

PUSHPA SHUKLA

NOMINEE NAME:

Pushpa Shukla

Organization Name:

LLF (Language and Learning Foundation)

Location:

Raipur

Field:

Education

Age:

35 years

Education:

M.A. in Hindi and D. Ed

Years of Experience:

16

Name of proposing organization:

LLF (Language and Learning Foundation)



INTRODUCTION

Pushpa Shukla is a hardworking and innovative grassroots-level social change maker born in a remote tribal village in Kansinghi, Chhattisgarh in 1982. Despite her father's non-supportive attitude towards girls' education and systemic challenges that could not let Pushpa excel in her studies to become a doctor, Pushpa's unwavering commitment to providing equal opportunities to every child from rural Chhattisgarh did not falter. Instead, she rose to the challenge and created online tools and resources that benefited more than 10,000 students, 200 school headmasters, and over 1,600 assistant teachers, among others.

She has silently been working over the past 16 years, creating a space where every child, regardless of their background, has access to quality education. Today, she is a name that resonates with impact and change in the field of education.

Her work in improving the foundational literacy levels of children in the most underprivileged and remote corners of Chhattisgarh has brought about a change in the Basic Education System of Chhattisgarh State, benefiting close to 7.5 lakh students and parents both directly and indirectly by increasing the enrolment and retention rates exponentially. As a Core Group member of the State Council of Education Research and Training, Pushpa has helped develop innovative Teacher Learning Material (TLM), equipped teachers from remote belts with essential skills and helped students access quality education. Her training on numerical knowledge, basic education, education policy, and language training has also benefited thousands of teachers, research scholars, and community members.

Growing up in a remote tribal village of Chhattisgarh, her own experience with weak foundational learning has made her an advocate for the importance of education. She knows that

that being able to read with meaning and do basic arithmetic are gateway skills that equip children to learn better in later grades. Despite her father's non-supportive attitude towards girls' education and cultural and societal norms limiting her access to education, she has managed to empower over 25,000 teachers from different states through her WhatsApp group, where innovative teaching and learning techniques are shared.

Pushpa's future plans involve creating a robust foundation for young students in the first two standards. She intends to accomplish this by prioritizing mother tongue education and conducting teacher workshops to improve their capabilities, with technology playing a significant role. Additionally, Pushpa plans to establish experimental labs on language and mathematics to foster innovation in education. She also aims to refine her skills as a trainer while concentrating on her own personal growth by creating training modules that address gender discrimination and promote education for all children.



NOMINEE'S JOURNEY

Born into a whirlwind of challenges.

Hailing from Chaura village in Rewa district, Pushpa was brought up in the Kansinghi tribal village of Chhattisgarh. Being the eldest of three siblings in a landless Brahmin household, her life was fraught with difficulties.

Despite her father's efforts to earn a living, his meagre income of ₹120 per month was insufficient to meet their basic needs, and the family grew up on simple meals of daal chawal.

Unfortunately, Pushpa's orthodox father refused to let her mother work as an Anganwadi worker, which would have not only added to the family's income but also provided her with some financial

independence. Instead, he humiliated and abused her for requesting necessities. She recalls her father on one occasion beating her mother black and blue for requesting a saree – this particular incident has scarred her such that she has always remained determined to never be financially dependent on anyone.

Despite her mother's acceptance of her fate, Pushpa was determined to pursue further education and achieve financial independence to care for her mother.

Struggle for education

Pushpa aspired to become a doctor, but she faced numerous hurdles along the way. She lacked teachers and resources to excel in Maths and Science. Her inconsistent schooling and lack of support at home didn't help either. In the 9th grade, she failed her Maths exam, prompting her to enrol in an open school to complete her 10th-grade exams. Her father, who was initially not that invested in her education and never supportive of her tuition,

eventually had a change of heart due to her relentless persistence and sought help from a friend to tutor her in Maths. However, the tutoring experience too turned out to be unpleasant as the tutor belittled her progress.

Additionally, she had to walk to school for three kilometers in ill-fitting clothes while rich girls rode bicycles, making her feel ashamed. However, her confidante, Manda ma'am, supported and encouraged her until Pushpa's inability to pay her fees cut short their relationship – an event which would go on further to strengthen her resolve towards working to promote the education of underprivileged children, knowing first-hand the struggles that come with a lack of support.

Somehow, she managed to complete her 10th grade. Post the completion of her higher secondary schooling, she was sent to Rewa to care for her ailing grandmother, who lived with her uncle's family. Pushpa's desire to study science was thwarted once again as there were no schools in the area that offered science, forcing her to take up Humanities. Despite these obstacles, she became the first girl in her family to finish schooling and go on to enrol in college.

