual Multi-domain Evaluations
Real-time Feedback & Reflection
40 Hours classroom coaching

Recruitment & Selection

Teacher Collaboration
Stakeholder Meetings
Data & Knowledge Sharing
Institutional Trust & Respect

School Integration

Professional Development

Community-led outreach
CEFR-based English Assessment
Demo classes & Interviews
Mindset & Motivation Focus
Candidate Screening
Diversity Recruitment
Role Specific Criteria

80 hours of annual training
CEFR-aligned language modules
CENTA-Based Pedagogy inputs
Interactive Content & Practice tools
Mentorship & Coaching
Peer Learning sessions
Assessment & Feedback cycles

Source: Authors' work, 2024

- **Professional Development:** Para-teachers receive up to 80 hours of annual training in English language skills, pedagogy, and curriculum implementation, guided by CEFR levels and Centre for Teacher Accreditation (CENTA) Teacher Standards. Most begin at CEFR A1 and are supported to progress to B2 through interactive instruction and continuous practice.
- **Pedagogical Training and Well-being:** Training spans four core domains: classroom culture, instructional planning, execution, and leadership. A focus on learner-centred, bilingual education prepares teachers to work with first-generation learners. The program also addresses teacher well-being, including financial literacy, mental health, and reproductive health.
- **On-Field Coaching and Feedback:** Each para-teacher receives 40 hours of annual field coaching, with regular classroom observations, feedback sessions, and reflection dialogues. Assessments span three domains—language, pedagogy, and curriculum—and feed into growth reports or Performance Improvement Plans (PIPs) when needed.
- **Integration with School Ecosystem:** Recognising the challenges of working alongside formally trained teachers, OBLF builds school-level support through regular stakeholder meetings and data-sharing, fostering collaboration and respect for para-teachers' training and contributions.

The OBLF model equips rural women to become effective educators by combining accessible entry points with intensive, ongoing support. It offers a scalable, cost-effective framework for enhancing learning outcomes while advancing women's leadership in education.

4.4 Methodology

4.4.1 Study Design

This study employs a longitudinal mixed-methods design, leveraging the extended operational history of the para-teacher model at the One Billion Literates Foundation, which has been in place since 2010. By examining the program over a prolonged period, this research provides insights into the long-term impacts of the intervention on both literacy outcomes among students and the socio-economic empowerment of community women employed as para-teachers. The longitudinal approach allows the study to capture the evolution of the skills, professional development, and empowerment of the para-teachers over time, as well as track changes in student performance across multiple years. The extended duration of the program enables a comparison between early cohorts of para-teachers and more recent participants, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the program's sustained effects.

4.4.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in Anekal Taluk, a peri-urban area located on the outskirts of Bengaluru, Karnataka, India. Anekal spans approximately 530 square kilometres and comprises over 227 villages, with a diverse population of over 850,000 people. The area is characterised by a mix of rural, agricultural, and migrant communities, making it a strategic location for assessing the impact of educational interventions aimed at marginalised populations. The study locale is further limited to 120 rural government primary schools where OBLF's education program, Elevate, is deployed using a para-teacher model.

The One Billion Literates Foundation has been operational in Anekal since 2010, focusing on uplifting marginalised communities through educational programs. OBLF's literacy initiative centres around empowering semi-educated rural women by providing them with continuous training in English language skills and pedagogical methods, enabling them to work as para-teachers in local government schools.

4.4.3 Sampling and Participant Details

This study draws on two distinct samples: one assessing student learning outcomes and the other evaluating social transformation among women para-teachers.

- Para-Teacher Sample: A purposive criterion-based sample of 120 women currently employed by OBLF was selected. All participants completed OBLF's Kickstart skilling program and were actively working as para-teachers. The sample includes women from marginalised communities—primarily Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST)—aged between 21 and 55 years, most of whom come from low-income or below-poverty-line households. Before joining OBLF, many were unemployed, engaged in agriculture, or running small businesses. Their association with OBLF ranges from 2 to 13 years, offering a rich spread of experience. Many joined the program with the initial goal of learning English, which they perceived as a gateway to better livelihoods. Today, all 120 serve as para-teachers, allowing the study to examine both their educational contributions and transformational experiences.
- Student Sample: A random sampling strategy was used within OBLF-partner government schools. From a pool of 5,300 students, 4,486 were selected based on matched baseline and endline English proficiency assessments. The sample includes:
  Grades 1–3: 1,788 students (40%)
  Grades 4–5: 1,540 students (36%)
  Grades 6–8: 1,158 students (24%)
  Two assessments were conducted:
  (1) A longitudinal study measuring learning gains over time;

(2) A treatment vs. comparison group study evaluating the impact of the para-teacher model.

For the second study, a comparison group of 358 students from non-OBLF schools was matched against a treatment group of 323 students from OBLF schools where the program had been implemented for at least one year. The design followed a 95% confidence interval and 5% margin of error, ensuring statistically significant findings. This enabled a robust analysis of whether students in OBLF-led classrooms outperformed those in non-intervention settings.

4.4.4 Data Collection

The study draws on four major points of data collection—two conducted internally and two externally by Socioven, a Bangalore-based research organisation. These mixed-method evaluations combine quantitative and qualitative tools to assess both measurable outcomes and lived experiences.

Quantitative data included:

(1) A baseline-endline student assessment (2023–2024), aligned with the CEFR framework, covering listening, reading, writing, and speaking, along with a review of ed-tech-based learning;
(2) A treatment vs. comparison group study (2022–2023), using CEFR and state-aligned tools to evaluate student outcomes in OBLF and non-OBLF schools;
(3) A para-teacher assessment measuring English proficiency, pedagogical skills, and curriculum understanding; and
(4) A survey on women's empowerment, capturing financial data (income, independence, sources), decision-making power, family structure, and occupational history.

