

Developing English learning in Madhya Pradesh

A partnership between the British Council and
Madhya Pradesh Board of Secondary Education

Stories of change





Foreword



Smt. Jaishri Kiyawat
Commissioner,
Directorate of Public Instruction, Bhopal

Our experience has shown that the importance of English language in daily business and for better career prospects stands unchallenged in today's fast paced world. Students from vernacular language backgrounds often face challenges in adapting to the language and gaining mastery over it. We are delighted to partner with British Council to address just this issue in an exciting project over four years. The project aims to develop the spoken English communication skills of two million learners per year from all government High Schools and Higher Secondary schools across the state of Madhya Pradesh.

Using more learning-centred approaches with both their textbooks and a customised British Council spoken English communications skills course, the cadre of 2500+ teachers and Master Trainers is developed to teach Class 9 to 12 learners. The project has witnessed three blocks of face-to-face training over duration of six days each. During the pandemic the teachers and Master Trainers were jointly trained through rigorous two blocks of training stretching over a period of 10 weeks each. The teachers have also participated in two MOOCs conducted during the project so far. Through the project we are glad that the continuing professional development opportunities for teachers have increased access to high quality self-access digital and print CPD resources over last two years.

The teachers have very well adapted their methods of teaching during the challenging times of Covid pandemic. The teachers have further benefitted from a TV show on Door Darshan DD which themed around online teaching to further support teachers in the state with help of British Council. Ongoing continuous support on Facebook provided by British Council has proven beneficial to the teachers in adapting to new methods of classroom teaching in the pandemic. It is encouraging to know that despite the Covid situation the teachers have been able to roll out the learner course in their classrooms. The learner course is the backbone for the success of the project and its roll out in these uncertain times has certainly proven to be a milestone achievement for the project.

It is heartening to see such best practices adapted by teachers captured in this book, to enhance teaching and learning of English language in their classrooms. As the project enters in its fourth year, we look forward to more sustainable approach and long term collaboration with British Council.

Foreword



Dr Jovan Ilić
Director – West India, British Council

In our well-connected and often competitive world, the ability to use English for communicative purposes is ever more important. In response, across the world, the British Council is working with governments and government agencies, schools, teacher educators, teachers and students, to support the development of English language systems within the state sector.

We are honoured to partner with the Government of Madhya Pradesh to realise a collective vision: By 2022, English language teaching and learning at secondary level will enable improved life opportunities for students, of teachers, and develop a cadre of Master Trainers and government officials who will be able to sustain the education system independently in the future.

Midway through this partnership project with the Madhya Pradesh Board of Secondary Education, it is inspiring to read these Stories of change, describing how some of the 2500 teachers and 180 Master Trainers from across the state have gained skills and knowledge from this project, and are applying their learning for improved student outcomes. It is also incredible to see how teachers and Master Trainers have adapted to the Covid-19 led challenges and thus far have participated in 20 British Council webinars, supporting them with innovative and relevant solutions to overcome the challenges of remote teaching.

Critical to the success of this project is the enthusiasm, collaboration and dedication of the teachers, trainers, and government officials, and I would like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to them all. We are grateful to the Government of Madhya Pradesh and our colleagues without whose commitment the project would not be the success that it is today.



Acknowledgements

We would like to express our thanks to all those who have helped to create this partnership with the Madhya Pradesh Board of Secondary Education, including:

- Shri Inder Singh Parmar, Honourable Minister for School Education, Government of Madhya Pradesh
- Shri Iqbal Singh Bains, Chief Secretary, Government of Madhya Pradesh
- Smt Rashmi Arun Shami, Principal Secretary, School Education, Government of Madhya Pradesh and Chairman, MPBSE Bhopal
- Smt Anubha Srivastava, Deputy Secretary, School Education, Government of Madhya Pradesh
- Shri Sudhir Kumar Kochar, Deputy Secretary, Chief Minister's Office, Government of Madhya Pradesh
- Smt Jaishri Kiyawat, Commissioner Public Instruction, Government of Madhya Pradesh
- Shri Umesh Kumar, Secretary MPBSE
- Ms Kamna Acharya, Additional Director, Directorate of Public Instruction
- Dr Hemant Sharma, Director Training, MPBSE.



Introduction

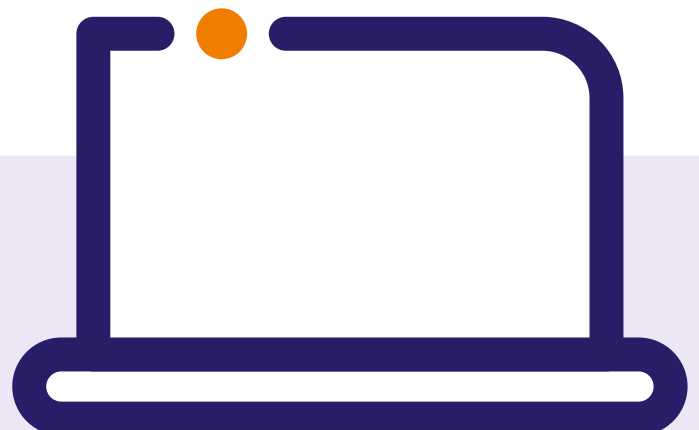
The British Council is working with the Madhya Pradesh Board of Secondary Education on a four-year project aiming to develop the spoken English communication skills of two million students per year from all government High Schools and Higher Secondary schools across the state. The vision of the project is that by 2022, English language teaching and learning at secondary level will be of sufficient quality to enable improved life opportunities for students. The objectives are that:

- Two million Class 9 to Class 12 students in Madhya Pradesh government High Schools and Higher Secondary schools per year will experience high quality English language teaching and have access to opportunities to develop and practise the English skills necessary for employment and future opportunities. They will participate actively in regular spoken English classes within the school timetable, aligned to the MPBSE General English syllabus, using a British Council spoken English communication skills course
- Three thousand teachers of English from all government High Schools and Higher Secondary schools across the 51 districts of Madhya Pradesh will use English more confidently in the classroom. They will use more learning-centred approaches with both their textbooks and a customised British Council spoken English communications skills course, which they will use to teach Class 9 to

12 students as a parallel track within the curriculum teachers will take greater responsibility for their own continuing professional development (CPD), have increased access to high quality self-access digital and print CPD resources, participate in monthly block-level Teacher Activity Group meetings, and interact in digital communities of practice

- A cadre of 204 Master Trainers will deliver effective teacher training courses, facilitate classroom mentoring and facilitate monthly block-level Teacher Activity Groups
- MPBSE will have improved capacity to implement and sustain successful in-service English language teacher development programmes at High School and Higher Secondary level, effectively utilising the skills of the Master Trainers to lead these initiatives, and the network of block-level Teacher Activity Groups.

With the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, lockdown and school closures, the project has moved online, with the British Council directly training up to 2500 teachers, through a series of weekly webinars and asynchronous tasks, with additional webinars for Master Trainers. The content of these webinars is designed to support teachers with the skills they need to conduct teaching remotely working in contexts where connectivity and internet access is often limited, and to prepare them for the challenges of resuming school after the lockdown.



Overview

This compendium of ‘Stories of change’ captures qualitative accounts of the impact the project has so far had, on ten teachers from across the state. It details examples of impact on their own professional practice, on their students’ English skills, on other teachers they have trained, and how the project has supported them during the lockdown.

To write these Stories of change, the British Council invited teachers/Master Trainers who are participating in the project to share examples of project impact, in a short online form. Analysing their responses, a range of different themes was identified, and four female and six male teachers’ stories were selected from districts across the state so as to portray different aspects of the impact so far achieved. These selected teachers were then interviewed over the phone by British Council consultants, with their accounts written up into these Stories of change, featuring verbatim excerpts from interviews. These qualitative stories illustrate the professional pathways of change that many participating teachers are currently following and shows the potential of the project to achieve similar outcomes for all teachers in the state, by building on these examples. Whilst the rich stories contain a wide variety of details, five overarching themes emerge.

1. **English:** Teachers are improving their own English skills and use more English language in the classroom to provide their students with increased exposure to English. To maximise learning, the project also encourages teachers to balance this use of English, with judicious support using students’ home languages.
2. **More active and motivated students:** Teachers adopt more student-centred approaches to teaching the curriculum by giving their students greater autonomy to participate actively, using collaborative techniques, activities and games. Students’

attitudes towards English are becoming more positive, motivating them to speak more and do better in exams.

3. **Developing other teachers:** Teachers have become more confident Master Trainers, delivering training and support to other teachers in their district, as part of the British Council-MPBSE partnership. Several of these Master Trainers have also implemented these training skills in other contexts for the Government of Madhya Pradesh, showing the project’s value in building capacity.
4. **Remote teaching:** Teachers are developing their skills in online teaching, using a range of technologies, to support students remotely while schools are closed. Where feasible, they are seeking to adapt student-centred approaches, techniques and activities to online teaching and learning, and introducing ‘flipped classroom’ approaches, so as to engage their students better.
5. **Increased self-awareness:** Dewey famously said, ‘We do not learn from experience, we learn from reflecting on experience.’ In all the stories we saw teachers confronting deeply held beliefs and established practices about teaching. Through a process of reflection which is embedded in all our materials, teachers have edited their beliefs and changed their practice, in some cases quite radically, to improve not just the pedagogy but also their relationships with their students.

These themes are fully aligned to the project aims, and provided the external conditions are favourable, it is hoped that after the pandemic is over, all teachers will be able to continue implementing the project aims, in particular delivering regular spoken English classes to all Class 9-12 students, using the British Council spoken English communication skills course, so as to match and go beyond the achievements identified in this volume.

A woman with dark hair, wearing a vibrant, multi-colored sari with a green shawl, is speaking to a group of people. She has her hands clasped in front of her and is looking upwards with a slight smile. The background is blurred, showing other people and a bright, indoor setting.

**Stories of
change**

Karuna Mastkar

**Teacher, Government Higher Secondary School,
Pagnispaga, Indore**



“

I am happy to know that I am able to inspire other teachers and make a difference

ELT and beyond

Karuna shares her professional journey, and how her newly-gained ELT skills and knowledge helped her excel in other arenas too.

Karuna recalls a particularly stressful job interview in 2008 in which she broke down. The reason? She spoke no English. In 2009, Karuna was posted as a teacher of English, and in 2013 she completed her training from ELTI, Bhopal, but still struggled to speak more than a few sentences at a stretch. Meanwhile, in the classroom, many of Karuna's students kept failing her subject despite her hard work. This left Karuna discouraged and unconfident.

Reformed classroom practices

Karuna applied to be a Master Trainer for the MP Government- British Council project, and within three years of implementing what she had learnt on the training, her subject result touched 100%. 'This was a huge achievement', says Karuna proudly.

How did this happen?

'Plenty of exposure to English and lots of practice via microteaching sessions during the training... These improved my English skills and trained me in student-centred techniques'. These techniques included, 'Grouping and pairing, task cycles, simple instructions, checking students' understanding, elicitation, live demonstration, whole class mingling, gallery walk, drilling....', lists Karuna with an ease that shows her familiarity with them.



After the training, Karuna returned to her classroom with a reformed approach to teaching English and several new techniques. 'I can now engage 100 students using grouping and pairing. For example, I assign genres of writing among groups e.g. essays, letters, notices, applications. Each group researches their genre and prepares a chart, then presents their chart to other groups. These charts are displayed in the class. Students feel good when they see other students referring to their work.'

