CHAPTER I
EARLY READING AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

1.1 INTRODUCTION
Reading is a foundational skill since it forms the basis of most other learning activities in the classroom. Students need to read with understanding to access the entire curriculum. Reading is about comprehension; and comprehension is crucial for learning. Ensuring that students learn to read early and well is the most important way of ensuring that every child gets an equal opportunity to learn at the primary stage of schooling. Any child who doesn’t learn to read early and well will not easily master other skills and knowledge (Moats, 1999). Once a child starts falling behind and becomes a struggling reader, it is very difficult for her to catch up in later years, unless there is intensive and individualized remedial support, which is rarely feasible. A longitudinal study (Juel, 1988) of 54 minority students of low socioeconomic status from first to fourth grade has shown that a poor reader in the first grade continues to be a poor reader in fourth grade, unless reading instruction is improved. Poor readers are also poor writers. In fact, reading skills are self-reinforcing. “Poor readers read about half as many words as good readers, thus getting half the amount of vocabulary practice and improving their reading skills at a slower rate” (Gove and Cvelich, 2010, p. 6). The gap between the poor and good readers continues to widen as they progress grades; commonly referred to as the ‘Mathew Effect’, based on the biblical saying that the ‘poor get poorer and the rich get richer’. Deficits that develop in these early grades are difficult to bridge in later grades when the textbooks become denser and the language more academic and abstract. This disparity manifests itself in significant differences in learning outcomes in reading and language as well as other curricular areas within the same classroom. Thus, it is absolutely crucial to
ensure that students acquire good skills of learning to read in the first two or three grades.

The differences are often apparent even at the beginning of grade 1, depending on the children’s home socioeconomic status (SES) or preschool exposure. Quality preschool education that focuses on laying the foundation for reading and literacy is a great starting point. In most developing countries, including India, this is not available to a vast majority of children.

Reading achievements can be measured quite easily and can be used as a marker for school performance. If a school cannot teach children to read, there is definitely a crisis in that school/classroom. The key to ensuring quality education is to work towards creating learning opportunities for all children in school. Thus, equitable quality should be the cornerstone of the quality improvement strategy at the primary stage of schooling. And, learning to read these are basic skills that open the window for future learning.

1.2 COMPONENTS OF READING AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Reading and literacy are used interchangeably in international literature. In early grades, these terms are synonymous with language development. Reading, literacy and language development for early primary grades have been defined in various ways. The common elements in these varied definitions could be combined as follows: Early grades literacy or language development is the ability to read and write and understand written text, and construct meaning from a variety of text forms; ability to express oneself in writing and speaking. Language development includes a holistic development of all language skills, viz. listening, speaking, reading and writing. These skills reinforce each other. For this study, the focus will be on reading skills, i.e. reading fluently with understanding. Writing has been included for limited
inquiry. Roskos et al. (2004) provide the following description of the first three phases of reading development (Table 1.1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>The Learner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 0 : Birth to Grade 1</td>
<td>Emergent Literacy</td>
<td>Gains control of oral language; relies heavily on pictures in text; pretends to read; recognizes rhyme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1 : Beginning of Grade 1</td>
<td>Decoding</td>
<td>Grows aware of sound/symbol relationships; focuses on printed symbols; attempts to break code of print; uses decoding to figure out words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2 : End of Grade 1 to End of Grade 3</td>
<td>Confirmation and Fluency</td>
<td>Develops fluency in reading; recognizes patterns in words; checks for meaning and sense; knows a stock of sight words</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Reading research, mostly in the West, has clearly established that five basic skills are required to be able to learn to read. These basic skills apply to most Indian languages as well.

(i) **Phonemic awareness**

*Ability to discern the smallest sound units in oral language.* Some correlational studies have shown phonemic awareness to be an important predictor of how children will learn to read in their first 2 years of school (National Reading Panel, 2000).

(ii) **Phonics**

*Applying letter and sound correspondence to decode words.* This is a systematic process of teaching reading and writing by sounding out the combination or blending of letters and other symbols (sub-lexical) to pronounce words. This is contrasted with the whole language approach that
works at the level of a meaningful unit (at least a word). Indian languages have shallow orthographies, i.e. they are phonetically regular. Here, unlike languages like English, teaching and practice of spelling is not very important since it is possible to decode letters and vowel signs and blend the sounds to pronounce the word. But, the issue with Indian languages is the large number of visual patterns (consonants, vowels and consonant-vowel combinations) that are difficult for a young child to master quickly and easily. This requires extensive practice with a variety of activities so that students achieve considerable automaticity in decoding these visual patterns.