A new beginning – the onset of the next phase

A new beginning – the onset of the next phase Pushpa faced rejection and financial difficulties while living with her uncle's family in Rewa. Her father sent little money, assuming their farm produce was enough to sustain them. Despite this, she worked hard, helping with house chores and farm activities.

Every other year, their family would be shifted

to another uncle's house, adding to their stress and discomfort. After years of facing rejection and feeling like a burden, Pushpa and her family returned to Chhattisgarh to live with her father in 2002. Pushpa's brother was able to continue his education with support from their father, but Pushpa and her sister were told to stay at home. The disappointment and distress of being told she couldn't work only fuelled Pushpa's desire to prove herself.

Despite her father's initial resistance, Pushpa persisted and eventually convinced him to give her Rs 500 to learn embroidery. With this new skill, she was able to earn an income for herself, but her dream of becoming a teacher still burned within her.

When she heard of a requirement at a nearby school for a Hindi Teacher, she grabbed the



opportunity and started her journey as a Hindi teacher. She continued to learn and grow, eventually mastering computer skills and even borrowing money from friends to apply for a government teaching job in a State Primary Shala (School) at Dewanmuda of Deobhog block 2009. With her monthly salary of ₹1500, she was able to complete computer classes and embrace digital teaching.

A rocky start

Pushpa's journey towards becoming a teacher was not without its challenges. Her posting in Dewanmuda of Deobhog block on the border of Odisha and Chhattisgarh required a gruelling 9-10 hour bus journey over difficult terrain. Add to it the school's lack of resources and inadequate teachers. Undeterred, Pushpa began her mission to revamp the education system.

Despite not speaking the local language, she made it her mission to bridge the communication gap between herself, her students, and their parents. She started by learning the Sambalpuri language and visiting families after school hours to discuss the progress of their children. By transforming one-

-way communication into two-way communication, she was able to foster a sense of community and collaboration between the school and the families. Through engagement in games and free after-school classes, Pushpa was able to increase the attendance of absentee students from 8 to 34.

Her engagement with the community went beyond just the students. She also counselled impoverished, illiterate, and indifferent parents on the importance of education, resulting in previously absent students attending school regularly.

Pushpa's tireless efforts and dedication as a teacher paid off as she was eventually transferred to State Primary School, Karchiya, where she continued to work until 2022 with the Language and Learning Foundation (LLF). Her remarkable work at the foundation level was highly appreciated and she was offered a position with the State Council of Education and Training in Raipur. In her new role, she was responsible for creating Teacher

Learning Modules (TLM), training modules, course materials, and educational videos.

Currently, Pushpa provides training on numerical knowledge, basic education, education policy, and language training to the State Council of Education Research and Training and the District Education Department. She has become a mentor to teaching staff and provides a comprehensive 360-degree training approach to all stakeholders. Her ultimate goal is to improve the foundational learning of children studying in classes 1-2 and she continues to work towards this objective with great passion and enthusiasm.

THE PROBLEM

The state of education in rural India is a cause for concern, as highlighted by the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2020. The report revealed that a majority of children between the ages of 4-8 years are unable to read a class-appropriate text in their mother tongue or language and solve basic mathematical problems. The shortage of trained teachers in the country, as per a study by the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), exacerbates the problem. In Chhattisgarh, where Raipur is located, a significant percentage of primary and upper primary school teachers have not received in-service teacher training, as reported by the District Information System for Education (DISE) in 2017-18.

The report also highlighted those remote tribal areas in Odisha and Chhattisgarh, in particular, suffer from a lack of access to quality education and infrastructure facilities in schools, leading to a high dropout rate, teacher absenteeism, and poor implementation of multilingual education programs.

Several factors, including the language barrier, physical barriers, the economic condition of

families, parental attitudes towards education, and teacher absenteeism contribute to the challenges faced by students in these areas.

DESCRIPTION OF NOMINEE'S WORK

Pushpa has overcome numerous obstacles, including poverty, lack of resources, language barriers, and cultural biases, to improve the quality of education for children in rural and tribal areas. Her willingness to learn and adapt, as well as her ability to engage with the community, were key factors in enabling her to make a difference in the education sector.

Her efforts have contributed to the overall development of the education system in Chhattisgarh, inspiring educators and aspiring change-makers everywhere.

From private school to government school

Pushpa's journey towards becoming a teacher began after she finished 12th standard. She joined a private school in Rewa, run by her uncle, where she taught Hindi to young children.

