AKSHARA’S LEARNINGS FROM ITS ENGLISH PROGRAMMES

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This report narrates Akshara Foundation’s journey so far with its English programmes and the understandings and learnings gleaned from them. **Swalpa English Thumba Fun (SETF)** and **EASY English** can be seen as a single programme with two imprints. They took place in different time spans. The first was SETF which later seamlessly transitioned to **EASY English**. Both embodied the learning of English in lower primary classes in government schools. They attempted to bridge the same divide – a paucity of English in the daily life of teachers and children, an unfamiliarity with its processes, and the strangeness of its tone and texture.

Government has accepted the need for English. In the multiple language context of India, the 1968 National Policy Resolution recommended a three-language solution to narrow down the languages children can reasonably learn, and teachers can be expected to teach. English is one of the three languages of the formula, introduced as a subject from grade V in government schools. In 2007, children from grade I started learning it. Karnataka adopted this approach. But the deficits remained unaddressed. There was a textbook and a curriculum, but nothing besides to mitigate the difficulties of English. Teachers had no tools, training or expertise to teach children who had no background or environment in English. The shortfalls in the government school setting resulted in parents admitting their children in the proliferating private schools around their villages.

Akshara recognised the gap early on and designed **SETF** as a response to plug the breach. It was a pedagogically supported programme, compatible with the syllabus, and had a child-friendly idiom. A range of colourful, printed learning resources enlivened classrooms across Hoskote, Kushtagi and Mundargi blocks in Karnataka where it was implemented. When its three-year tenure concluded teachers had gained a grip over teaching English, the abundance of printed materials supplementing their efforts, and children had mastered considerably more than the alphabet and the odd rhyme or two.
In the sum total of experience, SETF stimulated the English classroom. It underscored the fact that attractively designed teaching-learning print resources could convey a sense of the language to teachers and children. The programme invited participation in the learning process. But it had its vulnerabilities. It brought home the realisation that unless teachers and children were given a listening environment, speaking in English would be an elusive goal. At this point in time, bearing in mind the learnings from SETF, the NCF 2005 guidelines, and the fact of technology increasingly foraying into education with largely positive outcomes, Akshara’s theory of change was to walk the digital path and design an intervention using a Tablet for children who are at their most receptive in grades I, II and III. This would provide much-needed scaffolding to teachers as well, who have come from a vernacular environment and needed to catch the essence and register of the language.

**EASY English**, the sequel, an organic output of SETF, launched as a pilot, providing an intimate, immersive and rich user experience. The Tab was at the heart of the English classroom. A cozy cluster of children gathered around it, teacher and students in a shared zone of learning, while that magical ingredient of curiosity led them on. The digitisation of English kept them engaged, and the Tab was a great instructor, non-intimidating and reaching across barriers. Today this could well point the way to how the future unfolds - self-learning, home learning, and learning at one’s own pace.

This report aims to throw light on the key ingredients of the programmes and incorporates learnings that like-minded organisations can use as part of a second language learning process. It covers the design of the programmes, showcases case studies and teacher feedback as well as recommendations for policy makers and programme implementers.

A singular feature is that Akshara assessed its programmes as they happened. The section on Learning Outcomes assesses the impact of SETF and **EASY English** and makes it a useful barometer for all that went right with the programmes.
The evaluations conducted indicate that multi-year exposure is beneficial for children to enhance learning outcomes. Akshara’s in-house longitudinal study of SETF showed that the mean scores in treatment schools marked an improvement ranging from 1-25 percentage points in Year 1, 19-37 percentage points in Year 2, and 15-38 percentage points in Year 3.

A third-party evaluation further validated that SETF had made a positive impact on classroom transactions and students in treatment schools were found to be performing well. Findings reveal a higher proportion of treatment students in the > 75 percentage bracket in all the three years of intervention as compared to control schools. The Tab-based EASY English initiative registered an improvement in the test scores of the cohort in the study. They had higher mean scores across the grades exposed to the programme.

The report concludes that continuous and long-term capacity building of teachers coupled with appropriate resources, both printed and digital, would have positive impact on first-generation English learners. Teachers saw great value in the programme’s training model, a customised version that occurred at frequent intervals.: “Your training helps us,” said a teacher. “In our environment no one talks in English. It refreshes our skills. We get opportunities to talk.”
SECTION 1: Context

No language, barring one’s native language, comes to one naturally and spontaneously. It has to be laboriously and consistently learnt and taught\(^1\). Krashen, an acquisition theorist, proposed an anti-structural view of learning, and stressed that language learning occurs owing to the use of language in communication. This is generally referred to as “learning by doing” or the “experience approach.” He proposed that focusing on the meaning of language, which occurs during communication, aids Second Language Acquisition. He added that this communicative ability develops subconsciously in the learner, and that this subconscious process is similar to the process in which the learner utilizes his or her first language\(^2\).

In the Indian context language learning becomes much more complex due to the co-existence of multiple languages in the country. While the Indian Constitution has officially recognized as many as 22 languages, the Three-Language Formula of language learning (1968 National Policy Resolution) should ensure that a student passing out of secondary school has adequate knowledge of the three selected languages. Additionally, it recommended that a language should be offered as a continuous course for not less than three years. English is one of the three languages in the formula and while it was always a subject from grade V, recently in 2007 it was introduced from grade I.

According to the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005\(^3\), in the initial stages of schooling, English can be one of the languages used for learning activities that form an awareness of the world in a child. This is part of the national vision which seeks to promote multi-lingual skills.

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Further, the document says that input-rich communicational environments are a prerequisite for language learning. These inputs include textbooks, learner-chosen texts, and class libraries that include a variety of genres: print (for example, big books for young learners) and materials in more than one language. It recommends that language evaluation need not be tied to “achievement” with respect to particular syllabi, but must be reoriented to the measurement of language proficiency.

Further, in India, the approaches suggested by scholars like Prabhu⁴ advocate that language is acquired when attention is focused not on language form, but on the meaning of messages. On the other hand, success in doing a task needs only a certain level of language proficiency, i.e., to comprehend task-related information. Thus, the teaching-learning materials and outcome measures for linguistic proficiency need to be formulated only to the extent necessary for communicating meaning or content. A study by NCERT⁵ shows that English is introduced in grade I or grade III by 26 states and union territories out of the 35, while seven states and union territories have introduced it in grades IV or V⁶.

In Karnataka, a state in South India, English was introduced from grade 1 in government schools in 2007. A majority of the government primary school teachers in Karnataka have studied in schools with Kannada medium of instruction and few seem to have opted for English as a major subject in their professional teaching courses. Added to this, during informal discussions with teachers Akshara found that the training imparted to them in teaching English needs to be enhanced and sufficient teaching-learning materials provided.