(iii) Fluency

Being able to read accurately, quickly and with expression. Fluent readers must have good word recognition skills so that they can focus on the meaning of the text being read. Apart from some degree of automaticity in reading words, students need to develop speed and ease in reading connected text (Pang et al., 2006). Research shows a consensus that fluency develops from reading practice (National Reading Panel, 2000). Fluency is recognized as the bridge between word recognition and comprehension. Fluency is important because of the influence it exerts on comprehension. Unless students can identify words both accurately and quickly, text comprehension will be compromised (Center, 2005, p. 164). In early grades, oral reading fluency is a very important reading skill.

(iv) Vocabulary

Oral and written knowledge of words. One relationship constantly found in literature is that people with larger vocabularies tend to comprehend better (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997).

(v) Comprehension

Making meaning from text, which is the essence of reading. Comprehension can occur at different levels. At the superficial level, a reader can understand the literal meaning of a text. A deeper understanding helps to draw simple inferences that may not be directly stated. At a higher level, comprehension could involve relating the text to the reader’s earlier experiences and
integrating ideas. Reading researchers and practitioners hold strongly that comprehension needs to be taught explicitly through a variety of comprehension strategies, e.g. asking questions, retelling, summarizing, graphic and semantic organizers etc. (Pressley, 2000, p. 554)

It is actually better to expand this list to seven skills when we discuss early grades literacy and language development. The two more that should get added are:

(vi) **Oral language development**

*This provides the foundation for language comprehension.* If oral language remains stunted, reading comprehension will always be poor. A systematic effort at developing the child’s oral language helps improve vocabulary, understanding of the standard language used at school and abstract, academic forms of language used in print. Conversation, discussion, storytelling, narration of experiences etc. are some activities for developing a child’s spoken language.

(vi) **Writing**

*Reading and writing reinforce each other.* Poor readers are also poor writers. An effective language curriculum makes use of reciprocal relationships between reading and writing, and between comprehension and composition. Writing has been shown to foster growth in reading (IRA, 2007).

Oral language development, reading and writing reinforce each other and that constitutes language development. For this study, the terms reading, literacy and language development will be used interchangeably.

### 1.3 CRISIS IN EARLY GRADES READING AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

In many developing countries, students are not acquiring these basic reading skills in the first two or three grades. Various national assessments at the grade
2 and 3 level in Asian and African countries clearly indicate that a significant proportion of students are not learning to read by the end of grade 2 (Gove and Cvelich, 2010). In fact, a not so insignificant percentage cannot even recognize all the letters by this stage. Assessments carried out by Room to Read in grades 1 and 2 in government primary schools in Delhi, Rajasthan Uttarakhand indicate that (a) reading achievements are very low and (b) there is a serious disparity in the reading levels within most classrooms, i.e. low mean and high variance. A summary of the results from these assessments for grade 2 is at Table 1.2.

Table 1.2: Scores for different stages of Literacy Test: Grade 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill tested</th>
<th>Mean score</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Letter recognition (out of 60)</td>
<td>26.41</td>
<td>19.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading C-V blends (out of 60) in one minute</td>
<td>22.57</td>
<td>24.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading familiar words (out of 50) in one minute</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>13.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral reading fluency (correct words read per minute, out of 60)</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>19.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension (out of 6 questions: maximum score-6)</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>1.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence writing (maximum score-4.5)</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>1.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=2160 students from 240 schools

The Annual Status of Education Survey 2010 conducted by Pratham (an NGO) also indicates very low reading achievements. The national report highlights—‘Only 53.4% students in Std 5 can read a Std 2 level text. This suggests that even after five years in school, close to half of all students are not even at the level expected of them after two years in school’ (ASER Centre, 2010, p. 51).

