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## REPORTS

### Turning Assessment Tools into Learning Instruments

The Vidya Bhawan Education Resource Centre (VBERC) has implemented the Shiksha Sambal Programme (SSP) in 64 schools in rural Rajasthan. The objective of this programme is to strengthen children's conceptual knowledge and improve the results of board examinations. To assess the effect of the intervention, VBERC, since 2016, compares the performance of the ninth and tenth class students in Science, Mathematics, and English through annually conducted baseline, endline tests and the results in the Board examination of 64 SSP schools and 64 control schools.

However, in the last academic year, the education system as we knew it was completely upended. We lost the privilege of face-to-face interaction with students. The VBERC and its team of Field Personnel (FPs) explored different modes to reach students of SSP schools. These included WhatsApp groups, and classes on Google Meet, and home visits when restrictions eased. Because not many had access to these tools, we could only reach a small number of students. Assessment bodies were in a dilemma, and year-end summative examinations were forgone in favour of passing all students, and for board examinations, an elaborate scheme was formulated. Meanwhile, the educational resource centre (ERC) explored opportunities for assessment that could meet the rightful demands of the funding organization (in this case, Hindustan Zinc Ltd.) to evaluate the impact of the interventions and lend itself to a learning opportunity.

Open Book Tests (OBT) provided the opportunity to conduct assessments not only of learning but also for learning. The tests had to be delivered at students' doorsteps; it was inconceivable to work with the entire population of more than 5000 students. Therefore, a 25 per cent representative sample was selected using random numbers. The

students were divided into three groups based on engagement with them through the modes mentioned above: regular contact, partial contact, and no contact; assigned codes 1, 2, and 3, respectively and thus, the impact of the intervention was compared.

The biggest challenge was in conceptualizing the open book test. In principle, ours was an open resource OBT. Students were given the tests at their homes with the instructions that they had two days to submit and that they could use any resources at their disposal, from textbooks to the internet. The challenge was that many students did not have access to most of these resources. In the case of language, we dealt with this challenge by firstly keeping the tone very colloquial. The VBERC recognizes that our students reside in an impoverished English environment, and it is taught almost exclusively in schools with hardly any support at home. Therefore, we constantly attempt to use Hindi as a resource to teach English. Students were free to mix Hindi and English in their answers and knew that they would be tested on critical thinking, analysis, application of knowledge, etc.

The primary objective of the assessment through OBT was to ensure that the test would serve as an instrument for learning. To this end, the items included required students to comprehend and answer questions and read for understanding and learning. For instance, language test items included reading and responding to an e-mail, translation, and writing based on a series of pictures. Glossaries provided served as a scaffold to understand the text and a pre-reading exercise. Questions based on the text (e-mail) varied from those requiring the reader to locate specific information and inference-based questions. One test item explained punctuation marks and then asked students to use that information to rewrite a passage. Students were also asked to analyse the usage of similar punctuation marks in Hindi. The usage of the prepositions 'in' and 'on' concerning a place or position was explained to students using sentences and images, and they were asked to fill in blanks with the correct prepositions. Thus, test items such as 'fill in the blanks were used in meaning-making and application-based exercises.

Our experience with OBT informs us that they are time-taking and a serious endeavour. Students' responses take a long time to assess. Nevertheless, they lessen the burden of memorization on students. While OBT opens new horizons in testing higher-order thinking skills,

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it also imposes an ethical responsibility to teach in a manner that requires students to develop and use those skills, particularly in highly underprivileged settings. Most importantly, in the current situation, when the troubles of connectivity mar our interaction with students, it ensures that each interaction with children is a meaningful learning experience.

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