Her posting at a government school in a remote area on the border of Chhattisgarh and Odisha, was considered a "punishment posting" due to its difficult terrain and the fact that most students were first-generation learners. The school was in poor condition, and there were few resources available. The language barrier between the students, who spoke Sambalpuri, and the medium of instruction, Hindi, further complicated matters.

To tackle these problems, she transformed one-way communication into two-way communication by learning the native language, leading to a significant improvement in the children's performance and enjoyment of learning. Pushpa created a Sambalpuri Dictionary with the help of the cook in the school. By teaching the students in their native language, she improved their performance and made learning more enjoyable for them. She also developed creative games to make foundational concepts more engaging. She also opened up her home for her students, and taught them concepts through daily activities that she engaged in. Additionally, she counselled and engaged with the community, resulting in the regular attendance of previously absent students from impoverished, illiterate, and indifferent families.

Creating a Conducive Learning Environment

With a focus on creating a conducive learning environment, she worked tirelessly to improve everything from the classroom to the washroom. Her attention to improving the classroom environment with charts, slogans, and portraits of national heroes paid dividends in the form of a more engaged student body. She went a step further, working with the community to improve the sanitary conditions in the classroom and washroom.

But Pushpa didn't stop there. She made sure that all students, including the physically challenged and differently-abled, had equal access to education. Through storytelling, music, dance, and acting, she helped three children continue their education up to the fifth standard.

Pushpa's dedication to the rights of the children led her to fight for the regularity of the Mid-Day Meal Programme, which was previously irregular and sometimes not provided. By streamlining the program, she not only ensured that the children

received their meals but also brought them back to school.

Her efforts and success in improving student engagement levels caught the attention of the Language and Learning Foundation (LLF), which recognized her impact and offered her a role in their program.

Developed Innovative Pedagogy for Better Learning Outcomes

Pushpa's passion for teaching extended to her role at LLF, where she introduced a unique approach to student-centric learning that saw significant improvements in learning outcomes. She incorporated various engaging tools, from Teaching Learning Materials (TLM) to puppets, to create a more interactive learning environment. Her emphasis on oral language development and decoding skills allowed students to read and write at a higher level, with better retention and understanding of concepts.

Pushpa's commitment to adapting to new teaching strategies was evident in her participation in various training sessions organized by the education department and NGOs. She created her own training modules using audio-visuals, songs, and dance to engage students in language training. Her innovative techniques resulted in improved attendance and enthusiasm among students, and her methods have been integrated into the New Education Policy. Through her efforts, Pushpa established strong relationships with colleagues and the community to create a supportive environment for student success.

Established Collaboration with Government Bodies in Education

Pushpa's expertise in teaching and her outstanding work in education have made her a State/District Resource Person who trains teachers on numerical knowledge, basic education, language training, and education policy. Through her work with the State Council of Educational Research & Training (SCERT), Pushpa has trained countless teachers and resource group members on foundational education, language training, and education policy. She has also collaborated with UNICEF, Room to Read, and government institutions to create teaching and learning materials in local languages, benefiting students across the state.

Her exceptional teaching skills, including the use of innovative techniques such as storytelling, poster writing, games, and puppets, have earned her widespread recognition. She has developed an excellent rapport with both teaching and non-teaching staff and community members, earning her school a reputation as a model institution. Her expertise and dedication have made her an invaluable member of SCERT's Core Group, where she contributes to curriculum development and balwadi leadership.

Her impact extends beyond her immediate community. She has trained over 1 lakh teachers in Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) and was part of the core group responsible for publishing books under SCERT. Her influence also extends to D.Ed. students, for whom she organizes demo lessons, and to the Language and Learning Foundation (LLF), where she imparts teacher training in Hindi. With her expertise and collaborative spirit, Pushpa is making a profound difference in the education landscape of Chhattisgarh.

Amplifying the efforts using technology

Pushpa's passion for education did not waver during the pandemic, and she continued to find ways to ensure that children could continue learning. She recognized the potential of digital tools and prepared educational videos for the government-sponsored program "Padai Tuhar Duar" (PTD), which aimed to bring education to students' homes. Her expertise in puppetry was put to use in developing materials for the program, making the learning process more fun and engaging for children.

Pushpa's innovative approach to education extended beyond her classroom and her state. She created the "Nawachari Gatibidhiya Group," a free WhatsApp group consisting of 5000 teachers from different states. This group enables members to share and learn from each other's innovative teaching methods, creating a collaborative community of educators. Her vision for education extends beyond borders, as she believes that the collective effort of educators can create a more impactful and effective learning environment for children.

