

Class acts: Teachers cross language, infra hurdles

From learning dialects to pasting QR codes in books, teachers in rural areas across state overcome lack of resources to create better studying environment for students

More than 60km from the city, Class one students revise their Marathi alphabets on a chilly Thursday morning. As they go through the vowels and consonants, a rhythm emerges: 'ka karvanda cha' (k stands for wild berries), say students.



Rajan Garud, a teacher at Khorichapada zilla parishad school in Palghar, translated textbooks into Warli, a language spoken in Palghar, south Gujarat and parts of Nashik, to help students transition to Marathi with ease.

At the Khorichapada zilla parishad (ZP) school, run by the Palghar district administration, new entrants who come from adjoining hamlets are welcomed in their local language –Warli — to make learning fun and easy. The brainchild of Rajan Garud, a teacher, the school follows a bilingual approach to teaching students from Classes one to five.

In 2017, with the help of the school's head teacher, Jaywant Pared, Garud translated the language textbook for

Class one students into Warli, a language spoken in Palghar, south Gujarat and parts of Nashik, to help them transition to Marathi with more ease.

“Students who come here only speak Warli at home. We realised that imposing Marathi on them from the beginning will only make them disinterested in studies. We thus decided to have a bilingual approach and translated the text,” said Garud. From basic words to sentences and then complex concepts, everything is first taught in the local dialect and then in Marathi. “By Class two, students start picking up Marathi slowly,” he added.

Garud is one of the many teachers in the state who are trying to better the quality of teaching amid challenges like poor infrastructure, absence of resources and administrative apathy.

Asked about how the initiative has helped improve learning, Krutika Naru Baraf, a Class five student from the school, says, “I feel a lot more confident speaking Marathi now. This has helped me understand concepts well.”

Ranjisinh Disale, a ZP school teacher from Madha taluka in Solapur, is famously referred to as a ‘global teacher’ by the villagers. In 2014, Disale realised that students need to learn beyond textbooks. While he decided to use technology to better the learning experience for his students, the school only had one laptop. “It would take a long time to show content to students on a single device. I tried to look for solutions online and found an easy option — QR codes. In the days to come, I created QR codes and pasted them in textbooks. These codes could be scanned with the help of mobile phones and additional resources on the topic would pop up.”

In 2015, state government adopted Disale's idea and made QR codes available in Balbharti textbooks. In order to expose students to a global environment, Disale also started to conduct Skype sessions with various schools across the world. So far,

students of the school have learnt about 142 countries. “There were nine students from Classes one to four in 2009. Today, there are 47, thanks to these changes,” he says.

At Chiradpada ZP school in Bhiwandi, Pandurang Bhoir has come up with a low-cost strategy to make science interesting for students. Bhoir uses waste materials like plastic bottles, old wires and rubber to make models with the help of which, students can conduct experiments. “In rural areas, students are mostly scared about science owing to lack of exposure to the subject. Setting up a sophisticated lab is a costly affair for which there is no funding. With the help of discarded items, we created models with the help of which students can learn about important concepts like air pressure, electricity generation, among others. While Bhoir initiated the project in 2016, his students are now taking it forward. “Recently, a student won an award for coming up with a protective guard for trees made of old plastic bottles, which would save them from forest fires and soil erosion. Students are no longer scared of experimenting, which is a big achievement of the project,” he added.

Jagdish Indalkar, principal of KVK School in Ghatkopar, said while rural schools have issues with respect to access, those in cities have to often deal with apathy from staff and parents. The school runs an initiative called Bolkya Bhinti (talking walls). where each wall of the school is used to create learning aids for students — from maps to mathematical formulas. “We realised that students in the city do not get enough activity owing to sedentary lifestyles and thus decided to rearrange our breaks. Instead of just one long break, we have short breaks after every two periods for students to go around the school.”

Despite their innovations, however, the teachers have to still struggle for basics. “We have to teach 40 students in a single classroom because the second classroom needs repairs. It is sad to see that despite our innovative practices being recognised, there is no improvement in the support that we get to keep going. Teachers double up as clerks and peons to do everything — from planting trees in the campus to serving midday meals.”

Vechya Gavit, a teacher who came up with innovative teaching practices in 1995, said most teachers like him are driven by the sheer motivation of giving children a better learning environment. Gavit, who earlier worked at a school in Karjat, is now working at the Regional Development Authority. “I started out in a decrepit structure in Karjat, which looked nothing like a school. After learning the local dialect and interacting with parents, I could slowly bring about interest in learning among students. At a time when most villages still lack access to basic facilities, teachers who wish to bring about a change can only make learning interesting.” Gavit’s efforts had prompted the education department to include dialects in language textbooks from 2012.

Recently, Balbharti, the publishing bureau of the state came up with the first bilingual text book. The book for class ones Marathi has translated text in Madia, local language of primitive tribes in Gadchiroli.



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Ashwini Sonavane , education officer in the region, sent a proposal to the board to come up with text for kids to understand the language well. “Most kids here speak only their local dialect and find it difficult to adjust to Marathi initially. A bilingual text helps in initial orientation,” she said.