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1 Room to Read is an international education NGO working in Asia and Africa helping promote development of reading skills and habit among primary school going children in 10 countries in Asia and Africa. These assessments were carried out with support from National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), UK.
1.4 FACTORS INFLUENCING READING ACHIEVEMENTS

There are several factors within and outside the school that result in students in government schools in India not learning to read even at the end of grade 2. Socioeconomic level of the family, number of years of education of the parents, availability of books and other print at home and preschool education are important non-school factors that affect reading outcomes of students in early primary grades. However, reading research and the experience of effective reading programmes clearly indicate that the initial years of schooling can significantly compensate for a deprived home environment, and almost all students (except those with profound disability) can learn to read and write to a reasonable level by the end of grade 2. A summary of studies of some reading interventions (Fletcher & Lyon, 1988) indicates that 95 percent of all school students can learn to read successfully, if good quality reading instruction is provided.

Learning to read is a like basic right that can open the window for further learning. If the school system cannot guarantee this, we can never hope to achieve the goal of quality education with improved learning outcomes. Therefore, it is important to examine school factors that influence reading achievements in early primary grades.

In the initial one year before the start of fieldwork, the researcher engaged in intensive discussions with (a) Teachers from at least 20 schools in Assam and Rajasthan (b) Block and Cluster Resource persons from Assam (c) DIET (District Institute of Education & Training) and SCERT(State Council of Educational Research & Training) faculty in Assam (d) Room to Read programme staff working for supporting teachers in improving reading instruction in the states of Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, and Delhi, (e) Programme

3 Documents and evaluations from the following programmes were consulted to understand results for reading achievements: READ South Africa, SMRS and Molteno in South Africa and Zambia, GSS and Plan International (Sopan programme) from Bangladesh, Save the Children’s Literacy Boost in Nepal, Pratham’s Read India, Early Literacy Project in Rajasthan, SLIP Plus in West Bengal, Aid India’s learning programme in Tamil Nadu, Reading Guarantee programme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Assam, Activity Based Learning Programme in Tamil Nadu, Multilingual Education Projects in Orissa and Andhra Pradesh, Room to Read’s Literacy Instruction Programme in Rajasthan and Uttarakhand.
staff in other organizations like Pratham, Early Literacy Project (ELP), UNICEF Rajasthan, Aid India (Tamil Nadu) working to improve reading skills, and (f) District and State level pedagogy and teacher training coordinators of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), on issues of early grades reading and the reasons why students are not learning to read effectively in government schools. These discussions had thrown up a variety of school based factors that are perceived to influence reading achievements.

The analysis presented below outlines academic factors, identified during these initial reflections and insights from the literature review, that adversely affect reading achievement:

(i) Inadequate instructional time for teaching language
The time actually available for instruction is significantly lower than the time allocated for language (or any subject) in the curriculum/timetable. Time is lost in frequent school closures, teacher absenteeism and student absenteeism. The actual teaching time when the teacher is present inside the classroom is lower on account of other academic and non-academic tasks and multigrade teaching. The time-on-task (or engaged time) for students is even lower than the time during which a teacher is present in the classroom. The time spent by students on ‘learning’ tasks is a small fraction of the allocated time for teaching language. Instructional time is a crucial variable that affects learning outcomes (Abadzi, 2008; Berliner, 1990). In most states in India, students are required to study four subjects in grade 1. The time allocated for the language that is the medium of instruction is usually just 40-45 minutes a day. This translates to less than 35 minutes of teaching time in a day. When teachers are responsible for teaching more than one grade, the time spent in each grade is even lower, as they attend to each grade for a part of the allocated time. In general, grades 1 and 2 are neglected and get less face-to-face teacher time than grades 4 and 5. The general feeling among teachers is that the syllabus is wider and more difficult in the later grades and requires more time from the teacher. Actually,
grades 1 and 2 are the foundational grades and require the most support from a teacher.

(ii) **Language is treated as just another subject**
Language is a means of communication and a medium of thought and cognition. It is not just another subject to be taught in primary grades. A wide range of research in brain development, cognitive psychology, language development and education has confirmed that linguistic abilities help develop cognitive abilities (Banu, 2009). However, in most developing countries, and in India, in particular, this understanding of the role of language is not widespread. This influences the approach and processes of teaching language in the early primary grades.