Qualitative data was collected through seven FGDs and 25 in-depth interviews with para-teachers, exploring changes in agency, professional growth, and community perception. Additional interviews with a trainer, headmistress, and OBLF's Director of Academics offered institutional insight.

Data analysis employed SPSS for quantitative data (descriptive and inferential statistics) and NVivo for qualitative transcripts. Deductive coding was used to analyse themes such as teacher development, pedagogy, curriculum mastery, and student performance. Thematic maps were developed to visualise change over time. This mixed-methods design enabled triangulation, capturing both outcome improvements and broader social transformation.

4.4.5 Ethical Considerations and Reflexivity

Ethical safeguards were maintained throughout the study. Verbal informed consent was obtained from adult participants, with pseudonyms used to protect identities, especially given varying literacy levels. Students

participated only after securing written consent from schools and parents, with a teacher present during all interactions. To reduce power dynamics, interviews were conducted in private settings by unaffiliated researchers. The research team acknowledged its positionality and mitigated bias by involving external investigators to ensure authenticity in participant narratives. However, the study has limitations. Time constraints limited the capture of long-term outcomes, and purposive sampling may restrict broader representation. The findings, based in Anekal Taluk, may not be fully generalisable, and longitudinal data on sustained student progress and women's empowerment is limited. Nonetheless, the study offers a strong foundation for scaling teacher capacity-building models in similar low-resource contexts.

4.5 Findings

The findings are divided into three sections. Section 1 looks at how this model has defined the teacher role, built capacity and developed para-teachers into well-rounded educators. The second section explores the impact of this model on student performance, learning and building foundation literacy. The third and final section looks at the impact of this model on generating livelihood and empowering community women.

4.5.1 Teacher Role, Capacity Building and Development

Evolving role of the 'teacher'

The OBLF para-teachers have undergone a transformative shift in how they perceive their roles as educators, largely influenced by the interactive and student-centred approach embedded in the program. This evolution marks a departure from traditional, rigid teaching methods toward more engaging and inclusive pedagogical practices. For many para-teachers, the role of teaching has transitioned from merely delivering content to becoming mentors and facilitators of learning. One participant articulated this change:

> *"I used to think being a teacher meant giving answers and making students memorise them, but now I see my role as helping them ask the right questions and discover the answers on their own." This perspective highlights the increasing recognition of inquiry-based learning, where teachers cultivate curiosity and critical thinking rather than simply imparting knowledge. Central to this redefined role are the respectful and trust-based relationships para-teachers build with their students. As one para-teacher explained, "I've learned that the more I listen to my students, the more they feel comfortable expressing themselves. It's not just about teaching them; it's about making them feel valued in the classroom."*

This student-first approach reinforces the idea that education is a collaborative process, where students actively contribute to their own learning journey. The interactive techniques taught in the OBLF program have not only enhanced academic outcomes but also empowered para-teachers to see themselves as agents of change in their students' lives. One participant noted,

> *"When I see my students becoming more confident, speaking up more, and asking questions, I feel like I'm doing more than teaching—I'm shaping their future."*

This sense of responsibility extends beyond academics; para-teachers recognise their influence on the personal growth of students, empowering them to become more self-assured individuals. Moreover, the shift toward inclusive education has prompted many para-teachers to reflect on their role in creating supportive environments for all students, especially those from their own communities. One teacher reflected,

> *"In our schools, [there are] many children from my village. I have seen them grow up and know their families. I feel like it's my job not just to teach them English but to give them a space where they feel safe and understood."*

This narrative underscores how the role of para-teachers has expanded to encompass a holistic approach to education that prioritises emotional and social wel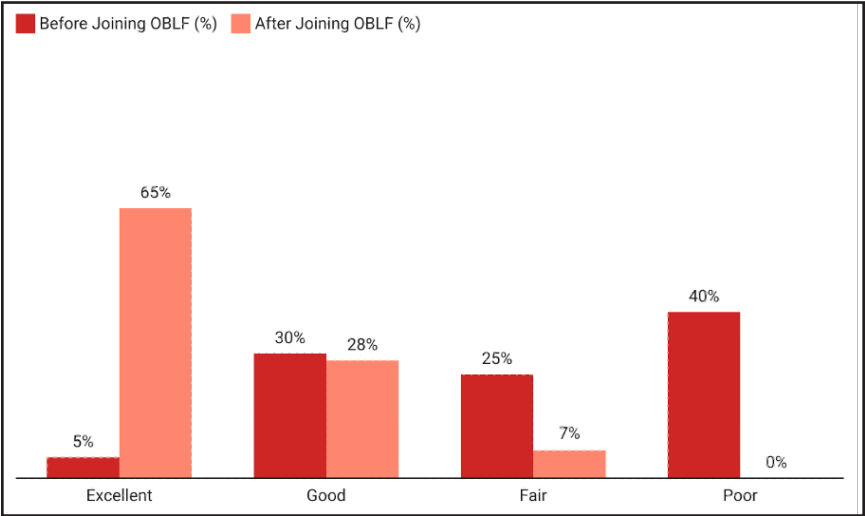l-being alongside academic success. As a result of these changes in teaching practices and relationships with students, para-teachers now view their role with greater purpose and pride. They no longer see themselves merely as facilitators of academic content but as mentors, role models, and advocates for their overall development of their students. One para-teacher encapsulated this sentiment by saying,

> *"Being a teacher now means more than just lessons; it means being a guide in every sense—someone who helps students grow, not just in knowledge but in character."*

Assessing English Language Proficiency and Pedagogical Skills

The OBLF para-teacher program has led to significant improvements in both English proficiency and pedagogical skills among its participants (Figure 4.2). Before joining the program, 40% of the teachers rated their English proficiency as "poor," while only 5% rated their skills as "excellent" and 30% considered them "good." Following the comprehensive training, these figures changed dramatically: 65% of teachers now rate their English proficiency as "excellent," and no teacher reports their skills as "poor." This striking improvement highlights the effectiveness of the program in elevating English language skills, particularly among those who entered with limited proficiency.

