



HOLISTIC
LEARNING
INNOVATIONS

SMART CLUBS

Country: Kyrgyzstan

Target Age: 10 Years

Learning Areas: Literacy | Critical Thinking |

Problem Solving

THE CONTEXT

The General Secondary School named after A. Zhutakeev is located in Jan-Bulak village, Naryn District, Kyrgyzstan. The school serves 750 students, including 57 children aged 10 supported by the Schools2030 programme. Jan-Bulak is a remote mountain community where access to modern educational resources is limited. Teachers identified persistent difficulties in students' reading comprehension and critical thinking, which affected learning across all subjects.

Many students struggled to define learning goals and lacked the ability to connect ideas or summarize key information. Teachers recognized that improving reading comprehension required not only stronger literacy instruction but also the development of goal-setting and problem-solving skills to help students take ownership of their learning.



General Secondary School named after A. Zhutakeev located in Jan-Bulak village
For a visual perspective of Jan-Bulak and its surroundings, please find following video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wuU4UzB7Arc&t=229s>



A 4th-grade student is conducting research around the Naryn River based on a text they read earlier
Photographer: school team



A primary school teacher explains the task in the text using various reading strategies
Photographer: Nazgul

THE CHALLENGE

How might we enhance students' reading comprehension through clear learning goals and structured methodologies?


Assessments and interviews with teachers and students revealed that weak reading comprehension was limiting progress in multiple subjects. Many students read texts passively without identifying main ideas or drawing conclusions. A lack of structured reading strategies and limited classroom engagement led to low motivation and inconsistent performance.


Observations confirmed that students with poor comprehension often struggled with science and mathematics, where understanding complex concepts relied heavily on reading ability. Teachers also noted that students rarely asked questions or discussed what they read, limiting opportunities for analytical thinking and deeper understanding.


THE INNOVATION

SMART Club: Improving reading skills and critical thinking of students

SMART Club is designed to improve students' reading comprehension and critical thinking skills through structured lessons and extracurricular classes. Teachers facilitate reading-focused activities tailored to the 10- year-old cohort. The club sets measurable and achievable learning goals for students, helping them develop reading comprehension and critical thinking skills.

 Lessons focus on reading comprehension, where students engage with scientific texts, and after reading interpreting and presenting information using diagrams, graphs, and summaries.

 Students are encouraged to underline or highlight key points while reading. This promotes engagement and helps them identify main ideas, supporting details, and unfamiliar vocabulary.

 Teachers act as facilitators, helping students set and achieve personal learning goals.



Students engaged in Smart Club
Photographer: Media Lab Company



Students during group work
Photographer: Media Lab Company

Competencies Targeted

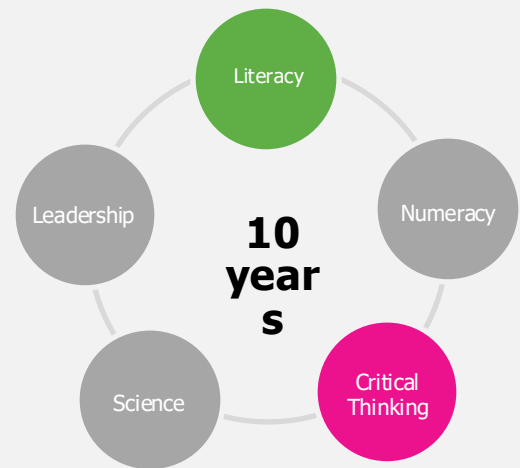
10-year-old Domains

Literacy and Reading Comprehension:

Students should be able to understand what they read, find the main points, make open-ended questions based on the text, and summarize it.

Critical Thinking and Problem Solving:

Students should be encouraged to ask questions, using knowledge, facts, and data to solve problems effectively. Activities like discussions and research can help with this.





Collaboration of design teams – previous with current one.
Photographer: Media Lab Company



Students discussing about affects of climate change
Photographer: Media Lab Company

THE IMPACT

Boosting literacy, engagement, and Student motivation

Implemented during the 2023–2024 academic year, the *SMART Club* has produced significant gains in literacy and engagement. Students showed measurable improvement in reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and summarization skills. They demonstrated greater confidence in interpreting texts and explaining their understanding across different subjects.

Teachers reported a visible increase in student motivation and participation, with learners taking more initiative in discussions and showing interest in reading outside class. Parents also noticed positive changes, describing their children as more confident, inquisitive, and eager to share what they learned.

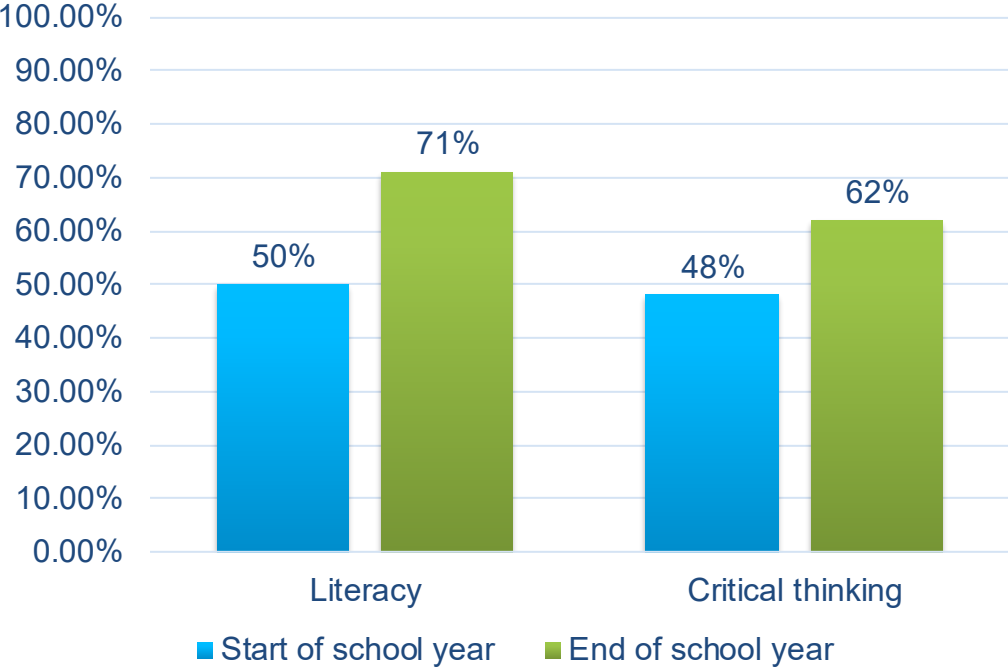
The success of the *SMART Club* has positioned it as a model for strengthening foundational literacy through practical, goal-oriented approaches, with potential for expansion to other schools in the region.

"I can now understand and explain texts better, which helps me in all my subjects." – Bekbol, 10-year-old student

"My child enjoys reading more and can discuss what they learn with confidence." – Parent

THE IMPACT

Mean results for Literacy & Critical Thinking skills assessment for the 2023-2024 School Year



Meet the Teachers



Mairam Musaeva

School principal



Astra Asankozhoeva

*Primary school
teacher*



Toktonbayeva Kunduz

*Secondary school
teacher*



Zhusup kyzy Meerim

*Primary school
teacher*



Aalieva Meerim

*Secondary school
teacher*



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