

Activity Based Learning (ABL)

An evaluation of the pedagogy, impact on learning outcomes, political economy of adaptation and subsequent scale-up of the programme in Tamil Nadu, India

Nidhi Singal, David Pedder, Malathy Duraisamy, Shakthi Manickavasagam, Shanmugam M and Govdinrajan M, ABL pedagogy in schools and classrooms in two districts in Tamil Nadu.

Monazza Aslam, Shenila Rawal, Anna Vignoles, Malathy Duraisamy & Shanmugam M, The trajectory of learning: the ABL story in Tamil Nadu, India.

Jaskiran Bedi & Geeta Kingdon, The political economy of the scale-up of the ABL programme in Tamil Nadu.

Shailaja Fennell, Malathy Duraisamy & Shanmugam M, Dissemination and scaling up of the Activity Based Learning Programme



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Report 4

Dissemination and scaling up of the Activity Based Learning Programme

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Executive Summary

This study focused on how the Activity Based Learning (ABL) innovation, that was devised in the state of Tamil Nadu was disseminated and scaled up within the state, and then transplanted at the national and international level. The study (i) identified what makes a successful dissemination and scaling up of an innovation, (ii) evaluated the nature of the innovation through tracing specific mechanisms of educational design and adoption (iii) investigated how the innovation was made relevant to the purpose and needs of teachers, and (iv) looked into how the nature of the innovation design and the ability of state level bureaucrats generated improved the likelihood of a successful scaling up process.

Key messages

1. **National Scaling Up:** In Tamil Nadu, a core team of state level bureaucrats wielding political skills generated a form of bureaucratic activism that supported the geographical spread of the intervention (quantitative scaling) and expansion in the scope of the ABL intervention (functional scaling). In Karnataka there was no bureaucratic activism, due to high turnover of staff, which meant that the state level push for an increased geographical spread (quantitative scaling) took place without the deepening of the innovation (functional scaling).
2. **Innovative Design of ABL:** Teachers who witnessed and participated in ABL became powerful internal change agents, and the ability to differentiate by each child's needs was quickly identified as an effective method of teaching. It seems that these features of the innovation design that focus on the methods and actions of teaching (through scaffolding) rather than those that focus on outcomes (through elaboration) were regarded as the most important in the design process that underpinned the ABL initiative. In the case of Puducherry, where the teachers did not become internal change agents, as they had very limited training and therefore little chance to experience the improved outcomes (through elaboration). The ability to participate in making modifications in teaching material (through scaffolding) and in using learning goals to explain learning outcomes to parents (through elaboration) was valued by teachers. These features of innovative design were recognized to be important to improving pedagogy by the international teams who came to observe the ABL intervention. The approval of international players helped to reduced the resistance to learning innovations in other national and international locations.
3. **Role of national institutions in scale up:** Institutions had a critical role in national scale up, both in a top down manner (hierarchical) through the use of district and block institutions by state governments to roll out ABL, but also through the active role of participants/early adopters in promoting scale up which was fostered by their role in the design of the innovation (relational). The creative and innovative design (relational) was at the core of the mechanics of the institutional scaling up process.
4. **Role of international institutional partners:** The manner in which UNICEF, Save the Children and DFID worked in a collaborative manner to introduce, motivate and move towards a piloting of ABL in Ethiopia and Bangladesh provide testimony of the value of policy entrepreneurs and international championing. These international championing provided the additional leverage for the increasing the credibility and visibility of the ABL programme, and this attracted the attention of national and international educational stakeholders. Their ability to influence policy and to demand increased documentation and evaluation of educational interventions has been important in pushing towards a more evidence-based approach to learning outcomes. There still remain institutional challenges for international

agencies with regard to finding policy change makers in other countries, who favour the transplanting of learning innovations, and are keen to take forward ABL type interventions.

5. **Role of national institutions in international scale up:** The international interest has resulted in visits by educational officials from other national education systems to the ABL schools in Tamil Nadu. There has been excitement among these teachers regarding the pedagogy (scaffolding), while the educational officers in national educational institutions remain unconvinced that the ABL programme can provide an intervention that will succeed in improving their existing national educational systems. These concerns have been overcome where education officers have engaged with the original internal change agents, as in Ethiopia. In Bangladesh, the education officials are still not sure of the institutional way forward to merge ABL within the educational reforms that are already underway in their country.
6. **Challenges and responses:** The key messages and the findings of this study indicate that the power of experiencing the ABL pedagogy was the key lever that convinced teachers and professional educationists, within both national and international contexts. There were challenges for ABL in the state of Tamil Nadu, in the very poorest resourced schools, as well as challenges of multigrade teaching in poorly resourced contexts, in Ethiopia and Bangladesh. The response of national educational institutions to the ABL educational innovation indicate that the top down (hierarchical) response is dependent on the ability of the teachers (relational) to show the benefit of the innovation with regard to learning outcomes. The challenge for scaling up the ABL innovation is to ensure that the role of teachers as internal agents of change can work effectively with educational officers to bring into play a process of bureaucratic activism.

Next Steps

7. **Measuring success of educational innovations through undertaking a mapping of institutional processes:** The result of this study of the dissemination and scale up of ABL was to show that the importance of identification of the opportunities and challenges that are encountered in scaling up innovative educational programmes. It pointed to the need for effective mapping of institutional processes to show how the political actors who generated bureaucratic activism worked with teachers to scale up the innovation through internal change makers. In the case of the early successes of a pilot study, an institutional mapping showed that a pilot study should not be taken to automatically imply the translation into system wide educational reform (Karnataka). A pilot cannot generate increased geographical coverage (quantitative scaling) or expansion in scope (functional scaling) without successful scaling up of human and institutional engagements, through partnerships between internal agents and external policy entrepreneurs.
8. **Mapping similar ABL type innovations:** There are a large number of ABL type innovations that have been designed and implemented in India in previous decades, such as Ekalavya in Madhya Pradesh, Digantar in Rajasthan, in addition to Nali Kali in Karnataka (see map). The institutional mapping of an ABL type intervention, as advocated by international agencies, would be a significantly important exercise to take forwarding the learnings from this study to understand how these similarly powerful innovations in educational reform took on the challenges of building early coalitions of advocates for educational innovation. The ability to compare and contrast innovative educational reform across Indian states has significant value for find a way forward to forge new internal and external champions to foster political entrepreneurship in India. It also provides an opportunity to examine further the role of

bureaucratic activism in both national institutions and international agencies to overcome resistance to educational innovation.

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1. Introduction

This study has addressed the phenomenon of disseminating and scaling up of the educational innovative Activity Based Learning (ABL) programme that was originally devised in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The study was devised so that it could compare the manner in which the ABL programme was devised and implemented with the state of Tamil Nadu with the conceptual and operational methods for rolling out ABL in national and international locations. The intention was to understand why and how the transplanting of the original ABL innovation from its primary location and political economy, has been undertaken in new sites/nations to which the ABL has been transported, and the extent to which it has been successful.¹

Background

The state of Tamil Nadu is located in the southern peninsula of India, (map) with a population of 72 million, and the state's capital city is Chennai. The state has 32 districts, is ranked sixth in the country in relation to the Human Development Index and has a literacy rate of 80 percent according to the latest census figures (Census 2011). The ABL approach was adopted in Tamil Nadu, with an initial introduction into 13 schools in Chennai in 2003 before being rolled out in a phased manner across the entire state for all children studying in grades 1-4 in all government and aided schools by 2007-2008. The roll out of ABL in the neighbouring union territory of Puducherry took place between 2009-2011. The dissemination to other states in India began with visits to the ABL schools in Tamil Nadu in 2008, and international interest in the innovation, and visits to ABL schools, sharply increased after the DFID Education Advisors' meeting in Chennai in 2009.

This study focused on processes through which the Activity Based Learning (ABL) innovation was devised, disseminated and scaled up in the state of Tamil Nadu, and then transplanted at the national and international level. The study of dissemination and scaling up was important for understanding how innovation spread through the educational sphere, in relation to both (a) the agents who adopt the innovation, and (b) the manner in which these agents further promote the innovation to become a widespread system level programme.

Research Questions

The following research questions were identified as central to an investigation of how educational innovation was designed, implemented, disseminated and scaling up in the ABL programme.

1. What are the features (components) in the process of innovation, dissemination and scaling up of the ABL that are critical to the stated success of the state-wide adoption of the programme?
2. How did the ABL pilot intervention chart the diffusion process and what were the consequences for achieving success in transforming into a system-wide educational reform?
3. How critical is the role of bureaucratic activism in disseminating and scaling up of the pilot ABL to the system-wide programme?

¹ The objective of this study is complementary to that of the Study 3 on The Political Economy of ABL. Where the political economy study examined the internal considerations of key actors within the SSA, Tamil Nadu Office and Tamil Nadu Education Department with regard to the agenda setting, implementation and scaling up, support of teachers, and sustainability of the ABL programme in the state of Tamil Nadu.

The current study differs in its focus as it examines the process of educational change that was set into play by the ABL process. There is a particular emphasis on understanding the design of ABL pedagogy and the rationale for scaling up, drawing on the perspectives of internal agents within the state bureaucracy as well the responses of international educational bureaucrats and experts, once they had experienced the ABL innovation (see political economy report).

The study focussed on identifying the following institutional features, as seen through the perspectives of agents in specific geographical contexts:

- (i) The perspectives of agents who identified the need for the intervention,
- (ii) The context within which these agents communicated with other stakeholders to convince them of the need for the intervention,
- (iii) The nature and design of the intervention, and how these impacted the process of dissemination and scaling up.

Orientation for design of the study

The study built on the institutional analysis of the process by which development pilots expanded to achieve a system wide presence. The four different dimensions of scaling up to a full system-wide reform: (i) quantitative; (ii) functional; (iii) political; and (iv) organizational (Uvin, 1995) were used to identify the institutional features of the trajectory of dissemination and scaling up of the ABL programme in Tamil Nadu and into transportation and transplantation to other national and international geographies.

The feature of innovation design in education was analysed through the use of the features of 'elaboration', that deals with the detail with which a reform is developed and that of 'scaffolding', that deals with the degree to which the innovation incorporates a strategy by which learning is carried out (Cohen and Ball, 2006).

The multidimensional process of institutional change and adaptation as understood from the response of institutions was evaluated in relation to the following features: (i) hierarchical, which is typically top down; (ii) individualized, which is bottom-up; and (iii) relational, which is based on the active participation of beneficiaries (Hartmann and Linn, 2008).

This Study forms part of a series of four, DFID funded, interrelated studies covering the following:

1. ABL pedagogy in schools and classrooms in two districts in Tamil Nadu.
2. The Trajectory of Learning: The Story of ABL in Tamil Nadu, India.
3. The Political Economy of the Scale up of the ABL Programme in Tamil Nadu.
4. Dissemination and Scaling up of the Activity Based Learning Programme.

The findings of the study are presented in the following sections. The review of previous studies on dissemination and scaling-up are presented in Section 2. This is followed by a presentation of the research methodology, methods and sampling criteria in Section 3. This leads to an analysis of the understanding, actions and interactions of the change makers in the educational sphere in Tamil Nadu in Section 4. In Section 5, we present an analysis of the ABL pilot and scaling up in the state of Tamil Nadu and follow that with a comparison with that process in the neighbouring Union Territory of Puducherry. In Section 6, there is an evaluation of the international experience and evaluation of the ABL programme. This is followed by an analysis of the ABL variants in India in Section 7. The final section, Section 8, reviews the policy implications of the analysis in the preceding sections.

2. Review of earlier studies on dissemination and scale up

The earlier studies of dissemination and scaling up prove a framework for this study. Recognising the importance of institutional structures and processes that facilitate educational reform is vital. The importance of these characteristics in the case of the educational sphere in Tamil Nadu was reflected in the state Education Department's recognition that the Saarva Shikha Abhiyan (SSA) was an equal partner in undertaking educational reform in the educational sphere. The SSA had its own State Directorate that is headed by the State Project Officer (SPO) who is an IAS officer. The SPO oversaw the District Project Offices that are headed by the Chief Education Officers (CEO) and

Additional District Project Officers. Undergirding this is the district level structure, with the Block Resource Centres (BRCs) that provide the resources for supporting the work of the Block Resource Teacher Educators (BRTE) and also oversaw the Cluster Resource Centres (CRCs). The SSA covered 385 BRCs in rural areas and 27 BRCs in urban areas of the state of Tamil Nadu. In Chennai city, there are 10 CRCs in the Corporation Zones that undertake these tasks (Akila, 2009).