Figure 4.2: English Proficiency – Before and After Joining OBLF

Source: Author's Calculations from Program Data

Several teachers have shared how their improved language skills have benefited not only their students but also their families. Many have begun teaching English to their children at home, demonstrating the broader impact of the program. One participant shared,

> *"My daughter, who studied at one of the OBLF schools, not only helped me learn English but also urged me to join the OBLF program as a teacher."*
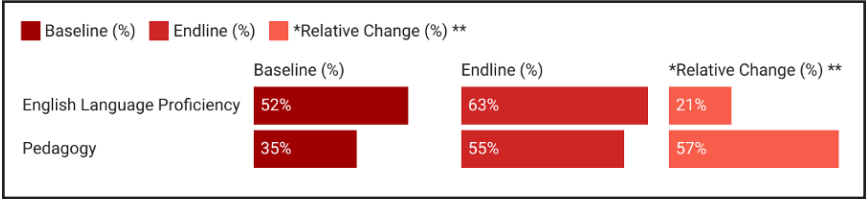
This example underscores how the para-teacher model enriches both teachers and their families.

Teachers in the OBLF program have achieved various levels of English proficiency as assessed by the CEFR scale. The overall improvement in the teacher cohort for 2023–2024 shows a 21% relative increase in proficiency, with all para-teachers advancing by at least one level on the CEFR scale. Currently, 63% of the teachers are at CEFR B1, while 5% have reached CEFR B2 (the highest two proficiency levels). In the Pre-A1 category, teachers scored an average of 50%. For those at the A1 level, the average score was 61%, while teachers at A2 scored 63%. Similarly, teachers at the B1 level also scored an average of 63%. The highest proficiency level, B2, saw teachers scoring an impressive 81%. These results highlight the diverse proficiency levels within the cohort, with many teachers demonstrating significant progress in mastering the English language.

In addition to language proficiency, para-teachers have also shown notable improvement in pedagogy (Figure 4.3). Throughout the year, teachers received targeted training on two core concepts: Classroom Culture and Instructional Planning. Their progress was tracked using a rubric, and by the end of the year, teachers had achieved a 57% relative

improvement in their pedagogical understanding. This development has allowed them to create supportive and engaging classroom environments, fostering better relationships with students and improving overall classroom participation. Training in instructional planning has equipped teachers with the skills to design rigorous, research-based lesson plans that cater to diverse learning needs. As a result, teachers are now more confident and capable of executing lessons that are both effective and inclusive, ensuring that all students are allowed to succeed.

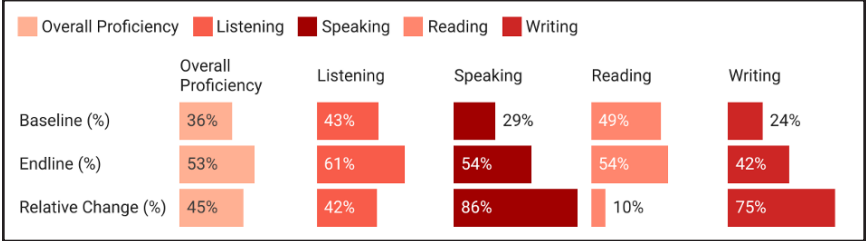**Figure 4.3: Shifts in Teacher Proficiency (2023-2024)**

	Baseline (%)	Endline (%)	*Relative Change (%) **
English Language Proficiency	52%	63%	21%
Pedagogy	35%	55%	57%

Legend: ■ Baseline (%) ■ Endline (%) ■ *Relative Change (%) **

Source: Author's Calculations from Program Data
Note: Percentage improvement denotes relative change from baseline

4.5.2 Student Proficiency, Performance and Foundational Literacy

Building English Language Proficiency

The findings from this study strongly affirm the hypothesis that a combination of learner-centric curriculum models and significant investment in teacher proficiency results in substantial improvements in student performance (Figure 4.4). The overall student proficiency increased by 44.5%, with scores rising from a baseline of 36.4% to an endline of 52.6%. This significant improvement reflects the effectiveness of a comprehensive approach to education that includes targeted curriculum revisions and teacher training. Notably, the structured, learner-focused environment has fostered improved outcomes across all language skills, with the most considerable gains observed in speaking and writing.

Figure 4.4: Shifts in Student English Language Proficiency (2023-2024)

Legend: ■ Overall Proficiency ■ Listening ■ Speaking ■ Reading ■ Writing

	Overall Proficiency	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
Baseline (%)	36%	43%	29%	49%	24%
Endline (%)	53%	61%	54%	54%	42%
Relative Change (%)	45%	42%	86%	10%	75%