Formation of SHG

Understanding the importance of education and self-sufficiency, particularly for women in rural areas, Pushpa has transformed them into volunteers who are committed to making a difference in their community. Even the Sarpanch has recognized the potential of Pushpa's vision and has joined forces with her. Her leadership is evident in her regular meetings with her team, volunteers, and community leaders to discuss social issues and devise solutions. She trains her volunteers, who are members of self-help

groups, to tackle these issues, providing them with alternative solutions and monitoring their progress. Pushpa's efforts empower these volunteers to take ownership of the situation and find sustainable solutions independently. By instilling confidence and leadership skills in these women, Pushpa has enabled them to become agents of change in their community.

Pushpa continues to be a role model for teachers and educators across the country, and her contributions to the field of education have had a lasting impact on the lives of countless children and their families.

IMPACT

Her unwavering passion for providing quality education to underprivileged students has driven her to revolutionize the education system in the region where she operates. Her dedication to improving foundation literacy and promoting experiential learning has had a profound impact on the lives of countless students. Through her innovative teaching models, Pushpa has created an environment where children are excited to learn and explore. She has transformed traditional classrooms into dynamic and engaging spaces. Her commitment to education goes far beyond the walls of the classroom. She recognizes the power of partnerships and collaborations and has worked tirelessly with various organizations to bring educational resources to students in remote areas.

-Pushpa through her initiatives has directly and indirectly impacted 7 lakh plus community stakeholders through trainings, awareness, pedagogy development

- Pushpa has imparted training to over 50,000 Anganwadi workers and indirectly benefited 7.5 lakh children.

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- Her work in preparing Balwadi Modules for the entire state has trained over 5,173 teachers directly which has impacted over 3 lakh children through them.
- During the Covid pandemic, she created online tools and resources, benefiting more than 10,000 students, 200 school headmasters, and over 1,600 assistant teachers, among others.
- Her work has influenced stakeholders, including teachers, research scholars, community members, and high-level officials in SCERT, DIET, and LLF, towards education at the grassroots, block, district, and national levels. She has also empowered over 25,000 teachers from different states through her WhatsApp group, where innovative teaching and learning techniques are shared.
- Additionally, she has mentored around 2,600 guardians of students face-to-face.
- She has provided training to 7,500 newly appointed teachers and 500 assistant teachers in primary schools.
- She provided mentoring to 200 teachers to successfully deliver different courses and 2000 teachers as a teaching package coordinator.



FUTURE PLANS

With a strong focus on foundation literacy and experiential learning, Pushpa wants to continue using innovative teaching methods to make children comfortable with learning.

She aims to develop a strong foundation for students in standard 1 and 2 by focusing on mother tongue education. She also hopes to open experimental laboratories on language and mathematics.

Her commitment to education goes far beyond the walls of the classroom. She recognizes the power of partnerships and collaborations and wants to work on collaborations to bring educational resources to students in remote areas.



SNAPSHOT

Name	Pushpa Shukla
Age	35
Education	MA in Hindi and D.Ed.
Years of Experience	16
Sector of Activity	Education
Key Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Began her journey as a teacher with a private school in Rewa ● Focussed on education through native language. ● Joined Language and Learning Foundation and developed an innovative teaching approach to enhance the learning outcomes of her students. ● Established collaborations with the State Council of Educational Research & Training (SCERT) to develop course materials, training modules, and educational videos in both English and Hindi. <p>Joined Language and Learning Foundation and developed an innovative teaching approach to enhance the learning outcomes of her students.</p>
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pushpa has imparted training to over 50,000 aanganwadi workers and indirectly benefited 7.5 lakh children. ● During the Covid pandemic, she created online tools and resources, benefiting more than 10,000 students, 200 school headmasters, and over 1,600 assistant teachers, among others. ● Her work has influenced stakeholders, including teachers, research scholars, community members, and high-level officials in SCERT, DIET, and LLF, towards education at the grassroots, block, district, and national level. ● She has also empowered over 25,000 teachers from different states through her WhatsApp group, where innovative teaching and learning techniques are shared. ● Mentored around 2,600 guardians of students face-to-face. ● Provided training to 7,500 newly appointed teachers and 500 assistant teachers in primary schools <p>Mentored 200 teachers to successfully deliver different courses and 2000 teachers as a teaching package coordinator. Direct Impact: 62,800; Indirect Impact: 7,86,800</p>
Future Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Pushpa aims to develop a strong foundation for students in standard 1 and 2 by focusing on mother tongue education. · She plans to open experimental laboratories on language and mathematics.