The educational reform undertaken the Government of Tamil Nadu was based on a commitment for reform within the educational institutions of the state government, and has been identified as part of the growing acceptance of the need for public-private partnerships in education that (Gopalan, 2013:33). The intention and the ability of the Tamil Nadu education department in the design, deliver, implement and scale up the ABL programme were also identified with the phenomenon of 'bureaucratic activism' where bureaucrats are cast in the role of 'institutional activists' who take up actions that are associated with 'social movement participation' while retaining their formal status within the government. A recent analysis of the ABL programme using this framework suggested that such activism has transformed both the educational structure as well as the nature of bureaucratic work within the education department (Niez, Krishnamurthy and Mahalingam, 2012).

Previous evaluations of this programme suggested that the use of SSA had been significant in Tamil Nadu. Since 2006-07, over 40 percent of total SSA expenditure has been devoted to ABL and ALM programmes, with the rest was spent on general education categories. The emphasis was on the innovative use of expenditure heads such as quality, to ensure both the re-organisation of classrooms and to allow both teachers and students to spend time on task (Geetha Rani and Kannappan, 2011).

The previous evaluations had indicated that the completion of the roll out of ABL across all districts of Tamil Nadu was a success and that this boded well for the adoption of a national level programme across Indian states. The SSA Joint Review Mission by Government of India and international donors of 2008 regarded the ABL programme as a model of a system-wide quality reform that other Indian states might like to observe in action and to consider as a blueprint for reform of the primary education (Geetha Rani and Kannappan, 2011). It was noted that the success of ABL is rooted in its ability to convey its pedagogic approach to both educators and administrators, so that they became imbued with the spirit of bureaucratic activism necessary to transform the education system. Such bureaucratic activism was supported by a recent history of strong people's science movement and state level support for educational innovation (Niez, 2012).

This study had the objective of finding the features of the dissemination and scaling up of that contributed to this stated success of the ABL programme. It addressed this objective by looking for the requirements for achieving scaling up of interventions that are provided by the earlier literature. There was also an attempt to understand the role of bureaucratic activism that has been identified by this literature.

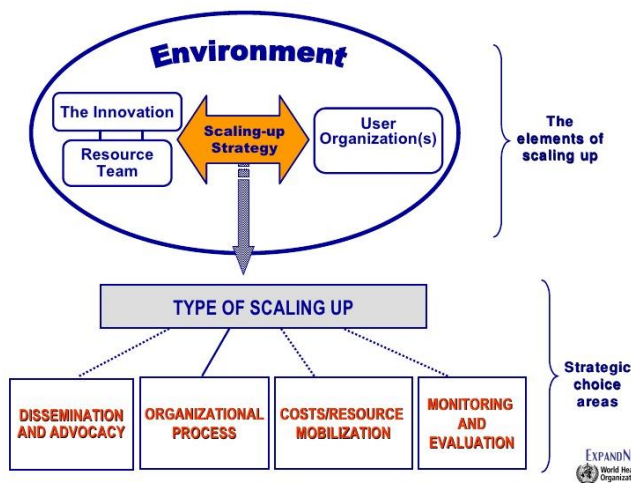
2. 1 Dissemination and Diffusion of the Innovative Designs

The process of disseminating a programme needs to be unpacked. It is not the case that an innovative programme that has been successfully piloted will be spontaneously transmitted and automatically adopted across the entire country. An early attempt to conceptualise the processes required for conscious communication is Rogers (1962) work on diffusion.

Diffusion is the process by which an innovation is communicated over time through certain channels among the members of a social system. It is a special type of communication, in that the messages convey new ideas (Rogers, 1973: 5).

These concerns regarding the ability to convert a pilot into a system-wide change through dissemination and scaling up have been raised more often in the realm of health interventions than in other areas of international development.² A successful pilot typically needs active sponsorship and the coordinated efforts of multiple stakeholders to be systematically diffused across a space, prior to a scaling up process being set in operation (Simmons and Schiffmann, 2007). Rogers (1973) had already shown that there is a large body of evidence on how the adoption of innovation is obtained from data collected on the transmission of new drugs by doctors. The impact of successful innovations in health has been very helpful in providing the basis of the earliest set of system wide reform formulations. A review of the history of health interventions, supported by the World Health Organisation (WHO) has provided a useful procedure for understanding how a promising pilot might successfully become a system wide change. The approach consists of the following elements: the innovation, the resource organization, the user organization, the scaling-strategy and the environment (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Innovation and Scaling Up



Source: EXPANDNET and WHO (2007)

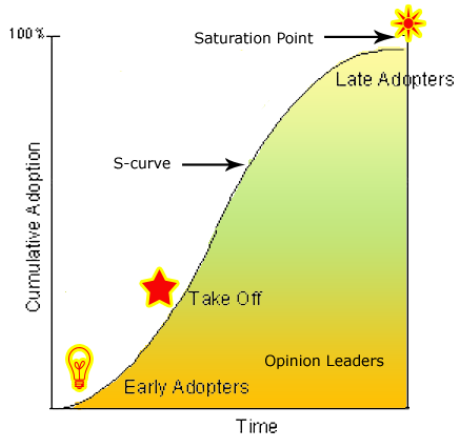
Rogers mapped out this process, stressing that in most cases, an initial farsighted few are open to the new idea and adopt its use. As these early innovators ‘spread the word’ more and more people become open to it, which leads to the development of a critical mass. Over time, the innovative idea or product becomes diffused amongst the population until a saturation point is reached. There are five categories of adopters of an innovation: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards (Rogers, 1973).

Kaminski (2011) further develops this line of thinking initially proposed by Rogers, by focusing on the movement from category 1 to category 5 as representing a process of innovation. She argues that achieving critical mass to ensure success depends on the ability of the innovators and early adopters to ignite the initial ‘take-off’ of the innovation adoption process through their propensity to form favourable opinions of the results of the original innovation. Kaminski regards these opinion leaders as the integral change agents who influence their peers in the system through (i) peer to peer communication, (ii) role modeling, and (iii) networking.

² See Fennell, Clark and van Gevelt (2013) for an institutional analysis of the reasons for the pioneering role made by health interventions with regard to scaling up as well as in relation to monitoring and evaluation methods.

The success of the take-off is key for ensuring the cumulative adoption of innovation results as indicated in the graphical representation of the S-shaped curve representing a successful diffusion of innovations (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Diffusion of Innovations
Diffusion Process



Source: Kaminski (2011)

We have used the Kaminski terminology to describe the process of diffusion that accompanied the ABL innovation and have examined the role of each of five categories of adopters. We have also followed Kaminski's preference for relating the success of early adopters to ensure take-off through sustained engagement with opinion leaders as an important precondition for ensuring that late adopters are brought into the system-wide reform (See Fig 2).

The academic literature in the field of political science also makes an important contribution to the subject of diffusion, by examining how policy makers are able to engage with and succeed in influencing government policy. The focus of this literature is on the ability of external players, termed policy entrepreneurs, to identify problems in existing policies, to adapt by devising and promoting innovative solutions, and to collaborate with others to turn these solutions into government policies (Mintrom, 1997: 740). In this literature the importance of the policy entrepreneur (akin to Roger's NGO or external change maker) is dependent on their ability to use personal networks to encourage the adoption of new innovation (typically a response to an existing problem in the system) by government agents, which then feeds into the policy reform process.

Most of the evidence used in these studies draws on fieldwork associated with health interventions, agricultural crop cultivation, and poverty reduction that document the result of the interventions undertaken by NGOs in relation to the diffusion of ideas and system wide reform. There has been less work undertaken in the field of education with regard to the theoretical understanding of the diffusion of innovations (Rogers, 1973).

There is an exciting potential contribution to be made by the education research tradition, stemming from the fact that organizations are involved, in one way or another, with the adoption of educational innovations (ibid: 62).

In more recent decades the relations between the original innovators and the adopters (this combines both the early and late adopters that were identified by Kaminski) has been emphasized in the literature on the adoption of educational innovations in United State schools (Cohen and Ball,

2007). The capacity to successfully diffuse an innovation is located in the relations between the innovators and adopters. An important case for our purposes is where the adopters are also the designers, as in the case of LEA and local state-devised innovations. This is a crucial distinction as it clearly differentiates innovation that is made by people who are external to the intended adopters, as identified by the work of Rogers (1973) and Mintrom (1997), and the case where the adopters of the original innovation are the designers, and therefore internal agents, of the method of adoption (Cohen and Ball, 2007).

2.2 The Importance of Innovative Design

There are two features of innovation design that require attention. The first is 'elaboration' and deals with the detail with which a reform is developed. The second is 'scaffolding' and deals with the degree to which the innovation incorporates a strategy for, and means of learning to, carry it out. Some innovations contain detailed elaboration, such as curriculum, examples of learning outcomes, and testing of outcomes. This type of elaboration provides adopters with an important starting point and is a useful enabling feature. It could be argued that in contrast, where there is limited instruction in design, scaling up may well result in weak and variable implementation. An elaborate design may also push away adopters who feel obliged to go through a detailed process of implementation in order to realize the innovators' design. The second feature of innovation that of scaffolding, has to do with the provision of materials and social processes to support the learning process (the 'scaffold')³. Any innovation needs to provide guidance on new practices, such as the use of new published or video materials for teaching lessons. Scaffolding provides the process of teaching and learning, where elaboration provides the objectives of learning (Cohen and Ball, 2007). A well-developed and interactive process between the innovators and adopters is crucial to achieve 'critical mass' and achieve a successful S-curve of diffusion of innovation. The interaction between innovators and early adopters is the key to ensuring the elaboration and scaffolding features work effectively to result in system wide reform. This is a necessary condition for a full scaling-up of an innovation.

2.3 Dimensions of Scaling Up

As mentioned, the development literature has considered the experience of NGO and donor led projects in moving from a successful pilot to expanding to achieve a system wide presence. Uvin (1995) has identified four different dimensions of scaling up to a full system-wide reform: (i) quantitative; (ii) functional; (iii) political; and (iv) organizational. Quantitative scaling refers to geographical spread and takes place when a successful project in one area is replicated in different places. Functional scaling refers to an expansion that increases the scope of the activity within the original location. Political scaling occurs when it is possible to gain the support of other stakeholders to promote the innovation within new institutions (a feature that closely mirrors the results of political entrepreneurship identified by Mintrom, 1997). Institutional scaling occurs when these institutions and organisations are able to introduce the programme at the national and/or international levels (Hartmann and Linn, 2008).

It is also worth recognizing that it is dimensions of quantitative and functional scaling up that permit the expansion of a pilot to becoming a system wide presence. On the other hand, political and organizational scaling up dimensions are prerequisites for ensuring transfer of a successful programme to other national and international locations. It is not always necessary that political and

³ The concept of scaffolding draws in the work of the psychologist Lev Vygotsky, and was used by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) in the field of educational research.

organizational scaling up result in a much bigger and more financially demanding NGO or donor programme. The process of scaling up impacts can also take place through decentralization. This would involve a successful model of the innovation being taken over by mainstream agencies and institutions, which could be the government or the market (Uvin, Gupta and Brown 1999).

The donor literature on scaling up began with regard to poverty reduction in the 1990s, and was given a boost by the World Bank's 'Scaling Up Poverty Reduction' conference in May 2004. In the last decade there has been a particular emphasis on the scaling up of health interventions (Hartmann and Linn, 2007), while there has been far less analysis of scaling up in the sphere of education in donor circles (McDonald et. al. 2006).

The literature indicates that scaling up requires a multidimensional process of change and adaptation (Uvin 1995). The response of institutions to the scaling up operations by which an innovation gains a system wide presence can be divided into three spheres: (i) hierarchical, which is typically top down; (ii) individualized, which is bottom-up and based on the appeal to the individual; and (iii) relational, which is based on the active participation of beneficiaries resulting in the increased empowerment of the people and communities (Hartmann and Linn, 2008).

3. Research Methodology

The literature review provides a wide canvas within which to locate the current study. It identifies the importance of ensuring whether or why the original educational innovation is successfully adopted based on interactions between innovators and early adopters.

The key features that are distinctive features of a successful dissemination and scaling up of an educational innovation as identified by the literature on dissemination and scaling up are the following:

- (a) Diffusion of the innovation from innovator and early adopters to ensure that there is a critical mass (Kaminski 2011) and the nature of the design of the innovation, with regard to elaboration and scaffolding (Cohen and Ball 2007);
- (b) the catalyst of the external policy entrepreneur and/or the internal innovator and the associated process of bureaucratic activism to ensure that opinion leaders (Mintrom 1997, Nietz 2012);
- (c) the four dimensions of scaling up: quantitative, functional, political and organizational (Uvin 1995);
- (d) the institutional response to scaling up: hierarchical, individual, and relational (Hartmann and Linn 2008)

3.1 Research Questions and Methods

The objective of the study was to understand what makes for a successful dissemination and scaling up of an innovation. The study evaluated the nature of the innovation, in relation to the processes of elaboration and scaffolding. It examined how the innovators and early adopters convinced the late adopters that the innovation was relevant for their purpose and needs. It finally looked at how the nature of the innovation design and the ability to generate a critical mass contributed to improving the likelihood of a successful scaling up process. It concluded with a commentary of the likely institutional responses to the scale up process: whether this is hierarchical, individualized or relational in its character.