Source: Author's Calculations from Program Data
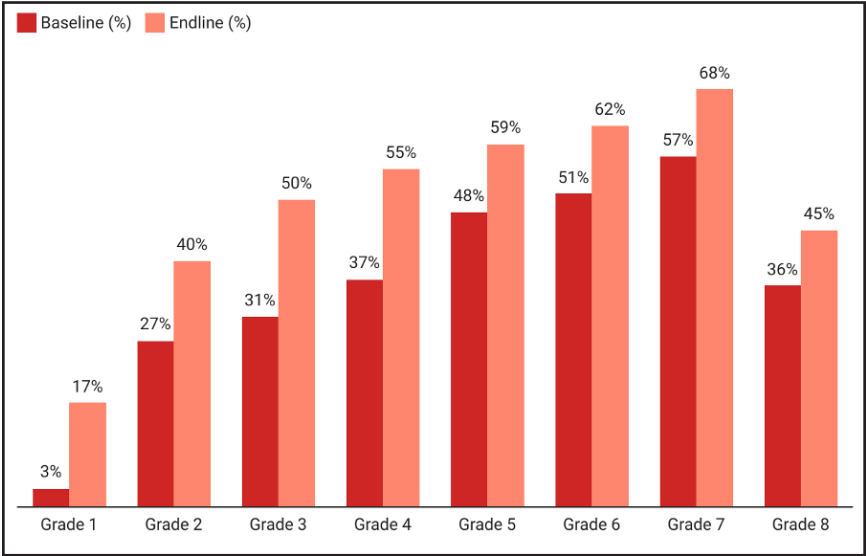*Note:* Percentage improvement denotes relative change from baseline

The proficiency increase across language skills showcases the success of this model in enhancing core areas of language acquisition. The proficiency gains across language skills highlight the effectiveness of the model in strengthening foundational English. Speaking skills saw the highest improvement at 86.2%, followed by writing at 75%, listening at 41.9%, and reading at 10.2%. Together, these results reflect a well-rounded enhancement in students' language acquisition across core competencies.

A critical factor in these outcomes is the substantial impact of para-teachers, who play an essential role in delivering an innovative and engaging curriculum. Selected from local communities, these para-teachers undergo rigorous training in English language pedagogy. Their approach is enhanced by the strategic use of both English and Kannada, allowing them to bridge linguistic gaps effectively and ensure that students feel comfortable and confident in their learning. This bilingual method aids comprehension and fosters an inclusive environment where students can transition smoothly between languages as they build their English proficiency.

One of the most effective elements of this program is how para-teachers contextualise the curriculum, utilising local examples and references that resonate with students. This relevance makes lessons more engaging, helping students connect classroom learning to real-life experiences. The curriculum is entirely activity-based, emphasising hands-on learning and interactive engagement. This approach facilitates a dynamic learning experience where students are actively involved rather than passive recipients of information. Para-teachers employ a diverse array of instructional tools, including ICT-based materials such as worksheets, flashcards, and audio files, to reinforce learning and enable students to practice and apply language skills across multiple formats. In addition to traditional tools, para-teachers integrate visual storytelling techniques—such as puppets, skits, and role-playing—to bring language to life and make abstract concepts more concrete. These methods effectively engage younger students and those who may struggle with conventional teaching approaches. The use of books, audio files, and visual aids accommodates various learning styles, supporting a more inclusive educational environment.

Moreover, para-teachers follow an integrated curriculum that emphasises daily lesson planning, bringing structure and rigor to the classroom. This meticulous planning ensures that lessons are carefully scaffolded, building on prior knowledge while introducing new material coherently. The rigorous preparation of lesson plans, combined with activity-based learning, guarantees that each class is well-organised and engaging, fostering a deeper connection between students and the material. The continuous professional development of para-teachers equips them with the skills necessary to execute these activity-based lessons effectively. Their ability to engage students through diverse instructional methods—including audio-visual tools and storytelling, has significantly contributed to improvements in student proficiency, particularly in speaking and reading.

Figure 4.5: Grade-Wise Student Performance (2023-2024)

Source: Author's Calculations from Program Data

By blending local context, bilingual instruction, and engaging activities, para-teachers have created a learning environment that is both rigorous and enjoyable, resulting in substantial improvement in student outcomes across all key areas of language acquisition.

The data from the student baseline–endline assessment of 2023–2024 indicate that over 80% of the student population is concentrated in Grades 1 and 2, highlighting a critical need to strengthen foundational literacy at these early stages (Figure 4.5). Students in these grades require increased attention to basic literacy skills, including phonics, pre-writing exercises, and other early pedagogies that establish the groundwork for language acquisition. This underscores the necessity for targeted training interventions with para-teachers that address the unique developmental needs of younger learners in this formative phase.

Across the sample, there is a relatively even distribution of students across higher grades, with a minimum of 400 students per grade. As students advance through the grades, there is a steady increase in both baseline and endline scores, suggesting that proficiency improves progressively with grade level. For instance, Grade 3 students' scores improved from 31% to 50%, while Grade 4 students improved from 37% to 55%, and Grade 5 students from 48% to 59%. This trend indicates that higher grades tend to begin with stronger baselines, reflecting the cumulative effects of prior learning.

Despite these baseline differences, the relative improvement remains fairly consistent, generally ranging from 20% to 60% across most grades. This indicates that OBLF's learning interventions are effectively designed to

ensure that students at varying proficiency levels benefit equitably from the program, regardless of their starting point.

An important observation is that students in Grades 4 and 5, who received additional support through specialised ed-tech interventions, demonstrated greater proportional gains compared to other grades. This suggests that targeted support at these transition points—combined with deeper engagement and structured learning modules—can significantly accelerate language acquisition and overall student outcomes. The gradual improvement across grades reinforces the effectiveness of OBLF's integrated model in ensuring consistent learning gains and equitable growth as students progress through their academic journey.

Accelerating Learning through Ed-tech Investment

As part of this assessment, we also examined the students who received ed-tech support through a weekly, in-classroom English language session conducted on a tablet. In these sessions, students played interactive games designed to help them practice key language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These students, who had sustained access to this gamified curriculum in addition to their daily OBLF English classes, were part of the program for at least two years. A sample size of 1343 students was selected based on their participation in this intervention.

The results show that students who participated in the tablet-based English language sessions demonstrated a 44% improvement in overall proficiency, compared to the 30% improvement among those in OBLF's program who did not receive the ed-tech support. These findings underscore the positive impact of integrating technology-based learning tools with regular classroom instruction.

