



## IMPACT OF THE PAKISTAN READING PROJECT (PRP) ON PROMOTING READING SKILLS OF STUDENTS AT ELEMENTARY LEVEL OF KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA

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**Abstract-** The study is observational in nature and it aims to observe the impact of Pakistan Reading Project launched in collaboration with department of Elementary and Secondary Education Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and district educational setup for developing reading skills of students in public sector schools at elementary level of southern districts of KP. Three districts Kohat, Karak and D.I.Khan were selected from all the five districts by using simple random sampling technique. All the teachers who were engaged in Urdu language teaching in these 3 districts comprised the population of the study. A sample of 24 teachers (12 male & 12 female) (8 from each district, 4 male & 4 female) were selected through convenient sampling for observing the role of PRP in their teaching learning activities. The observational checklist carrying 15 items related to reading skills including (phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension) was developed and then it was made valid and reliable before its administration. The data collected through observation checklist was processed for analysis through simple calculating mean. The study concludes that the project contributed a lot in improving the reading skills of grade 1 & 2 related with reading skills of Urdu language. The study suggests that such activities for improvement of the reading skills of English and Pushto need to be initiated in all the districts of KP. The teachers engaged in language learning may be provided professional training in regard to reading skills of 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Keywords:** Pakistan Reading Project, Reading Skills, Elementary School Level

### I. INTRODUCTION

Language performs key role in communication of day to day and all people subconsciously mirror their cultural background through languages. It is strong supporter of communication and reflects cultural background of a nation. Miscommunication sometimes creates conflicting style and results in bad situation. So it is mandatory that kids may be taught or practiced well in their national language for having congenial healthy environment. A person with less knowledge of a language may seem angry and aggressive to a foreign listener while communicating (Wikipedia, 2021).

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan is a country of multi languages where 72 languages are being spoken (Mansoor, 2004). Rahman (2006) reported that Punjabi, Pashtu, Saraiki, Sindhi, Balochi are the prominent languages across the country. Urdu and English are the languages which are spoken across the country. Lewis, Simons & Fenning (2015) claim that Urdu occupies the status of lingua Franca as well as status of national language. The valuable services of Pakistan Reading Project (PRP) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) were acknowledged and awarded the 2020 International Prize of the Library of Congress' Literacy Awards Program. The program facilitated more than 1.7 million students and organized professional development courses for more than 27,000 teachers. The project was formally launched in 2013 and covered 69 districts for improving the environment of classroom, endorsing policy reforms and strengthening community based support for reading skills of Elementary level students.. The previous studies reported dull picture of the early grade students as Annual Status of Education Report

2013 quoted 49% of grade 3 kids were found unable to read sentences in their own languages. The PRP worked on promoting students' reading skills in their own dialects/languages and supported academic learning. The project created good changes in practices of classrooms and enhanced the skills related to reading component. The project in support with Government of Pakistan facilitated the regional as well as provincial set up. It focused on removing the gender differences in learning and supported female participation. The project provided reading materials to 7.3 million students, supported in establishing 15000 classroom libraries and provision of 27,000 tablets with teaching aides (PRP, 2019).

The Pakistan Reading Project (PRP) and Sindh Basic Education Program (SBEP) started in 2011 to improve reading skills at early grade level. As the Annual Status Report 2012 depicts a very grim picture related to reading skills of grade 5 students. Sixty percent students of Grade 5 were unable to read a Grade 2-level story and more than 50 % were weak in simple arithmetic like two digits subtraction. Report of study regarding Early grade reading assessment (EGRA) shows a very dismal situation of the reading skills of the 3<sup>rd</sup> graders and the reality was that they were facing difficulty even in reading a single word of their own local languages i.e. Sindhi or Urdu. The background of the fact that due to poverty, the parents preferred to send their kids for earning their livelihood. Report of the Sindh education census report for 2016-17 indicates that 45% of all school aged kids are out of school and it depicts the same situation of the poor countries such as Chad, Bukina Faso and Liberia. The next phase of PRP was launched in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the story related to reading skills of early grade kids is not of a success nature so here PRP focused on improving the reading skills of kids, majority of the kids were having no awareness about phonemes, phonic awareness, they were facing problems in sentence structure due to having no sound vocabulary. Fluency and comprehension were poor even in their own languages i.e. Urdu & Pashtu. (Report of USAID, 2019).