(iii) **Inadequate understanding of appropriate strategies for teaching of reading in early primary grades**
Reading is not recognized as a specialized area of language development and is subsumed as a part of the overall language curriculum. Reading is not a skill that comes naturally to students or adults, unlike acquisition of spoken language. Reading instruction has to be systematic from the pre-reading stage in preschool or early grade 1 till a child acquires reasonable fluency with full comprehension of grade appropriate texts by the end of grade 2 (and beyond). Some of the major problems with the teaching-learning process of reading include:

a. *The focus is on teaching content, rather than developing a clearly identified set of skills:* Thus, teachers focus on ‘covering’ the language textbook instead of working to develop skills that contribute to early reading success, e.g. phonological and phonemic awareness, development of oral language, pre-writing skills, concepts of print, letter-sound association and blending leading to word recognition, vocabulary development, comprehension and fluency.

b. *Decoding not taught systematically:* While textbooks and teaching predominantly focus on developing decoding skills in grade 1, decoding instruction is not done systematically through a variety of activities. There is
not enough scope for students to practice their decoding skills through oral and written work.

c. **Comprehension is not stressed adequately:** Reading consists of two related processes: word recognition and comprehension. Word recognition refers to the process of perceiving how written symbols correspond to one’s spoken language. Comprehension is the process of making sense of words, sentences and connected text (Pang et al., 2006). The focus of teaching is almost exclusively on correctness and accuracy, while a focus on meaning and communication is equally important.

d. **Teaching-learning process is teacher-centred:** A teacher-centred process does not provide adequate opportunity for students to practice and consolidate skills that have been taught. The focus remains on teaching, as opposed to learning. In some classroom observation studies, it is seen that almost the entire instructional time is used for teacher led activities, in a whole-class mode, with little scope for students to practice. Classroom culture is authoritarian and does not encourage student participation.

e. **Reading outcomes not assessed regularly:** The classroom transaction is not focused on understanding students’ progress towards identified reading milestones. Therefore, teachers continue to teach irrespective of the reading levels of students in the class.

(iv) **Lack of appropriate reading materials**

The only material available in grades 1 and 2 is the textbook. Learning to read requires the support of a variety of materials like big books, letter and word cards, picture cards, simple and graded storybooks etc. Thus, students are not able to practice any of their decoding skills with simple texts that can help develop fluency and reading comprehension.

(v) **Textbooks are difficult**

When students start grade 2, they are expected to read long and difficult texts at a stage when they have not mastered basic word recognition (decoding) skills. The content is also (often) abstract and not interesting for young students. The texts in grade 1 and 2 have long sentences and passages with many new words,
and a focus on memorization of information. This is not conducive to development of skills of speedy word recognition and improved fluency.

(vi) **Little scope for revision and consolidation in general, and remediation for weaker students**

The concept of ‘scaffolding’ and spiralling to help students from deprived backgrounds to be able to learn effectively with scope for revision, extra remedial support, and graded tasks in small steps is hardly used in the classrooms in government schools in India. When students do not learn, they are stigmatized as ‘slow learners’ and their socio-economic status is stated as the reason for their reading/learning failure.

(vii) **Medium of instruction is a different language**

When the medium of instruction is significantly different from the students’ home or first language, they face a huge learning disadvantage and cannot easily acquire language skills (oral, reading and writing) in the school language in the first few grades (Jhingran, 2005; UNESCO 2007). This is the situation for a significant number of students in government schools in India.

(viii) **Low accountability of the school system for student learning**

The focus of the system is not on student learning and achievement. Assessments in the form of examinations are not oriented to measuring learning in different skills. Teachers do not feel responsible that all children should learn to read and write by the end of grade 2.

### 1.5 GOOD PRACTICES IN TEACHING READING IN EARLY GRADES

Reading research and the experience of some good programmes in India and outside have identified essential elements for ensuring that students learn to read well in the early grades. Some of these are stated below:

a. **Systematic instruction for all the key component skills of reading**: Phonemic awareness, decoding, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension (IRA, 2009; Moats, 1999; N’Namdi, 2005; Strickland, 1998; Vagh, 2009)

b. **Active classroom environment**: Students are involved in learning tasks through a variety of activities (Vosniadou, 2006)
c. **A print-rich environment**: It supports the development of reading skills.