The interactive games played during the tablet sessions were designed to reinforce critical language skills through real-time feedback and engaging exercises, making learning more immersive and dynamic. This method has contributed to significant improvements in speaking, reading, and writing skills. Of particular note is the 77% increase in speaking skills, highlighting the effectiveness of using interactive, gamified learning tools to enhance the language proficiency of students, especially in areas that are more challenging to develop through traditional classroom methods alone. This approach not only complements regular teaching but also accelerates the learning process, demonstrating the value of technology-driven interventions in fostering greater student outcomes.

Testing Model Efficacy through Student Literacy

In the 2022–2023 external evaluation study of OBLF's model, the research aimed to validate the hypothesis that learners exposed to OBLF's CEFR-aligned syllabus and instructional framework would perform significantly better in English proficiency than those in non-OBLF schools. Two groups—a treatment

Figure 4.6: Treatment & Comparison between OBLF and Non-OBLF Students

	Overall Average	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
OBLF (Treatment) (%)	36%	76%	71%	62%	78%
Non-OBLF (Comparison) (%)	18%	58%	49%	30%	46%
Relative Difference (%)	50%	24%	31%	52%	70%

Source: Author's Calculations from Program Data

group (OBLF learners) and a comparison group(non-OBLF learners)—were assessed using the same standardized English test(Figure 4.6). The results confirmed this hypothesis: learners from OBLF partner schools scored an average of 36.4%, compared to 18.3% in non-intervention schools. This means that OBLF learners performed nearly twice as well, achieving a 49.8% higher proficiency level relative to their peers. In other words, for every unit of proficiency gained by non-OBLF students, OBLF students demonstrated roughly one-and-a-half times more learning progress, underscoring the strong impact of OBLF's structured, level-based teaching model.

In particular, students in OBLF partner schools outperformed their non-intervention peers across all components of English language proficiency, with the most significant gains in speaking and writing, two of the most challenging aspects of language acquisition. The success of the OBLF model is largely attributable to the contextualised and student-centred approach employed by para-teachers, who integrate the local language (Kannada) alongside English to facilitate better understanding and engagement. Additionally, the continuous professional development provided to para-teachers has empowered them to effectively address key learning challenges, particularly in fostering speaking and writing skills, where OBLF students demonstrated the largest proficiency gains.

Figure 4.7: Treatment & Comparison between OBLF and Non-OBLF Students

#	English Language Skills	Average % difference between Treatment Group and Comparison Group	
		Grades 1-3	Grades 4-7
1	Listening	16.05%	34.16%
2	Speaking	18.55%	46.45%
3	Reading	50.97%	54.49%
4	Writing	65.81%	75.97%
5	Overall	43.16%	57.98%

Source: Author's Calculations from Program Data

As exposure to the OBLF program increases, the gap in English proficiency between learners in the OBLF intervention and those in non-

intervention schools widens. The longer students participate in the OBLF program, the greater their proficiency gains, particularly in writing and speaking. OBLF learners consistently outperform their non-OBLF counterparts, demonstrating cumulative benefits in language acquisition (Figure 4.7).

In both assessed levels, the writing and speaking performance of OBLF learners is significantly higher than that of students in non-intervention schools. These findings highlight the effectiveness of the OBLF model in enhancing language production skills, largely due to the efforts of para-teachers trained to emphasise these critical aspects of language learning. As students remain in the program, the integrated instruction provided by para-teachers continues to drive progress, ensuring that the proficiency gap between OBLF and non-OBLF students expands with each year of exposure.

The findings of this student evaluation provide a comprehensive analysis of the impact of the OBLF program on English language proficiency among learners. First, students in OBLF partner schools demonstrate significantly higher levels of English proficiency compared to their peers in non-OBLF schools. This advantage grows with the duration of participation in the program; as learners remain in OBLF, their language skills improve, resulting in an increasingly pronounced gap between OBLF and non-OBLF learners. Notably, proficiency in productive skills—specifically speaking and writing—is markedly higher among OBLF students, suggesting that these areas benefit most from the program's focus. In contrast, listening and reading skills do not show the same level of improvement. Furthermore, the results validate OBLF's strategic approach and curriculum design, which emphasise functional and productive English components. This deliberate focus aligns with OBLF's transition to CEFR methodology three years ago, reinforcing the effectiveness of its instructional framework in fostering language acquisition. Overall, these findings underscore the program's success in enhancing English language skills among its participants.

4.5.3 Livelihood and Transformation of Rural Women

Income and Agency through Livelihoods

The OBLF para-teacher program has significantly transformed livelihood opportunities for the women involved. Before joining the program, 58.3% of participants reported having no source of income and relied on their spouses or guardians for daily expenses. The transition to financial independence has been pivotal, allowing these women to take control of their economic futures and contribute meaningfully to their households. A remarkable 83.3% of participants reported an increase in income since becoming para-teachers. Among them, 25% had held jobs before joining OBLF, yet even these individuals experienced a notable rise in earnings. The average income before joining OBLF was Rs. 3,975, while their current average income has surged to Rs. 10,985, representing a 176.4% increase. This substantial rise in income has

greatly enhanced their financial stability and fostered a stronger sense of self-sufficiency. One participant shared,

> *"Before joining OBLF, I didn't know how I could ever support my family financially. Now, not only do I bring home an income, but I've also learned how to manage our expenses and even save for the future."*

Another added,

> *"I never thought I'd be able to contribute to my household this way. My husband respects my decisions more now because I earn and manage things independently."*

The ripple effects of this financial empowerment are evident in other areas of participants lives. For instance, 11.7% of the women run additional side ventures such as tailoring, working as National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) officials, offering home tuition, and selling bangles, with an average income from these activities of Rs. 6,000. However, their primary source of income remains their teaching role with OBLF, which provides a monthly salary of Rs. 10,985. This secure income not only grants them financial independence but also earns them newfound respect within their communities. One participant remarked,