PRP aims to strengthen the reading skills of teachers as well as for students. Five manuals were developed to support the supportive team engaged in improving the reading skills of kids in this respect. One manual was developed for specialists, the other for mentors in training, one for head teachers, one for academic supervisors' orientation, and the last one for supporting training of teachers. These manuals were developed in English for helping face to face training and these were further translated in Urdu to support them in improving reading skills in Urdu. Subject Specialists were recruited for developing manuals and hiring the services of consultant of international level was also done to streamline all the matters of the project. The project team also worked on development of 10 Urdu TIG modules for getting success in this regard. It also worked on the improvement of instructional practices of about 26,622 teachers and 1.6 million students of grade 1 & 2 with the aim to improve the students'; literacy skills. The project forte is to strengthen the professional grooming of teachers and it is a three-prolonged model covers face to face, monthly teacher inquiry group (TIG) and school support visits (PRP, 2019). The study conducted in three districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa out of the total five districts where PRP worked in collaboration with provincial and district education set up.

Teeyno & Raisani, (2017) studied the causes of poor reading skills of students in language and summed up that due to outdated teaching methods, ignoring the learners' needs in classrooms and overcrowded classes led us to poor quality of reading skills of students. Dudley-Marling, et al. (2004) not every student is capable of learning reading because it is a complex process of not just pronouncing a word rather to be able to communicate a larger message in the form of meaningful sentences which are the combination of phrases. It's not just to read out a word or a whole sentence but also to understand its deeper meaning. Krashen (2004) made it clear that reading is one of the most crucial elements of the learning process and without it a student's academic and professional success is at stake. Imam (2009) stated that such students will be in dire need of high-level intervention.

The scholastic growth and achievement of a student is totally dependent upon the reading skill which is one of the most important of all the four basic skills. It also adds to a student's emotional and social development. Kinniburgh and Shaw (2007) stated that if a student is not decorated with the reading skills in his early stage of learning, it will have drastic effects later on both on his personality and career. Krashen (2004) states that if a student is confronted with a situation where he has to acquire a second language, the need and importance of reading becomes double. Molla (2015) adds to it by saying that it is only reading which is both technical and complex and it connects the rest of the three skills. As far as the primary students of Pakistan are concerned, the results of their reading skills are really troublesome as reported by Annual Status of Education Report and Early Grades Reading Assessment.

In 2012, ASER analyzed the reading ability of the students of class 2 and 3. The percentage in Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto was 43 while the same was 37% of class 6th and 28% of class 7th meanwhile the later students were also unable to read English of class 2. These results simply show that the reading skills of the students in a second language are alarming and below the standard though students are not very good at local languages too. Same was the case with recognizing basic digits. EGRA also made the same level of assessment involving the students of class 2 and 4 handing over the results to United States Agency of International Development (USAID).

Shah & Armstrong (2019) stated that Early Grade literacy program under USAID Pakistan Reading Project worked fruitfully with Pakistani education official. Its major objective was to stand with regional and provincial Education departments with the single goal of improved reading skills in grade 1 and 2 students. Three major components were kept in mind during the whole process of the said project i.e., classrooms with improved learning environment for reading, improved system and policies of reading and improved reading with the help of community-based support. The earlier was not only confined to enhance the reading skills of students but also to improve and develop teaching assessment skills by providing the teachers with opportunities of pre- and in-service trainings along with continuous professional development skills. This project was specially initiated for government schools in Pakistan to enhance a reading culture (Kokab & Mohabbat, 2020). This study is specially conducted to examine the consequences of PRP and its impacts on the reading skills of the elementary schools' students.

### Objectives

1. To explore the role of Pakistan Reading Project in promoting Reading skills among elementary level students
2. To find out the impact of Pakistan Reading Project on different dimensions (Phonemic awareness, Phonics, Vocabulary, Fluency and comprehension) of Reading Skills of students.