Following the mantra encouragement is key to successful learning, Karuna changed the way she gave feedback. 'I started using smileys in their notebooks. A big smiley and a small smiley depending on the level of their performance, but never a sad smiley. This made my students very happy and more engaged.'

Improved English skills of students

With the changed approach to teaching, Karuna's students began to reap the fruits. 'Drilling helped improve my students' pronunciation. They show interest, attempt to speak English, and ask questions. Meaningful reading tasks have improved their reading comprehension. They have started writing. More importantly, they are eager to learn and engage.' Karuna summarises. She's

proud to share that students who were scoring 4 to 5 marks out of 100 in English are now scoring 17 to 60 marks.

Her journey as a Master Trainer

It wasn't easy for Karuna to win over resistant teacher trainees, but she was determined. 'I prepared well for my sessions. This made me more confident and ensured a smooth delivery. I consistently linked the training activities with the classroom teaching. I made my sessions energetic, fun and learning-packed. We all spoke in English. When the trainees realised this training was different and useful, things fell in place.' 'After attending your training, I now feel like teaching', a participant commented.

In 2015, Karuna entered a British Council competition; her language game was one of the best games submitted, and she won the opportunity to attend the AINET conference in Nagpur, which introduced Karuna to the wider field of ELT, giving her insight into curriculum design, mixed-ability classes and formative assessment.

Making a difference

Karuna's newly found confidence percolates to her role as a Principal too. 'I began to encourage my students to participate in district and state level competitions, which brought many laurels to school.'

Karuna does not limit herself to just ELT. 'Inspired by the concept of CPD, I trained myself as a yoga trainer and transferred ELT techniques to yoga workshops, for example, I would divide aasanas among groups, each group would prepare poster on the assigned aasanas and then they would learn from others' posters during a gallery walk.'

Once an underconfident teacher, Karuna is now a state resource person for monthly trainings. 'I am responsible for selecting and sharing resources with teachers through the Diksha app', explains Karuna. She has been felicitated as one of the top ten ELT specialists by ELTI and honoured for her valuable services in ELT by the Indore District Collector.

Sudesh Sharma

Teacher, Government Higher Secondary School,
Anand Nagar, Bhopal



“

I was proud of absolute discipline and pin-drop silence in my classes. Little did I know how terribly mistaken I was.

From ignorance to self-awareness

Moving from a strict disciplinarian to an efficient classroom practitioner, Sudesh adjusted his notion of ‘perfect teaching’.

Imagine a classroom with absolute discipline, pin-drop silence and a knowledgeable teacher in front, speaking refined English. Facing him are his students listening in complete obedience. This was Sudesh's classroom until April 2015. ‘I was happy that I was able to maintain order in my class. I considered this my biggest achievement’, recounts Sudesh.

What about lesson planning? ‘Well, I never felt the need because I remembered the entire textbook. I would confidently walk into my classroom and begin unfolding my knowledge’, confesses Sudesh.

When Sudesh joined the British Council EMPOWER programme in April 2015, little did he know that his idea of ‘perfect teaching’ was going to be edited.

The transforming teacher

As Sudesh began to explore the nuances of English language teaching under the guidance of British Council trainers, he soon realised that his notions about teaching were ‘terribly mistaken’. From giving instructions to monitoring, conducting group and pair tasks to playing language games, and teaching to facilitating, the training had immense learning to offer. Upon reflecting on his previous teaching style, Sudesh admits that he was ‘a control freak’ and that his students were silent because they feared his wrath. ‘The training clarified that unless students were given room for free expression and enquiry, and engaged meaningfully, their learning would be limited’, concludes Sudesh.



Sudesh also realised the need to grade his language and reach the level of his students, just the way his British Council trainers had demonstrated, so he began using simple instructions, language chunks, interesting activities and plenty of group and pair work. 'Following the footsteps of my trainers, I involved all the students and gave them freedom to speak, make mistakes and learn from each other. I would correct only some errors to ensure they retained confidence to speak.' Today, Sudesh's students find him approachable and his classes fun. Role plays, games, collaborative learning, elicitation, and curious students characterise his approach to covering the MPBSE curriculum with his students.

How do the students feel about the British Council spoken English and communication skills course? 'Very happy, especially the language practice activities. Once, when I entered my classroom for a regular English class, my students said let's just speak English today. This made me very happy.' This led to collaborative learning and both the students and teachers were busy exploring the unexplored.

The transforming Master Trainer

'When I delivered the first teacher training, it didn't go well. I just imposed it on my participants', recalls Sudesh. 'I was struggling to manage my own issues of being a control freak and grading my language.' But Sudesh did not give up. He prepared harder for his sessions. By the next training course, Sudesh had grown to be patient, moving towards being a facilitator, sensitive to the needs of his teachers.

Sudesh describes the process, 'I delegated responsibilities to participants. I listened to their opinions and grievances patiently. I also presented training in manageable chunks, linking it to classroom teaching. These helped immensely. I emphasised the idea that English would be easy for students if taught appropriately. This got the teachers interested and encouraged them to sit through the entire day of training, unlike the first time.'

When one of his trainees remarked, 'This is the kind of training we really needed', Sudesh knew he was doing things 'right'.

A dive into materials design

Sudesh, from participating in both the EMPower and MPBSE projects, had grown into a well-trained teacher and trainer. Besides being invited as a resource person on district level training programmes, Sudesh was also nominated as a writer for the MP Bridge course, which is currently being used for class 9 students across the state.

'My learnings on the materials design training by the British Council came to my rescue, for example, using a Gantt chart to clarify timelines, roles and responsibilities and project outcomes, or even using simple rubrics and clear instructions for writing the teacher manual', reminisces Sudesh.

Sudesh's story has a clear message: 'your subject knowledge is of no value unless you have the right skills and techniques to impart it to your students.'

Vijay Verma

Teacher, Government Model Higher Secondary School,
Ichhawar, Sehore



“

Online teaching to me meant sitting in front of the camera and lecturing, but not anymore!