> *"I used to feel invisible in my village. But now, people come to me for advice; I'm known as a teacher and a role model. It feels empowering to be recognised for my work."*
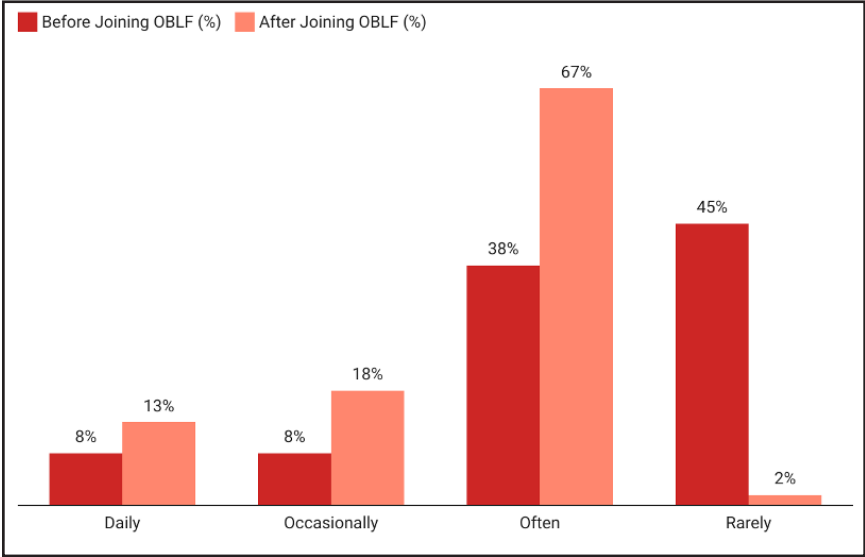
Moreover, the positive social impact is reflected within their households. Many participants noted how their financial status has shifted power dynamics at home. One woman explained,

> *"I used to feel like my opinions didn't matter, but since I started earning, I have a voice in family decisions." Another participant added, "Being able to provide for my children has been life-changing. I can now afford to send them to better schools and buy things we couldn't even dream of before."*

Financial Independence and Literacy

The OBLF para-teacher program has not only provided stable income opportunities for rural women but also significantly improved their financial literacy and promoted greater economic independence (Figure 4.8). Survey results indicate that 98% of participants have a bank account in their name, a crucial step toward financial autonomy. However, many women did not actively engage with their accounts before joining OBLF. Specifically, 45% reported rarely using their accounts before the program, but this figure dropped dramatically afterwards, with only one participant continuing to report limited usage. This shift reflects how participation in the

Figure 4.8: Operating Bank Account: Pre-and Post Joining OBLF

* *The X-axis represents the frequency at which women access their bank accounts*
Source: Author's Calculations from Program Data

program has encouraged regular and informed financial engagement. One participant noted,

> "*I never used to visit the bank, but now I go regularly to check my balance and make transactions. It gives me a sense of control over my own earnings.*"

Since joining the program, 66% of participants reported frequent usage of their bank accounts, while 18% stated they now use them occasionally. This increase in financial engagement is particularly notable when compared to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) state figure, where 88.7% of women have bank accounts but may not actively use them. Thus, the OBLF program has significantly contributed to improving the financial habits of its participants. In terms of financial planning, 73.3% confirmed they have implemented some form of household budgeting. However, 50–60% revealed they have not yet established short-term or long-term financial plans, indicating an area where further financial education could be beneficial. While the program has encouraged women to take control of daily financial activities, there is still room for growth in future planning. One participant shared,

> "*I can now manage my household budget better, but I still don't know how to plan for the long term. Saving for emergencies is something I need to learn more about.*"

Additionally, 67% of participants were unaware of flagship government programs aimed at supporting the underprivileged, such as financial inclusion schemes. Nevertheless, some participants mentioned they had started saving under the Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana scheme, which provides savings options for the education and marriage of girl children. This suggests that while awareness of broader financial programs remains limited, some participants are beginning to explore government-backed initiatives.

The survey also revealed that participants are now better able to manage household finances. Their earnings from OBLF are being used to cover small but essential expenses like electricity and mobile phone bills. For some, OBLF income has enabled them to pay EMIs on two-wheelers, enhancing both mobility and financial management. One participant remarked,

> *"Before, we were always behind on our bills, but now I can pay them on time, and we've even managed to buy a scooter, which I'm paying off with my earnings."*

This newfound capability showcases how the program instils practical financial skills that extend beyond basic literacy into everyday decision-making.

Enhanced Capability and Mobility

The women's skilling survey data underscores the significant impact of OBLF's para-teacher training program in upskilling rural women, empowering them to take on more capable roles within their communities. Among the participants surveyed, 60% reported receiving training in formal classroom settings, while 28.3% noted that their training occurred in both learning centres and classrooms. This structured approach has provided women with conducive learning environments that enhance their skill development and boost their overall confidence. The widespread use of digital devices during training was notable, with 98.3% of respondents affirming the use of tools such as computers, laptops, projectors, mobile phones, and tablets. This incorporation of technology not only facilitated a modern learning experience but also equipped the women with essential digital literacy skills for today's educational landscape. Interestingly, 66.7% identified mobile phones as their preferred mode of learning, reflecting the flexibility and accessibility that digital platforms offer. Confidence emerged as a key outcome of the program, with 98.3% of the teachers reporting feeling "very confident" in their professional abilities. Many attributed this newfound confidence to the positive results stemming from OBLF's comprehensive training. One teacher shared her personal growth:

> *"I felt left out among other qualified women and wanted to be more qualified,"*

highlighting how the program motivated her to pursue further education. Beyond professional skills, the program also facilitated the acquisition of practical life skills that positively impacted the teachers' personal and social lives. A commonly highlighted skill was learning to drive a scooter, which not only improved their ability to travel between schools but also became a symbol of independence and societal respect. As one teacher noted,
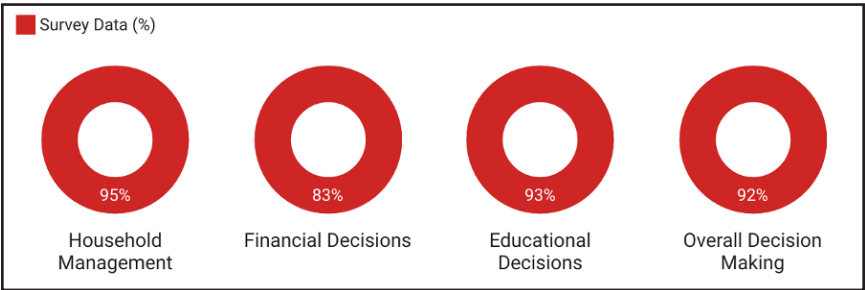
"Learning to drive a scooter not only eased conveyance to different schools but also is a symbol of success and respect in society."

This skill illustrates how the training has broadened empowerment for these women, enhancing their mobility and status within their communities.

Increased Autonomy and Decision-Making Power

The OBLF para-teacher program has significantly enhanced the autonomy and decision-making power of the women involved. According to NFHS-5 data, 82.7% of married women in Karnataka participate in household decision-making, with the national figure for rural women at 87%. In contrast, survey results from OBLF participants indicate an even higher level of engagement, with 93.4% stating they are actively involved in decisions related to their children's education—either independently (31.7%) or in collaboration with their spouse (61.7%) (Figure 4.9). This increased participation reflects their growing confidence and autonomy.

Figure 4.9: Participation of Women in Household Decision Making

Survey Data (%)

| 95% | 83% | 93% | 92% |
| Household Management | Financial Decisions | Educational Decisions | Overall Decision Making |

Source: Author's Calculations from Program Data

One participant shared how this newfound autonomy has enabled her to manage her children's schooling more effectively:

"I can visit my children's school regularly and speak with the teachers, something I never had the confidence to do before. Now, I can actively contribute to decisions about their education."

This proactive role empowers her to shape her children's academic futures. The data also reveals positive trends in decision-making regarding household expenses and management, with 26.7% and 33.3% of participants respectively reporting that they make these decisions independently. This marks a significant improvement in their financial and operational

control within their households. One participant expressed her newfound independence:

> *"While earlier I had to beg in front of my husband, now that I earn on my own, I can manage things."*

Her sentiment reflects a broader trend among participants who feel more confident in contributing to their families' welfare, leading to increased self-esteem.

Perhaps the most significant finding is that 91.7% of participants reported feeling "very confident" about making key financial decisions independently. This confidence is a testament to the empowerment provided by the OBLF program, which equips these women with the skills and financial autonomy necessary to take charge of vital aspects of their lives. As one participant noted,

> *"Having control over the money I earn has changed how I think about myself. I feel stronger and more capable of handling my family's needs."*

This shift in mindset, coupled with their financial independence, reflects the far-reaching impact of the program on both personal and familial levels.

Increased Awareness of Social Issues and Enhanced Community Engagement

The OBLF para-teacher program has significantly improved participants' knowledge about critical social issues, including **gender equality and safety**. Survey results show that 83.3% of participants reported a substantial increase in their understanding of these topics after undergoing training. This newfound knowledge has positioned them as influential sources of information within their villages, as they help raise awareness on issues that were previously overlooked or misunderstood. As one participant shared,

> *"My mother-in-law was earlier sceptical about me working, but now she shares with our neighbours how proud she feels that I am working as a teacher."*

This shift in attitudes illustrates a broader societal change, where women's roles and contributions are being increasingly recognised and valued.

Moreover, the program has empowered women to navigate their responsibilities more effectively, particularly in households where **traditional gender** roles often dictate domestic duties. Many participants have had to adjust their lifestyles to balance work and home responsibilities, demonstrating their adaptability and commitment to both spheres. For instance, some participants mentioned making adjustments like waking up earlier to complete household chores before heading to work. This shift reflects their ability to manage multiple roles, highlighting the program's success in fostering resilience and capability in both professional and domestic settings.

Overall, the impact of the OBLF program extends well beyond the empowerment of individual participants; it fosters a culture of awareness and engagement around important social issues. Participants narrated incidents of how they questioned and challenged cultural norms within their households and communities. Many participants reported that the training has given them the confidence to speak out against long-standing traditions and practices that they now view as restrictive or harmful. For example, several women shared that they are now actively advocating for their children's right to pursue higher education, regardless of gender, which contrasts with earlier expectations of early marriage or limited schooling, particularly for daughters. As one participant explained,

> *"I've made it clear that my daughter will finish her education before we even think about marriage. She deserves to choose her own path."*

In addition to prioritising education, many participants are beginning to insist on marriage with consent and choice for their children, challenging the norm of arranged marriages without the input of those directly involved. The training has also empowered some women to speak up against domestic violence and assert their right to live in safe, respectful environments. One woman noted how the discussions around gender equality in the program gave her the strength to stand up against verbal and physical abuse, adding,

> *"Before, I thought it was just something I had to tolerate, but now I know I have the right to say no."*

Another significant shift has been in the area of self-care—an often overlooked aspect in traditional rural households where women are expected to prioritise family over themselves. Several participants mentioned that they now feel more comfortable taking time for their own personal growth and well-being, which they believe is equally important to fulfilling their roles as mothers and wives. One participant shared,

> *"I've started setting aside time for myself, whether it's reading or just taking a walk. It's important for me to recharge so I can be there for my family in a healthier way."*

4.6 Discussion

The success of the para-teacher model lies in its integrated approach: rigorous selection, comprehensive training, and ongoing coaching. These elements have led to significant gains in English proficiency, which in turn have transformed teaching practices. Para-teachers have shifted from rote methods to interactive, student-centred pedagogy, promoting critical thinking and active engagement. As one teacher reflected,

"I now guide students in discovering answers rather than just delivering information."

This professional transformation also redefined para-teachers' roles as facilitators, mentors, and trusted community educators. Beyond the classroom, the model has had a profound impact on women's economic and social empowerment. With 83% of participants reporting increased income, many para-teachers have gained financial independence and greater say in household decision-making. One participant shared,

"Before, I had to ask my husband for everything. Now I manage the household bills on my own."

This autonomy has sparked wider social transformation. Para-teachers are now advocates for education and gender equity, rejecting early marriage for their daughters and championing continued schooling—especially for girls. Their growing influence in both households and communities reflects a shift in social norms, where rural women, once excluded from public roles, are now recognised as educators, leaders, and change agents. In sum, the OBLF model not only strengthens teacher capacity and student outcomes, but also catalyses intergenerational change by positioning para-teachers as drivers of equity within their families and communities.

Recommendations for Scaling the Para-Teacher Model

To replicate the success of the para-teacher model, it is essential to implement a comprehensive teacher development framework that focuses on continuous professional growth. This framework should include rigorous selection criteria for para-teachers, ensuring that those chosen have the potential to benefit from intensive training and mentorship. The development framework should prioritise ongoing training in areas such as English proficiency, pedagogy, and curriculum mastery, with at least 80 hours of annual training. Alongside this, real-time in-classroom coaching and mentorship programs will help para-teachers refine their skills and confidence. Additionally, bilingual teaching methods and interactive, student-centred pedagogies should be a core part of the framework, making the model adaptable to local contexts and improving learning outcomes.

Community engagement is another critical area for scaling the model. Strengthening the involvement of the local community will enhance the program's effectiveness by fostering a supportive environment for both para-teachers and students. Community campaigns should be implemented to raise awareness about the value of education and encourage more women to participate in the program. These campaigns can also highlight the benefits of financial independence and professional growth, motivating more women to pursue teaching as a viable career. Regular stakeholder meetings, involving school leaders, government officials, and community

members, should be held to build awareness of the positive outcomes the program brings and ensure continued community support.

Expanding the use of technology is also essential for enhancing both teaching methodologies and student engagement. Ed-tech tools, such as tablet-based learning, interactive games, and digital instructional resources, have already demonstrated their effectiveness in improving student proficiency, particularly in speaking and writing. Scaling the model should involve providing para-teachers with access to these digital resources and training them in their use, enabling them to implement innovative teaching strategies that cater to diverse learning needs. Personalised learning through these tools will allow students to practice language skills independently, leading to better learning outcomes and accelerated progress.

A key aspect of scaling the para-teacher model is the emphasis on foundational literacy, particularly in the early grades. Students in Grades 1 and 2 require targeted interventions in areas such as phonics, pre-writing, and early reading comprehension to build the foundational skills necessary for long-term academic success. Prioritising early literacy will set students on the path to greater proficiency in later grades, ensuring that they have the skills to succeed academically. The model should continue to emphasise these early interventions as a critical factor in sustaining positive educational outcomes.

To further support the financial independence of para-teachers, financial literacy training should remain a central component of the program. Equipping para-teachers with the skills to manage their earnings effectively will not only foster their economic stability but also empower them to make informed decisions for their families and communities. The program should offer additional financial mentoring, helping para-teachers with short-term and long-term financial planning, budgeting, and saving for future investments. This will ensure that the economic empowerment gained through the program is sustainable and long-lasting.

Additionally, gender awareness training is crucial for the broader social impact of the para-teacher model. Integrating gender awareness into the curriculum will empower para-teachers to challenge traditional norms and advocate for social change within their communities. By becoming leaders in promoting educational equity and gender rights, these women can act as role models for others, inspiring more women to pursue education and break away from restrictive gender roles. This focus on empowerment will enable the para-teacher model to drive cultural transformation beyond the classroom, fostering greater gender equality and educational opportunities.

Finally, the establishment of robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms is essential for scaling the para-teacher model effectively. By implementing regular feedback systems from teachers, students, and community members, the program can continuously assess its impact and make adjustments where necessary. Monitoring systems should focus on tracking student outcomes, teacher development, and the broader

social impact of the program. This data will provide valuable insights into the program's effectiveness and ensure that it remains responsive to the evolving needs of the community, ultimately sustaining its success in improving education and empowering women.

4.7 Conclusion

The para-teacher model at OBLF has demonstrated a transformative impact on both educators and students in resource-constrained settings. By equipping rural women with the necessary skills, confidence, and pedagogical tools, the program has not only enhanced their professional and personal lives but also significantly improved student proficiency, particularly in critical areas such as speaking and writing. The integration of interactive, bilingual teaching methods and ongoing professional development has shifted classroom dynamics, fostering greater student engagement and participation. Moreover, the program's success in challenging traditional gender roles and advocating for financial independence underscores its broader social implications. These findings reinforce the value of scalable, community-driven education models that combine comprehensive teacher development frameworks with innovative, learner-centred approaches to address educational deficits and empower marginalised communities.

Disclaimer: In preparing this manuscript, we have used ChatGPT, Perplexity and Turboscribe version (open-access version) to translate participant interviews, prepare transcripts and frame relevant quotes. We have marked and described specific content generated by the AI technologies/tools, and the details can be requested for review purposes. We take full responsibility for the content.

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