d. **Use of scaffolding instruction**: At every stage, learners get the benefit of teacher modeling, scope for practice and opportunity for regular revision and consolidation (Rose, 2005; IRA, 2009)

e. **Ongoing informal assessment as well as regular tracking of students’ progress on identified reading skills**

f. **Balanced approach to reading instruction**: That includes a focus on meaning making activities as well as systematic instruction on skills like decoding. A balanced approach emphasizes provision of adequate scope for literature based activities like reading aloud, shared reading, guided and independent reading using a variety of simple, graded and interesting student’s literature along with effective phonics instruction (Pressley, 2002; Wren, 2001).

g. **Oral language development**: It is the foundation for early reading (Center, 2005; IRA, 2009) and a good instructional strategy should include adequate emphasis on development of the students’ listening and speaking skills. This is crucial for developing an understanding of standard language, listening comprehension, developing verbal reasoning, vocabulary etc.

h. **A suitable mix of whole-class, group work and individual work activities**: This helps in providing an active learning environment and a high student time-on-task.

i. **Professional development of teachers**: This is the key to improving the teaching-learning process of reading. Professional development is much more than an annual training programme. This should include regular on-site support, coaching and mentoring, peer interaction and development of professional ethics. A major change in classroom processes requires a change in beliefs and attitudes about how students learn; the role of the teacher in the classroom, equity in learning, active participation etc. A one-off training is completely inadequate for such objectives (Cooper, 2009; Learning First Alliance, 2000)
1.6 PRESENT STUDY

Learning achievements of students for reading at the primary stage are really low. This needs to be the focus of the country’s effort for universal education of good quality. Reading is a foundational skill and gains in reading achievement levels could help in improving learning outcomes in other curricular areas. Being a basic skill, ensuring that almost all students learn to read and write is an important equity issue in primary education. Right now, with huge intra-class disparity, the school system is not able to ensure learning for all. Even though, there has been considerable advocacy on the issue of poor reading outcomes, this has not become a priority area for intervention. The focus on quality and student learning is often weak in most states. Teaching of English and Mathematics receive more attention because they are considered more ‘difficult’. The general perception is that the children are fluent speakers of the language used as medium of instruction. Therefore, teaching of language does not require as much time or attention. It is felt that children can quickly learn to read and write the language they already know. However, this is an erroneous belief. Apart from the fact that the standard language used at school is very often quite distant from the children’s mother tongues, teaching of reading and writing to young children is a complex process and is as demanding as the so-called ‘difficult’ subjects.

There has been very little research in India around the subject of early grades reading and language development. We are largely dependent on reading research carried out in the West. However, our context is very different in terms of teacher qualification and competence, preschool availability, preparation for reading at home, class sizes, teacher professional development, resources for creating print-rich classrooms etc. There is need for research on reading issues in the Indian context. This study will add to the limited literature available in the country on the issues and strategies for effective teaching of reading and language in early primary grades.
Through SSA, a lot of in-service training of teachers is being conducted each year. But, these training programmes are not based on inputs from research about the real issues that need to be addressed to enhance student learning and achievement. They are usually focussed on providing more information to the teachers. We need to recognize that there is a serious crisis in the teaching of language in early primary grades in the country, and that is affecting learning in all other subjects. We cannot claim to be focussed on improving the quality of primary education without addressing the crisis in language learning. This study would help provide another reminder about crucial role of reading and language development, and the attention it needs from academic institutions and primary education programmes.

An identification of the major academic factors that influence reading achievements will help in identifying priorities for action for improving the teaching-learning of reading in primary grades.

1.7 RESEARCH QUESTION
What are the school based academic factors that influence reading achievements of students in primary grades? What strategies can help improve the teaching of reading in primary schools?

1.8 OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS
(i) Reading
Reading is a complex cognitive process of understanding written texts. Reading consists of two related processes: word recognition and comprehension. Word recognition refers to the process of decoding written symbols in to the spoken language. Comprehension is the process of making sense of words, sentences and connected text.

It is difficult to separate reading from other aspects of language development, viz. oral language and writing. Listening, speaking, reading and writing are
related skills and reinforce each other. For this study, the terms reading, literacy and language development have been used interchangeably. However, the focus of the study was on reading skills. Only a limited inquiry was taken up for writing skills.