Online teaching and assessment

Vijay shares his experience of online teaching and assessment in the midst of the pandemic, and his ideas for future classrooms.

Like many of his peers, Vijay was at a loss when the Covid-19 crisis compelled schools to migrate from face-to-face engagements to online learning. ‘The biggest question before me was how do I engage my students meaningfully during online teaching?’ Vijay had taught online earlier, but it only meant he would sit in front of the camera and lecture the audience. ‘Not very useful, right?’ Vijay thought aloud.

Discovering online teaching tools

Both Vijay and his students had been struggling to find their feet in the new territory, when a series of webinars were organised as part of the British Council’s support for MPBSE teachers during the pandemic. ‘This was a great opportunity: I observed what my trainers did, how they engaged us and used various features.’ This helped Vijay to engage his students and bring his online teaching to life. ‘I also learnt about using Cisco Webex, Google meet, Zoom and WhatsApp for teaching, and applied their features to my classroom teaching, incorporating techniques such as live chat, Mentimeter, screen sharing, and online polls’, he adds..

Once Vijay had developed some proficiency in online teaching, he began to focus on other challenges. ‘My students came from contexts where some did not have access to smart phones. Some had connectivity issues while some others were not good at typing. This made things more challenging.’



'I had to think out of the box obviously, so I started with voice messages. This helped those who could not become a part of the live classes. I also clicked pictures of worksheets, posted them on WhatsApp groups. I also clicked pictures of worksheets, posted them on the WhatsApp group. This showed the students that they could manually write their answers and post the picture of their work, they didn't need to type. I would then share the correct answers in the same way.'

Once Vijay had developed some proficiency in online teaching, he began to focus on other challenges. 'My students came from contexts where some did not have access to smart phones. Some had connectivity issues while some others were not good at typing. This made things more challenging.'

To encourage interaction among students, Vijay made videos. 'I involved a few students or colleagues to make these videos interactive and shared via WhatsApp. This demonstrated how they could carry out the task.'

Assessing learning

Assessing learning was important too. Vijay put his problem-solving hat on, once again, to find solutions. 'I designed tests and quizzes using online

quizzes and forms, and Mentimeter. I shared the links with students and they submitted their tests. This had value as formative assessment; I could assess their understanding and identify learning gaps that needed more attention.'

The future classrooms

The entire struggle around online teaching and assessment made it clear to Vijay that technology would continue to play a pivotal role in future classrooms. 'How wonderful it would be if every teacher was prepared for the new normal post the pandemic!'

When asked what he would carry to his future classrooms, 'obviously, the touch of technology', comes the quick reply. 'I'd like my classes to be a good blend of face-to-face teaching and online education.' But will this be possible? 'For sure!', Vijay sounds determined. 'For example, I can teach a lesson in the class and create a test online. I could continue to make videos so that students have another aid to fall back on when they are at home. They can watch the video and come to the next class with their doubts. Flipping the classroom like this would mean we can use classroom time more efficiently'.

Anurag Mishra

Teacher of English, Government Girls Higher Secondary School, Amarwara, Chhindwara



“
I am happy to know that I am able to inspire other teachers and make a difference

Dictatorship to democracy

Anurag Mishra talks about how he changed from being a stern, autocratic teacher, to being a facilitator. He also talks about how from being ‘dreaded’, English became fun for his students.

‘There, in his noisy mansion, skill’d to rule,
The village master taught his little school;
A man severe he was, and stern to view.’

Oliver Goldsmith, The Village Schoolmaster

About five years ago, Anurag Mishra stood like Goldsmith’s village schoolmaster, stern of aspect, in his school in Amarwara. Standing at the front of the class, he relied on lectures to teach his students the day’s lesson. He talked and talked, and the students had no choice but to listen. ‘It was lectures and explaining, more lectures and more explaining.’ After all, that was what teaching was, wasn’t it? It didn’t really matter if the student was participating. If they didn’t, there was discipline!

‘Discipline was always important for me, in fact more important for me than anything’ My classroom was like a dictatorship. There was phobia of English and phobia of learning!’

From phobia to fun

It was after his involvement in the British Council project, that Anurag started changing. No more was he at the front of the class giving commands, no more did the students dread their English lessons. 'The British Council opened my eyes to student-centred teaching', said Anurag. He decided that he would try out some of the skills he had learned in the British Council's training. 'I had learned techniques like group work and pair work, and techniques to increase student talk time and reduce teacher talk time. I now started trying them out in class.' It was the trigger the students needed. Slowly they started speaking to each other and Anurag, in English. 'Earlier they used to come silently to class, then they slowly started greeting each other every morning with phrases like hello how are you.... It's nice to meet you; this was something they enjoyed'. Phobia was becoming fun.

Introducing these techniques and approaches to other teachers

Around the same time, other things changed in Anurag's teaching and training. He was chosen by the MP government to train teachers. 'While conducting this training I applied the skills I had learned during the British Council training. My teachers found these very useful and practical and started using them in their classrooms. They

found their students eager to learn, and they themselves are more confident about teaching English now. In fact, I would say my own English skills have improved and I feel a lot more confident now.'

Extending these techniques to online learning

The pandemic forced a new way of teaching and Anurag rose to the challenge. He started using online tools like WhatsApp and Google Meet, and features like breakout rooms so that 'I could continue to use the grouping techniques I had learned at the British Council and also increase my students' talk time. I modified other things from my British Council training and online webinars, to suit my context. For example, I changed the phonetic script of words in the text to drills and posted them as short audio clips on my students' WhatsApp groups. I changed the praise and the gestures that the British Council trainers had used into emojis, to share positive feedback and encourage learning.'

Anurag had certainly come a long way from standing in front of the classroom and lecturing, but that's not his greatest achievement!

