
REPORTS

Building Language Research Capabilities: A Report

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The Department of Public Instruction, Kalburgi division, recognizing the importance of teachers engaging in research, initiated an Orientation to Research in collaboration with the District Institute of Northeast Karnataka, Azim Premji Foundation. The programme covered teacher educators from six districts, Kalburgi, Yadgir, Raichur, Koppal, Ballari and Bidar. Although the programme included research on various themes, this report is limited to the language learning theme—specifically, learning Kannada as the second language. Thirty five faculty members from DIET and CTE lecturers attended the programme. The programme was conducted as an online programme using Microsoft Teams.

The Structure of the Programme

The programme was designed to continuously engage teacher educators in research. It was a six-phase programme (each phase lasting for 9 hours through an online workshop). The six stages were (a) Formulating the Research Question, (b) Review of literature and Designing the Study (sample, ethical issues), (c) Designing tools and preparing for analysis, (d) Analysis of the findings, and (e) Report Writing, (f) Preparing for the conference. The programme was planned for eight months but took more than one year because data collection and analysis took more time than expected due to Covid-19.

The Design of the Programme

The programme was designed to have an anchor, four resource persons, and six field mentors.

The anchor was responsible for coordinating and communicating among the district mentors, follow-ups, motivating the teacher educators, and coordinating with the resource person for planning the content and providing feedback on the research. Each location had a field mentor with whom teacher educators could frequently interact over the phone and face to face. The mentors had three roles to play. (a) Since they enjoyed a good rapport with teacher educators, they could lull the anxieties and continuously motivate teacher educators, (b) Since they were familiar with the terrain and grassroots problems, they helped in sample selection and in identifying questions critical to the district, and (c) developed insert own capabilities.

Most of the studies undertaken in language had to do with teaching Kannada as a second language to other language speakers, students' problems in learning Kannada, and teachers' views about students' learning.

A Few Challenges in Capacity Building

Teacher educators were also language teachers. They frequented Kannada, Urdu, Telugu medium schools and Tanda (Tribal) schools; we thought that they would be familiar with what students know and do not know. These students spoke Urdu, Telugu, and other languages as their mother tongues and studied in Urdu, Telugu, or Kannada medium schools. They were learning Kannada as a second language in schools. When teacher educators were asked to share problems generally faced by students in learning Kannada, they consistently harped on three points. These were: "students do not know Kannada", "they lack interest/motivation to learn Kannada", and "there is no encouragement for Kannada in their homes". Facilitating teachers to go beyond these sentences was challenging. The resource person used several prompts to help teachers go beyond gross thinking. Some prompts were: (a) Do these students recognize Kannada alphabets? (b) If yes—list the alphabets they can identify and not identify? c) Are they able to read words? (c) If yes—what sort of words—simple, frequent, letter words, words with consonant conjuncts? Such probes helped narrow their research questions and made them see what the students knew.

The sample was a mere number for many teachers. Discussions on sampling technique and confidence levels helped participants in sample selection and mitigated this problem to some extent.

Participants looked at the tool as a bag to dump the questions they felt like asking without examining their relevance. They also did not consider which question in the tool answered which larger research question or how they would analyse the findings. Some learnings occurred when each study's tool was reviewed on a one-to-one basis through tcons.

Interviewing requires researchers to think of questions on-the-spot depending on the participant's answer (despite having an overall plan). The quick-thinking did not happen. For instance, an Urdu teacher taught Kannada in an Urdu medium school. When interviewing her, the researcher could have brought out the uniqueness of her teaching Kannada. Unfortunately, this did not happen. With the result, her answers were similar to Kannada mother tongue teachers teaching Urdu in Urdu schools.

It was relatively easy for teachers to understand the quantitative research, reflecting their clarity in developing tools, conducting the analysis, and interpreting their findings. The qualitative research analysis was a challenge. Their transcription removed small details (which is critical in qualitative research) and averaged out the interview data using only those data that showed commonality in responses. They were frustrated with having to do the analysis repeatedly. A model data was analysed and shared, detailing the process. This modelling helped some teachers to do the qualitative analysis, but not all teachers. Some gained more insight as they did the qualitative analysis and got a deeper understanding of what was expected of them.

The capacity of the field mentors: Field mentors were not researchers, although they did have some exposure to research. They had different levels of research awareness, which was reflected in their mentoring. The one-to-one with researchers and their mentors was also learning for the mentors.

What Went Well

The Assistant Commissioner of Public Instruction, Kalburgi district, played a critical role in completing the programme. The department ensured that the participants had adequate time to engage in research, followed up on the progress in each district, attended all the orientation programme stages, provided feedback to the participants on their progress, and constantly motivated them to complete their research.

At a research conference called Sahamanthana, the teacher educators presented their research studies with enthusiasm. Their peers' questions helped them understand the problems in their studies and appreciate their efforts.

Guru Sankayya Moger works as a resource person in the Gulbarga district, providing research support. His research interests include studies on learning loss and recovery and teacher assessment.

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