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# Report

## English Online Capacity Building for Field Personnel

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Vidya Bhawan Education Resource Centre (VBERC) responded to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic by organizing online programmes for its projects. The English language online capacity building programme of the field personnel (FP) in the “Siksha Sambal Programme” (SSP) was one such example of an online programme. The SSP aims to provide quality education to underprivileged children at the secondary school level. The project is a collaboration between Educational Resource Centre (ERC) and Hindustan Zinc Ltd. It was started in 2016 and is currently in its fifth year.

### Background

The FPs are responsible for facilitating English language studies of students of classes IX and X as per the school syllabus. They provide additional support through extra sessions and materials, help students achieve higher grades in the Board examination and assist the overall academic and intellectual growth of the students. Regular capacity building sessions are essential for the FPs to update their knowledge of the English language as well as to enable them to deal with issues they face in the classroom while facilitating students.

### Structure

Residential workshops were held in the ERC office as part of the offline mode. They were extended to the field when the ERC members visited schools. The offline sessions were conducted in each location separately. The FP as well as the ERC team felt the need for prolonged and continuous academic engagement and the online sessions were used to fulfil this requirement. The online sessions were mentored and led by senior faculty and the English language team from the ERC. Between 31 July 2020 and 30 December 2020, around 15 sessions and 2 refresher

sessions were conducted every Friday for one hour. Where the participants felt the need for more discussion, the sessions were extended beyond one hour. The online sessions ensured a rich and healthy engagement between the ERC and FP.

## Content and Method

The sessions were designed to deepen the participants' understanding of the English language and to equip them to apply their knowledge in the classroom. The topics for the sessions were selected after a discussion with the FPs on the areas in which they needed help, and these were sequenced from elementary to advanced level.

The initial sessions concentrated on identifying and describing English word categories—noun, verb, adjective and adverb. The properties of these words and their usage were highlighted. The FPs were guided to break away from conventional definitions of parts of speech by comparing and contrasting their functions under various linguistic conditions. This was followed by a discussion on tenses and aspect of verbs. The concept of time was introduced to show how tense indicates the location of an event in time; aspect is internal to the event. It tells how an event occurs or how it is viewed by the speaker along dimensions like frequency, duration and completeness of action. The differences were discussed through various examples. The other three major elements of grammar in the online sessions were direct-indirect speech, active-passive voice and clauses. Their underlying principles were discussed before going into their complexities. Noun phrases and verb phrases in different types of

sentences were also detailed. The importance of punctuation marks and the transformation of phrases in changing voice was clarified.

The grammar sessions strengthened the foundations of English, but reading comprehension skills still required attention. More than five sessions were dedicated to reading comprehension. This was done through different activities such as a graphical representation of the storyline, tracing character sketches diagrammatically, summary writing and so on.

To prepare the participants for the upcoming session, they were given worksheets to complete and submit before the next session. The ERC team went through the responses and selected the items that needed to be addressed in the sessions. Most of the texts and examples used for the worksheets and discussions were either taken from the school textbooks or other texts of the same level. The majority of tasks/questions were modelled on Class IX and X exam patterns. The FPs were encouraged to read the texts out aloud during the session. This helped to improve their reading skills. The multilingual background of the participants provided helpful inputs in these sessions. Authentic texts from different languages were used as examples for making comparisons.

## Afterword

The online capacity building sessions provided a very valuable learning experience for the FPs. The weekly online session kept the discussions alive and assured academic growth. It must be admitted that face-to-face interactive sessions could not be completely replaced with online sessions; physical presence, longer attention span, use of

blackboard, etc., are challenges that online mode faces. On the other hand, the virtual nature of the online mode made it possible for all the participants to attend the session regularly. This rigour is more

difficult to achieve in offline mode. The scope of online media has to be exploited further for capacity building sessions along with offline support.

### ***Thank you, Azim Premji University***

Thanks are due to Azim Premji University, which has provided full financial support and inspiration for bringing out twenty issues of Language and Language Teaching (LLT) journal spread over one decade (from January 2012 to July 2021). We are also thankful to the University for providing financial support and encouragement for bringing out four exclusive issues in Hindi, based on the selection of articles published in various issues of LLT. There were four special LLT issues with the following themes: “Literature and Language Teaching”, “Disability and Language”, “Literacy” and “Language Acquisition in Informal Settings”. Through LLT, we had the opportunity to reach out to a large number of language teachers, researchers and teacher educators on issues and practices relevant to language and language teaching. We are thankful to the members of the Executive Committee for their observations, suggestions and guidance. Our special thanks to Mr S. Giridhar and Mr Ramgopal Vallath, among others.

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*'There are many aspects of human emotions and knowledge which cannot find expression in words and must therefore get spaces in 'lines and colours, sounds and movements'.*

Tagore

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