

Status of Primary Education in Assam after Introducing Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Program (FLN)

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Abstract:

The National Achievement Survey (**NAS**) **2021** of India shows that in Language **63%**, Mathematics **60%** and **EVS 60%** of students from Assam able to solve class **III** standard of curriculum and in Language **57%**, Mathematics **47%** and EVS **52%** of students able to solve the class **V** standard of curriculum. This statistics indicates that in class three standards there are **41%** and in Class five standards **48%** of students unable to solve their respective curriculum. This survey report reveals a plague scenario of quality primary education in Assam where almost **48%** students who lag behind in their quality education they are not able to perform well in reading, writing and calculation in basic primary level of curriculum. In light of the weak foundational level competency of primary students in Literacy and Numeracy the government of India centrally introduced the Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (**FLN**) Program under the **NIPUN** Bharat Mission. Similar way, in state level, the state Assam introduced the **NIPUN** Assam Mission to develop these **48%** students up to mainstream student's academic level. Therefore the present study is conducted to visualize the progress and prospect of primary education of Assam after introducing Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (**FLN**) Program. For the present study, Naraynpur Educational Block of Lakhimpur District of Assam selected as the area of study and **298** primary schools of the block selected as the sample of the study on the basis of judgmental sampling technique.

Key words: Primary Education, National Achievement Survey, Foundational Literacy and Numeracy, Curriculum, NIPUN Assam.

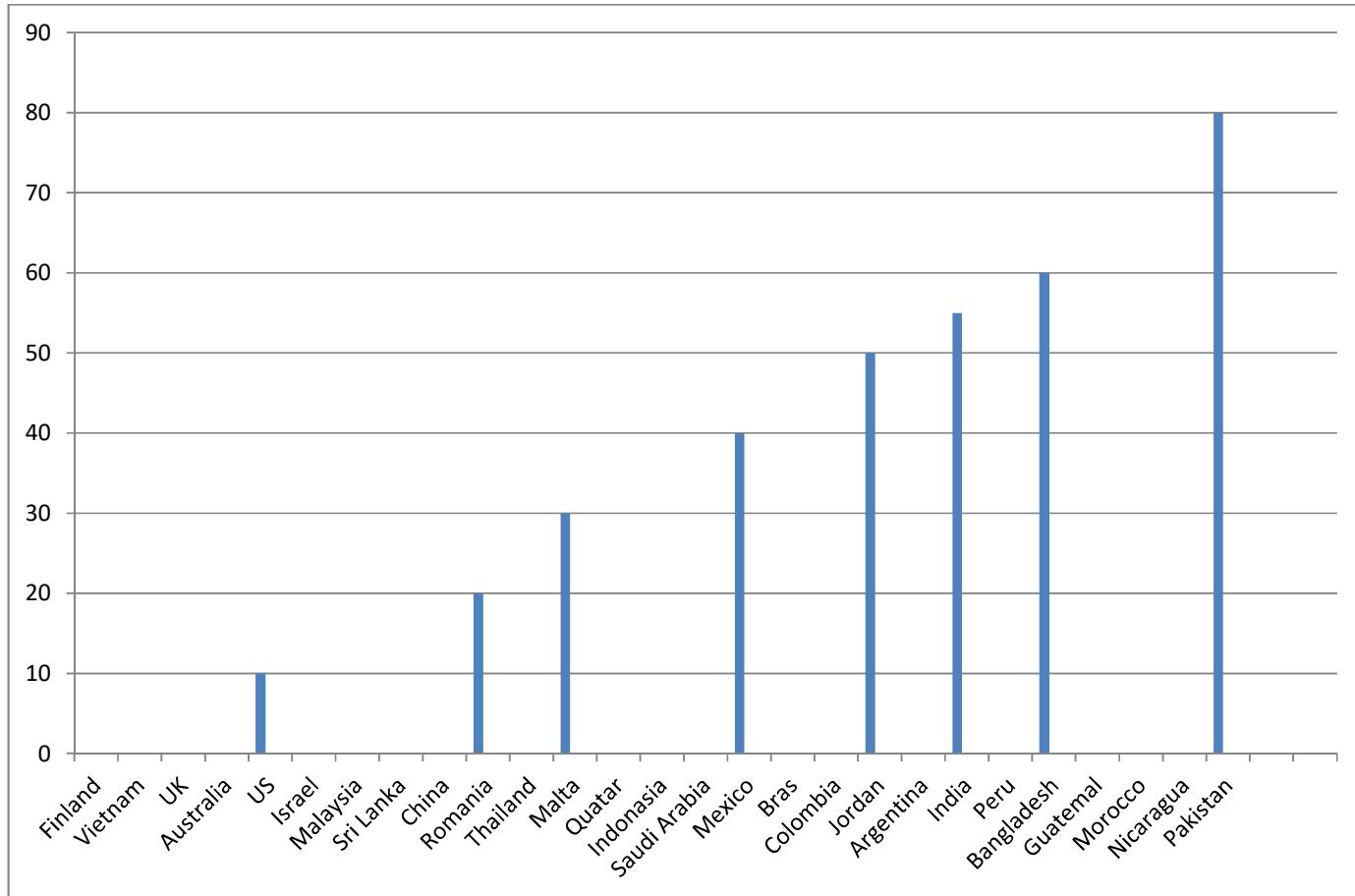
Introduction

National Achievement Survey (**NAS**) **2021**, **ASSAM** stated that “*Despite a significant overall progress in NAS 2021 for both numeracy & literacy, there is a decline in the learning progress in the state as we move to the higher grades*”. There are **55%** of children in India at late primary age today suffer from learning poverty (**NAS-2021**). They are being unable to read and understand a simple test by age **10**. In India, schooling is still not equal to learning. Many children left behind without attaining the most basic skills in primary school that is foundational literacy and numeracy (**FLN**). Following bar diagram shows comparative study of the world in students learning poverty.

The bar diagram shows Finland is top rank in the list, India rank is **55** and Pakistan is bottom of the list. There is a strong national concern today regarding the poor learning levels of children at various stages of school education. Early investment through timely and appropriate intervention becomes essential for a child to develop to her fullest potential. Various research studies found foundational literacy and numeracy are two important skills on which the entire course of future learning depends. The findings of the studies has shown conclusively that once students fall behind on foundational literacy, they tend to maintain flat learning curves for years, perpetually

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unable to catch up. Gaps in early grades affect a learner's ability to read with meaning and do basic math by grade 3.



The National Education Policy (**NEP**) **2020** recognizing the importance of early learning. **NEP-2020** postulates that “*Our highest priority must be to achieve universal foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) in primary schools and beyond by 2026-27. The rest of the policy will be largely irrelevant for such a large portion of our students if this most basic learning (reading, writing and arithmetic or the foundational level) is not first achieved.*” **NEP-2020** emphasis on three things of primary education i.e. (i) Making foundational leaning the highest priority for the country, (ii) Launching a national mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (**FLN**), and (iii) Achieving universal **FLN** in primary schools by **2026-27**. All students must acquire Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (**FLN**) skills at the end of class 3 by **2026-2027**. Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (**FLN**) means a child’s ability to read, write and solve basic mathematical problems.

Literacy and Numeracy are two important areas of national education policy 2020 of India and these most basic learning requirements are necessary for learning other skills for participation in day-to-day life activities. Literacy includes the awareness about the sounds of language, the knowledge of relationship between letters and sounds, and the skills related to vocabulary, spelling and comprehension. Literacy also includes development of oral language to communicate with others. Numeracy is also important for individuals to develop logical thinking and

reasoning in everyday life activities. Foundational numeracy skills include the ability to do fundamental arithmetic operations, namely addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division.

The Ministry of Education has launched a mission named **NIPUN Bhart** (*National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy*) on 5th of July, 2021. The Government of Assam has also undertaken the **FLN** mission under name **NIPUN AXOM** based on the **NIPUN Bharat**. It was launched on 16th November, 2021, by Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, Honorable Chief Minister of Assam. The present paper studies the status of primary education of Assam after implementation of **FLN** Program under **NIPUN AXOM**.

Objective of the Study

- To study the process of how the **FLN** program is implemented in Assam.
- To investigate the present status of **FLN** program in Schools.
- To examine the progress of students after implementation of **FLN** program.

Methodology of the Study:

The present study on “*Status of Primary Education in Assam after Introducing Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Program (FLN)*” accomplished by following the survey method of educational research under descriptive method of educational researcher. As the population of the study the students and the teachers of primary schools of Assam were selected. For the survey of the study to collect relevant data selected *Narayanpur Educational Block* of *Lakhimpur* district of *Assam* as area of study. The total 298 primary schools of *Narayanpur Educational Block* were selected as sample on the basis of judgmental sampling technique.

Rationale of the Study

The Institute for Competitiveness and US-Asia Technology Management Center; Standford on February 29th 2024 published a report on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy where emphasized Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) improving outcome among children. This report capture the significance of evidence backed curriculum designs, intervention, and practices in improving learning outcome among children. It is fundamental to ensure equity and excellence by providing quality education during the foundational years. To do this, teacher must have the requisite expertise and abilities to employ FLN program appropriately, and this can be developed through comprehensive capacity-building initiatives.

The government of Assam through the FLN Program already had conducted three phases FLN training among all the elementary teachers of Assam in the year 2022, 2023 and 2024. This FLN training has provided to the teacher the requisite guidance, support, knowledge and skills for implementing FLN program. Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) refer to the basic literacy, numeracy and transferable skills that form the building block for a life learning (Herbert, Savedra et. all, 2021). According to the state wise assessment conducted in Kanataka by ASER in March 2021, The National Assessment Survey conducted in November 2021 by the Ministry of Education and Multi-state study conducted by Azim Premji University found the foundational learning levels is poor in India. Similarly, the foundational learning levels in Assam very poor it falls far behind in comparison to other state in India. Therefore, the Assam government implements the Foundational Literacy and Numeracy

Program; in this juncture it is necessary to study the status of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy competency of the elementary level students of Assam. Hence, the present study had conducted.

Review of Related Literature

Mehulkumar Patel (March, 2022), presented his research paper that NIPUN Bharat, its requirements and importance as well as associating socio-scientific issues with Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN), its need and methods are also discussed. He revealed that awareness, argumentation and conceptual understanding for Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) need to be developed in the coming years. It is also important to integrate skills, attitudes and values in the field of science with Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) to accomplish competency based learning. Amit Kapoor, Natulia Chakma and Sheen Zutshy (February, 2023), published a report on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy of Institute for Competitiveness(IFC) where they postulated the significance of evidence-backed curriculum designs, interventions, and practices in improving learning outcomes among children. Herbert, Saaveda et.al, 2021 identified three critical stakeholders- parents, teachers and teacher coaches/mentor- in the FLN program. They also identified in the FLN program some behavioral barriers among these stakeholders that hindered the acquisition of FLN skills by the student.

Tapaswani Mahapatra and Dharmendra Singh conducted a study on Revolutionizing Education: Unveiling the Impact of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Training through Diksha on Teachers found a positive correlation between DIKSHA training and improved FLN skills among students, highlighting its potential in supporting the NIPUN Bharat mission.

The report Ministry of Education, Government of India prepared by Chairperson Prof. Divesh Prasad Saklani, Director NCERT presented that the early years 0-8 years are the most significant period of growth and development, in the life of a child. This period is the foundation for holistic development of the child and the child's future learning are set-up. Strong foundations in the early years have a lasting impact on children's development and are considered to be critical inputs in improving the enrolment and participation of children in formal schooling.

Rukhsana Bashir and Tasleema Jan (March, 2023) conducted a study on the topic of 'Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (NEP, 2020)-Urgency, essential skills, challenges and the integration of key Areas. They found that the most critical period for growth and development is the initial eight years of a child's life that is 0 to 8 years, as this is when the foundation for comprehensive growth and learning is laid. Children who attend a high-quality preschool curriculum reach major social, educational and intellectual milestones that set them development and can significantly impact their school enrolment and involvement.

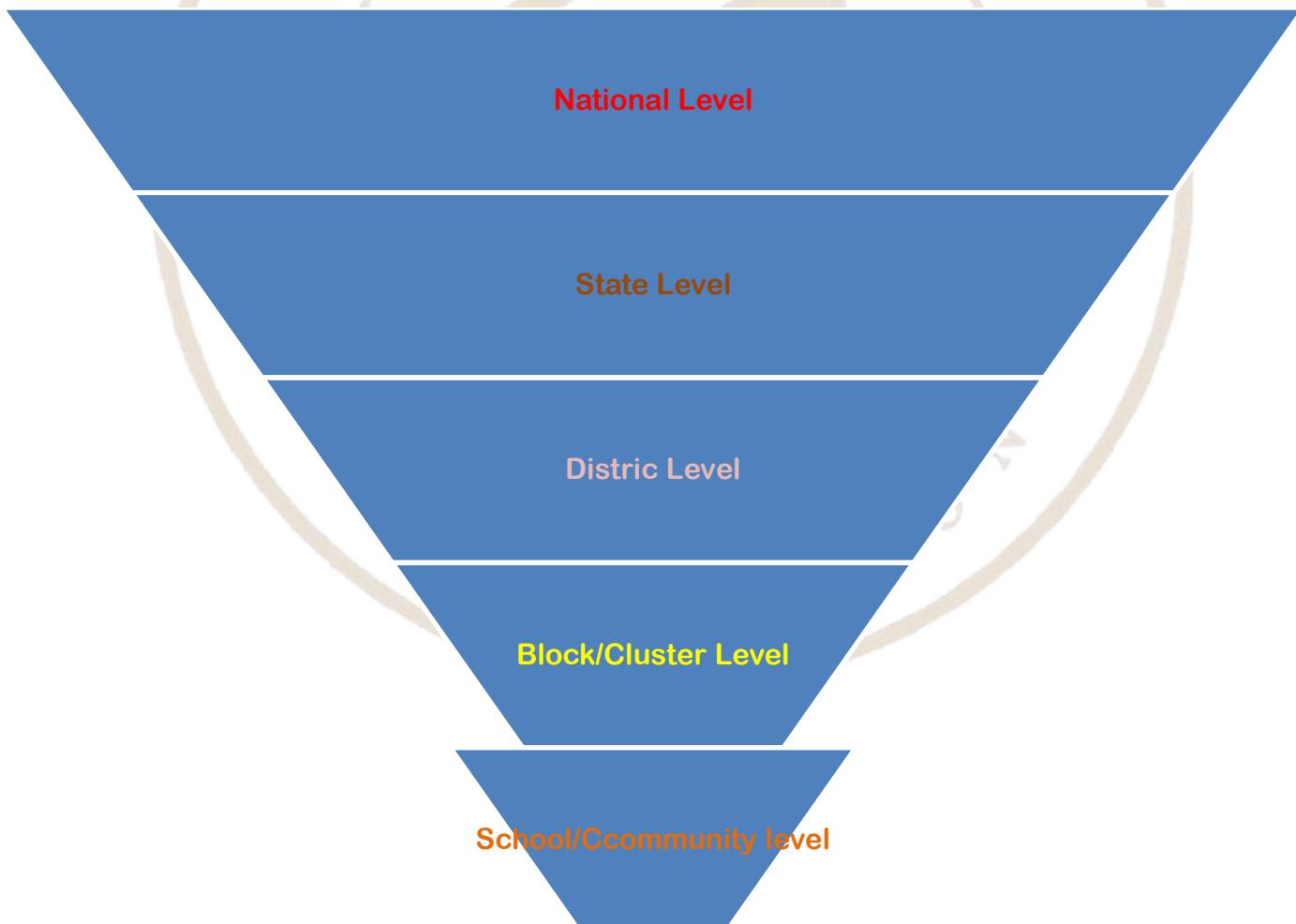
Discussion and Interpretation

The vision of the FLN mission is to create an enabling environment to ensure universal acquisition of foundational literacy and numeracy, so that by 2026-27 every child achieves the desired learning competencies in reading, writing and numeracy at the end of Grade III and not later than Grade V where every child will be capable to read with comprehension, write, basic mathematical operations and learn life skills. For this purpose Assam government launched FLN mission, in this juncture the first objective of the study (*To study the process of how*

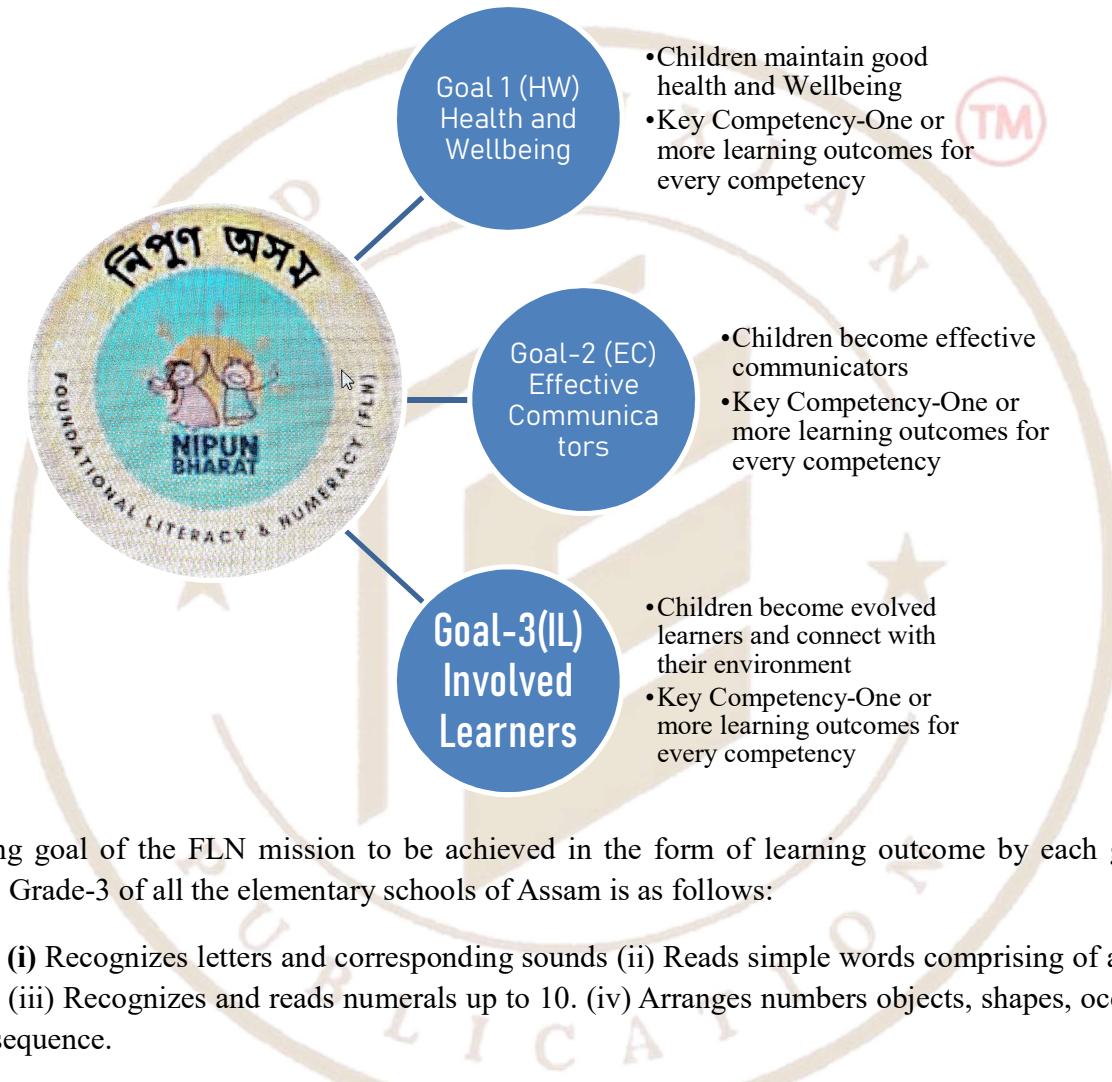
the FLN program is implemented in Assam) was formulated to see how Assam government implement FLN mission. In Assam FLN mission has been implementing by NIPUN AXOM.

FOUNDATIONAL LITERACY AND NUMERACY (FLN) MISSION IN ASSAM IS KNOWN AS NIPUN AXOM. NIPUN AXOM was launched on 16th November, 2021, by the Honorable Chief Minister of Assam, Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, along with the Honorable Education Minister of Assam, Dr. Ranjan Pegu. The vision of NIPUN AXOM is to create an enabling environment in the education system for attainment of all-round development of children, with special focus on achieving foundational literacy and numeracy from preschool to class 3 by 2026-27.

All the district of Assam had completed three phases of teacher training on FLN programme from 2022 to 2024 under NIPUN AXOM. The FLN programme has been implemented in the mission mode, with use and strengthening of the existing mainstream structures. The Department of Education and Samagra Shiksha Assam is the implementing agency headed by a Mission Director under which has FLN coordinators for each district. FLN mission follows a five tier mechanism that is national level, state level, district level, block level/cluster level and school level/community level which are presented following diagram.



Objective number two investigated the present status of **FLN** program in Schools. In this aspect all the elementary teachers of Assam had completed three phases training on FLN where hands on training had been given on all the hard core concept of FLN such as learning goal, FLN skills, Approach and Assessment. The Learning outcomes for Foundational learning have been divided into 3 three developmental goals: Goal 1-HW (Health and Wellbeing), Goal 2-EC (Effective Communicators), Goal 3-IL (Involved Learners).



The Learning goal of the FLN mission to be achieved in the form of learning outcome by each grade from Balvatika to Grade-3 of all the elementary schools of Assam is as follows:

Balvatika:- (i) Recognizes letters and corresponding sounds (ii) Reads simple words comprising of at least 2 to 3 alphabets. (iii) Recognizes and reads numerals up to 10. (iv) Arranges numbers objects, shapes, occurrence of events in a sequence.

Grade 1:- (i) Read small sentences consisting of at least 4-5 simple words in an age appropriate unknown text. (ii) Read and write numbers up to 99 (iii) Perform simple addition and subtraction.

Grade 2:- (i) Read with meaning (ii) 45-60 words per minute (iii) Read and write numbers up to 999 (iv) Subtract numbers up to 99.

Grade 3:- (i) Read with meaning (ii) at least 60 words per minute (iii) Read and write numbers up to 9999 (iv) Solve simple multiplication problems.

Key Skills of Foundational Literacy are:

1. Oral Language Development: Includes improved listening comprehension; oral vocabulary and extended conversation skills. The experiences in oral language are important for developing skills of reading and writing.
2. Decoding: Involves deciphering written words based on understanding the relationship between symbols and their sounds.
3. Reading Fluency: Refers to the ability to read a text with accuracy, speed (automaticity), expression (prosody), and comprehension that allows children to make meaning from the text. Many children recognize words, but read them laboriously, one-by-one.
4. Reading Comprehension: Involves constructing meaning from a text and thinking critically about it. This domain covers the competencies of understanding texts and retrieving information from them, as well as interpreting texts.
5. Writing: This domain includes the competencies of writing words as well as writing for expression.

Key Skills of Foundational Numeracy: Foundational Numeracy means the ability to reason and to apply simple numerical concepts in daily life problem solving. The major aspects and components of early mathematics are:

1. Pre-number concepts: Count and understand the number system.
2. Numbers and operations on numbers: Learn conventions needed for mastery of Mathematical techniques such as the use of a base ten system to represent numbers.
3. Shapes and Spatial Understanding: Perform simple computations in her/his own way up to three-digit numbers and apply these to their day to life activities in different contexts.
4. Measurement: Understand and use standard algorithms to perform operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division on numbers up to three digits.
5. Data Handling: Identify and extend simple patterns starting from repeating shapes to patterns in numbers, interpret simple data/information in his/her daily life activities.

At the part of the objective number three ‘To examine the progress of students after implementation of **FLN** program’ it was found that after implementation of FLN programme in the school of Assam there had been conducted 4th and 5th round Gunotsav where schools were performed well progressively round by round. At 4th round Gunotsav there were 88 schools got **A+**, 100 schools got **A**, 15 schools got **B**, 2 school got **C** and 9 got **D** grade out of 205 school where enrollment was more than 29. At 5th round Gunotsav 107 schools got **A+**, 50 got **A**, 4 got **B**, 2 got **C**, and 0 school got **D** degrade out of 163 schools where enrollment was more than 29.

Following table shows the comparison of 4th and 5th round Gunotsav result

Sl no	Education Block	Gunotsav Round	A+	A	B	C	D	Total
1	Narayanpur	4 th Gunotsav result	88	91	15	2	9	205
2	Narayanpur	5 th Gunotsav result	105	50	4	2	0	163

Above table data proved that implementation of FLN programme in the school of Assam improve the performance of the students. Gunotsav is a method of assessment and rating of schools for education in Assam. After implementation of FLN programme in Assam it was also found that various initiative had been taken by government to improve Administration, Capacity building, Curricular/Academic Areas and Assessment of the schools education.

For the smooth administration: (i) Formation of Steering Committees (state and districts), State Resource Group (SRG), Project Management Units (state, districts and blocks), Academic Task Force (ATF) and Academic Resource Pool at DIETs, (ii) Engagement of School Mentors and human resources under state and district PMUs and (iii) Fixation of one teacher exclusively for teaching in class 1.

For Capacity Building: (i) Orientation of state- level functionaries, district/block authorities, **DIET, BTC, Normal Schools, DACG and BACG** members, (ii) Capacity building of teachers through **NISHTHA-3.0**, (iii) Orientation of **SMC/SMDC** members, community members, parents and guardians on **NIPUN AXOM**, (iv) Orientation of Key Resource Persons (**KRPs**) at the state level on **NIPUN AXOM**, (v) A 5-day state-level residential workshop on **NIPUN AXOM** for State Resource Group (**SRG**), in collaboration with **UNICEF**, (vi) Monthly cluster-level meeting / orientation of teachers on the implementation of **NIPUN AXOM**

For Curricular/Academic Areas: (i) Alignment/mapping of learning outcomes (term-wise)as per guidelines of **NIPUN BHARAT**, (ii) Development/adaptation/modification of learning materials (charts, letter/word/picture cards, teacher's manual, school readiness package, conversation charts etc.) for classes **I to III**, (iii) Development of Learning Outcomes Framework (**LOF**) for primary classes.

To work with foundational stage learners, i.e. in the age group of 3-9 years, teachers may require a variety of Teaching Learning Materials (**TLMs**) to get children engaged in meaningful activities. Along the same line, the state has developed a total of 214 learning materials which includes conversion charts, grids, instructional design, word cards, letter cards, sentence cards and barnawali cards. Teachers can make use the existing materials, activities, worksheets, toys etc. for achieving pre-determined early learning outcomes. Use indigenous/ locally available materials which are low cost or no-cost. Ensure that children can manipulate the materials and have safe accessibility. Encourage children to read "written words" wherever available like newspaper, wall slogans, hoardings in school, advertisements etc. Design different areas like Reading Corner, Math Corner and Creative Corner to encourage free play, self learning ,socio - emotional learning etc. Creation of print-rich classroom environment in the form of word walls, story books, posters etc to help children in their develop literacy skills.

In view of the challenges of in-service teacher training across the different stages of school education, **NCERT** has designed an innovative and integrated programme for teacher training, now popularly known as **NISHTHA** (National Initiative for School Heads and Teachers Holistic Advancement) one of the special features of **NISHTHA** is its interactivity with teachers. It provides teachers opportunities to not only share their concerns and problems with the Resource Persons but also to present solutions to these problems through their activities and presentations.

NISHTHA 3.0 for **NIPUN Bharat** (Pre-primary to Class V) **NISHTHA 3.0** aims at achieving the major objectives of FLN based on the recommendations of **NEP 2020**. There are 12 courses covering the following topics:

Course 1: Introduction to FLN Mission, **Course 2:** Shifting towards Competency based Education, **Course 3:** Understanding Learners: How Children Learn?, **Course 4:** Involvement of Parents and Communities for FLN, **Course 5:** Understanding 'Vidya Pravesh' and 'Balvatika', **Course 6:** Foundational Literacy, **Course 7:** Multilingual Education in Primary Grades, **Course 8:** Learning Assessment, **Course 9:** Foundational Numeracy, **Course 10:** School Leadership for Foundational Literacy and Numeracy, **Course 11:** Integration of ICT in Teaching, Learning and Assessment, **Course 12:** Toy based Pedagogy for Foundational stage.

Every teacher and school headmasters will be expected to conduct action research to immediately solve problems related to foundational learning in the classrooms and will also develop low-cost innovative TLMs as follow-up activities of the capacity building programme. Face-to-face training will be conducted by the SCERTs at the state level.

Conclusion

Strong foundations in the early years have a lasting impact on children's development. But various survey specially **NAS 2021** and various comparative studies of Indian education with rest of the world indicate the poor quality education of India. India had a glorious past in the sphere of education. Where rest of the world laid in dark then world Class University like Nalanda, Takshashila, Bikromshila attracted students from all over the world but pace of time India had lost it's the glorious past. The root cause of this issue is the foundational education of India not so strong comparatively to the modern-day world and various problems covered it. The Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (**FLN**) is the bedrock of a child's learning journey. It ensures the children development on fundamental literacy- reading and writing and numeracy- mathematics skills in the early years of their education. The **FLN** programmer of Assam improves the basic pillars of education system these are educational infrastructure, access to education, basic health, learning outcome and governance. Besides it improves the professionalism of the teachers, increase the participations of community and guardians, creates a strong bond among different stakeholders of educations, and ensure all round development of the children.

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