'I used to teach lessons the way I had been taught, now I have begun to plan and teach the way that suits my students' learning needs. I would say that it my classroom was now becoming for the student, of the student and by the student. It was dictatorship, now, it's democracy'.



Garima Batra

Teacher of English, Government Higher Secondary School, Chhindwara

Garima's story is one of hope and dreams and transformation; her own, her students' and her teacher trainees'.

Priyanshi, a grade 12 student at the Government MLB GHSS school, Chhindwara, had dreams of going to college and becoming a professor of mathematics. But how would she ever face an interview board and answer questions in English when she could only manage the very basic phrases?

Garima Batra was Priyanshi's English teacher. She too had a dream; she too had a problem. 'Although I knew English, I just didn't feel confident in speaking it and I didn't know exactly how to teach it.' Around this time, Garima was selected by the MP Government to attend the British Council training of Master Trainers. Little did Garima know how pivotal that experience would be! 'The British Council,' she says, 'gave me a vision. For the first time, I got the opportunity to speak English, understood the importance of exposure in language learning, and improved my teaching skills.'

'Aasha ka diya jala diya'

At the training Garima learned how to make teaching more student-centred. 'I learned new techniques to manage classrooms, like group work and pair work', she says, recalling the excitement of those days. Armed with these new approaches and techniques, Garima came back a changed person. 'I teach a large class. It's very difficult to check every student. By using the grouping techniques I'd learned I made group leaders and managed, quite easily, to monitor their learning.'

But that wasn't the most important thing that happened to Garima. Previously the students had been very scared of speaking in English. 'Yeh to bahut kathin hai' (It's very difficult) was their answer. 'When I started using student-centred methods they started speaking simple sentences in English. When I asked them questions like 'Have you completed your work?', they were able to answer. For the first time, I saw the light of hope on the faces of my children. Aasha ka diya jala diya!'

Shyness to confidence

The candle of hope that Garima had lit in the students burned brightly, and it spread. Priyanshi's professorial dreams were now rekindled. Meanwhile, in November 2019, the Madhya Pradesh government invited Garima to cascade the British Council's training to teachers in her district. 'To be honest, I was afraid because I didn't know what I'd do.' To add to her fear, all 90 teachers, kept absolutely quiet on day one. 'On the second day I told them that even if you speak two sentences, it's ok'. That seemed to work. During the role play many of the teachers spoke a bit of English. On the fifth day, most of them used at least a bit of English. Garima's persistence had paid off, and this was just the beginning.

'I adapted techniques from the British Council training and showed teachers how to involve students in the textbook materials. For example, I showed them how to group students and have the students form questions from the textbook. The teachers enjoyed this adaptation as it made life easier for them, it also made me confident.' The once shy teacher had become a confident Master Trainer.

Dreams to reality

Garima adds, 'the purpose of an English education isn't just to learn the alphabet, but to be proficient enough in the language to get a good job. And I want to enable my teachers so that they in turn can enable their students to learn English.' It is an ambitious task, but, given that Priyanshi is now more confident of becoming a professor of maths, those dreams now look more achievable.

“

the purpose of an English education isn't just to learn the alphabet, but to be proficient enough in the language to get a good job

Hare Ram Joshi

Teacher of English, Government Higher Secondary School
Pagangisi, Tilak Nagar Lashkar, Gwalior



“

The teachers want to know how to teach the way I teach

A paradigm shift in varied contexts

Hare Ram Joshi's story is about adapting approaches from the British Council training, to his classroom and online teaching.

Before joining the project, Hare Ram Joshi used to read out a paragraph from the textbook, then translate it word for word for word to Hindi. He would then read out the next paragraph and translate it again. Only his voice could be heard in the classroom. The board was practically empty, aside a few words from the textbook. The students would repeat these words mechanically without understanding much of what they were saying.

The change began in 2018 at the MPBSE training conducted by the British Council. Hare Ram observed how the British Council trainers set up

activities like chain drills and stood back as the participants took over. It looked simple, less stressful than reading the textbook aloud and everyone was involved!

'As soon as I came back, I implemented what I had learned. Instead of reading poems and passages aloud, I used pair work and chain drilling to set up a speaking activity from the textbook. I wrote key words from the poem and asked yes/no questions to elicit meanings and the key points of the lesson.

What happened?

Hare Ram's students took to asking simple questions like 'What's your name?' immediately, and they also used their mother tongue to answer questions. This was an example of the multilingual approach British Council trainers had encouraged teachers to adopt, and students' use of English gradually increased. This was a sea change from earlier, when students would rarely speak in class. By 2019, all his students got opportunities to speak, because they were now involved in the lesson. Most importantly they were losing their 'fear of English'.

'Certainly, I've changed a lot,' says Hare Ram Joshi, 'I used to be a teacher earlier, but now I'm a facilitator. I used to read long sentences, and looking back, I used to bore the students, but now I know they enjoy every moment'.

2020: Online teaching and flipped classrooms

Like his peers, the pandemic affected Hare Ram in more ways than the obvious health-related risks. He was left with large portions of the curriculum to cover and very little time. The idea that classroom learning could increase by raising students' active involvement, with the corresponding shift in the teacher's role and workload, made Hare Ram think about how to adapt such approaches to his online lessons.

What if he could send out his lessons on WhatsApp, share YouTube videos, design a few exercises based on the content, and elicit as much as possible, through the digital platforms they were using? The ideas worked! 'The students competed with each other to answer. I managed to cover 70 per cent of the material very effectively by flipping the classroom and involving students in discussions about exercises', he says with well-earned pride.

