

How a teacher's efforts to teach English brought these kids closer to the world outside



GUNTUR: The world has become smaller for students at Ilavaram ZP High School, who now have friends from as far away as USA or Canada. And it was all possible for the efforts of their English teacher P Harikrishna, who took an initiative to connect his students to the bigger world. Students of the zilla school now regularly interact with foreign students and academics via video calls, on various issues. The video call classes are held twice or thrice a week depending upon the availability of the guests on call.

The move was aimed at improving students' communication skills and enriching their language abilities. In fact, in no time, students have started picking up foreign accents with ease. The ZP high school kids have already interacted with students from more than 200 schools of various countries.

It all started when Harikrishna built a social media network of teachers and professors from different universities in the US, Canada, Russia and France to hone his own skills. However, he then thought of using the network for his students.

With the dream, the English teacher sent out proposals to teachers and leaders of student organisations at various foreign universities and schools and got permission from the head master K Lakshminarayana to start this interactive session. He then approached philanthropists to renovate the school's computer room. Next, students of classes IX and X were encouraged to interact with foreign students via video link. "I can't forget the joy in the eyes of my children after the first interactive session," Harikrishna said.

Besides interacting with their counterparts abroad, students have been exchanging letters with people from the US, Canada, Mexico, Sweden, Croatia, Denmark, France, Poland, Tunisia, Japan, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Chile and Turkey.

BREAKING BARRIERS
Students in the school: 530
More than 300 have taken part in video interactions
Authorities have shown interest about the school's activities
People have come forward to modernise the Skype room by spending Rs 1 lakh

"While teaching a chapter about Nobel-winning environmental activist Wangari Maathai of

Kenya, we got connected with a Kenyan teacher who is also a member of the Greenbelt movement. She spoke on Maathai's activities at length and helped our children understand the lesson better," Harikrishna said.

Little did the teacher know that his initiative would bring in such blessings for his pupils. An English teacher from Sweden, Ninna Jonsson, has come forward to adopt one of the poorest girls in the school, P Prasunamba. Jonsson has promised to spend Rs 6 lakh for Prasunamba's education over the next few years.

Two other students, P Anusha and Geetha Kamala Kumari, received Rs 20,000 each. Many students have received gifts.

"Gateway College of Sri Lanka has shown interest in providing drinking water facilities in our school," said Harikrishna.

But monetary grants are nothing when compared to the confidence boost and gift of glee the students have had.

"Initially we were not confident to interact with foreigners because we can't speak English fluently. Our teacher encouraged us to speak whatever we can. Slowly, we gained confidence and now are happy to interact with people from so many countries," said G Pujitha, an SSC student.

Another student P Phani Kumar said they were now being able to speak without fumbling. "We are getting good marks in English thanks to regular letter-writing," said N Mukhesh, a Class IX student.