The study asked the following research questions that were directed to the ABL programme, and emerged from the review of the existing literature on dissemination and scaling up:

1. What are the features (components) in the process of innovation, dissemination and scaling up of the ABL that are critical to the stated success of the state-wide adoption of the programme?
2. How did the ABL pilot intervention chart the diffusion process and what were the consequences for achieving success in transforming into a system-wide educational reform?
3. How critical is the role of bureaucratic activism in disseminating and scaling up of the pilot ABL to the system-wide programme?

The central conceptual proposition that was explored by this study whether change makers (both innovators and early adopters) who seek to influence political opinion leaders can ensure diffusion on an innovation from a pilot to a system-wide change (Kaminski, Fig 2).

The successful implementation of dissemination and scaling up of innovative programmes requires change makers to set into motion, to influence political opinion makers, often through a process of bureaucratic activism. The ability of these change agents, particularly the combined critical mass of the innovator and early adopters and the well-established relationship between these two, using both the elaboration and scaffolding features of the design, are the decisive features in whether a pilot is able to bring in the late adopters at the national level and interested educational institutions at the international level.

The study employed three levels of analysis, to understand the dissemination and scaling up processes that took place (i) within the state of Tamil Nadu; (ii) within the adjoining union territory of Puducherry and neighbouring state of Karnataka (map) (iii) and in the more distant geographies of Ethiopia and Bangladesh, to understand the role of dissemination and scaling up in sustaining the ABL pedagogy. The selection of the adjoining union territory of Puducherry provided the opportunity to understand the opportunities and challenges of being a late adopter of the ABL programme. The selection of the neighbouring state of Karnataka was to understand how other states, that have adopted ABL type educational innovations have charted the dissemination and scaling up process necessary to move from a pilot project to a successful system wide reform. The adoption of Nali Kali in Karnataka in the 1990s, a programme that had a similar intention of improving educational outcomes through use of innovative child-centred pedagogy, was regarded as comparable with the objectives of ABL.⁴

Research Design

The research undertaken for this study examined how the agents of change, both innovators and early adopters, were able to bring about (i) a successful diffusion of innovation through a combination of interviews with key stakeholders, analysis of primary data and a desk review of previous evaluations and reports on the ABL programme. The research design was devised to establish (ii) the various dimensions of the dissemination and scaling up activities of the ABL programme (Kaminski 2011). It also had the intention of (iii) identifying its characteristics, whether these be quantitative, functional, political or institutional (Uvin 1995); the nature of institutional response, be it hierarchical, individual or relational (Hartmann and Linn 2008), and (iv) the implications of these for the future of dissemination and scaling up ABL at national and international levels.

Sampling Criteria

⁴ Ramachandran (2008) sets out a description of key educational innovations in India, namely Ekalavya in Madhya Pradesh, Digantar in Rajasthan, as well as Nali Kali in Karnataka and ABL in Tamil Nadu.

The study was based on the following research methods:

(a) Interviews with head teachers and teachers in schools in the Kanchipuram district, in Tamil Nadu and in the neighbouring Union Territory of Puducherry. Three rural schools were selected from (i) the ten schools that formed the sample in Kanchipuram district (Study 1 on pedagogy) and three rural schools from (ii) the set of schools selected in Puducherry (Study 2 on learning outcomes). Focus groups and interviews were conducted in this sub-sample of six schools, three from Kanchipuram and three from Puducherry, for this study. The rationale for this sample selection was that the schools in Kanchipuram district of Tamil Nadu were part of the rapid roll out (a mid-term adopter, in Kaminski's terminology) of the state wide ABL programme between 2006-2008 (Unvin's *quantitative* scaling up)⁵, while the case of Puducherry was the case of a late adopter through a process of political engagement (Unvin's *political* scaling up).

(b) Interviews were also conducted with the key stakeholders in the state: the senior staff of the SSA office, Chennai, the senior staff at the SSA office at Puducherry, the Education officer of the UNICEF Chennai office, the Education Economist of the World Bank India office, and the Education Economist who has evaluated the Nali Kali programme in the adjoining state of Karnataka (see Appendix 1).

(c) Interviews were conducted with education professionals in DFID and partner organisations, both in India and in other countries where ABL type programmes are being rolled out.

(c) Data was also collected from the SSA office in Chennai, and from the entries recorded in the Visitors Book maintained at the Rani Mayyammai Primary school, Adyar, Chennai for the period 2008-2014. This provided a list of visitors, the date of their visit, the institutional affiliation of the visitor and their comments about the ABL programme and lessons that they have observed.

(d) A questionnaire was devised to obtain information from the education officers of international donor agencies (such as the World Bank and DFID), to learn about ABL types educational programmes that might be underway in other countries (see Appendix 2).

(e) The visitor comments and the feedback from educational officers on other ABL programmes were drawn together to provide a commentary on the attitude of visitors and donors (their institutional response) after their sensitization to the original innovation and the associated exposure to the critical mass provided by the innovator and early adopters.

The institutional responses gathered from national and international stakeholders provide the basis for evaluating the development effectiveness of the innovation process and ensuring they can be transmitted through the proximate actions of opinion leaders, to the more distal methods used by change agents and gatekeepers within receiving areas. This translates into the relationship between the political and organizational scaling up elements (Uvin 1995) and whether the elements of elaboration and scaffolding (Cohen and Ball 2007) in Tamil Nadu play an important role in spiking the level of interest expressed by the visitors. This also helped advance our understanding whether organizational scaling up is impacted by the critical mass of the original innovators. Furthermore, it pushed us to ask questions of how these translate into new demands for *elaboration* and *scaffolding* in the face of the new meanings imposed by the new adopters at the national and international levels.

⁵ Study 3 provides a detailed table on the periodization of the roll out of the ABL programme.

Research Methods

The research methods were devised to understand the diffusion of innovation process. The role of the change agents, both the innovators and adopters, in devising, implementing and scaling up the ABL in Tamil Nadu and in the adjacent union territory of Puducherry constituted the first level of analysis. This was followed by an evaluation of devising and scaling up of the Nali Kali programme in Karnataka and ABL like programmes Ethiopia and Bangladesh. The intention of the research methods was to identify how effective communication through personal networks had been in terms of bringing about political and institutional scaling up.

The treatment of the role of change agents was undertaken through examining a range of narratives with regard to both the processes of quantitative and functional scaling up in the state of Tamil Nadu. These were obtained from interviews with various key stakeholders. The narratives of stakeholders in the neighbouring Union Territory of Puducherry were analysed to understand the engagement of change makers in the case of a late adopter. There was also an analysis of the perspectives of international donor agencies on their role as change makers in transplanting ABL methods to other international geographies.. The interviews provided by educational professionals in international agencies, as well as a log of entries in the visitor log book provided by the SSA office, Chennai provided a basis for understanding how the educational innovation, in relation to both elaboration and scaffolding of the design, of ABL is regarded by national and international visitors to the ABL in Tamil Nadu and the actions undertaken after their return to their own geographies.

4. Change makers in the Tamil Nadu Education System

The historical context within which the ABL programme was designed and implemented can be traced back to the 1930s-40s, when there was a strong Gandhian philosophy in the public sphere in Tamil Nadu.⁶ This promoted public dialogue, and was succeeded by a popular science movement that advocated scientific thinking and promoted public education in the two following decades (Niez, Krishnamurthy and Mahalingam, 2012).

There was also federal level institutional support for expanding public education that advocated improvements in the quality as well as quantity of education, through engaging with quality education provision by pioneering educational institutions such as the Rishi Valley School (RVS). The initiative had strong support from Mr. Anil Bordia, the Education Secretary at the Ministry of Human Resources Development (MHRD), in the early 1980s, and he promoted the innovative work of the Rural Education Centre at Rishi Valley School (RIVER). Funds were provided to the RIVER facility to develop techniques and materials to improve the content and quality of teaching for less-privileged students in difficult contexts, such as extreme poverty and child-labour environments.⁷

4.1. Identification of the problem

The original identification of the problems with educational provision in Tamil Nadu, for children in difficult environments came from the vision of then Collector of Vellore, M. P. Vijaykumar, an officer in the Indian Administrative Service. There was also international support for educational innovation with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) supporting Montessori Training and providing funds for an 11 month training course in Tamil Nadu. This took place at the time that Vijaykumar was Additional Secretary of Education, Tamil Nadu. The ABL programme was developed from the earlier

⁶ See section 4.1 in the political economy report.

⁷ Interview with Ms. S Malathy, Officer, SSA Office, Chennai.

Montessori training initiative that was being supported by UNICEF, Tamil Nadu. As it built on this earlier educational initiative, it should be regarded as a process-based notion of educational innovation. It is not the result of a one-off idea but the consequence of a deep-felt concern that there is a need for an educational programme that would ensure that child labourers do not leave school and return to work. It was the institutional focus on the need to design an educational innovation that would overcome the problem of child labour that drove the engagement with educational innovation,⁸ in the very sense that was identified by both Mintrom (1997) and Simmons and Schiffman (2006).

When Vijaykumar became the Commissioner of Chennai Corporation in 2003, he took up the objective of innovation in the content and quality of teaching to prevent children returning to laboring activities in Tamil Nadu. As Commissioner he travelled across the country to study various innovative educational strategies that were operating at the time. He visited Ekalavya in Madhya Pradesh, Rishi Valley in Andhra Pradesh and a number of initiatives in Rajasthan.⁹ Following his visits and the subsequent analysis of the programmes that were being provided in each of these states, Vijaykumar came to the conclusion that the Rishi Valley RIVER programme would be the most helpful in relation to providing an innovative design and preparing content for the purpose of keeping child labourers in the school system.¹⁰

Vijaykumar orchestrated a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Chennai Corporation and Rishi Valley. The signing of the MoU was an institutional catalyst, as it provided public acknowledgement that the Chennai Corporation wanted to provide better educational opportunities for children in difficult environments. This permitted UNICEF to enter and offer to contribute to the cost of the teachers' training and travel while the cost of board and lodging of the RIVER teachers in Chennai was met by the Chennai Corporation. Ms. Rathnam joined UNICEF as education officer in 2003, and was a key player in bringing about the collaboration between UNICEF and the Chennai Corporation to facilitate the design of an innovative education intervention.¹¹

The MoU signaled the beginning of the training programme for Chennai Corporation teachers and was conducted by RIVER teacher trainers from two Telugu medium schools in Andhra Pradesh. Thirteen schools from within the Chennai Corporation school network volunteered for the training programme and a hundred teachers from these schools were trained during the course of 2003. These teachers were at the core of the process of developing teaching materials. Ms. S. Malathy was part of the second batch of teachers on this programme, and the most distinguishing feature about these trainees was that they "put their hearts and souls"¹² into the project.¹³

4. 2 Relationship between Innovators and Early Adopters

In the first phase of the project, the target was to introduce and implement the ABL teaching methods into one school in each of the ten zones of the Chennai City Corporation. Meetings were held in each selected school, where Vijaykumar as Commissioner, two supervisors, a lecturer from

⁸ The material in this paragraph is from an interview with Ms. Aruna Rathnam, Education Officer, UNICEF, Tamil Nadu.

⁹ The Map in the appendix identifies the states with established educational innovation programmes, which have previously been regarded as alternatives to the state system, such as Ekalavya and Diganter, as well as the more recent innovations of Nali Kali and ABL. Ramachandran (2008) also mentions the Childrens' Language Improvement Programme (CLIP) that is in operation in Andhra Pradesh in the 2000s.

¹⁰ Interview with Aruna Rathnam

¹¹ Interview with Aruna Rathnam

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ *ibid.*

DIET and a professor on deputation from the DTER, discussed problems that came up during the application of the methodology in the classroom. They identified the root causes of problems and provided pedagogical solutions for teachers to put into practice the following week. The impact that these suggested solutions had in the classroom were relayed back as feedback to the team by the teachers, to be used to improve the learning cards.