Mohammad Ziya Qureshi

Teacher, Government Higher Secondary School Ner,
Chhindwara



“

From the time
I was unable to
speak English to a
stage where I can
train teachers of
English, I have
come a long way

Light at the end of the tunnel

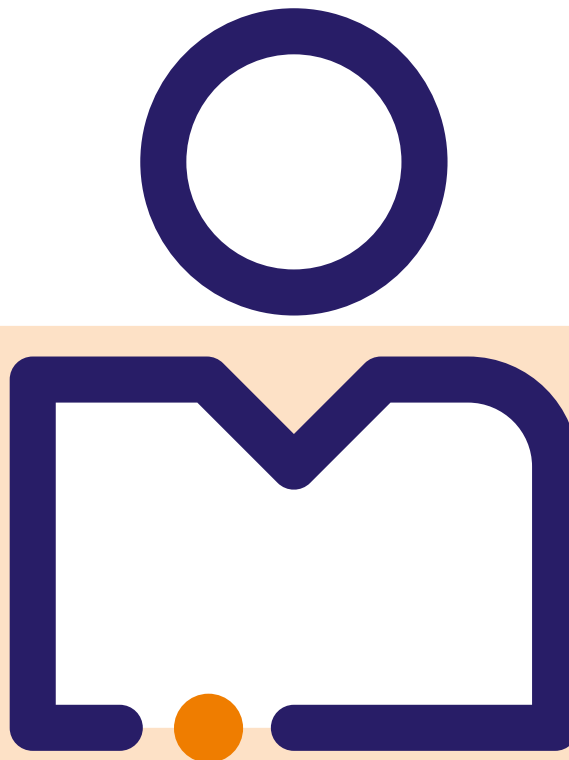
Mohammad Ziya Qureshi's journey towards a revamped teaching methodology and developing as a trainer for MPBSE and beyond.

‘Angrezi bolna bahut mushkil hai. Hum kabhi nahi seekh payenge’ (Speaking English is very difficult. We would never be able to learn it); something Ziya would hear constantly from his students. Ziya thought no differently. ‘I assumed that learning English was unnecessary for my students as all they needed was 17 marks to pass the exam’. Thus, neither the teacher nor the students made attempts to speak English. Ziya explained in Hindi and his students listened - rote learning was the norm.

Changed attitude towards English

The training on the MPBSE project alerted Ziya to aspects he had not considered as crucial to language learning. During the training, he realised the importance of exposure to spoken English. Listening to his trainers speak English throughout the sessions, Ziya thought, ‘If I could gain confidence in speaking English given the exposure, why wouldn’t my students?’

Ziya rolled up his sleeves and went back to his classroom with a determination to update his teaching methodology. ‘I used different activities and games to encourage students to participate actively. My students could never imagine a game in an English class. This excited them. When my older students saw my younger students speak English as a result of the new methodology they got inspired and thought even they could speak.’ recalls Ziya.



Students' improved English skills

Ziya began to teach 'language chunks' rather than just teaching isolated new words, which, he says, 'helped students speak more fluently and confidently.' His students frequently use chunks now when they talk with their friends, for example, Can you read? Go there, Let's play etc. This created an English-speaking ambience in and outside the classroom. Ziya felt proud when his students started encouraging other teachers to speak English. 'My grade 4 student, on listening to another teacher say gaddi (a local word for eraser), said, 'no gaddi sir, say eraser'. it was funny and encouraging. Such incidents fuelled my enthusiasm.'

Soon, students' interest in speaking developed, as did their interest in writing. Ziya started personalising the writing tasks. 'The British Council student course emphasises personalisation. When my students see the connection between what they learn and their real life, they genuinely want to learn', Ziya reiterates. Ziya's classes now feature elicitation, collaboration, open-ended questions, drilling and lots of opportunities for students to speak. 'These changed the ambience. Students who were never participating started to engage actively.'

Come a long way but still a long way to go

Summarising his journey as a Master Trainer, Ziya gives credit to the practical microteaching and microtraining sessions that built skills. 'I had never thought I was capable of training my colleagues, but our trainers gave us enough practice. The microtraining sessions boosted my confidence in speaking and Master Trainer notes provided a clear direction to help with session aims.' Were there any challenges? 'Of course.' Ziya laughs, 'It was difficult to train my colleagues as many had no idea about various terms, such as 'scaffolding' or 'ICQs' (instruction checking questions), so I read more about these first and then helped them understand'.

Ziya's CPD journey has now led him to start the Post Graduate Certificate in Teaching of English course at the English and Foreign Languages University. He also took an exam organised by the state government to become a State Master Trainer. 'My learnings from the MPBSE trainings played a pivotal role in this exam. I had substantial knowledge about pedagogy and developed my spoken and written English, which I could use to clear the selection process.' Ziya is now a State Resource Person and leads monthly workshops in Chhindwara district.

From the days he didn't speak any English to becoming a competent trainer, Ziya feels he has come a long way, but as he says, 'There is still a long way to go.'

Kamlesh Kushwah

Teacher of English, Government Higher Secondary School,
Bistan, Khargone district



Knowledge and skills matter, so do behaviour and attitude

Kamlesh Kushwah's story focuses on how knowledge and skills combined with appropriate behaviour and attitude helped him overcome challenges as a teacher and trainer.

Lectures... translation... passive students... no spoken English..... this defined Kamlesh's teaching for years. Kamlesh would write new words on the board and provide Hindi equivalents. Students would copy these in their notebooks. His reading lessons were no different. Kamlesh summarised his reading lessons as 'providing word-to-word translation of the text, then dictating answers.'. He always focused on one aspect at a time, 'I thought if I had to teach grammar, then only grammar and if vocabulary, then just vocabulary. The concept of integrating skills was alien,' he explains.

“

If you are a teacher, become a good teacher, not a mediocre one.

Wave of change

The MPBSE-British Council project came at the right time in Kamlesh's journey as a teacher. 'As well as translation, I now use mime, realia, contexts and pictures to elicit words and their meanings. These have increased my students' retention of new vocabulary'. Soon Kamlesh introduced integrated skills lessons. 'I was amazed to see how a single text could be exploited for grammar, vocabulary, listening, speaking, reading and writing. Minimum materials and easy for students to handle, especially when they have limited linguistic ability.' While teaching the textbook, Kamlesh's classes now buzz with activities, games and group/pair work. Students ask questions and participate actively.