(ii) **Academic Factors**

Academic factors are factors relating to the curriculum, textbooks, teaching-learning materials, teaching-learning process, student assessment, teacher professional development, including training and regular support to teachers, and teacher competence. These are distinguished from non-academic factors like teacher absenteeism, regular functioning of the school, student absenteeism, school management, administrative supervision, etc.

### 1.9 OBJECTIVES

(i) To study the status of teaching-learning process and materials for development of reading skills among primary grade learners.

(ii) To assess the reading achievements of learners in primary grades

(iii) To study the school based academic factors that influence reading achievements of learners in primary grades

(iv) To study existing good practices in teaching of reading in primary grades in some effective reading programmes

(v) To compare the teaching-learning process and teaching-learning materials in the observed schools with the identified good practices.

### 1.10 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

(i) This study focuses only on the academic factors that influence reading outcomes of students in primary grades. It does not focus on systemic issues that affect the functioning of the school, e.g. teacher availability, teacher and student absenteeism, school holidays, community involvement in school management etc. Thus, the schools selected for the study are those that function regularly, have at least two teachers and ‘reasonable’ student-teacher ratios.
(ii) In this study, the terms ‘reading’ and ‘language’ are related only to the language that is taught and used as the medium of instruction at the primary stage. For this study, this school language (Assamese for Assam, and Hindi for Rajasthan) has been considered as close to students’ home languages in the schools selected for study.

(iii) Several studies have followed a ‘whole school’ approach to examine factors responsible for school effectiveness. This study has a narrower focus in examining the teaching of reading alone.

(iv) The study includes only Grades 1 and 2 in its scope, and not all primary grades. The language curriculum in the first two grades is designed to help students acquire basic reading and writing skills by the end of grade 2. It is here that reading deficits begin to appear and these become bigger in the later primary grades. Unless we can ensure that students learn to read well, with fluency and comprehension, by the end of grade 2, they will keep falling behind in future years and can never catch up with the curriculum in later grades.

(v) This study does not include investigation of issues related to language instruction in schools where the students’ home languages are very different from the language used as medium of instruction at school.

Thus, the schools selected for the study are better placed than other primary schools that have additional constraints outlined above.

1.11 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

(i) Process of Development

The starting point of the development of the conceptual framework of academic factors for the study was the following (Figure 1.1) model of inputs and intermediate outcomes and the end outcome of student learning. Academic factors as defined in this study include enabling conditions and actual classroom processes that support student learning and reading achievements. This model was developed based on generic school effectiveness models; the
researcher’s earlier work with learning enhancement programmes, within and outside the government; consultation with teachers and faculty members from institutions like SCERT and DIETs; and key programme staff of a few reading improvement programmes in the country. The model explains how inputs or independent variables like students’ readiness; home environment; textbooks and other materials; assessment systems; teachers and their training and certain enabling conditions at school interact with each other to influence the intermediate outcome of teaching-learning process and the end outcome of student learning.

Figure 1.1: Inputs, intermediate outcomes, and student learning
The framework in Figure 1.1 was modified in the following manner to arrive at the conceptual framework for this study:

a. Factors not connected with the school, e.g. children’s nutrition and readiness, parental involvement in children’s learning, governance and other external factors were removed from the framework. Out of these, parental involvement in children’s learning was one factor that came up repeatedly during the course of the study, through teacher interviews and focus group discussions, as well as the questionnaire-based survey.
b. The model was made more specific to the teaching of reading and language learning
c. Shift in focus from the school to individual classrooms for observation (detailed below)
d. Exclusion of the factor relating to the difference between students’ home languages and the school language

(ii) Classroom as a unit for observation
Since the main objective of the study was to identify and study school-based academic factors that affect students’ reading achievements, the major focus of the field work was on the teaching-learning processes for language inside a classroom. However, to the extent that certain academic factors that are not controlled by the teacher inside the classroom, but influence what happens inside a classroom, they were included in the study (curriculum and textbook, teacher training and academic support and allocated time for instruction). But, unlike school effectiveness studies, where the school (and the larger education system) is the focus of study, in this research, the focus was on classroom processes for reading and language instruction. Another reason for not considering the school as a unit for observation was the clear understanding that followed from the review of literature and preliminary school visits that classroom processes differed significantly from one teacher to another within the same school. Thus, it is not appropriate to talk of effective schools for language instruction in our context. The main analysis has to be conducted at the teacher-classroom level. Also, in most states in India, at the primary level,
there is really no school leadership. The head teacher or headmaster is not really an effective head of the institution. The head teacher is just given a small extra salary (usually as low as Rs. 50 or Rs. 100 per month) for being in-charge of the head teacher’s responsibility. In most primary schools, the head teacher is not in a position to work effectively towards promoting a particular kind of school climate or influence teacher attitudes and behavior or classroom processes. Thus, the classroom processes are largely dependent on the individual teacher teaching that class.