The commitment to designing content and materials was outstanding and teachers would write out cards on the training programme and try them out in their schools the following day. The training was conducted in a Chennai Corporation school that had been closed down as it was on the junction of two large roads. This building became the centre where trainee teachers met to discuss their ideas and experiments with the teaching materials. There were some 30 to 40 teachers in the initial training programme, who became the core of a very committed group who directed the content and design at the centre.¹⁴

The detail that went into the materials indicates that careful attention was paid to both the elaboration and scaffolding of the original design of the educational innovation, very similar to the notion developed by Cohen and Ball (2007). The dedication of the teachers, who were the early adopters of the idea of ABL, was in great part motivated and supported by Vijaykumar.¹⁵

Vijaykumar was very “hands on” in his engagement and would accompany teachers on the training programme and travel with them and stay alongside them in the same accommodation. This was regarded as a very unusual trait in a senior IAS officer and it bowled people over. Vijaykumar was very nurturing in his dealings with the teachers and ensured that they were made to feel valued. He also went out of his way to engage with their families and express his gratitude and regard for the design and content contributions made by trainee teachers. Vijaykumar was aware that women teachers would return home late in the evening after the design and practice sessions, and that their mothers-in-law objected to this delay in their returning home. Vijaykumar would get the addresses of these teachers, and made a point of calling at their homes when he was in the vicinity. He spoken in laudatory terms about the work of the teachers to their in-laws and to their husbands and this praise from a senior figure in the Chennai administration was very important in given these early groups of teachers a sense of professionalism and personal importance.¹⁶

The teachers were in effect a form of volunteer group and they operated as “a set of messiahs” throughout 2003-04. As a consequence of the unflagging effort and commitment of this group, a new set of materials was designed and was available for use in Corporation schools by April 2004.¹⁷ The materials now needed to be published and once again the success of the process was dependent on the innovator or change maker working with the Tamil Nadu bureaucracy to bring about agreement for change and for consensus of what might be realized through the innovation of ABL. The Deputy Commissioner, Dharmendra Prasad Yadav, was a strong protagonist of improving the content of books and teaching materials. He had two children of school age, and he was very clear that there should be a minimum level of uniformity in the resources available to all children. Mr. Yadav was opposed to the idea that children from the poorest families, who went to Corporation schools, could continue to write their letters and numbers upon slate boards. He was adamant that they too should have books to write in, just as his own children did. He put this idea across to Vijaykumar, who responded that there was no money in the training project for the printing of new books and cards. It was at the instigation and suggestion of Yadav (that the ABL cards

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ This early messianic zeal has not been recorded in earlier studies, and needs to be documented to fully comprehend the radical nature of this internally generated educational innovation (see the pedagogy study).

might be published by Chennai Corporation Press), that triggered the funding of the first set of cards in black and white, with UNICEF coming into to support the cost of the printing.¹⁸ The full set of feedback and improved cards were the basis of the prototypes printed for teacher resource packs. This creative use of institutional resources meant that the ABL programme in Chennai Corporation Schools was able to start in June 2004, with a full set of learning materials, workbooks and trained teachers (Pillay and Ramaswami 2009).

This regular interaction between the bureaucrats, teachers and educational institutions in Tamil Nadu was a major factor in encouraging *bureaucratic activism* that has become a hallmark of the dissemination and scaling up of the ABL programme.¹⁹

4.3 Fashioning of Bureaucratic Activism

As the Commissioner of Chennai Corporation, Vijaykumar was simultaneously lobbying the education secretary, Girija Vaidyanathan, to get permission to use the SSA money to improve the quality of education and facilitate the exchange of knowledge and process of ABL across Tamil Nadu. He was able to persuade her to allow funds to be spent to bring teachers from other districts of the state of Tamil Nadu to visit and observe the Chennai Corporation's model of education innovation. This approval was critical for facilitating the state-wide pilot that took place between 2005 and 2008. Vijaykumar also lobbied at the federal level with the senior officials at the MHRD. He invited the Joint Secretary, Vrinda Sarup, to come and see the new innovation in operation in Chennai Corporation schools. He accompanied her on visits to the schools, and was able to impress upon her the need to support a state-wide pilot, with 10 schools in each block.

Vijaykumar's ability to engineer *bureaucratic activism* through professional skills and personal networks are also evident in the lower orders of the administration. Vijaykumar made it his business to talk with all of the teachers in the Chennai Corporation about the persistent problem of children in difficult environments not staying on in the schools. He continued to keep alive the strong network that he had developed with DIET level officers when he was Additional Secretary. He gained the trust of the Educational Officers at the district level during his tenure, and now as Commissioner of Chennai Corporation he requested these same district level education officials to visit Chennai Corporation schools to witness the ABL innovation in action.²⁰

The peer-to-peer engagement and the role model effect of the personal and professional actions undertaken by Vijaykumar played a fundamental role in ensuring that a powerful form of opinion leadership.

4.4 Early Adopters and the ability to achieve Critical Mass

The success of the volunteer group in ensuring the design and testing of the cards during the course of 2003-04 was significantly assisted by the arrival of the cell phone as a form of communication. With this tool, it became possible for teachers to stay in touch with each other throughout the day. The mobile phone became an important communication network: teachers exchanged telephone numbers and talked in real time, about their experiences. When teachers returned to their own districts after observing the activities being undertaken in the ABL programme, they could call the Chennai Corporation teachers, from their own blocks and clusters in the state.²¹

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ *ibid.*

Another feature of the programme that contributed to the ability to get a critical mass of teachers was that new recruits got to drive the design process. The block training (BRTs) institutions, and their established teacher trainers, were not part of the project. It was a case of microteaching and the teachers felt that they were at the core of the innovation. Chennai Corporation teachers organized the whole process, and they led and sorted out the process throughout the period 2003-2004.²²

These features closely mirror the analysis of Cohen and Ball (2006) of the importance of balancing the characteristics of *elaboration* and *scaffolding* in the innovation design.

4.5 Challenges in the state-wide scaling up process

The support of key institutional figures in the educational establishment, such as Vrinda Sarup and Girija Vaidyanathan, facilitated the selection of 10 schools in each block of the State. Aruna Rathnam wrote up the case for UNICEF to fund a state-wide ABL pilot in Tamil Nadu. Despite the obvious merits of the case, objections were placed by UNICEF officers in other states, as it was felt that this additional spend would result in two states (Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh)²³ swallowing up most of the national budget for education. These objections were over-ruled following a suggestion made by Lata Menon at the Hyderabad office of UNICEF. Her suggestion, which was approved, was that all Education Officers in UNICEF India should undergo Rishi Valley Rural Centre (RIVER) training for 15 days in 2005. Subsequently, UNICEF became the only agency to undergo full ABL training.²⁴

Vijaykumar still had the challenge of ensuring that state level political functionaries were fully supportive of the ABL state-wide pilot. This is when he made an explicit decision to begin working on political negotiation using methods of political persuasion (strongly reminiscent of the analysis of Mintrom (1997)) to influence the physical scaling up process (Uvin, 1995). He used his powers of persuasion to convince the chief minister, Jayalalitha Jayaram, that her support and vision were critical for making the ABL a realizable proposition. At state level administration, Vijaykumar was also fortunate to have access to a young education minister, Thangam Thenarasu, who had a deep interest in education and a wife working in special education teaching. Thenarasu was aware of Vijaykumar's skills and accomplishments, and wanted to make him Secretary of Education in Tamil Nadu. Vijaykumar was able to convince him that given their common interest in education, it would be better for him to be the State Project Director (SPD) for the SSA programme, so that he could support Thenarasu as the Minister for education.²⁵

Key members of the education department were also becoming adept at using political negotiation to further their objective of system wide change, as part of their skill-set of bureaucratic activism. As the state of Tamil Nadu was so deeply mired in caste politics, there was a strategic move to appease caste sensibilities through inviting Mr. Ravi Kumar, an education official in the state administration and a Dalit, into the school programme in 2005. He wrote an article in the *News Daily* that described the processes to be initiated by the ABL programme. His article was avidly discussed in the public domain and was immensely helpful in providing public support for the roll out of ABL.²⁶

The Joint Directors in the state education department were already champions of the ABL programme, having been convinced by Vijaykumar. His persistent engagement with his administrators resulted in their support and facilitation of the roll out based on a thorough

²² *ibid.*

²³ Blum, 2009 provides a review of NGO initiatives that have made use of the RIVER educational provision as a training resource.

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ *ibid.*

understanding of ABL principles. Mr. Shiv Dev Mena, who spearheaded the ABL roll out, was a key player in improving the physical infrastructure of the schools. He imbibed the arguments of ensuring quality education for children in difficult environments, and it was at his insistence that government schools were required to put in a mosaic floor to replace the earlier mud floor as part of the ABL scheme. He made the case that as sitting on the floor is an unavoidable part of the innovation at the core of the ABL educational process, it was essential that a requirement for better flooring should be part of ABL to ensure the dignity of teachers and children.²⁷

The mission mode that was adopted by Vijay Kumar when he came in as SPD was critical in ensuring that institutional scaling up took place subsequent to a full diffusion of innovation, through both hierarchical and community channels, as identified by Hartmann and Linn (2009). He ensured there was an on-going process of active discussion among officials and a regular response to the exchange of dialogue between JDEs and the teachers. Vijay Kumar would go to a district and visit the schools, and get the teachers together as a group and discuss their experiences as ABL teachers. After these meetings, he would meet the young IAS officers who had been appointed to the post of district collectors, to convince them of the merits of supporting ABL initiatives in their schools. Vijaykumar had a very open communication strategy and he provided his mobile phone number to all teachers and officials, and he replied to every call, notwithstanding the hour, whether night or day.²⁸

This was followed by the commissioning of the baseline and the year-end surveys conducted during the academic year of June 2007 and April 2008 to understand the effect of the Activity Based Learning intervention that was up-scaled across the state of Tamil Nadu in more than 37,000 schools (SchoolScape, 2008). The importance of evaluation was not a high priority in the initial design and content workshops conducted by Chennai Corporation teachers taking part in the training in 2003-05. It would appear that the characteristics of *scaffolding*, or the features of the innovation design that focus on the methods and actions of teaching rather than that of *elaboration*, with the focus on outcomes was what regarded as being more important in the design process that underpinned the ABL initiative.²⁹

4. 6 Contribution of International Institutional Partners

Aruna Rathnam made the point that it was the advent of evaluations such as the JRM that increased the emphasis on outcomes in the ABL programme. It was this new impetus that resulted in recognition of a need for documentation being pushed in the state. This is what led to a commissioned report on the ABL programme processed compiled by Dr. S. Anandalakshmy (2007). There were difficulties in devising and conducting a baseline study of the ABL programme, as NCERT did not know how to do a baseline evaluation of the programme. Furthermore, UNICEF was not entirely convinced of the value of such a study.³⁰

There was a significant change in national level thinking on the monitoring and evaluation of the ABL programme after Michael Ward and Vijakumar met at the JRM in 2007-08. The two men hit it off and Michael Ward indicated that he would like to see the ABL model in operation in Tamil Nadu. The importance of Ward's enthusiasm for, and keenness in learning about, the ABL programme should not be underestimated; it facilitated a great deal of interest in the programme at the national level. This increased visibility was the catalyst for the commissioning of Deepa Sankar's time-on-task study after she (and other World Bank officials) had also visited the ABL programme.³¹

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ *ibid.*

Another consequence of Michael Ward's visit to the ABL programme, was that UNICEF in India became convinced of the value of championing the ABL programme at the global level. There was also considerable interest from the World Bank and DFID, both of whom increased funding for ABL evaluation and promotion, which greatly increased the programme's exposure to a global audience. In 2009, Michael Ward wrote to the country director of UNICEF and urged them to begin an evaluation process. It was this maneuvering that was crucial in setting up the directive that resulted in the evaluation conducted by R. Akhila (Akila 2009) funded by UNICEF.³²

A third consequence of Michael Ward's championing of the ABL programme was a much greater interest in visiting and experiencing the ABL teaching and learning process. There was a particularly significant event in early 2009, when Michael Ward requested that a DFID education officers' Global meeting be held in Chennai to give participants the opportunity to observe the ABL programme. The upshot of this international institutional affirmation of the ABL programme has been a long lasting stream of international visitors, which has also put the spotlight on UNICEF as a partner for ABL with the ability to bring in international and national expertise in both partnership and evaluation of the programme.³³

The important role of international opinion leaders is clearly emphasized in the actions of Michael Ward. He played a powerful part as an external change agent, who worked with the internal change maker Vijaykumar, to create a critical mass that was visible to national and international educational stakeholders.

The nature of engagements between the innovators and early adopters with regard to physical and functional scale up within the Chennai Corporation Schools were vital for ensuring a critical mass of support for the ABL programme. This was the key feature for nurturing a form of bureaucratic activism that was able to generate the trust and goodwill necessary for ensuring that this process was channeled into moving towards political and institutional scaling up of the state-wide reform. This set of elements in the scaling up process will be compared with the process of change that was underway in the neighbouring Union Territory of Puducherry.

Puducherry Stakeholder perceptions of the Political and Institutional Scale Up

The process of engagement with the ABL programme in the neighbouring Union Territory of Puducherry began with a visit from Mr. Vijaykumar to the SSA office in 2009-10. Vijaykumar was readily recognized as the architect and guide for ABL by officials in the SSA office and was welcomed by them. He gave a talk for an hour and a half to head teachers from across the Union Territory and they appeared to be impressed by the new method of teaching. However, the introduction of the programme was hampered by a number of factors.³⁴

The UT of Puducherry is different from its neighbour, the Department of Education in a Union Territory is directly administered by the federal MHRD, and is dependent on this federal ministry for the disbursement of funds for education. There are four districts within the Union Territory of Puducherry and their education systems are not uniform but linked to different state education boards: those of Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. There is the associated problem of the posting and training of teachers, on account of the involvement of three states in the education system. The teachers trained in one district could not work in another one, as it followed a different education syllabus. This also led to complaints and legal cases put up by teachers who did not want

³² *ibid.*

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ Interview with the Education Officer, SSA Office, Puducherry

to transfer to another district, which would require them to retrain so that they could teach a different curriculum in another jurisdiction.³⁵

The biggest problem that the SSA office had with ABL in Puducherry was the difficulty in convincing parents to support the programme. In contrast to Tamil Nadu, where teachers were encouraged and supported to explain the new education system, there were no resources or training provided for teachers to advance the new system. The introduction of ABL into Puducherry was restricted to the schools that fell within the district covered by the Tamil Nadu education department. Even though the teachers did undergo training in 2009-10, and ABL was in place in schools in 2010-11, the UT government rapidly moved away from this teaching methodology to the Central government sponsored CBSE scheme in 2011-12, due to a need to ensure that the education department continued to get federal funds from the MHRD.³⁶

The severely underfunded roll-out of ABL in Puducherry provides a sharp contrast with the fulsome and detailed process-based approach to the adoption of the programme in Tamil Nadu. It is apparent that the innovator did not have the ability to engage with early adopters or to nurture them to ensure that critical mass was achieved. It would appear that even physical and functional aspects of scaling up are not likely to succeed as the diffusion of the innovation is stymied by both political (a different financial outlay that operates through a link to the federal government) and bureaucratic (lack of alignment of the SSA office with the Directorate of Education) obstacles.³⁷

5. Scaling up and teacher perceptions of ABL in rural Kanchipuram and Puducherry

The impact of this institutional difference between the state of Tamil Nadu and the Union Territory of Puducherry will be evaluated through an analysis of the manner in which the innovator and early adopter nexus was able to train teachers in the two states. The rationale for such an analysis is based on the understanding that it is forging the relationship between innovator and early adopter that is crucial for achieving critical mass, and pushing outwards to system-wide reform.

5.1 Perceptions for rural Puducherry

We visited three schools in rural Puducherry and conducted interviews and group discussions with the head teacher and teachers of each school. The purpose of our visit was to ascertain how the teacher stakeholders regarded the ABL training process and to understand their evaluation of the ABL method of teaching based on retrospective accounts.

There was agreement across the three schools with regard to the training provided for implementing ABL as well as the value of the ABL programme as an educational innovation. Some teachers had been given the opportunity to attend a two-week training programme in 2008, conducted by the SSA office of the department of education. These teachers had been given the opportunity to experience how the students would participate in the activity based learning. They participated in a set of group activities with other teachers as though they were the pupils, sitting in 5 groups and learning and teaching with cards and ABL methods. They had the opportunity to use of trays and the teachers

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ *ibid.*

were able to see how students would use the resources. In cases where the training had been provided in 2009, it tended to be one week training programme.

The younger teachers who were the class teachers for Class 1 and 2 teachers were of the opinion that the training was 'very good' and that the trainers were excellent, and did a 'super job (*'supera paana'*)³⁸. The older teachers did not seem as enthusiastic about the training. All agreed that while the training was of a high quality it was difficult to work with the ABL system, as it depended of timely delivery of books and cards. This was not working out in Puducherry as the SSA office did not deliver the materials on time, and teachers were forced to work with materials provided in previous years.

The teachers also appreciated the ability of the ABL teaching method to allow time for the teacher to support the learning of the weaker students, and allow the better students to learn using a peer-to-peer method.³⁹ They were critical of the fact that ABL had only run for two years in Puducherry, from 2011-2013, and was already being phased out. A further cause of concern was that the haste with which the ABL programme had been brought in, without allowing for a strong relationship between the trainers and teachers, meant that there was also no voice for teachers in the DIET meetings⁴⁰. This lack of feedback did not pose a problem in Tamil Nadu as there were fortnightly meetings for providing feedback to the trainers and the innovators. It would appear that the lack of elaboration and scaffolding in the case of introduction of ABL in Puducherry is a significant problem.

5. 2 Perceptions for rural Kanchipuram

We conducted interviews and focus group discussions with the teachers and head teachers of three rural schools in Kanchipuram. The views with regard to the value of training and of the usefulness of the ABL programme as an educational innovation were the focus of the questions that we put to the teachers.

The teachers of the two government schools indicated that the training was undertaken in Chennai in Chennai Corporation Schools, and was for a duration of two weeks. There were 60 teachers in the training programme from two blocks in TN and the teachers had the time to discuss their problems with teachers from other blocks. The teachers were able to recall that the programme included an introduction to ABL, and was designed around the teachers of each subject with one subject taught on one day. They were also aware that the innovations in teaching had been adapted from the Rishi Valley RIVER method and that the key figure spearheading the educational innovation was Vijaykumar.

In the case of the aided school, the training was only provided for a period of one week and they were aware that government schools in other blocks had received training over a two week period. They did not appear to have as fulsome a knowledge base of the institutional history behind the ABL programme initiative or about the innovator.

There was agreement among the teachers of all the schools that the ABL methodology was excellent in giving the students self confidence and that it did allow the able children to advance far more quickly with their learning than the 'chalk and talk' method. It was also clear that the teachers appreciated the fact that their feedback at CRC/BRC meetings was taken on board and that the revisions in the cards and books reflected that feedback requests had been taken on board. There was also evidence that the teachers did have the ability to differentiate between the first ABL cards

³⁸ Interview in School 1

³⁹ Focus group in School 2

⁴⁰ Interview in School 2

that had far more words, and the later cards that been 'simplified' and has less words. There was a general sense that the simplified cards made it easier for the children to learn.

The teachers were also agreed that they had been able to convince the parents of the effectiveness of the ABL teaching method by inviting them to come to school and see the learning ladder and also by sending notes with the homework so that the parents can see how much their children have learnt.

The superior ability of the Kanchipuram teachers to discuss both the elaboration features (such as learning goals for increasing parent satisfaction) and scaffolding value (in relation to the modifications in the cards) compared to the teachers in Puducherry is noteworthy. This could be due to the longer period of training and the greater commitment of Chennai Corporation trainers to set out the context as well as content of training, supported and nurtured by Vijaykumar.

In contrast the Puducherry schools appear to have never really experienced the excitement that accompanies the critical mass generated by a close relationship between innovator and adopter. There is also clear indication that the bureaucratic structures oppose any possibility of activism within the government education department.

5.3 Process of Diffusion and the Implications for Scaling Up Across Indian States

The need for regular engagement between innovators and early adopters to ensure critical mass in support for an educational innovation is clearly the first stage in achieving an S-shaped diffusion curve. The second aspect is in the ability of such a critical mass to transfer the educational innovation from the existing location through political and institutional scaling up features into a new national or international location. We examined the records of the SSA office, Chennai to gauge the comments of national and international visitors to identify their perceptions of the critical mass generated by Vijaykumar and his messianic team of early adopters, and the implications for adaptation of the ABL model in these new locations.

The state wide ABL roll out was completed by 2008 and it was at this stage that both Vijaykumar, and national and international supporters of the ABL programme began to highlight the innovative processes that had been designed and delivered through the programme. This resulted in visits from education department officials from other states as well as from educational institutions from the private and public sphere.

The records in the model school in Chennai have been maintained from 2008-2014 and we used the entries in the visitor book to undertake our analysis of the perceptions of national stakeholders with regard to the effectiveness and replicability of the ABL programme.

There were visits made by the education officials from a range of Indian states, with visits in 2008 from officials from Mizoram, Jharkand, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Tripura and Nagaland. The comments made by the officials were unanimously appreciated with almost all education officers wanting to use the methodology in their own state or district. Some officials even go as far as stating that ABL should be the chosen strategy for the nation 'The Nation is looking to you to eradicate illiteracy'.

It is also noteworthy that states are aware that the ABL methodology should be adapted to the needs of their own contexts, as evident from comments such as 'I hope that our state Rajasthan will learn and implement the programme with adaptations to our own needs and environment'. The

visits in 2009 were from officials from Maharashtra and Bihar and their comments indicate that they were even more eager to engage with the trainers and to learn from the critical mass generated in the educational system in Tamil Nadu. The team from Maharashtra indicated that 'Our humble request would be to train us in the summer vacation in the methodology either by us visiting you in Chennai or your teachers visiting us in Pune' and from the state of Karnataka, where Nali Kali was already underway 'some of the good elements such as provision to move further up the ladder if a child complete the present learning ladder can be replicated elsewhere'. The laudatory comments are also commonplace among educationalists from national institutions with the NCERT team that visited at the end of 2009 noting that 'It has widely been appreciated and recognised and this shows that this model can be replicated with suitable modifications across country' and the desire to replicate the system is also clear in the comments of the Gujarat education team that visited in early 2010 'An experience and process worth replicating in our state'. These comments that relate to the possibility of adaptation and replication of ABL indicated that the exposure to this innovation had resulted in critical thinking by later adopters as to the suitability of the original model for bringing about educational reform in their own distinct state geographies. This is a crucial prerequisite to ensure that *political* and *organisational* changes that are needed to transfer an educational innovation to a different geography are taken into consideration by late adopters.

5.4 The making of the next generation of bureaucratic activism

Another significant group of visitors, identified by the visitors' book is the regular visits by the IAS probationers, the future civil servants of the states and union territories in recent years. The professional network of Vijaykumar as a senior IAS officer appears to have provided a method of highlighting the success of the ABL programme by building it into the training programme for future civil servants. The ABL visitors book is evidence that the experience of the educational innovation has been incorporated into the national wide (*Bharat Darshan*) visits that are an integral part of the year-long training programme for the probationary officers. The comments made by these officers since their visits began in 2011 is particularly important to understanding how *bureaucratic activism* might be further institutionalised with regard to educational innovations in India. The comments go from a desire to make the ABL programme the basis for reform in one state 'This is a model to be used by my cadre', i.e., the civil servant cadre in a particular state of India in 2012 in the early visits, to objectives of system wide educational reform such as 'We are quite convinced that ABL and ALM would certainly be the buzz words in elementary education in India' in 2014. The latest entry in the visitors book by the probationers' team is near euphoric as it states that 'The Activity Based Learning Concept is an amazing thing and should be replicated across the country' in 2015.⁴¹

The gathering momentum for *bureaucratic activism* that is evident in the comments of IAS probationary officers in the visitors' book, and the engagement with and enthusiasm for educational innovations is a powerful force for hope for the educational futures of children in difficult environments in India. The importance of local champions within the state bureaucracy was identified as a critical feature in Section 4, for ensuring the successful link between the innovators and early adopters in transforming the RIVER educational resources into an operational educational programme. The building in of an early exposure to the ABL programme within the training programme for IAS probationary officers signifies the possibility of facilitating *political entrepreneurship* through internal agents. This bodes well for prioritizing the importance of educational outcomes in district level administration, as the probationary officers take up their district level offices after the completion of their training.

⁴¹ Entries in the visitors book maintained at the Mayammai school, Chennai

6. International experience and evaluation of ABL

The evidence of opinion leadership being built through providing role models, peer-to-peer engagement and networking clearly manifest themselves in the actions and strategies adopted by DFID educational officers, such as Michael Ward. As a consequence of the interventions undertaken by DFID, there has been a far greater visibility for the ABL programme since he expressed his interest in visiting and observing the ABL initiatives during the deliberations of the JRM of 2007-08. This awareness-raising exercise spearheaded by DFID, was key in bringing about agreement within the institutional process in UNICEF India that it was appropriate to explicitly champion the ABL programme. This avowal was followed by a large delegation of international UNICEF officials visiting the ABL programme in the autumn of 2008. The affirmation of the programme also led to the organization of a DFID Education Advisors meeting in Chennai in the spring of 2009 and a large team comprising of World Bank and European Commission officials in the summer of 2009.

