

FLETCHER D-PRIZE COMPETITION

2021-2022 Academic Year

Education Challenges

Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) in Resource-Limited Settings

We challenge you to design a new social enterprise that delivers Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) to underserved primary students in a developing region. TaRL is an educational program designed to improve primary grade literacy and numeracy. D-Prize will award up to \$20,000 to teams with a plan to launch a three-month pilot of this work serving 100-250 primary students with a vision to scale country-wide.

The Poverty Problem

Over the last two decades the world has enrolled millions of previously out-of-school children in primary school.¹ But attendance has not improved learning outcomes. In many resource-limited countries over 50% of Grade 2 students are unable to read a single word of a short text or perform two-digit subtraction.²

Why does this happen? In school, children are grouped according to age, and often move to new grades regardless of learning level. Teachers then use a prescribed curriculum. This disfavors students who are not yet at that learning level, and they fall further behind.³

The Proven Intervention

Fortunately, there is a simple intervention. Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) is an education program that tailors instruction to the learning level of the child, rather than their age. The result is that basic literacy and numeracy is achieved by students before they finish primary school. The program was developed by [Pratham](#), an India-based NGO.

TaRL works by assessing children's learning levels, then grouping them according to these levels (rather than by age or grade). Within each group, the TaRL instructor leads a series of

¹ <https://data.unicef.org/topic/education/secondary-education/>

² <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/28340/211096ov.pdf?sequence=61&isAllowed=y>

³ <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/case-study/teaching-right-level-improve-learning>

engaging learning activities that develop foundational skills in reading and math. After a period of time children are reassessed and sorted into new groups by learning level as the program continues.

Researchers have evaluated TaRL for over fifteen years and found significant impact on test scores, with several TaRL models creating above a 0.6 standard deviation improvement.⁴ There are currently TaRL programs in 11 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. However, with millions of children still falling behind, there is a need for more organizations to scale this program.⁵

Your Distribution Challenge

D-Prize will award up to \$20,000 to teams that can create a new organization that teaches the TaRL education program to students who otherwise would fall behind.

You must have a vision to reach 50,000 students (about 1,000 classrooms) within five years. Our award is meant to enable the first step toward this vision by supporting a small test pilot of your idea, that helps anywhere from 100-250 students.

Designing Your Social Enterprise

There are several challenges we think a TaRL organization must eventually solve. We recommend you consider focusing your pilot on testing solutions to these challenges.

1. *How do you gain Government support?* Cooperation with existing education systems is almost always required. You may need a high-level government partner who is willing to collaborate with you, or who is at least willing to signal support with a Memorandum of Understanding.

Cooperation at the local level is almost always important too. You must also consider how you will work with local school officials.

2. *What is your TaRL implementation model?* There are a number of working models for Teaching at the Right Level, and your job is to pick the one that best fits your market. Please review [TaRL](#) and [J-PAL](#) resources to learn more about possible implementation models. Choosing an existing model and changing it the smallest amount will help you reduce operating and impact risk. In India, Pratham has found success using these models:
 - **Learning camp model:** Your instructors work directly with children in "Learning Camps." Learning Camps are intensive periods of instructional activity usually lasting ten days. Children (generally in grades 3 to 5) are grouped according to learning level for two to three hours of instruction per day. They are then

⁴ <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/case-study/teaching-right-level-improve-learning>

⁵ <https://www.teachingattherightlevel.org/tarl-in-action/>

re-grouped into new Learning Camps. Three to five camps are done through the year for a total of 30 to 50 instructional days, often with a gap of roughly ten days between each camp. When they are not in a Learning Camp, children return to their regular grade classes. Learning Camps are carried out during the school day with the permission of local authorities.

- **Government partnership model:** Government teachers are trained and supported to implement TaRL in their schools. Teachers group children in grades 3 to 5 based on learning level for one or two hours per day to focus on basic skills. Usually the program is led by “leaders of practice”- teachers who are part of the government system and have received specialized training running practice classes. The leaders of practice train teachers, and provide continual support onsite. Drawing on learning from randomized evaluations in Haryana and Bihar, Pratham helps ensure that teachers receive strong ongoing mentorship support and that monitoring and review systems are integrated into existing educational systems.⁶
3. *Who are the members of your implementation team and how do you recruit, train, and manage them?* The quality of your TaRL instructors and trainers is critical to rolling out a quality program. We recommend reviewing how past TaRL programs have instituted instructor training and implementation, and selecting models that reliably produce good results.

TaRL programs typically require three different roles to be filled:

- **TaRL Instructors** assess children, group them according to the results of the assessment, and facilitate engaging reading and mathematics activities to help them progress. Instructors attend a short (usually 5-day) initial training to learn about the TaRL approach and are equipped through refresher trainings and ongoing mentoring. The role of TaRL instructor has been played by different stakeholders including: volunteers, government teachers, tutors, or NGO staff. Choose the instructors that best fit your context.
- **TaRL Mentors** offer consistent support to instructors throughout TaRL implementation. This is done through visiting classrooms to observe TaRL classes, stepping in to demonstrate activities, noting successes as well as areas for improvement, and giving instructors feedback on how well they are using TaRL activities and materials. Mentors keep track of whether instructors are focusing on foundational skills, grouping children by level, using level-appropriate activities, and fully engaging children in the classroom.

⁶ Ibid.

- **TaRL Program Leaders** support the implementation of TaRL programmes, assisting with program design and management, material development, and measurement. These are your core leadership team members, including yourself.

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4. *What data will you collect?* Although TaRL is generally a proven intervention, the impact can vary a lot depending on your local and regional variables. A winning proposal must include a detailed plan to measure the learning outcomes of students.

You should consider adapting simple off-the-shelf assessments to capture learning outcomes, like [the ASER and Uwezo tools](#).

You must also have a detailed plan to collect data on your teachers or trainers performance. This data is critical to help you catch problems early on, without having to wait until the end of an instructional period to view student test scores.

We recommend reviewing which data previous TaRL programs have collected and used to measure program's quality and make adjustments.

Market Conditions

- TaRL is not appropriate in all markets. Before you select a geography, please review the relevant TaRL research online to determine whether or not this intervention is appropriate for your context.
- We are interested in reaching the most underserved students. This generally means students who lack reliable internet access. We recommend your idea tailor itself to these students, and avoid plans that require stable internet access.

Ready To Apply?

Download a First Round Application Packet and start creating your proposal at www.fletcher.tufts.edu/D-Prize.

Questions? Email Dorothy Orszulak at dorothy.orszulak@tufts.edu.

⁷ <https://www.teachingattherightlevel.org/the-tarl-approach/implementation-teams/>