(iii) Final Conceptual Framework

Based on this contextualized analysis, the following simplified conceptual framework showing a broad set of enabling conditions and classroom processes was identified for investigation by this study (Figure1.2).

Figure 1.2: Simplified Conceptual Framework for this Study
(iv) Desirable enabling conditions and classroom process

Some elaboration of the desirable enabling conditions and classroom processes identified in the framework for the study is as follows:

a. Adequate instructional time for language:
   - Allocated time: allocated in the curriculum or the school timetable
   - Actual teaching time: Time for which language is actually taught by the teacher in the classroom
   - Time-on-task: Time for which the teacher is actually teaching and students are engaged in a planned classroom activity

b. Teacher knowledge, skills and attitudes relating to
   - Effective reading/language instruction
   - Active engagement of students
   - Effective learning organization and classroom management (e.g. mix of whole-class teaching, group and individual tasks)
   - High expectations of students
   - Regular assessment and follow-up
   - Understanding the importance of reading and language learning in early grades

The study focuses on Teacher Professional Learning through in-service teacher training, regular academic support to teachers, and a professional learning environment at school and beyond.

c. Print-rich environment, including availability of simple and interesting graded books for students at different reading levels

d. Good classroom instructional practices:
   - High student time-on-task; active student engagement
   - Focus on skills and not on content
   - Inclusion of all essential components of reading instruction, e.g., oral language development, phonological and phonemic awareness, decoding, vocabulary development, fluency development, comprehension and systematic writing
• Balanced literacy instruction, i.e. systematic decoding instruction along with adequate meaning based activities. Thus, the focus in early grades should not be only on drills for letter and word recognition, but include many other activities for oral language development, reading and writing that focus on meaning, e.g., reading aloud, conversation and discussion, comprehension strategies for understanding a text etc.

• Adequate time and encouragement for reading practice with additional reading materials like storybooks.

• Regular assessment to understand students reading achievements and adjusting instruction based on assessment findings. Regular revision and consolidation and providing adequate scope for practice by students. Ensuring some extra attention to weaker students on a regular basis, apart from periodic remedial instruction for students who are lagging behind.

• Good reading strategies like reading aloud, choral reading, shared reading of text, strategies for developing vocabulary and comprehension, monitored loud reading for developing fluency, independent reading for pleasure, and systematic writing instruction (not confined to copying or handwriting practice).

• Use of appropriate teaching-learning materials (TLM) by teacher and students e. *Curriculum and textbooks* have clearly defined outcomes related to language skills that are understood by teachers. The focus should not be on memorizing content, but developing key language skills. The textbooks have an appropriate sequence that supports the teaching-learning process, and are not too difficult for students at that age. Textbooks and workbooks should provide enough scope for reinforcement and practice of newly learnt skills. This practice should not be only for lower-order activities, but also at application level. Textbooks should be interesting and easy to read. The classroom should have a large number of additional reading materials to support students’ reading needs.
Since basic reading and writing skills in early primary grades form the foundation for all learning in later years, it is crucial that all students acquire these skills to desirable levels. Thus, classrooms that are effective in reading and language development have to not only ensure high levels of reading achievements against identified standards but also ensure equity in learning. It has to be ensured that (almost) all students acquire basic skills of reading. This is the guiding principle followed in the preparation of the conceptual framework and the analysis of data from the research.

This study investigates the above factors and processes in selected classrooms to arrive at an understanding of the crucial academic factors that influence reading achievements in primary schools in two selected contexts. The tools for the study were prepared keeping in view some of the desirable practices and standards for different enabling conditions and classroom processes. These desirable practices and standards were used as reference to study the observed enabling conditions and practices in the selected classrooms.