6.1 Donor Knowledge of ABL

The World Bank has been engaging with the ABL after the JRM of 2007-08 when they visited the ABL classroom, and discovered that there was a buzz emanating from this programme. The education officer at the World Bank, Dr. Toby Linden regards the ABL programme as a potential piece of evidence on the global practice of educational interventions. He pointed out that there are many interesting features with regard to this evidence: (i) The teachers seem in charge of learning and did seem different, (ii) it appeared to be change through a system change perspective; (iii) there was evidence of record taking though the records did not seem to be used by teachers; (iv) data collected was not used for accountability, but it could be most helpful to inform the realm of accountability and feasibility of such programmes.

There does not appear an official policy position on the success of the ABL programme among international donors in India. There is, however a very keen interest in using the ABL experience as an example of important practices to improve education. The World Bank is interested in learning how different states engage with each other with regard to using educational innovations. The sense among the educational professionals at the World Bank, India office is that there is very minimal evidence on the success of the programme. It would appear that the mechanisms are in place, but the outcomes of the innovative pedagogy employed by ABL are not discussed publicly or disseminated openly by the ABL team. The education officer was of the opinion that the organization of the classroom in ABL was valuable and it would be worth knowing if there was a way of showing this as a piece of evidence. The World Bank is currently unable to recommend or not recommend ABL as global practice due to lack of systematic research. They are keen to see key research on ABL that might allow the evaluation of the outcomes of the programme.⁴²

The higher international profiling of the ABL programme by donors led to a rapid increase in the number of requests to UNICEF, Tamil Nadu office to organize visits for education officers in other countries to experience the ABL teaching methods. There were visits by teams of education officials from Bangladesh and Nepal in January and February of 2009, and their comments indicate that they are going to discuss what they have seen and learnt from ABL when they return back home. An immediate consequence of the DFID education officers meeting is that the ABL programme is no longer unknown in international policy circles. There was a visit from the Lead Education Economist of the World Bank in April 2009 and the comment provided in the visitors' book is 'The ABL approach is obviously working as students are able to demonstrate their mastery and exhibit their confidence. The ABL model can serve as a model for other countries as well'.

⁴² Interview with Dr. Toby Linden

The educational advisers in DFID who attended the DFID ABL education advisors' meeting in Tamil Nadu in 2009 were 'blown away' by what they observed in the ABL classrooms. The educational advisers were struck by how the pedagogy, through the use of the learning ladders (something akin to a snakes and ladders board) systemised differentiated learning. It promoted self-paced learning, based on the diagnostic feedback provided by the activities cards. Students only progressed up the learning ladder on proving competency at each level. This enabled the teacher to manage her support to children more effectively – supporting where needed and encouraging peer support and learning. It also encouraged the students to take greater ownership of their learning. They also note that there was a radical departure in the learning dynamic from traditional practice, where teachers are seen as transmitters and students as recipients of learning. At a broader level the fundamentally different classroom atmosphere – more open, friendly and positive, building design and even the 'geography of the classroom' (more learning friendly – no regimented benches, student work displayed on walls were also of great interest.⁴³

There was also a considerable interest among educational professionals, researching educational access in India under the aegis of a DFID funded research programme, Consortium for Researching Educational Access, Transition and Equity (CREATE). The international academic community was educational particularly struck by the pedagogy, and the teaching methods used by the ABL trained teachers.⁴⁴

The role that educational advisers in DFID, and the international educational community, played in making the ABL programme more visible at the national and international level comes about not through the financial contribution made by DFID, but more from its ability to influence policy and demand a more complex understanding of educational interventions and the mechanisms by which the subsequent learning outcomes are realized. The simple results from RCTs or dipstick tests are not able to capture the complexity of the ABL pedagogy. The rigour of external evaluation by leading academics that DFID has now put in place in the educational sector are also very helpful in generating a more effective evaluation of educational interventions, and could be useful in the case of ABL type interventions. DFID has developed technical dialogue that has now become mainstream within the organisation. There is an emphasis on in-house capacity and the process of challenging the organization from within has also become another key characteristic of DFID's educational practice.⁴⁵

The cumulative effect of the growing interest in ABL among the international donor community is evident in the increase in international visits from education department where donor agencies are particularly active. There was a visit from a group of education officers from Ghana in August 2010 and they want it to be recorded 'Please note the team was very impressed and hope to adopt some of the strategies and methodologies used in teaching the children'. A later visit in 2014 from education officials from Ethiopia is recorded in the visitors' book with the note that 'I will go back to my country and spread (ABL) to my region and try to apply by adapting according to my regional context', while a team of education officers from Bangladesh who visited in early 2015 made the point that 'I would like to introduce this method in my country'.

The key question for investigating the dissemination and scaling up of ABL in locations in other countries is what were the institutional responses to the suggestion of these officials that ABL should be introduced in their own countries. Interviews with education professionals in Ethiopia and

⁴³ Interview with Colin Bangay, DFID, India

⁴⁴ Professor Angela Little presented her experience of ABL at the Institute of Education, <http://www.lidc.org.uk/news/lidc-podcast-new-approach-education-india>

⁴⁵ Interview with Colin Bangay, DFID, India

Bangladesh were very helpful in setting out the processes that were needed in these countries to set in motion the adoption of ABL as a feasible pilot innovation.

6. 2 Transplanting of ABL methods to Ethiopia⁴⁶

The international donors and agencies were working to support educational initiatives as part of the Peace and Development programmes in 2010. The educational sector in Ethiopia had embarked on a pilot for improving the provision of teachers training programmes at the teacher training college to support the objective of Every Child Learns. Save the Children was the lead in this initiative and was supported by DFID and it was this engagement that brought about an encounter between the education officer, Dr. Sridevi Srinivasan at Save the Children, Ethiopia and with Chris Berry, the Chief Education Officer of DFID in 2011. Chris Berry had seen the ABL programme in Tamil Nadu when the DFID Education Advisors' meeting was held in Chennai in 2009 and was very impressed by the pedagogy that it entailed. He asked Sridevi what she knew about the programme, and she spoke to him at length about her experience of the ABL methodology in her earlier position as a practitioner with Action Aid in Tamil Nadu. The outcome of the exchange was that Chris Berry gave Sridevi Srinivasan a free hand to bring ABL to Ethiopia as he felt it was a pedagogic method that would do well in the Ethiopian context.

With the formal approval from Chris Berry, Sridevi contacted Vijaykumar, whom she met, while working in the education sector in Tamil Nadu. The upshot of this exchange was that Vijaykumar visited the Ethiopian Save the Children team in March 2011 in Ethiopia and made presentations of the ABL programme both at the district level and to the Ministry of Education at Addis Ababa. He also extended an invitation to education officials to visit the ABL programme in Tamil Nadu. The Ethiopian educational establishment responded favourably to visit and invitation and there was a move made to consider a visit to experience the ABL pedagogy in Tamil Nadu. This positive response was tempered by opposition from Ethiopian Save the Children staff who were of the view that the predominance of pastoral livelihoods among Ethiopian communities made ABL inapplicable for the Ethiopian context. Sridevi Srinivasan communicated these concerns to Vijaykumar and he responded to these concerns with evidence of the positive impact of ABL in more difficult environments even with the state of Tamil Nadu. He also invited those officials who had expressed opposition to join the Ethiopian team visiting India in June 2011. The official who had been at the centre of the opposition and had sent written objections about the ABL programme, due to its non-congruence with the Ethiopian context, did join the team visiting India. After observing the ABL method in practice he changed his stance and admitted to Vijaykumar that he was now convinced of the effectiveness of the ABL programme.

The Ethiopian delegation of 3 members of the Regional Educational Authority, 5 teachers and 3 staff members of Save the Children who went to Tamil Nadu to observe and participate in the ABL programme. It was Vijay Kumar who facilitated the process, and he asked Sridevi to get in touch with the SSA office in Tamil Nadu to support the visit. The team was taken to Kollachi village, the original pilot area for ABL that was in Vijay Kumar's district in the state. The pedagogy used in the ABL programme was demonstrated by teachers employed in the government schools in Kollachi village and the teachers from Ethiopia were very happy with the visit that allowed them to experience teaching alongside local teachers and where they could reside in a local hotel in the village. The communication was conducted, despite the fact that the teachers spoke only Amharic, as the officials and Save the Children staff translated the conversation. Mrs. Malathy of the SSA office,

⁴⁶ The process of rolling out of ABL in Ethiopia was provided by an account by Sridevi Srinivasan, an education professional with Save the Children.

Chennai was very helpful and even took a class to explain the key pedagogic methods and materials of ABL.

In the summer that followed the Save the Children team, Ethiopia worked with DFID, Ethiopia to ensure that ABL was brought into this programme in 2012. The lead for the educational innovation was designated to Save the Children and the programme was funded by DFID and was approved and signed by the partners.

In 2013, there had already been six months of work undertaken to plan for ABL in Ethiopia, and the video of the ABL training methods sessions laid out for the Ethiopian delegation to Tamil Nadu was used at a series of presentations by Save the Children education offices to gain the support of the regional education office in Ethiopia. The planning period in 2013 also saw the development of teaching material development through collaboration between the original ABL adopters and the new geography of Ethiopia. Two retired teachers from TN who went across to Ethiopia to assist with the development of teaching materials. They spent two weeks with the Ethiopian teachers and Save the Children staff supported their visit. The material was developed for Class 1 and Class 2.

The intention of this planning period was to facilitate the acceptance of the ABL pilot in five schools in Ethiopia. While the teachers who were making the materials were keen to see an ABL pilot introduced, there was no sustained interest in ABL in Ethiopian educational institutions. In the end, there was a pilot agreed to be undertaken in only one school in Ethiopia. It appears that one reason for the difficulty in maintaining the support and ownership for ABL in Ethiopia was that there was too rapid a turnover of staff in the educational system in Ethiopia, resulting in a loss of momentum between 2013-2014.

6.3 The adaptation of ABL in the case of Bangladesh⁴⁷

The educational scenario in Bangladesh in 2014-15 was that the education programmes in place were following the Each Child Learns approach. It was in this context that DFID worked alongside with UNICEF to develop an ABL programme. This ABL initiative was set up by the UNICEF, Bangladesh office with the intention to create a small pilot of an ABL type intervention.

The process by which ABL was disseminated from the SSA office in Tamil Nadu was through the aegis of UNICEF who took a team of government officials to Rishi Valley and to tour the schools in Tamil Nadu in 2015. The team returned to Bangladesh and the decision was taken that a pilot would be initiated at the end of 2015 and rolled out in 2016. It was not to be based on the full set of principles set out by the original TN ABL formulation as it was felt that the context in Bangladesh was not congruent with that in Tamil Nadu. The reason for the divergence in the features of the Bangladeshi pilot, from the original formulation was that Bangladeshi education officials were of the view that there were specific challenges in the Bangladeshi context that needed to be explicitly recognised in structuring the ABL pilot. The government had recently initiated a pre-service teacher -training scheme that had raised the level of training from a certificate to that of a diploma. This had been undertaken to facilitate a more effective delivery of the ECL programme. In particular, the intention was to provide teachers skills that would allow teachers to undertake child-learning methods in a multi-grade teaching environment.

The pilot preparation phase in 2015 included the design of teacher materials for innovative child-centred pedagogy. This was undertaken with support and direct from a team from Rishi Valley that

⁴⁷ The process of rolling out of ABL in Bangladesh was provided by an account by Fahmida Shabnam, an education professional with DFID Bangladesh.

came to Bangladesh to train the teachers for a period of a few weeks. There was some initial resistance from teachers to the ABL pedagogy as the national education system that was in place in Bangladesh for primary school teaching was already quite demanding, as it was based on lesson plans in Bangla and mathematics. The children are grouped according to their ability. Every three months there is an evaluation of each child by the teacher and head teacher, through a test. This already required the teacher to do an assessment at regular intervals. The teachers were therefore unwilling to adopt a system such as ABL, which they regarded as demanding even more work within the classroom.

The resistance displayed by the teachers was gradually overcome, once the training had taken place, and the benefits of this system of teaching became clearer in the teachers participating in the ABL training. The greater interest evident among teachers who took part in the ABL training came from their ability to see the educational possibilities that are made possible by using the ABL methods. There is still reluctance on the part of educational stakeholders in Bangladesh, to the bringing in widespread use of an ABL type intervention, if this means a watering down of education features that have been put into place through recent educational reform in the country.

In the pilot stage that is to be rolled out in 2016, UNICEF and DFID will work in parallel as partners, with UNICEF leading the implementation of the pilot programme and the DFID will provide funds. The focus is on learning between Grades 1-4, and the examining of outcomes will be undertaken with the help of UNICEF.

The interest in ABL type interventions grew rapidly in the international sphere since the Chennai DFID educational advisors meeting, and a synthesis report published by the development consultant Coffey, based on research undertaken by the University of Cape Coast reviewed the ABL programmes in education. The intention was to find ABL type programmes that could be of relevance to Ghana in 2012. They noted that the ABL programme of Tamil Nadu and the Escuela Nueva of Columbia were most similar to the ABL types currently in operation in the country (Synthesis report, Coffey and University of Cape Coast, 2012). The question that the report was addressing was whether the ABL programmes in Ghana had demonstrated sufficiently positive results to justify a national wide scaling up. It is worth noting that this 2012 report did not mention the visit of the Ghanaian education officials' trip to Chennai in 2010 to observe the ABL initiative. It would seem that they had not ascertained the opinions of their education officials, for their review of the ABL in Tamil Nadu was based on public documents published by the government of Tamil Nadu. This could indicate a lack of engagement between education officials and academics in the country, pointing to a lack of, or at least low visibility of *bureaucratic activism* with regard to scaling up ABL in the case of Ghana.

Notwithstanding the variation across countries, the explicit interest in ABL, and ABL type innovations that was explicitly voiced by education officials in international donor organisations is a positive development. While the increased awareness of educational innovations such as ABL, on account of the institutional learning that has been encouraged by DFID, and its partners such as UNICEF and Save the Children, is reason for hope, the level of knowledge about ABL initiatives and the existence of its variants is rather limited. This study used questionnaires to ascertain the knowledge of international agencies and consultants of ABL and ABL-like innovations (See Appendix 1 and 2). The response indicated that while sensitization to the ABL pedagogy was evident there was little depth of understanding or ability to identify the individual components that made up the ABL pedagogy.

'Despite attending and being very impressed by ABL in Chennai, it may assist if you give details of key features of ABL (Tamil style) and how close a variant has to be.

For example many will observe EGRA/EGMA with US support being rolled out and in some locations Computer Assisted Learning (CAL) or workbooks that have elements of scripted exercises to follow. I suppose one key element of ABL I recall was self paced activities by students (as in ethos of Montessori), but to assist the research some simple guidance on what are key features may help
(Response to Questionnaire in Appendix 1)

This led to the designing of the revised questionnaire (Appendix 2) that was used for interviews with consultants and officials.

Looking at the criteria, I doubt I could provide personal experience of observing ABL in my last 7 years in Africa. The Bridge chain of private schools may be a potential that use technology and scripted modules but I'm not sure on delivery approach. I've seen some Montessori pre-schools which also share some ABL traits⁴⁸

The comments in the visitors' book indicate that there is considerable interest in the teaching methods. Notwithstanding this keenness of the ABL programme, there has not been any attempt as yet to evaluate the variants of ABL that are currently in operation in other countries, be they Montessori (which was the precise antecedent of the ABL variants in India) or with activities that are clearly comparable with those used in the ABL (particularly the use of ladders and cards). There is also a keenness to ensure the scaling up taking place in other countries, as seen from the consultancy work undertaken by organisations such as Coffey, the particular interest in evaluation expressed by both DFID and the World Bank, but there is as yet no methodology for assessing the teaching methods or learning outcomes is available at the present moment.

7. The case for evaluating variants of ABL in India

There has been a growing interest in evaluating ABL type interventions as a way forward for understanding how educational innovations might improve learning outcomes. The production of reports, and particular examples are the reports by Akhila (2009) and Anandalakshmy (2007), that reviewed the ABL programme in Tamil Nadu have been the direct consequence of an increased interest in evaluation and learning outcomes that might be brought about by the educational innovations.⁴⁹ The reports have emphasized that the ABL approach in a pedagogic approach where skill acquisition is provided through child-focused activities (Gowda et. al, 2013).

There have also been recent evaluations of the impact of the Nali Kali programme, an ABL variant that was adopted in the state of Karnataka. This educational innovation had a similar design to that of the ABL programme of the Tamil Nadu government and it also used ladders and other educational resources and drew its inspiration from the teaching methods developed by RIVER. The focus of one early study was on the impact of introducing child-centred teaching methods on the perceptions of teachers with regard to their own profession as well as their attitudes towards their students (Sriprakash, 2009). A recent four-year long study analysed the learning outcomes that were associated with the educationally innovative Nali Kali variant of the ABL form of pedagogy (Gowdas et. a. 2013). The focus of all these studies is to try and evaluate the teaching methods and the associated learning outcomes of these innovative pedagogies, which is an exercise that has not been undertaken yet being systematically undertake for ABL programme variants in India (ibid.). The

⁴⁸ Email communication with Ian Attfield, DFID since 2007, Northern Nigeria, Zimbabwe and in Tanzania in 2012)

⁴⁹ Interview with Ms. Aruna Rathnam

academic researcher who led this study indicated that the Karnataka ABL variant, Nali Kali was also similar to the Tamil Nadu ABL programme in having a powerful opinion leader, a senior civil servant Mr. M. N. Baig, who was the Director of Directorate of State Education Research and Training (DSERT).⁵⁰ The rationale for the programme was similar to that in Tamil Nadu, where both state level UNICEF officers and education officials were concerned about the large number of out-of-school children in Mysore district, Karnataka. The Nali Kali programme was originally initiated in 1995, when Mr. M. N. Baig was the Education Officer in Mysore district, and was designed and implemented in conjunction with the UNICEF office and the Commissioner for Public Instruction. The Nali Kali was also focussed on the primary learning years, and was initially for students in years 1 and 2, and was later extended to year 3 and the programme was consolidated across the state of Karnataka over the period 2006-08.

The evaluation of the Nali Kali programme was funded by the Hewlett Foundation, their decision to fund the evaluation came out of an earlier engagement that the Hewlett advisor had with educational initiatives in the state of Karnataka. The evaluation was led by Professor Anjini Kochar, Catalyst Management Services and with institutional support from the Azim Premji Foundation as they had worked closely with the state government of Karnataka. Dana Schmidt indicated that she was keen to commission the evaluation as the first stage of understanding the impact of innovative educational programmes in various Indian states. The outcome that Hewlett wanted from the evaluation of innovative educational programmes such as Nali Kali in Karnataka (or similar programmes such as ABL in Tamil Nadu) was to identify the outcomes of the programme. The next stage of evaluation what would follow on would be to explain any differences in the outcomes that have resulted from different innovative educational programmes.

There are some initial differences in the roll out of the two programmes, where the NK programme began in in small schools. The NK programme had not become a system wide educational reform by the end of the 1990s. It was only in 2007-08, that there was a state wide progress, and Class 1 and Class 2 in all schools was covered by NK. This was not extended to class 4. During the Nali Kali project, the training courses for teachers conducted through the auspices of the RIVER scheme.

It was noteworthy that Karnataka was not the only state using an innovative educational programme in the 2000s. The RIVER model and the use of their teaching methods was popular in a number of states. It was attempted in Gujarat and Rajasthan as well. The educational resources of RIVER have also been identified as a valuable national resource, as has been the new Azim Premji University (Ramachandran 2008).

The reasons for the particular type of scaling up that took place in Nali Kali, where it was not driven by bureaucratic activism to state wide adoption appeared to lie in the phenomenon of a greater turnover of officials in the NK system, as compared to the Tamil Nadu system. There was, consequently, no push back from the government and it may be that the high turnover was the reason for the inability to continue the roll out due to the lack of continuity of tenure of individual bureaucrats.⁵¹

The value of these educational innovations that are to be found in a number of Indian states today, could provide a short route to identifying a process that will ensure that the most vulnerable children who live in difficult environments are able to stay at school and complete the educational cycle. The lack of evaluation of teaching methods and associated learning outcomes is a challenge that needs to be overcome if these educational innovations are to be regarded as examples of global

⁵⁰ Interview with Dr. Anjini Kochar, Stanford University

⁵¹ Interview with Dana Schmidt, Hewlett Foundation.

practice. The data that is currently collected within the ABL system, through the maintenance of records on individual children, could be an important starting point for undertaking such a study.

8. Analysis of the process of dissemination and scaling up of educational innovations

The ABL initiative in Tamil Nadu has been successful in leveraging resources through the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), to implement a much lauded pilot programme in 2003-04, followed by a state-wide scaling up of the programme between 2006-08. The SSA office has become the institutional basis for providing the funding developing ABL teaching-learning kits, and training teachers within the state. These efforts have been ably facilitated by the effective interaction between the original innovator and the early adopters of the educational innovation (Mintrom, 1997). This effective nexus was crucial for achieving a critical mass during the pilot phase that was based on the regular usage of role model actions, peer-to-peer interactions, and political networking. This entire set of actions was initially driven by internal rather than external agents, who operated within a framework of bureaucratic activism (Neiz, 2012).

At the juncture where the pilot project was being converted into a full-scale state-wide reform the ABL initiative benefited tremendously from the explicit encouragement and approval from an external agent operating within the international environment. The external policy entrepreneur, who was able to use higher order networks to provide additional leverage for the credibility and visibility of the programme gave a much-needed fillip to gain considerable attention from national and international stakeholders in the field of education. This was also important from improving the *organizational* dimension of the scaling up process, reinforcing the value of the scaffolding and elaboration mechanisms that were at the core of the ABL type educational innovation, at critical junctures.

The biggest draw of the ABL initiative, as recorded from the comments of the national and international visitors is that of the child-centred activities, and the activities with the ladders and the cards. It is the features of elaboration and scaffolding (Cohen and Ball 2006) that are central to ensuring the attractiveness of this type of educational innovation. It has been this primary set of features, and the manner in which was developed, i.e., directed and driven by the teachers themselves, that made the initial diffusion of the innovation and the quantitative scaling up so successful. The subsequent stages of scaling up: those of functional improvements (such as the revising of cards, congruence between cards and books) required a feedback mechanism between the larger teacher body and the SSA office. The ability to ensure functional improvements proved to be the difference between success and failure in transferring the ABL programme from Tamil Nadu to Puducherry. Furthermore, the lack of will to work through the conditions for political scaling up in Puducherry meant that the organizational scaling up in this neighbouring Union Territory did not eventuate.

The final stage of scaling up needs to be understood in relation to the institutional responses to scaling up. It would appear that there has been a combination of hierarchical and relational features, with evidence of the former in the manner in which the education department used the State government institutions and procedures, and employed district and block institutions to ensure the implementation and training aspects needed for the state wide roll-out. The relational feature was far clearer, in the early stages, where the innovator-early adopter nexus was at the very core of creative and innovative design. The only feature that has not yet received due attention is the individual institutional response, where individual teachers and students can begin to see how an

evaluation of their contribution and performance respectively, could be made within such a pedagogy. This remains an area that requires further work.

In the international sphere, the transplanting of ABL made possible by the change makers among educational professionals in agencies such as UNICEF, DFID and Save the Children is built on effective peer-to-peer working and networking between agencies. The collaborative work that took place in both Ethiopia and Bangladesh has been successful in initiating a pilot programme of ABL. The challenge is to facilitate political and organizational change within the educational institutional establishments in these two countries. The current opposition to ABL within these institutions appears to be do with the specificity of elaboration associated with the original ABL model. On the other hand, the teachers who visited the ABL programme in India, and were able to draw on the expertise of teacher trainers from India, brought across by international change makers, have come to realize the highly effective results from using the scaffolding design elements in the ABL model. It would appear that the pilots might benefit from being rigorously evaluated so that early metrics could be used by these change makers to further influence the political opinion makers in these geographies.

These policy features corroborate the findings of other research that show that the success of scaling up requires an effective assignment of functions to specific actors at different levels by the agent(s) of change. Clear instructions of what, and how actions should be taken and what tools should be used using field-tested operational manuals are emphasized (Binswanger and Aiyar 2003). The results of scaling up should, however, not be presumed to emerge quickly or readily in a process of educational innovations. As the educational reform requires an institutional response to ensure that it becomes embedded in the environment, it takes time.

As an institution-building task with a focus on sustainability, scaling up requires longer time horizons than those frequently mandated by donor agencies and policy-makers keen to show results. The means and resources necessary to ensure successful and sustainable scaling up are therefore at odds with a “project” perspective which expects that results can be achieved in two or three years.

(Simmons, 2007: 180)

The key messages and the findings of this study indicate that the power of experiencing the ABL pedagogy was the key lever that convinced teachers and professional educationists, within both national and international contexts. The importance of an innovation design that permits internal agents of change to work with innovators results in a strong sense of ownership. The ability of both internal agents, the teachers in Chennai Corporation schools who volunteered for the RIVER programme, and the external agents, the international educational professionals who had the opportunity to observe the ABL pedagogy, have successfully used peer-to-peer methods and networking to effectively provide a supportive platform to raise the visibility of ABL. The leverage of these processes could provide the way forward to understanding the likelihood of achieving the various dimensions of scaling up, quantitative, functional, political and organizational, in new environments with different contexts of teaching, pastoral or multigrade and more challenging environments, of worsening resource constraints or weaker political will. It is these levers, which could provide the answer to moving from pilot project to institutional scaling up.

The outcome of this study of the dissemination and scale up of ABL was to be able to distil the lessons of opportunities and challenges that are encountered in the process of moving successfully from pilot study to system wide educational reform. The procedure followed by the study was to identify the human and institutional engagements and partnerships that permit the transplanting of ABL type innovations. This was a crucially important exercise to learning from the transplanting of

ABL to other Indian states and to international geographies of the catalyzing role of early coalitions of advocates for educational innovation, the value of developing champions to foster political entrepreneurship, and the power that bureaucratic activism in both national institutions and international agencies to overcome resistance to educational innovation.

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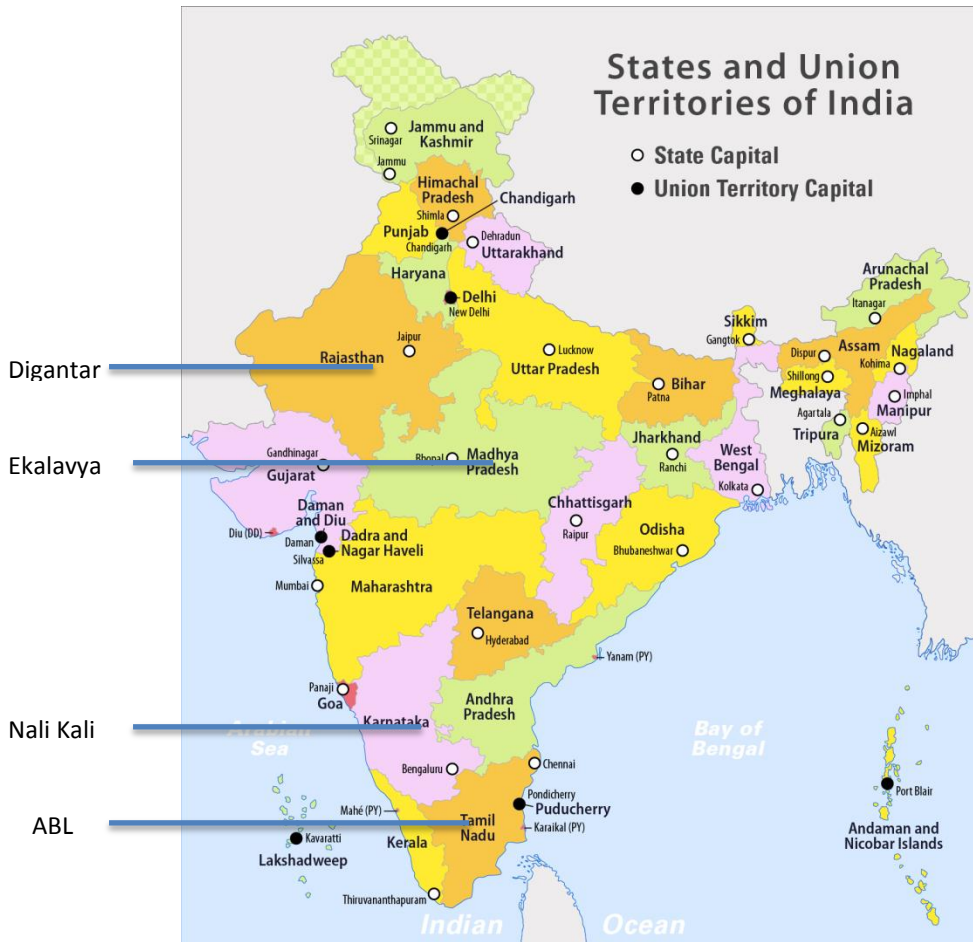
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Map 1: Sites of Educational Innovation in India



Appendices

Appendix 1

Questionnaire: On Roll out of an Activity Based Learning (ABL) Programme in Country

Please fill in this questionnaire if you are aware of an ABL programme being run in country.

1. When was the ABL introduced into the country's educational programme set-up?
2. What are the objectives of the ABL?
3. What is the nature of the interventions within the ABL?
4. What is the educational level that is targeted by the ABL?
5. Which educational body implemented the ABL?
6. What is/are the source/sources of funding for the ABL?
7. How important was government involvement in the roll-out of the ABL?
8. Who were the key individuals responsible for the government involvement of ABL?
9. What is geographical coverage of the ABL across the country?
10. What are the inputs, resources and materials, provided for the roll-out of the ABL?
11. What are the processes that were rolled-out
 - a. teacher training
 - b. headteacher training
 - c. development of TLMs
 - d. development of continuous/school based assessments
12. Which organisation(s) facilitated the teacher training and development of materials?
13. Which organization(s) undertook the monitoring and evaluation of the ABL programme?

14. What are current results/outputs of ABL?

Appendix 2

Identifying the Use of Activity Based Learning (ABL) Programmes ⁵²

Please describe the characteristics of the ABL programme in your country in relation to the descriptors and key characteristics set out below.

A. ABL methodology

The ABL methodology uses a child-centred approach. The process of learning is made possible through intensive teacher-training and on-site support. Teaching materials are developed for teaching and learning of each curricular aspect. The method of teaching and learning permits multi-grade teaching and learning. The ABL method rests on an integrated Grades I - IV structure in a multi - grade classroom organization, enabling both vertical and horizontal groupings within the classroom.

B. Characteristics of ABL

Children sit together according to their learning levels, irrespective of their age - appropriate grade. The school timetable operates on half day or even full day units, rather than the conventional 45 minute periods per subject. This allows children to persevere and complete the tasks on hand and get a sense of closure. They can concentrate longer and without any interruption or pressure to complete.

Specific features of the methodology that are identified are the following:

1. Each child learns at her/his own pace
2. Provision of more time for self-directed learning and teacher directed learning is reduced considerably
3. Group learning, mutual learning and self-learning are promoted
4. Rote learning is discouraged

C. Evaluation in the Classroom

⁵² The original descriptors are taken from the Field Visit to Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, World Bank report, 2008; the individual criteria were originally used in a study by Rabi Prakash and Vishwambar, Claims of Innovativeness: A philosophical exploration of Learning and Knowledge Assumptions in Activity Based Learning, Digantar.

An ABL classroom has a wide variety of cards and materials, which enable a structured learning process amongst children at different levels of competencies. Each child's learning follows the defined milestones for each curricular area, which are depicted in a pictorial manner through a learning ladder that is displayed in the classroom. In addition, every child's learning progress is monitored and displayed on an achievement chart. Every child is able to check his / her location on the chart and identify the corresponding activity card on the learning ladder and thus initiate his /her own learning activity for the day. Each activity is done three times over by each child for reinforcement and mastery, once in his/her own exercise book, then in his/her designated slot in the low blackboard and then finally in the activity book.

The key processes identified in the ABL Classroom

1. Competencies are split into different parts/units and converted into different activities
2. Each part/unit is called a milestone
3. The relevant milestones are clustered and linked as chain and this chain of milestones is called a LADDER
4. Milestones are arranged in a logical sequence from simple to complex and also activities in each milestone
5. Each child is provided with workbook/worksheet for further reinforcement activities
6. Each child's progress is recorded through on an assessment chart
7. Each milestone has different type of activities such as introduction, reinforcement, practice, evaluation, remedial and enrichment activities have a separate pictorial representation.

D. The role of teacher as facilitator in the ABL classroom

The teacher's role is that of a facilitator who takes a more active role only with the 'introductory' activities. The learning materials are arranged in an orderly way and each child is able to access the card specific to her or him. Textbooks are brought into the classrooms are not directly used to avoid teacher - centered pedagogy???. The children self - evaluate their own learning as the last step in a series of activities, which is then ultimately reviewed by the teacher.

The following characteristics that are identified:

1. Teachers only initiative activities for children who have difficulties in starting the learning process
2. Teachers judiciously allocate their time across children in the entire group
3. No child can move to the next higher step of learning unless attains the previous one
4. The child led learning instills a sense of achievement, confidence and morale in each child
5. Children gain a sense of security as they sit in groups and move between groups

Appendix 3: List of Entries in the Visitors' Book, maintained at the SSA model school, Chennai

Date	Visitor	Institution
05-Jun-08	Malsthamwangi	Director, Education, Mizoram
27-Jul-08		Education Officer, Jharkhand
27-Jul-08		Jharkhand
19/09/2008	UNICEF Visit	
	Irene Duyn	Netherlands
	Alison Hiscocks	Australia
	Andrea van der Kuip	Netherlands
	Javier Piacentini	Argentina
	Bonnie Carrera	USA
	Venita Kaul	World Bank
	Deepa Sankar	World Bank
8th Sep 2008	Visit from Himachal Pradesh	
10/09/2008	Visit from UNICEF, Rajasthan	
12th Sept 2008	NCERT mathematics team	
22nd Sept 2008	Visit by 25 officials of the Arunachal Pradesh Education Department	
16th October 2008	25 member team from UNICEF Jammu and Kashmir visited the school	
3rd November 2008	Team from Rajasthan Education Department visited the team	
5th November 2008	Visit from SSA consultant, Karnataka	
29th November 2008	Group of 59 members from Nagaland, on a four day trip to TN	
4th December 2008	Group of 8 members from Tripura	
9th January 2009	Visit from Education Department, Maharashtra	
5th Feb 2009	DPEP SSA IGNOU visited as part of making a video documentary of the ABL methodology	
10th Feb 2009	Visit from the Education Department Mizoram	
12th Feb 2009	Visit from Education officer, Bihar	
18th February 2009	12 member team from Bangladesh	

2nd March 2009	Visit from Nepal: 6 government officers, 6 from UNICEF and 1 NGO person
17th March 2009	David Levesque, DFID, UK; Vera Najima, Malawi; Sam Carlson, DFID, India
23rd March 2009	Education Department, Karnataka
29th March 2009	Suresh Ramalingam, World Bank, Washington DC
29th March 2009	Anu Sareen, DFID, India team
29th March 2009	Clare O'Donohue, British Council, Alison Barrett, British Council
2nd April 2009	Visit by Education Department, Karnataka
8th April 2009	Kim Wing Wu, Lead Education Economist, World Bank
24th June 2009	Education Department, Goa
24th August 2009	Education Department, West Bengal
3th September 2009	Team from Sawai Madhopur, Rajasthan
8th September 2009	Education Department, Kerala
11th September 2009	Curriculum expert, NCERT
26th September 2009	Zhou Yuchi, Project Manager, South West Basic Education Project, China
10th November 2009	Visit by British Council UK members
14th December 2009	Visit from the Ambassador to the European Union
8th Jan 2010	Secretary, Education, Gujarat
19th Jan 2010	Visit by eight member team from UP
18th February 2010	Visit by team of education department members, Gujarat
10th April 2010	Visit of UNICEF India Officials
16th August 2010	Visit from a team from Ghana, Ministry of Education
26th August 2010	Professor, University of Gothenberg, Sweden
30th August 2010	Adivasi Group, Tamil Nadu
9th December 2010	Visit by 30 officers of ICDS
19th January 2011	Visit by IAS probationary officers in a group of 16
29th January 2011	Another batch of IAS probationary officers
20th May 2011	Dr. Alison Girdwood, Education Advisor, DFID

20th November 2011	Visit by IAS probationary officers
24th October 2011	Visit by Vivekananda Kendriya Vidyalaya Schools, Nagaland
10th Jan 2012	Visit from Columbia University
4th September 2013	RIVER brought a team of 14 Nepalese visitors
31st October 2013	Visit from education team in Arunachal Pradesh
4th Feb 2014	Visit from IAS probationary officers
25th March 2014	DIET office, Dehra Dun
8th April 2014	Visit from Teacher Development, Ethiopia
12th Sep 2014	Visit by J-PAL South Asia
2nd Feb 2015	Visit by IAS probationary officers
16th Feb 2015	Visit by 14 officers from Education Department, Bangladesh