⁵ National Council for Educational Research and Training.
SECTION 2: The Programmes - Strategies and Resources

CONTEXT FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING – NCF 2005

The National Focus Group on Teaching English (NCF-2005) states in its Position Paper that “regardless of when English is introduced in the curriculum, the first one or two years is to build familiarity primarily through spoken (or spoken and written) inputs in meaningful situations so that a child can build up a working knowledge of the language”.

It emphasizes the importance of the teacher’s language proficiency and use of English in the child’s everyday environment. The Paper admits that both of these are “greatly unfavourable” in the case of government regional medium schools; hence teacher capacity-building assumes significant importance.

Akshara Foundation began its endeavour to design a support programme for primary school teachers in English as a subject way back in 2012-13. Swalpa English Thumba Fun, the first of Akshara’s English programmes, was a multi-year initiative implemented for three consecutive years in 576 rural government schools in Karnataka. The goal was to empower teachers in grades I-IV with resourceful strategies to teach children English. As suggested by the NCF 2005, this programme was seeking to establish an environment that facilitated English learning in classrooms through fun-filled, exploratory understanding.

However, in 2017 a digital extension of Swalpa English Thumba Fun was designed. Akshara christened it EASY English. It had a limited footprint of just over 50 schools in Karnataka. This report aims to document the design of these two programmes, the strategies followed, the processes involved and the overall learnings from Akshara’s English programmes. Insights from the implementation of Swalpa English Thumba Fun led to the conceptualisation of EASY English, a digital version of the English programme.
The programme involved the use of a Tablet with digital content to scaffold the teachers in government primary schools to teach English in grades I, II and III. This section unfolds the key components of the English programmes that Akshara Foundation implemented.

**EASY English** followed in the footsteps of its predecessor, except that it was in digitized form, with audiovisual accompaniment that added colour and zest to learning. The strategy was an activity-based teaching-learning method with content and instructions on conversation, rhymes, grammar, Total Physical Response (TPR) activities, phonics, reading, writing and assessment.

The content was aligned to the government-prescribed textbook. A range of resources was developed to aid the teaching-learning process. **EASY English** was a response to the combination of deficits in teacher training in English and appropriate teaching-learning materials (TLMs) to teach English in government schools in Karnataka.

Both of Akshara’s English programmes, **Swalpa English Thumba Fun** and **EASY English**, had three components - classroom strategies, capacity building of teachers, and teaching-learning materials. The ensuing parts of this section provide a description of the three components in the programmes.

### 2.1 PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES

Approaches to language teaching have evolved over the last century. Each approach expects a certain teacher and learner role and a certain learning environment. Akshara’s approach recognizes the realities of the context especially in rural and semi-urban government schools – low language immersion, low input and low exposure. Accordingly, Akshara evolved an approach which blended the tenets of the Natural Approach – basic interpersonal skills being the primary goal – along with elements of the Structural Approach so that it could be implemented at scale.
From the beginning Akshara’s thinking was to address the goal of critical elements in English language learning - i.e. Listening-Speaking-Reading-Writing (LSRW), with equal emphasis assigned to each component. The programmes believed in the logic of ‘Read-and-Write’, which would follow closely behind ‘Listen-and-Speak’ since listening and speaking are first-order literacy skills that are triggered by the need to communicate. For reading and writing to be meaningful, the learner must get a sense of the style and register of the language. The content of the Swalpa English Thumba Fun package therefore focused on the four areas that aim to improve teachers’ and students’ oral knowledge of English and its sentence structures through rhymes, conversation, storytelling and language activities.

The content design followed a theme-based approach, wherein the themes were aligned to the government-prescribed curriculum for the early grades. Both the programmes endorsed this content arrangement. The theme-based lessons included stories, readers, flash cards and rhymes as well as workbooks.

Both the programmes also had an in-built field support mechanism. The Field Coordinators (FCs) appointed by Akshara Foundation had a professional qualification in education and were recruited from the local community. They supported the teacher with classroom observation, demonstrations and oversaw the implementation of the programmes. Typically a Field Coordinator supported a cluster of 20-25 schools.

The content of the Swalpa English Thumba Fun package concentrated on four areas that aim to improve students’ oral knowledge of English and its sentence structures through rhymes, conversation, storytelling and language activities. A 40-minute lesson plan was provided in the Teacher’s Manual to navigate the class through conversations, rhymes, total physical activities and games.
In the case of **EASY English** a partner App was created by [EkStep](https://ekstep.org/) wherein the data of all the students and teachers was displayed in the App. A teacher login was created for each teacher and a student login for each student. Once the teacher had transacted the lesson through oral instruction, her students were exposed to the same lesson through the digital content.

### 2.2 TEACHING-LEARNING RESOURCES OR MATERIALS

This section elaborates the teaching-learning materials designed and provisioned for schools in the project area. The TLMs were aligned to the pedagogical strategy explained in the previous paragraphs. The segment unfolds in two parts showcasing the TLMs employed in **SETF** and **EASY English**.

**TLMs in Swalpa English Thumba Fun**

**Swalpa English Thumba Fun** began with print-rich TLMs provisioned for teachers and the same content was digitised for **EASY English** and loaded in a Tablet that was provided to the teacher to enable her to transact in the classroom. Opportunities were given to students for self-learning during classroom transactions. The emphasis here was on introducing basic vocabulary and exposing students to simple sentences so that over two or three years they could begin reading from the English textbooks provided by the Education Department.

**SETF** designed a Teacher’s Manual, charts, flash cards, reading cards and workbooks to provide opportunities to listen and speak the language in class. The TLMs were designed to assist students to transit from understanding English sounds (phonics) and prepare for reading and writing. The schools where **EASY English** was extended had all the TLMs specified above and in addition received a Tablet loaded with content.

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8 A Bangalore-based, not-for-profit, open learning platform that curates e-content on literacy and numeracy. [https://ekstep.org/](https://ekstep.org/)
a) The Teacher’s Manual

The Teacher’s Manual contained a complete set of suggestive lesson plans and activities using the Akshara method that were appropriate for the grades and the topics they covered. The delivery of vocabulary and syntax in the lesson was through a dialogue between the teacher and students using the visuals in the charts. The goals of every lesson were presented in the beginning, in terms of vocabulary and sentence structures. The Manual provided an overview of the methodology and rationale. It contained support activities where vocabulary and syntax were reinforced through drills and practice work to use the language, including model conversation pieces between students to counter the total lack of articulation opportunities either in the school or in the social environment of the learner.

b) The Charts

The Charts had pictures designed around different themes and stories that appeared in the government textbooks. The stated objective was to introduce students to a range of English vocabulary on different topics. It was designed to be used in conjunction with the activities detailed in the Teacher’s Manual.
c) **Flash Cards/Phonic Cards**

These cards introduced sight words and phonic sounds to children in a recognizable context. The cards had short, phonically regular words as well as high-frequency sight words.

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**d) Reading Cards**

These cards introduced sight words and phonic sounds to children in a recognizable context. The cards had short, phonically regular words as well as high-frequency sight words.

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**e) Workbooks**

Skill based workbooks for grades I-IV were provided for incremental writing skills. Grade 1 workbooks focused on writing of letters to develop fine motor skills and eye-hand coordination; letter-sound correlations were emphasised.

Workbooks for 2\textsuperscript{nd} graders were aimed at developing simple consonant-vowel-consonant (cvc) words, short sentences and sight words.
For grade III the workbooks introduced consonant blends like “sh”, “ch,” “ck,” and “th” with simple words and basic grammar components such as use of the article and prepositions. Workbooks for grade IV introduced interrogatives, skills to frame answers, usage of adjectives and pronouns. In both the programmes children received workbooks.

**TLMs Developed for EASY English**

A 10” iBall Tab was used and the content was designed and developed by Akshara’s English Resource Team. The Tab became the central teaching-learning tool, which served the twin purposes of reaching the student as well as the teacher. The guiding principles in designing the content for students were NCF 2005, Position Paper on the Teaching of English and the competencies listed out by the state’s SERT9. While Listening-Speaking-Reading-Writing skills were the cornerstones, they were split into smaller goals of comprehending instructions, vocabulary building, grammar and usage, responding in one word and speaking short sentences - in other words, communicative competencies.

The short conversations modelled in the Tab were designed to stimulate speaking skills. The EASY English App for students and teachers could be downloaded from Google Play through Genie, an app in beta version developed by EkStep Foundation, our technology partner. Further, ILP Konnect10 retrieved data from the EkStep server, analysed it for usage and shared the results.
The themes aligned to the textbooks were woven into the 7 theme-based lessons loaded onto the Tab. The lessons had 7 components, namely, Conversation with TPR, Rhymes with TPR, Phonics, and Grammar with TPR, Reading, Writing, and Assessment. The interactive sessions on the Tab were simple and child-friendly requiring actions such as drag-and-drop, multiple-choice-questions and so on to attract students’ participation. Students got to handle the Tablet for self-learning opportunities. Formative assessments were organically built into the content after each lesson, while the responses were captured in the back-end servers immediately; and the teacher too was enabled to see the score. The EASY English App was an additional resource that facilitated teaching and learning.
Equally important was the utility for teachers. Sessions on the fundamentals of language structure, LSRW skills, vocabulary and grammar were loaded onto the Teacher Modules in the Tab. The Teacher Modules were spread over three years as Basic, Intermediate and Advanced modules (8+8+4= 20 modules). Each of these modules included activities, tips, notes and practice sessions for the teacher. The Tab offered reinforcement for teaching in the classroom through the self-learning route. Staggered, interactive workshops were conducted for teachers to give mini immersion experiences, thus building self-esteem and confidence in speaking.

**WHAT WORKED**

NCF 2005 suggests a comprehensible, input-rich curriculum that lays the foundation for spontaneous language growth, with the understanding of spoken and written language as precursors to language production (speech and writing). Keeping these suggestions as guidelines, Akshara developed the TLMs that helped both the teacher and the learner to navigate the language class with ease. The learnings from SETF led to the evolution of the digital content of EASY English. Akshara’s theory of change was to walk the digital path and design an intervention using a Tab for children who are at the most receptive stage in grades I, II and III. Perhaps the combination of print-rich TLMs with digital inputs creates a more conducive ecosystem for English learning in government schools.

**2.3 CAPACITY BUILDING**

Capacity building for second language learners had a two-fold challenge - the challenge of training the teachers, most of whom had low exposure to English during their schooling years, and low English language skills among them, especially speaking skills, due to dearth of opportunities to speak, and hence low confidence to teach English as a subject. It was often said that they “teach English through Kannada,” a fitting reflection of their English class. There was also the challenge of building the capacity of students who require an “English language environment” (an apt phrase used by a teacher) at home and school.
Keeping these challenges in mind Akshara’s training aimed to enhance teachers’ listening, speaking, reading and writing skills to aid their professional development and make them competent, confident and efficient in delivering English language skills. The training goal was to improve teachers’ capability and output. It sought to equip participants with these teacher-characteristics and incorporated in its design classroom simulation techniques that provided long-lasting learning.

**Swalpa English Thumba Fun - Training Strategies**

The capacity building of English teachers under SETF was designed as an introductory 5-day training in cascade mode. A team of Resource Persons handpicked from the government pool of teachers, Cluster Resource Persons and Block Resource Persons was trained by Akshara’s Master Trainers. These Resource Persons in turn trained English teachers at the cluster level.

The training structure for the first year was designed with more focus on fluency in spoken English and less on structural rigour. The sessions were highly interactive.
Teachers were made to work in groups and make presentations on how to use the TLMs, create activities around them and practice SETF’s pedagogic strategy. The training covered LSRW skills and introduced teachers to the methodology and use of the TLMs. It was designed as activity-based sessions with the focus on delivery of skills.

In subsequent years, Akshara’s training component was incorporated in routine in-service trainings designed by the Department of State Educational Research and Training wing of the Education Department as a part of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan’s training sessions. During all the three years of the programme Akshara’s Resource Team and Field Coordinators supported implementation at the school level in every block.

**EASY English – Confidence-building Workshops**

Based on a needs-analysis English Language Workshops were conducted for teachers every month – a total of 9 one-day workshops in an academic year. The Basic level modules were delivered in the first year of the programme and the Advanced level for the subsequent years.

These activity-based workshops were designed to encourage teachers to speak in English, with feedback from the facilitator, and included short reading and writing exercises and tips on TLM preparation. The content for teachers’ practice exercises were loaded on the Tablet. A device was given to the teachers. The Teacher Modules covered basic structural patterns, phonics, grammar tips and sentence formation - in other words, activities catering to enhance their speaking skills and provide for their professional development.

Every teacher teaching English in grades I, II and III along with the Cluster Resource Persons (CRPs) of the schools participated in the workshops. CRPs, who are the last mile connect with schools and education delivery in the Department of Education, were encouraged to interact with teachers in English and give demonstrations during their school visits.
The workshops followed the framework given below.

1. Akshara’s facilitators shared the back-end data on usage of content during the period between the workshops and informed teachers on the areas of improvement they could concentrate on, like listening, speaking and so on. This set the specific objectives of the workshop.

2. This was followed by identifying a teacher as a lead teacher for every workshop. This allowed all the teachers to take the lead as Resource Persons.

3. Each workshop was therefore anchored by the lead teacher who began the programme with an invocation and the EASY English anthem, followed by a welcome address and recapitulation of the previous workshop's proceedings.

4. The lead teacher carried out the following activities scaffolded by the Akshara facilitator:

   a) **Group work:** The trainees were assigned to groups to work on activities in skills like grammar, listening, speaking, reading and writing. Teachers were encouraged to develop the TLMs they would require for the activities during classroom transactions.

   They had to ensure that the resources they created aligned with the content in the Tab. Each group presented its work, while other groups reflected, debated, discussed and comprehended the newly created activities. All through the process it was mandatory to link what they were doing with the content provided in the Tablet.

   b) Akshara’s facilitator assigned each teacher a rhyme and the participant had to recite it with Total Physical Response activities. Children from the schools, which were the venues for the workshops, were invited to take part in this activity. It was designed as a live demonstration of how to recite rhymes with TPR.
c) This task was followed by another group activity that created an opportunity for the teachers to demonstrate a lesson on any of the components of the content in the Tablet, like conversation, rhymes, phonics, grammar, reading, writing skills and assessments. The Akshara facilitator walked them through the Tab during this module.

5. At every workshop the Akshara facilitator assigned speaking, reading and writing tasks to the teachers.

6. The lead teacher gave critical feedback and pointers to teachers to improve their English skills and ended the workshop with a vote of thanks.

The strategies and objectives of EASY English were reinforced at the workshops and teachers were given a timetable for content delivery and achievable indicators like number of conversations, rhymes and sentence creation, as well as a vocabulary list as a target for every month.
The insights Akshara got from the first two years of EASY English were that there was lack of uniformity in implementing the programme due to multi-grade situations. For example, the team observed that teachers lacked strategies to keep the children of grades II and III occupied when they were using the Tab with grade I students and vice-versa. Hence, the Resource Team developed strategies like the weekly timetable and month-wise indicator targets to support them.

The Weekly Tab Timetable was aligned with the Nali Kali curriculum format. The timetable suggested had activities around conversation, rhymes, grammar, phonics, reading and writing. All these activities were carried out by the teachers accordingly through the week. These tailor-made activities were further modified by the teacher as per the student strength in her class and the local situations in each school. This gave the teacher clarity on lesson transaction on a daily basis.

**WHAT WORKED**

School teachers must mandatorily receive both pre-service training and in-service education at regular intervals, says NCF 2005. Akshara’s SETF training was aimed at improving teachers’ capability in listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. However, when the teacher went back to school, she was found struggling with language teaching and at times there were lapses in pronunciation as well. SETF brought home the realisation that unless a sufficient listening environment for good English was provided, teachers and students would struggle to communicate effectively in English, and just printed materials would not be enough. The capacity building sessions of SETF were found to be less effective and interactions with teachers suggested that there is a need for longer and frequent engagement with teachers. The initial scaffolding built a sense of confidence in teachers but it did not last long.

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11 Karnataka follows the Nali Kali path of education for grades I-III in all its government schools. This is a multi-grade, multi-level, activity-based pedagogy.
**EASY English** attempted a different model of capacity building. Frequency increased, the level of immersion was deeper, and the one-on-one approach was more enabling. Further, it was felt that the digital modules would act as reference material.

### 2.4 COMMUNITY STRATEGY

The **EASY English** programme developed a strategy to connect the programme with the local community. The idea was to hold a Graduation Day for children of grades I, II and III to promote such cohesion. The event was organised in schools which for two straight years had implemented the programme and reaped its rewards. It was found to be an impactful initiative.

Graduation Day was facilitated by Akshara Foundation and the Department of Education took ownership for organising it at the end of an academic year to display what children had learnt during the course of the programme. Graduation Day came as a precursor bearing good tidings, a proud milestone-marker for teachers and children as they presented before a gathered audience their accomplishments in English.
This section presents qualitative data. It is a snapshot of narratives which aims to give an understanding of how the programmes worked at the field level. It captures the many aspects that shape and grow programmes, and the receptivity of government, as reflected in an interaction with DIET.

Teacher Venkatratna who so completely believed in EASY English she immersed herself in it. Also featured are classroom engagements with Chinnamma whose faith in technology had to be established from scratch, and with Tejashvi, an ‘A’ grade teacher and programme loyalist, who displayed incredible commitment, and there's young Lavanya, an end-user of Swalpa English Tumba Fun, who in a month, learnt to read English with the help of the programme.

3.1 “We’re Ready to Cooperate. Quality Education is DIET’s Aim”

The District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) have the responsibility to make government primary education more innovative and productive, orientate teachers to new techniques and methodologies of teaching, and keep children, the end recipients, interested in school and learning.

Akshara has been dialoguing with DIET, Chikkaballapur, ever since EASY English began in 25 schools in Gudibande block in the district. The programme harmonises with DIET’s vision for education. Technology is at the vanguard, there’s a Tablet in the classroom, and a strong, inbuilt, monthly training protocol for teachers.

For EASY English, or for that matter any programme, to scale and achieve widespread impact, government support and institutional adoption are key.
“EASY English is helpful for children to learn English easily,” says DIET Principal T. L. Sharadamma. “Children fail in English and Mathematics. They’re very poor in English. The government has now made English a compulsory subject in government schools. This programme is useful. We’re hoping it will improve grammar, vocabulary and the English skills of teachers and children.”

“Today, enrolment is falling in government schools. Most parents want private schools for their children. There are uniforms and shoes. And there’s English. We have to move with the times.

We all know that English has to improve in our government schools. The Tab has been given. So many materials have been given. We have to change our ways, isn’t it? We’re ready to cooperate. Quality education is DIET’s aim.”

Nishath Salma, DIET lecturer and Nodal Officer for EASY English, says, “English is a global language. Children face many problems if they don’t know English. They can’t go outside Karnataka to seek a job. They can’t go for higher studies – it is all in English.”

In her assessment, EASY English overcomes many of the limitations that impede a government school student’s path to success. It has many pathways to learning and many methods. “The programme’s goal is very good. It starts from the beginning, from grade I. You have technology, lessons installed in a Tab. That aspect is attractive for children.

There are pictures and they can listen on the speakers you provide. Listening is very important for children to learn a new language. This is a great opportunity. These students shouldn’t face the kind of problems we faced in our time.”
3.2 “This programme is Very Useful for us to Survive”

Venkatratna of the Government Lower Primary School in Geggilarallahalli village in Gudibande block is by all accounts one of the best English teachers in the programme. She has an ELEP\textsuperscript{12} training. She respects discipline and punctuality and wants to be a “model and good guide” to her students. Her thoughts are powerful.

“This programme helps us attract pupils to the classroom. It helps us learn vocabulary. It helps us enrich ourselves. It helps us create curiosity about the topic with the Tab. It creates something new in our classroom with the Tab. It encourages us to speak in English. It improves our LSRW skills. \textbf{This programme is very useful for us to survive.}”

“People are not interested in sending their children to us. They’re going to private schools because of English.” If parents have to be persuaded otherwise, English has to emerge as a language of transaction in government primary schools. There’s no future for government schools if that doesn’t happen, she says.
3.3 Learning Together

English was once outside the scope of classroom life in Chinnamma’s Nali Kali section at the Government Higher Primary School, Kolathur, Hoskote block. The English period went by, 3-4 p.m. every day, in dull tedium. The less than 10 children in Nali Kali – Chinnamma has the 4th grade there as well – did not know a single thing other than the alphabet, she confesses.

The grade I and II textbooks open on the floor, most of it going over their heads. It felt weighty and overwhelming. “Very heavy,” as Mangala Mary in another school remarked. Chinnamma was helpless, she says, tied down to matter she could not understand, much less teach.

It was then that EASY English came into class. Chinnamma was open to its methods, its imaginative approach. “It’s a great help to us. In these times you have to know English.” But there was a catch, and that was technology, the new learning matrix in class. Three years away from retirement, she says, “I don’t want to go into the internet and all that,” and has used the same basic-edition mobile phone for the last 20 years.

Overcoming resistance was a large part of her conversion story. Today, two years later: “I keep the Tab open and the textbook open and integrate. To tell you honestly, I use only the Tab. The same lessons are there in the Tab, and much easier too. I often don’t open the textbook at all.” But Chinnamma continues to be technology-averse.

She shuns a smartphone, in fact does not know what it is. Were it not for the inducements of the Tab she would not have crossed her mental barrier about technology entering her English class.

As for English, she says, “I’m only learning, still.” Chinnamma’s students too, along with her, are learning. “They’re improving slowly.”
They are moving up, not as much perhaps as in the other schools, but they can answer most of the 23 questions and instructions Chinnamma has framed for them on a chart. Some examples: “What is your name?” “What is your father’s name?” What is your mother’s name?” “What is the first sound of your name?” “Which animal gives milk?” “Can you jump?” “Touch the board.” “Show me your nose.” Though whole-sentence answers are not within reach yet, the programme has made English comprehensible. The children understand the questions posed.

Action songs are their forte, a passion. The children know a repertoire of 10 rhymes, the tally way more than they ever knew before. It does not take much to set them off, they are willing singers and movers. A regaling happens every time during the English period. The big, semi-dark room reverberates as the children stand in a circle, singing full-throated words they can sometimes only barely grasp or pronounce - this little cameo at the centre, and Chinnamma on the perimeter, like a conductor, raising and lowering her arms.
3.4 Tejashvi’s Class

The morning is underway in Ms. Tejashvi G’s English class for Nali Kali students at the Government Model Higher Primary School (GMHPS) in Varlakonda, a village in Gudibande block. To simply characterise her as good would perhaps not define her enough.

Tejashvi has been implementing the EASY English programme for over a year and her English class is one of the busiest. She is a grade ‘A’ English teacher in the programme’s internal rankings, with a score of 60% and above.

Many attributes place her at this crest. She is fluent and comfortable with English, has a reasonable grasp, and a feel for idiom, expression, and the unexpected twists and turns of the language.

Her Nali Kali classroom is large, but not large enough for 34 students. Of special significance, because they underscore Tejashvi’s urge to capture a higher note, are the English teaching-learning materials she has designed herself, motivated by EASY English, its training workshops of reinforcement, and the Resource Team’s unceasing urgings. Parts of the Body, Parts of the Face, Objects of Daily Use, and more, their distinctive features being neatness of execution, clarity of communication, and the correct English in which it is conveyed.

“A teacher is always a learner,” Tejashvi says. “I have to learn new things. I have to teach new things. I have to learn more, teach more.” A commitment to self-improvement as a teacher is a clear, well-marked goal. “She takes initiative,” says the Akshara team.

She is a respected teacher in school. Headmaster Narayanaswamy’s acknowledgement is unequivocal. The Block Education Officer (BEO) was at her English class recently on an observation visit and commended her for it.
The programme is very effective and useful. It teaches us a method we can implement in our classrooms. The Tab is very, very useful. It makes it easy to teach English. Bringing technology to government schools is very important. I have learnt how to make my class active by using the Tab, by using motivating words, by imparting the lessons I learn at the training workshops. They’re so useful.”

“In the beginning all of us hesitated – teachers and children. Now my students do the Tab by themselves. If I tell them the lesson, they open the screen on their own. If I don’t give them the Tab, they ask for it. ‘Give it to us now,’ they say. They’re very happy with it.” With the method and swiftness that come naturally to her, Tejashvi arranges her class. She does not have to start right from the beginning.

She credits EASY English for her method of working her class. Grade 1 children, 13 of them, occupy the middle space, forming a circle. The ten 2nd graders and the eleven 3rd graders despatch themselves to two fairly roomy corners.
Tejashvi has strategized her classroom interaction with care, though she admits to a sense of personal limitation in summoning and engaging them all at once. “Managing all of them is a little difficult. Too many children. I find it difficult to teach. If I use the Tab with one group, the other two do not pay attention.”

The Tab meanwhile is circulating among the grade I group, segregated only for form’s sake. They are all part of a melting pot. This is the spot where the action is. Sphurthi takes it around, holding it with some reverence. She creates a sub-group and sits down. The screen shows up the rhyme, “Two little hands go clap, clap, clap…” When the voice-over comes through, the children listen with awe mixed with trepidation. They are not unknowing, they have learnt this rhyme just a few minutes ago. They are not confused as much as shy, and more so, fearful.

As Tejashvi strives each day, trying to realise her potential and bring out the best in her students, she looks forward to EASY English, its helping hand, and the guided traverses it makes possible through a language she hopes to be fully proficient in. The morning passes too soon. The team broaches the question that often hangs over a programme’s extension.

What if EASY English does not get permission for renewal in 2019-20? In Tejashvi’s large, kohl-lined eyes comes a sudden sense of loss. “Really? Why?” she asks. Whatever Akshara’s efforts on the ground, such matters are decided at the highest levels in the Department of Education.

“EASY English is so useful for the children,” Tejashvi says, “the Tab, the workbooks. So useful for us. Your training helps us. It refreshes our skills. We get opportunities to talk. I don’t get to talk in English and I miss that. In our environment, no one talks in English. I hope this programme continues. You have to continue it.”
3.5 About Grit and Determination

Lavanya is the best student in class at the Kurubarahatti school in Hoskote block, her mastery whetted by her father’s punishments at home. For her age and given the fact that she is in a government school, in an environment where opportunities for an interchange in English are few, she is skilled. She is in grade IV.

Lavanya may not be up on top of it all where comprehension is concerned. What is the meaning of ‘candle?’ may leave her bewildered. Her strengths are a phonics-based deduction of pronunciation, figuring out how words sound, how English works, and answering in complete sentences, at least the simple questions put to her.

Lavanya sets it up for herself before reeling off, standing up, folding her hands against her chest, as government school children are generally taught to do.

“What is your name?” Yashodha, her teacher, asks.
“My name is Lavanya.”
“What is your father’s name?”
“My father’s name is Anand Kumar.”
“My mother’s name is Nagaratna,” she says even before she is asked.

Lavanya casts a look of confident anticipation, seeming to say, “Any more questions of this kind?” She is capable, her look says. Lavanya’s phonics test is with ‘e.’ She articulates the sounds that ‘e’ makes with words she is sure of – ‘elephant,’ ‘engine,’ ‘pen,’ ‘hen.’ She enters each word on a phonically high pitch, putting it together, enjoying herself.

How did this little girl accomplish such a feat? Her English used to be roughhewn, even inarticulate, just three months ago. Anand Kumar, a daily wage labourer, would beat his daughter saying, “Read. READ. You have to learn English.”
Humiliated, Lavanya sat up awake at nights, writing English letters, words, and their phonic sounds in long-flowing Kannada, her mother tongue, in which pronunciation is easier to set forth. She transferred the content from one language to another, she wrote the words down and read them in Kannada, memorised sounds, combinations of sounds, pronunciations. And now here she is.

“When I saw her three months ago, Lavanya was finding it extremely difficult to read. She could not manage even simple words,” says Nalini of the Swalpa English Thumba Fun Resource Team. “She came up to me and said, ‘I want to read. I want to learn phonics. I want to learn English,’ and in one month she had achieved it. The next time I was at the school she showed me the book in which she had written it all in Kannada and told me how her father used to beat her for not knowing how to read English.”

Looking at Lavanya sitting there in the airy verandah – that’s her classroom - teaching the other children English from the programme’s Teacher’s Manual, it is difficult to ignore the tears and pain that must be an indelible part of her proficiency. “This is a cat. It is a fat cat......The rat saw the cat......” She gets her peers to respond with actions.
It says as much about her character as of her English skills. She is hardworking, but that cannot be the last word about Lavanya. She is obedient, without a trace of rebellion.

That would not suffice either. Her father’s desperate, high-handed, aspirational anxiety, that English literacy might mean better prospects for his daughter, motivated her. Her ignorance and her inability, more than the punishment she was meted, stung her to the quick and far from putting her off, strengthened her resolve, helping her rebound with all that she was capable of, which is grit and determination.

The Akshara team believes that, given an environment to grow and flourish, Lavanya can pull herself out of her self-limiting socio-economic circumstances and discover her true inner potential.
SECTION 4: Measuring Impact – Learning Outcomes

This section unpacks evidences of the learning outcomes of children who were exposed to Akshara’s English programmes. The learning outcomes are the result of adaptation to the classroom strategies suggested by Akshara’s programmes, the usage of TLMs and the extensive capacity building of teachers to teach English. The section collates the evidences from different studies, both internal and external, and presents an analysis of data collected by Akshara’s research team. **Swalpa English Thumba Fun** was evaluated by the in-house team as well as a third-party research agency. The learning outcomes of **EASY English** were analysed by Akshara’s research team.

4.1 EVIDENCE FROM IN-HOUSE RESEARCH

Akshara Foundation designed and executed a longitudinal research for three years to evaluate the effectiveness of **Swalpa English Thumba Fun** right from the beginning, just before the implementation of the programme, i.e. from 2011-12 to 2013-14. The objective of the research was to study the longitudinal$^{13}$ effect of **SETF** by selecting a representative cluster of schools. The methodology employed was a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques. The framework followed was the controlled before-and-after design in which beneficiaries of **SETF** were compared with non-beneficiaries. The learning assessments of children in grades 1-IV and classroom observations were carried out thrice every year. Outcome variables were measured at the baseline, midline and end-line in both treatment and control groups to record the change.

Data was collected on school profile, classroom processes and learning outcomes. The research was conducted by Akshara’s internal research team. A sample of two clusters drawn from the educational blocks where **SETF** was being implemented was designated the treatment cluster$^{14}$ and another cluster from an adjacent block was selected as the control cluster$^{15}$.

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14 Where **Swalpa English Thumba Fun** was implemented.
15 Where **Swalpa English Thumba Fun** was not implemented.
SECTION 4: Measuring Impact – Learning Outcomes

All the schools of the two cluster sets were considered as samples for the study. The Akshara team developed tools to collect school and teacher information and established classroom observation guidelines and testing principles. The overall evaluation structure was based on two dominant aspects — child assessments and classroom observations.

Nine assessments were administered across three academic years for grades I to IV. The test scores and qualitative data from the schools under the two groups were compared. Data quality checks were conducted to ensure the quality of data. Logistical checks were embedded into the survey form to triangulate information.

Team leaders were allocated two enumerators per school whose primary responsibility was to plan the field work, supervise and track the process and to do unannounced spot-checks/visits to observe data collection, mitigate violations and report on them, as well as to monitor the tasks.

A control sheet was developed to track the protocols. Any reported violations in protocols were discussed with the field team on a daily basis. The survey formats and filled test papers were cross-checked once every two days.

KEY FINDINGS

1. A majority of the English teachers had studied in Kannada medium schools and had less exposure to English during their own education.

2. It was found that the transaction time of an English class in grades I to III varied between 30 and 57 minutes, and between 28 and 47 minutes in grade IV.

3. It was evident that capacity building of teachers is a gradual process and if they felt that the programme was useful and made their life easy in the classroom then there was a higher possibility of them appreciating and implementing it in class.
4. Teachers’ in-depth interviews in treatment schools revealed high satisfaction with Akshara’s TLMs, and they requested for more support in improving their English-speaking skills and materials like audio or video cassettes. In fact, teachers from the control group eagerly requested for ‘Akshara’s English kit’.

5. From the findings it is evident that the intervention had a positive impact on the English learning outcomes of students. The mean scores were higher in treatment schools than in control schools, across all classes, in all three years of the study, with improvement in scores ranging from 1–25 percentage points in Year 1, 19–37 percentage points in Year 2, and 15–38 percentage points in Year 3.

6. The cohort analysis showed that children with three years of exposure performed well in comparison with their counterparts. The findings indicate that multi-year exposure is beneficial to children in enhancing learning outcomes.

4.2 EVIDENCE FROM THIRD PARTY EVALUATION BY CMDR - 2012-2015

In 2012 Akshara Foundation commissioned a Third Party Evaluation by the research institute, the Centre for Multi-Disciplinary Development Research\(^\text{16}\) (http://www.cmdr.ac.in/) to examine the effect of Akshara’s classroom intervention on English teaching and learning. The effect of the programme was evaluated in terms of teacher training, usage of the TLMs and the classroom strategies it suggested to understand if all of it led to improvements in the English skills of students.

The evaluation followed a methodology of examining the impact of the Akshara intervention in government schools where the programme was being

implemented, which was the treatment cluster, and compared it with the government schools without the intervention, the control cluster, over a period of three years from 2012 to 2015. The data was collected in two phases\textsuperscript{17} every year. The study followed a cohort of students over the three-year period. The overall research findings are based on the data collected on components like classroom processes, learning outcomes and perceptions in both treatment and control schools.

**KEY FINDINGS**

The analysis of the learning outcomes of children in grades I, II, III and IV shows that the Akshara initiative made a positive impact on classroom transactions and the performance of students. Tests were conducted to assess the listening, speaking, reading and writing proficiencies of the students in both treatment and control schools to understand the impact of the Akshara initiative across six phases, i.e., in the beginning and the end of each academic year starting from 2012-13 till 2014-15.

Oral tests were administered for grade 1, oral tests and identification of letters for grade II, and oral and graded reading and written tests for grade IV. The performance of children across the grades is shown below:

1. More than 90 percent of the teachers in the research component had completed their education in Kannada medium schools. Despite that, teachers from treatment schools were better in: speaking in English, translating English words to Kannada and Kannada to English, enthusiasm, making connections to real life, attitude towards children and motivational levels as compared to those in control schools. With regards to following the timetable, display of timetable, usage of TLMs, display of English charts and activities in the classroom, treatment schools were better in all the phases than the non-Akshara or control schools. Classroom transactions were found to be better in treatment schools and as the intervention progressed they improved.

\textsuperscript{17} Each cycle of assessment was defined as a phase. Two assessments were administered in an academic year as baseline and end-line. As a result, there were six phases of assessments administered across three academic years.
2. The overall average learning outcomes of students in treatment schools were in the range of 50%. However, the learning outcomes of students from grades III and IV in treatment schools were significantly better as compared to the control schools and they were found to progressively improve over the phases. The programme effect was visible as outcomes yielded higher results over the phases, particularly in the 5th and 6th phase.

3. Students in the slab of 50 to 75 marks performed better as compared to their counterparts in control schools. The proportion of students getting lesser marks in English was low in the case of the treatment schools.

4. The study found that Akshara's initiative had made a positive impact on classroom transactions and hence on the performance of students as well. Akshara students were found to be performing well as compared to the non-Akshara students in the control group. A higher proportion of treatment students were found in the > 75 percentage bracket in all the three years of intervention.

4.3 EVIDENCES ON EASY ENGLISH

The evidences presented below reflect the learning outcomes of children and the teacher assessments in schools selected from the programme pool. The content for EASY English was developed in a sequence. Content for grade I rolled out in 2016-17 in two clusters of Bangalore Rural district. In 2017-18 Akshara implemented the content for grade II in the same schools.

In 2018-19, content for grade III was designed and applied to the same schools in Bangalore Rural district. In the same year, the programme was extended with content for grades I to III in two clusters in Chikkaballapur district. As a result, there were two clusters which were exposed to the programme for three years in Bangalore Rural district and two clusters which were exposed to the programme for one year in Chikkaballapur district.
**Data Collection and Tools**

To get a sense of the effectiveness of the programme, Akshara’s research team selected a statistically identical cluster in both the districts as the control group. Outcomes were measured at baseline and end-line in both treatment and control groups to record the change. Analysis was carried out to see the learning outcomes of students and teachers across the treatment and control schools for the year 2018-19.

The analysis presented below is based on the data collected from baseline and end-line tests conducted for all the children as well as teachers in an academic year for the treatment and control groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coverage</th>
<th>Treatment group</th>
<th>Control group</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of Clusters</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of Schools</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Teachers</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of students assessed</td>
<td>614</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>981</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The target groups were stratified and drawn from the 2 districts where the programme was implemented. The team developed testing tools for the Student Assessment Test (SAT) around listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

In the Teacher Assessment Test (TAT) the competencies tested were listening, speaking, reading, writing and grammar.
As explained earlier two sets of data were collected from the schools.

1. Schools which were progressively exposed to the programme as content was developed (two years of exposure) - from Bangalore Rural district.
Tests were administered to both students and teachers across the treatment and control groups for two years.

2. Schools that were exposed to the programme with a complete set of content for grades I to III (one year of exposure) - from Chikkaballapur district. Tests were administered to both students and teachers across the treatment and control groups for one year.

The analysis reported below includes the student and teacher assessments and the cohort assessment of students and teachers who were exposed to the programme for one and two years.

**KEY FINDINGS**

**4.3.1 STUDENTS’ ASSESSMENTS - COMPARING TREATMENT WITH CONTROL**

The tests for students were administered both manually and on the Tab. A total of 981 students studying in grades I, II and III from 77 schools were tested.

The data was analysed across the pre- and post-test cycles in both treatment and control groups. The graph on the next page shows that the treatment students performed much better as compared to the control.

The treatment group’s scores in all the three grades were almost two and three times higher as compared to the control groups’ indicating the effect of the programme (see Figures 1, 2 and 3).

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18 From Bangalore Rural and Chikkaballapur districts
### SECTION 4: Measuring Impact – Learning Outcomes

#### Fig-1 Learning Outcomes, Post-test scores of Grade I Students, 2018-19 (in %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Listening</th>
<th>Speaking</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Fig-2 Learning Outcomes, Post-test scores of Grade II Students, 2018-19 (in %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Listening</th>
<th>Speaking</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Fig-3 Learning Outcomes, Post-test scores of Grade III Students, 2018-19 (in %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Listening</th>
<th>Speaking</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 4.3.2 STUDENTS’ ASSESSMENTS - COHORT ANALYSIS

The cohort analysis was carried out to examine the continuity of the children’s performance from year one to year three of the intervention. The mean scores of students from grades I, II and III for the treatment and control groups for the years in the data collection period, 2016-17, 2017-18 and 2018-19, in Bangalore Rural district were analyzed.

| Table 1: Comparison between control and treatment groups for cohort (in grades I, II and III) |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Treatment ($n_1 = 38$) | Control ($n_2 = 60$) |
| **Year 1 (Grade I)** | **Year 2 (Grade II)** | **Year 3 (Grade III)** |
| Test | Mean | Median | SD | Mean | Median | SD | Mean | Median | SD | Z-value | P-value |
| Baseline | 28.8 | 30 | 21.8 | NA | NA | NA | -7.9 | 0.00** |
| End-line | 87.6 | 92.5 | 16.1 | 56.7 | 60 | 22.2 | -6.3 | 0.00** |
| Baseline | 27 | 25 | 13.2 | 18.3 | 15 | 10.5 | -3.3 | 0.00** |
| End-line | 70.9 | 70 | 9.4 | 26.6 | 20 | 16.1 | -8 | 0.00** |
| Baseline | 34 | 30 | 15 | 30.5 | 30 | 13.3 | -1.1 | 0.25 |
| End-line | 75.8 | 85 | 20.9 | 30.3 | 30 | 12.8 | -7.4 | 0.00** |

The statistical analysis demonstrated above shows that the cohort which was exposed to the intervention for three years (i.e those who were in grade I in 2016-17, moved to grade II in 2017-18 and to grade III in 2018-19) showed significant improvement as compared to that of the control group (see Table 1).

