

DEALING WITH STUDENT ABSENTEEISM AMONG TRIBAL CHILDREN USING BHILI SONGS AND DIALOGUES

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Shri Balwant Singh Mansinh Parmar was born on March 10, 1960, in Rampur (Kasanpur), a village in Morva Hadaf Taluka of Panchmahals. After his secondary education in Morva, he completed his primary teacher training in 1979 and started his teaching career. He completed his higher secondary education, B.A., and B.Ed. as an external student. He retired in May 2018.

Developing the idea

Students used to communicate in local dialects, whereas the teachers provided education in standard Gujarati. Hence, there was a gap in communication. His first appointment was in Lalpuri Primary School (Class 1 to 4) in a remote village. Shri Parmar stayed in the village itself and to generate interest among the parents, started “chotre betha vaat”, a general discussion about various topics. Every day, for about an hour before school and after school, this forum was open to groups of interested parents. The topics covered school and schooling, education and society. This had a positive effect on parents who started sending their children regularly.

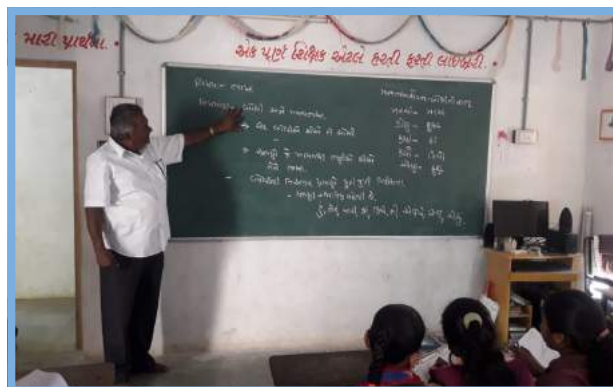
Shri Parmar attempted to learn the vocabulary of the area – there were two regions and the words used varied widely. For example,

in the eastern region, some peculiar words included the following: hu (what), ter (then), vani (but), aan (me), ehiyo (Pronoun- masculine), ehi (feminine), ehiyu (for kids). In the western region, some words were very unique: for example, ta (then), shiya (boys), kancher (sound), ungar (this year), porgar (last year), ole (for), kan javana ho? (where are you going?). As can be seen, these words are very different from standard Gujarati. Shri Parmar compiled information on the local dialects and the words children used frequently. He then prepared a chart which gave the meanings of these words and their Gujarati versions. The chart was used in the classroom. He then extended the words to include native language songs, quotes, puzzles, sayings and proverbs. Students started learning better when they were taught using their own dialect. Since the transition to the standard language was also done, they also began performing well in the schooling language.

Shri Parmar also created children’s literature, like “Gamta Gito-Vato (Bhililok Bolima)” (Liked Songs and Talk, in the Bhili Dialect), which had puzzles, quizzes, rain songs, science songs, and nature songs. When he was transferred to another school (Rampur), he created Nayka, a collection on tribal female heroic figures.



Storytelling in Bhili language in the classroom



Teaching textbook language with the help of local language

While doing such activities, Shri Parmar monitored children's attendance and performance in tests. The improvement in attendance and performance were testimony to the benefits of his experiments. The problem of absenteeism was solved, and the project became a role model for other schools. Though the project was done many years ago, its continued relevance is indicated by the fact that it was selected as a case study for Samarth Online Professional Development Programme by Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad. Teachers who have used the idea have given positive feedback.

Shri Parmar has received many awards, including Best Teacher at the district level, Gujarat Sahitya Academy (Gandhinagar) award for original children's literature, IIM Ahmedabad Innovative Teacher, and many others. He has written many pictorial and other books for children.



Story Book and Songs Book in Bhili Language



QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

1. Apart from folk songs, rhymes, and charts, what other efforts can motivate children to come to school?
2. What steps should a teacher take to help children become interested in teaching and make the classroom lively?
3. What activities can be done to make the children have more fun while teaching new points?

QUESTIONS FOR TRAINEES

1. What are the prerequisites for teaching children new topics?
2. What activities can be done in the classroom to make children understand the local and regional language content?
3. What activities can make the content more engaging?