Increasing exposure to English

The project has also taught Kamlesh that exposure to English is crucial. 'My own speaking skills improved as a result of listening to and speaking lots of English during the training. The British Council trainers introduced the importance of listening exposure in language acquisition, which made me realise that if I speak in English more in class, my students will get more exposure and understanding. The training taught me to grade my English, to teach vocabulary in chunks and phrases rather than isolated words, and to give clear instructions. It is wonderful to see how my students pick up what I speak. Some students have started making presentations in English. This is a big achievement.'

Becoming a reflective teacher

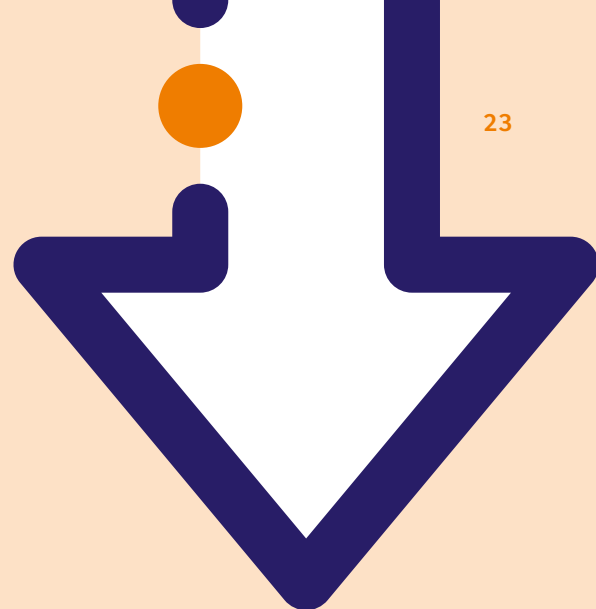
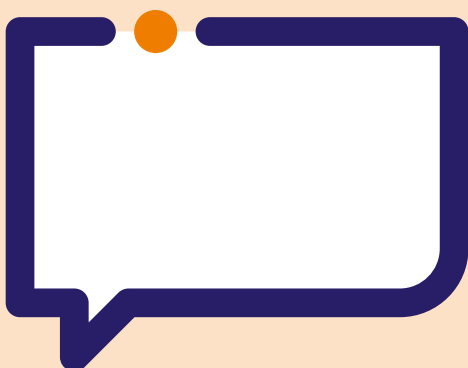
Before attending the British Council training, Kamlesh had not engaged systematically with reflection, and says, 'I wasn't aware of it or the tools used. Only when I saw how reflections had been an integral part of the British Council

training, that I got a clear direction.' Kamlesh now maintains a reflective journal. 'The reflection encourages me to track what worked or didn't work well, and how I can do it better.'

Journey as a teacher trainer

Kamlesh had never been a teacher educator until he became a Master Trainer on this British Council-MPBSE project. 'Training teachers was hard, but extremely rewarding at the same time. 'It gave me immense confidence,' while also recounting challenges. 'I had participants who were senior to me, some of whom would deliberately ask me tricky questions to test my knowledge. Initially it shook my confidence, but then I followed my trainers' footsteps. I spoke with all my participants politely and encouraged them to express their opinions freely.'

The benefits were visible soon. 'For the first time, I realised that one doesn't need a baton to make people follow you. The right attitude and behaviour does that, and I didn't let unnecessary arrogance kill the soul of training.' This was reaffirmed when a senior teacher applauded Kamlesh's training calling it 'the most interesting and learning-focused training.' Today, Kamlesh is a respected trainer and peers regularly reach out to him for professional support and advice. 'Sometimes, I do not have a solution to their problems, so I read about it first, which helps me grow further.'



Neetu Singh Mohare

Teacher of English, Government Higher Secondary School,
Bistan, Khargone district



“

My students and I have been blessed to get this opportunity to participate in this MPBSE – British Council programme

The opportunities of a lifetime

Neetu's story of change is peppered with humorous incidents of students running away from other classes to join hers.

‘The English class is more interesting!’

A teacher at Neetu's school was upset - her student had run away to join the English lesson in the next classroom. It was more interesting!

In the nearby classroom, Neetu Singh Mohare, the teacher of English, had her students participating in the British Council English communications and life skills course. 'When I took my first class, the students noticed what I was doing and the very next day they were in my class, eager to participate in this new type of English lesson'.

Silence greets the inspector

Neetu's idea of teaching until the British Council training happened, was to write lists of words and make students 'cram' them. The students never got an opportunity to speak in English, so they 'feared speaking in English'. 'Whenever the external inspector came to class and asked them to introduce themselves, they couldn't utter a single word. Can you believe it, they were in 11th class and couldn't even say their names!'

British Council and the beginnings of change

At the British Council training Neetu understood what the classroom teaching of English meant. 'I understood the rationale for teaching and how to make students understand and use English easily. Start by introducing themselves, drilling the new vocabulary in the textbook, organising communicative role plays, and, most importantly, understanding English'.

The snowball effect

The changes she made after this training would have a snowball effect on the students' English and her own teaching and training.

After developing mastery of simple sentences, the students in Neetu's class began reading short texts on their own. 'Earlier they had never read their textbooks, only the teacher read the text aloud and explained everything. I told them to take turns and read passages from the textbook and they can now do bits of it on their own', she recalls.

Role playing helped their speaking skills. 'Nowadays I give them a role play activity every day. Although they may not be able to do the whole role play in English, they try. The fear that once paralyzed Neetu's students from opening their mouths started vanishing. 'Now', she says, 'they are more confident!'

More changes

In 2019 I conducted a five-day teacher training program. She recalls how teachers from another training room popped into hers and watched her teaching. They enjoyed it so much that soon they were calling Neetu for solutions. 'One of them, Diksha, who couldn't face her students because she couldn't speak English, started including some classroom English in her lesson plans. Now she had only to read out what she had written to practice some English.'

It's difficult to say what Neetu's biggest achievement has been, because there have been many. And they are probably best said in her own and her students' voices. 'Madam please come to take our class; our sir is absent today' said the students of the arts section. But the best of all quotes is in Neetu's own voice. 'I would say that earlier we were limited, but my students and I have been blessed to get this opportunity to participate in this MPBSE – British Council programme.'



Hemlata Saxena

Teacher of English, Government Vivekananda Higher Secondary School, Bharad, Shajapur

“

The British Council gave me a new direction on how to teach English

English is not just for passing exams, it's a life skill

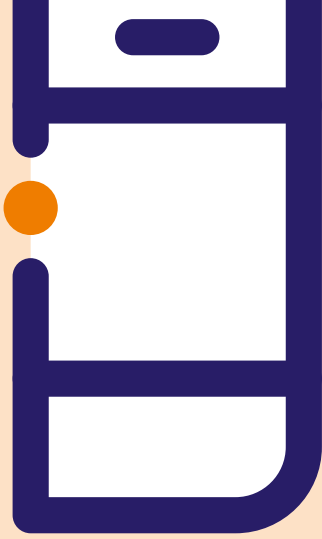
Hemlata's story shows the possibility of changing approaches to teaching English across Madhya Pradesh.

The voice was firm and honest. 'Earlier it was only a one-way method, and I was a lazy teacher', says Hemlata, 'I used to just circulate class notes because it seemed the easiest way to teach.' Small wonder then that the students at her school thought English was a 'tedious subject' and were 'only interested in passing the exam'.

It was at the training of the British Council EMPower and MPBSE projects, that Hemalata first realised that there were other ways of teaching English. 'After I attended those programmes' she says, 'I got a new direction on how to teach English'.

Building an atmosphere for English

To fully understand this change, one has to look into the background. Neither the teachers nor the students of her school had ever thought English was an important subject. 'The percentage of those interested in learning English earlier was zero. But after I started applying the student-centred methods I had learned from the British Council, I noticed a huge change in my classroom'. The 'monotony' of those dreary mid-afternoon lessons was broken, the yawning faces woke up.



‘Today at least 50 per cent of those attending are interested in learning English. They want to really understand what they are reading; they are definitely more motivated’, says Hemlata.

Along with the interest came a realisation that; to say ‘it’s nice to meet you – it’s nice to meet you too’ was not just another mechanical classroom exercise; it would have implications beyond the classroom, and in the not-too-distant future. ‘From no atmosphere in English’ said Hemlata, ‘they started realising the importance of English.’

From ready-made lessons towards personalisation

What you have just read is only part of Hemlata’s story of change. ‘From the time of the British Council training, I have been checking the level of my students on the first day and planned my lessons accordingly. I have started putting students in groups and pairs and making them work together, asking and answering questions. I regularly made the strong students help others in the group and teach others. This definitely makes them more motivated.’

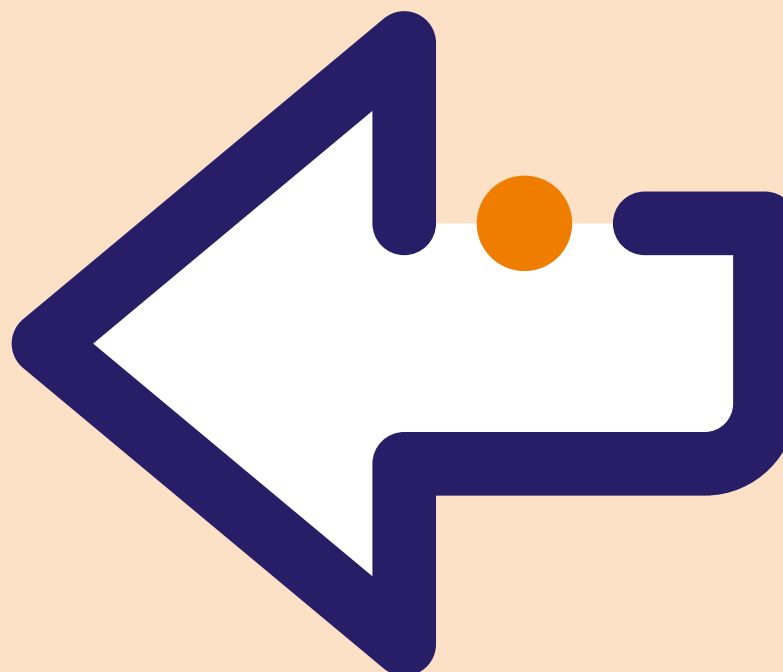
The highest percentage, the biggest change

‘The biggest impact on me, is that I have been involved in the state’s teacher training programmes, training teachers at district level’. Training these teachers was a challenge for Hemlata. ‘When I started training them during the district level training, they were all quiet and didn’t participate in any of the activities. But just as the students enjoyed the way Hemlata

integrated games and activities into the textbook, the teachers also enjoyed doing these methods. Soon, ‘at least 80 per cent of them were participating. They realised that teaching English was not just preparing their students for exams but that it could be really beneficial in life.’

Eager to learn more

The British Council training has made Hemlata realise there’s much to be done. ‘First of all, I would like my students to become better at reading. They aren’t very interested because they don’t understand much of what they are reading. So, I would like to know more about how to teach reading skills. I would also like to know how to make grammar rules easy for my students as they have to face competitive exams and grammar rules are tested there’. Hemlata has many more plans for her students. The teacher who once dished out ready-made lessons now feels she has miles to go on her professional journey!



© British Council

The British Council is the United Kingdom's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities.