



In the Spotlight

If the teacher enjoys teaching, students will enjoy learning: Viswanath G S

Raghvendra Herle

Viswanath G S is currently a Kannada Language Teacher and the Headmaster in charge at the Government Higher Primary School, Nagarthapet, Sindhi, Bengaluru South. He is known for the innovative processes he brings to his classes. He treats all the children who come to his class from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds with respect and instils self-confidence so that they do not hesitate to use their mother tongue. At the same time, they learn the Kannada language, which is new to them. He effectively uses the school library to support this.

Vishvanath GS is the author of four books. These include two editions of poetry— *Chaukabara* and *Edeya Danige Kiviya Gona*, a collection of short stories – *Mukhavadagalu Mattu Itara Kathegalu*, and *Samanya Gyana* – a book on general knowledge. He has edited two books – *Janapada Ayisiri* and *Sampreeti*. A recipient of the Bengaluru South District Best Teacher Award (2014), and Karnataka State Workers Association's Sahitya Ratna Award in 2016, Vishvanath GS has worked as the Honorary Secretary of Bengaluru City District Kannada Literature Council as well.

For this column, Raghvendra Herle (RH) had a conversation with Vishvanath GS (VGS) on the creative methodology that the latter brings to his class. Following are the excerpts from the conversation.

RH: What are the new initiatives that you have taken as a teacher in your class?

VGS: Each day, I attempt to keep the class vibrant and alive as much as I can. I plan activities that are interesting for the students. For instance, making use of various songs to introduce tonal variation according to the nature of the text, and getting the class to enact plays like *Panjara Shale* (caged school) and *Billa Habba* (festival of the bow). All this demands a creative thought process in the teacher, which is necessary to break the monotony of the teaching-learning process. While teaching poems like *Hacchevu Kannadada Deepa* (we will light the lamp of Kannada), *Huttari Haadu* (song of harvest) etc., I use diverse ways of reciting poetry and singing. Then, I motivate the children to recite and sing in multiple ways. Whether the text is prose or verse, I deploy the technique of enactment. It can be mono-acting or several children acting out the text. Depending on the requirements of the lesson, I try to include questions on general knowledge, comprehension, reference to context, or explanatory and application-based questions.



Figure 1: The author (R) in conversation with Vishwanath GS.

“ The process of teaching should proceed from simple to complex. Linkages between the child's internal world and the world outside have to be established. Language and literature play a very significant role in this. ”

My primary objective is to ensure that the teacher enjoys teaching a chapter or poem, while students derive pleasure from the learning experience. It is evident that when a teacher lacks enthusiasm for teaching, students are likely to lose interest in learning.

While teaching grammar, I ensure that students are not overwhelmed with multiple grammatical concepts simultaneously. Instead, I provide them with sufficient time to engage with each concept, allowing for a structured learning process. Rather than simply sharing my knowledge of grammar, I encourage students to discover practical examples independently. When teaching drama, I place a strong emphasis on immersion (the actor getting into the heart and mind of the character), stress and tonal variations. I can put across to the children the joy of a text only when I enjoy reading it myself.

RH: To improve the learning of students, what methods and techniques can be employed through the teaching of language and literature?

VGS: The process of teaching should proceed from simple to complex. Linkages between the child's internal world and the world outside have to be established. Language and literature play a very significant role in this respect. I make good use of the school library, which has more than 5000 books. We must transform the library into a learning resource for the children. I make use of the *Reading Corner* in my class systematically for supplementary learning by encouraging students to read the books of their choice and recording this in a register. Further, I encourage them to speak about the poem, story or essay they have read. I motivate them to write down their feelings and impressions. From the library, I borrow critical works and book reviews that are suitable for my students and exhibit them for the children to notice. I ask them to collect the details about writers and their texts, to collect proverbs and to create a file/book (handmade) of such collections. Developing their skill for collecting material and information is very important. I entrust the children with the responsibility of celebrating Independence Day, Children's Day, Teachers' Day, Sports Day and other cultural events at school and make sure that they manage the events successfully. During the annual and mid-term holidays, I encourage students to write a diary and ask them to read it to the class when they return to school. The teaching of language and literature has an effective role in developing the comprehension, expression and creativity of children.

RH: What methods and means do you use to develop the literary interests of students inside as well as outside your class? Do you think that such literary interests would prove helpful for their holistic learning and managing school activities?

VGS: I have already mentioned the activities designed for the classroom. As for outside activities, I have taken my students to Freedom Park to stage the play, *Sangoli Rayanna*. Every year, for the Annual Day Celebration, I have my students enact a drama under my direction. I also provide them with guidance for participating in singing competitions of *Pratibha Karanji* (talent competition).

I have written a play, *Putani Picnic* (children's picnic), for children and am going to have my students enact it for this year's Annual School Day celebration. I believe that such experiments and activities have a positive impact on their literary interests. I have seen students benefitting greatly from such activities. In this context, I miss my mentor, Kannada teacher, Mahalingaiya, who influenced me greatly in my high school days.

RH: In the context of students in government schools, especially in a multilingual environment, how can we resolve their problems of, and barriers to, language learning?

VGS: In every class in our school, we have children whose parents are natives of Bihar, Nepal or various other Hindi-speaking regions. These children face difficulties in learning the Kannada language. To start with, I encourage them to talk to their Kannada-speaking classmates.

The other important thing is to accept their oral expressions as valid, whichever language they choose to communicate in. This includes the use of body language and gestures. Once they attempt to speak in Kannada, I focus on their pronunciation. I adopt positive reinforcement, repeatedly, to get them to acclimatise to our linguistic environment. I remember how, once, a boy from Nepal by the name of Bishal Kumar learnt excellent Kannada in my class. He still calls me and speaks with me in Kannada over the phone. He is doing a diploma in engineering.

More important than our efforts is the collaborative engagement of students from different linguistic backgrounds. It is essential that our native students interact with their peers from different language backgrounds with respect and kindness, thereby cultivating a welcoming environment.

RH: In today's context, what kind of challenges do language teachers have at the primary level? How can they overcome those challenges?

VGS: The greatest challenge faced at the primary level is the multilingual environment. Teachers must acknowledge this fact while teaching, ensuring that it does not become an obstacle to their teaching. Also, many teachers are not aware of the different approaches to teaching texts and often fail to notice the areas where they can use demonstrations. There is a need for them to engage in creative exploration, both personally and professionally. They must learn to break free from conventional thinking to innovate beyond established models. Additionally, there is a need to appreciate texts through the enhancement and recreation of knowledge.

RH: Our policy documents state that the medium of teaching at the primary level should be the home language. What do you think about this? How do you fundamentally view various teacher training programmes, workshops and professional development programmes? What is your opinion on the practical capabilities and effectiveness of their implementation and accountability?

VGS: According to me the home language should be the language/medium of instruction at the primary level because it is the home language that resonates deeply with the children. Regardless of the language we engage with, our understanding is fundamentally shaped by our home language. This familiarity fosters the growth of our vocabulary and enhances our language skills. It acts as the primary tool through which we navigate our daily interactions. The home language will always form the cornerstone of education upon which we can construct our linguistic framework.

When it comes to teacher training programmes, these days, numerous subject-specific training programmes are conducted. However, by the time these programmes are integrated into the school setting, their anticipated outcomes have often changed. It is essential that new programmes are introduced only after evaluating the success of the existing ones, taking into account both their impact, as well as their shortcomings. When many programmes are launched simultaneously, it leads to confusion among the teachers. Training programmes must align with the actual needs of the classroom; they should not be just theoretical but also be effective practically. They should include the preparation of teaching aids and demonstration of teaching. Emphasis should be on ground-level responses more than on a higher quest for knowledge. Instead of having several training programmes, there should be just one or two that are of excellent quality. There is a need for evolving a mechanism that would examine the realisation, at the classroom level, of what is learnt by the teacher in a training programme.

RH: How does the school management contribute to the learning process of students? In this regard, what unique steps have you taken on an individual level?

VGS: The head teacher is like an oarsman leader who has to work hard to direct the work of creating a learning atmosphere for the children and the teachers that is different from the ordinary. It is essential for the head teacher to possess strong administrative capabilities, as well as the ability to mobilise resources and foster the development of the school.

During my tenure as headmaster, I have invited several resource persons to enhance the educational experience for students in both curricular and co-curricular activities. I recognise that the daily operations of the school are as crucial as the annual educational plan, and I have given equal significance to both. Effective daily activities contribute to the quality of the annual plan. I have also taken the help of donors to buy computers and other infrastructure materials for the school. I have the confidence that I have worked hard and successfully to strengthen the learning atmosphere of the school in a well-disciplined environment.

Translated from Kannada to English by Ganesh U H; English to Hindi by Nalini Ravel; Hindi to English by Eklavya, Bhopal



Raghavendra Herle is a member of the Kannada Translation Team of Azim Premji University, Bengaluru. He is also a member of the Kannada Initiative Team and the Editorial Team of *Pathshala*.

Contact: Raghavendra.herle@azimpremjifoundation.org