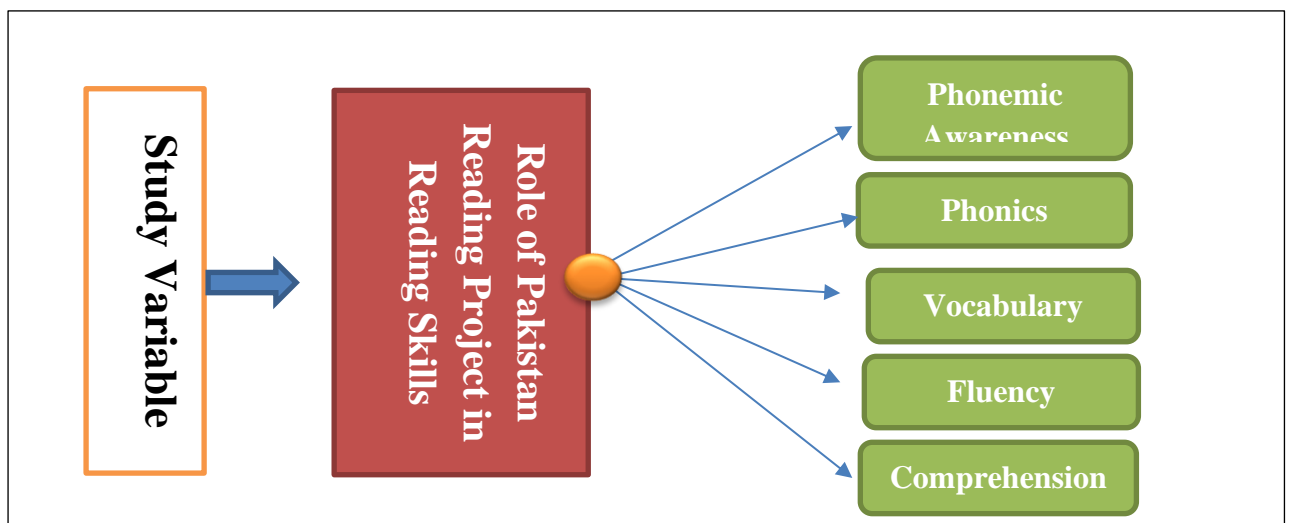
### Significance of the Study

The study is of significant nature as it evaluates the impact of PRP on promoting reading skills of students at the elementary level. This study shows the effectiveness of Pakistan Reading Project, whether this program was needed and suited to be followed all over Pakistan. The study highlights the new teaching strategies for improving students' reading skills at elementary level.

### Hypotheses of the Study

- H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant impact of Pakistan Reading Project on promoting phonemic awareness of students at elementary level  
H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant impact of PRP on promoting the awareness of Phonics at the elementary level  
H<sub>03</sub>: There is no significant impact of PRP on promoting the proficiency in Vocabulary at the elementary level  
H<sub>04</sub>: There is no significant impact of PRP on promoting the flow of fluency at the elementary level  
H<sub>05</sub>: There is no significant impact of PRP on promoting the comprehension skill at the elementary level.

### Conceptual Framework



## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is observational in nature. To observe the achievement of Pakistan Reading Project in collaboration with Provincial educational setup, Observational checklist was developed then it was made valid and processed for checking its reliability. All the elementary schools of Public sectors of 3 districts Kohat, Karak and D.I.Khan where the project started its activities for promoting the reading skills of grade 1 & 2 learners. 24 teachers were consulted 8 from each district (4 male and 4 female) for observing the effects of the Project. The checklist carrying 15 items related to phoneme awareness, concept of phonics, vocabulary, fluency and reading comprehension. It was Likert type scale having 3 options frequently used, moderately used and not at all and these were added value 3, 2, and 1 respectively. Three items related to each component of reading skills were asked from teachers' whether these were properly implemented in the classrooms for the language teaching purpose with specific purpose of Urdu language. The data collected was analyzed by calculating simple mean and it was tallied with the below interpretation scale using by Valerio (2015).

### Valerio M. 2015

Scale	Mean Range	Description
5	4.20 – 5.00	Very much affected
4	3.40 – 4.19	Much affected
3	2.60 – 3.39	Moderately affected
2	1.80 – 2.59	Slightly affected
1	1.0 – 1.79	Not affected

## III. RESULTS

### Descriptive statistics

Variables	Mean
Pakistan Reading Project	4.38
Phonemic Awareness	3.81
Phonics	3.97
Vocabulary	3.83
Fluency	4.58
Comprehension	2.90

Table 1 shows that the mean scores of phonemic awareness, phonic, vocabulary, and fluency are 3.81, 3.97, 3.83, and 4.58 respectively. The four components of reading skills including phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, and fluency fall in much affected category as given by Valerio (2015). Whereas the comprehension mean score is 2.90 falls in slightly affected. Therefore it is found that Pakistan reading project affected for reading skills of learners as mean score is 4.38.

## IV. DISCUSSION

The study aims to investigate the impact of Pakistan Reading Project on promoting reading skills of students. The result of the study indicates that there was significant impact of Pakistan Reading Project on the different areas of reading skills of students. The result of the study was in line with Molla (2015) and Mahreen (2016). They explored that PRP effectively promoted reading skill in different areas (Phonetic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension) among students. The project enhanced the reading skills with active pedagogical strategies and recreational reading materials which boosted the interest level of the students. Reading quality associates identified the reading difficulties and developed techniques to overcome such reading hurdles faced by the students at elementary level. It was also observed that in districts Karak and Kohat where Pushto language is spoken as a mother tongue and the

students of these districts were not so good in awareness of phoneme and phonics of Urdu language as compared to D.I.Khan district where Urdu is spoken as a mean of communication.

Awais (2013) conducted a study in the same area and concluded that the poor reading skills of kids at primary level is due to having not sufficient materials for reading purpose of the interest of the children. That is why they do not find the materials of their choice for their reading purpose. The lack of materials lead us to the poor reading skills of the kids. Vinay (2009) conducted study and summed up that parents need to motivate their kids for good reading habits and make them willing and responsive readers and further stated that if a child is accustomed to environment of reading good books it will lead him to develop a love for reading books in his later stage.

Shamim (2019) concluded that practitioners need to be engaged with policy makers on issues of broader nature and skills related to teaching literacy in both Urdu and English for transferability of regional/local languages. Mustafa (2015) talked about the importance of language in socialization process of an individual and overall development of the community. It polishes the culture, political thoughts and sociological dimension of the people. She is of the view that mother tongue, the national language Urdu and the international language of the day, English need to be developed to boost education system in Pakistan.

## V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Learning reading skills can be challenged for school children particularly at elementary level. Before intervention of Pakistan Reading Project, one third of teachers had not received training regarding reading skills. As a result, majority of teachers from urban and rural areas in Pakistan had no exposure to Early Grade reading strategies. The study concluded that the role of PRP in boosting the students' reading skills has been significant.

The level of reading quality among students observed good but students still face hurdles in comprehension skills. The study recommended that Government may conduct training sessions for teachers regarding reading strategies. For this purpose, best experts may be hired for teachers to improve the reading strategies. All Government training departments like Directorate of Curriculum and Teachers Education (DCTE), Provincial Institution of Teacher Education (PITE) and Regional Provincial Institution of Teacher Education (RITE) may involve in training programs, developing training manuals and reading materials. Language places a dominant role in developing a nation for language learning, all the required domains cognitive, affective, and psychomotor need to be focused in the classroom activities while teaching language. The students often do not have knowledge about proper use of dictionary, contextual meaning, skimming and scanning, so the teachers should focus on these areas for improving the reading skills of students.

The project was implemented only in five districts by involving teachers, mentors, academic supervisors, reading quality associates and students of grade (1 & 2) and here the study concludes that the project helped to a greater extent in improving the reading skills of the students in focused districts. The study recommends that as the project was closed in 2020 and no further funding is available, the government of KP needs to take the help of these teachers, mentors, academic supervisors, and reading quality associates to engage them in facilitating the students' of other districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

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