As children moved to higher grades, the cohort showed an improvement in test scores in the treatment schools. The mean scores across the grades were higher in the treatment group as compared to that in the control group.

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19 For cohort analysis schools from the Jadigenahalli cluster were considered as the treatment group and schools from the Tavarekere cluster as the control group. Both fall under Hoskote block, Bangalore Rural district.
4.3.3 TEACHER ASSESSMENT

The data for 2018-19 was analysed across two groups of teachers based on their years of exposure. Teachers who were exposed to the programme from 2016-17 were labelled as teachers at the Advanced level and teachers who were exposed to the programme only in 2018-19 were labelled as teachers at the Basic level.

The tests administered to the groups and the test tools were designed around the basic competencies.

The above graph shows the pre- and post-test results administered to teachers at both Advanced and Basic levels.

The data shows that there was a significant difference in the outcomes of teachers between the pre- and post-tests across all competencies in both the groups.
TEACHER ASSESSMENT - COMPARING TREATMENT WITH CONTROL

The analysis was carried out for teachers from the treatment and control groups for the year 2018-19. It considered teachers from the Basic and Advanced levels and compared them with the unexposed or control group to see the effect.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency</th>
<th>Treatment (N=24)</th>
<th>Control (N=13)</th>
<th>z value</th>
<th>p value</th>
<th>Basic Level</th>
<th>Treatment (N=24)</th>
<th>Control (N=12)</th>
<th>z value</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening &amp; Speaking</td>
<td>86.5</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>-3.5</td>
<td>0.00**</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td>-2.9</td>
<td>0.00**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>55.8</td>
<td>-3.2</td>
<td>0.00**</td>
<td>85.8</td>
<td>63.3</td>
<td>-2.8</td>
<td>0.00**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>82.3</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>-4.3</td>
<td>0.00**</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>-3.01</td>
<td>0.00**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>66.1</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>-4.1</td>
<td>0.00**</td>
<td>79.2</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>-2.5</td>
<td>0.01*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>78.8</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>-4.4</td>
<td>0.00**</td>
<td>82.1</td>
<td>60.4</td>
<td>-3.2</td>
<td>0.00**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table (Table-2) clearly shows that the gap between treatment and control group teachers widened as they moved from Basic to Advanced levels of training. Teachers from the treatment group at Basic level were scoring 82% as against 60% in control schools. But the comparison of teachers at the Advanced level shows that control school teachers were at 44% and treatment school teachers at 79%.

What we find is that the learning outcomes of teachers and children from the treatment group were statistically significant as compared to the control group. The cohort analyses of both children and teachers showed that the longer the exposure the better the results.
The public schooling system has many challenges. Teachers in government schools are generalists, not specialists, not qualified to teach a subject with confident authority. There is multi-grade teaching they have to contend with, and they lack the strategies to manage a multi-level system of combined classes. Their exposure to English is acutely limited. These are some of their limitations.

It is evident that along with enhancing the capacity of the teacher, trainings should also focus on their beliefs regarding teaching English. A closer look at the data on classroom observations showed that many factors are at work, and these factors cannot be controlled or easily influenced. However, the success of a particular practice depends on the teacher’s appreciation of the rationale for the proposed practice. Some teachers of the treatment group appreciated this over a period of time. Teachers from the control group eagerly requested for “Akshara’s English kit.”

Teachers appreciated Akshara’s training and found it useful. They would have liked it extended to subsequent years and were quick to acknowledge their low English language capabilities. It was evident that teachers would benefit from regular and sustained exposure to language acquisition starting with basic interpersonal communication skills.

The longitudinal research showed that the print-rich intervention of Swalpa English Thumba Fun had a positive impact on the learning outcomes of students. The mean scores were higher in the treatment schools across all the grades. The digital technology and face-to-face workshops of EASY English developed in teachers and Cluster Resource Persons better skills in English communication. The EASY English App made a great impact on English language learning. Hence, Akshara believes it can be widely used.
**Individualised face-to-face** workshops have better impact. Akshara’s training gave it momentum. Every teacher was made to speak and actively engage in the workshops. This enhanced their self-confidence and made them empowered speakers. Staggered, month-wise workshops equipped teachers more than clustered trainings of longer periods once in a year.

Setting up of clear goals at the beginning of the academic year via baseline assessments gave direction to the teachers. The digital intervention enabled the storage of actual usage data from each school in the back-end server the Tab is connected to. A record of user journeys was compiled every time the Tab was used. Sharing this collected body of data with teachers during the workshops highlighted transparency and held them accountable for their classroom transactions.

The capacity building of CRPs made it easy for them to facilitate on-site classroom demonstrations and monthly follow-ups with adequate **scaffolding** to empower teachers with better spoken English skills. The capacity building of CRPs was critical in ensuring quality implementation.

The assessments showed that the digital device made a difference and had a positive impact on students and teachers’ learning outcomes. The cohort analysis in both the programmes revealed that major improvements could be predicted when the period of scaffolding was longer. The children exposed to the intervention at entry level had a greater advantage. Students were more enthusiastic to learn English through digital technology.

Hence it would be a great tool to use with rural children to enhance their English communication skills. It was found that improvements in transactional skills amongst the early graders were possible with the use of the Tab and child-friendly interactive content. The transportability of the digital device was found suitable for the classroom and gave a personalised learning experience to both teachers and students.
To sum up, learning outcomes are influenced by multiple factors, but above all, teacher competency, teaching strategies and scaffolding are important.

Akshara’s English programmes identified the gaps in teaching English as a subject in government schools by a teacher who is often a first-generation English learner herself and provided solutions without disturbing the textbook framework prescribed by government.

The programmes focused on the development of teaching-learning materials supportive of the Department of Education’s textbook and syllabus and the capacity building of English teachers and supervisory staff.

Akshara ran the programmes with in-built measurement indicators and community participation as key components. While digital tools alone may come in handy too, technology-based tools combined with a print-rich environment and constant support to the teacher will enable the language learning process to become more meaningful and long-lasting.

Akshara Foundation’s household survey on the access and use of smartphones and perceptions about them in rural Karnataka revealed that the penetration of digital devices remains a challenge in villages where economic factors govern access and affordability.

While digital learning tools could aid the teaching-learning process for some, they could also introduce a new layer of inequality in education for the digitally excluded. Technology’s functionality is not in question here, but its practical application for all may be some way away.

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LINK TO RESOURCES: