

## The ASL Project: Establishing the Sustainability of a Teacher Training and Assessment Initiative

### What is the ASL Project?

The ASL Project was a collaboration between the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE, the largest board of education for state sector schools in India) and Trinity College London, with the aim of raising standards in communicative English language performance in all CBSE schools. The project introduced a teacher-delivered speaking test (named the Assessment of Speaking and Listening, ASL) and provided teacher training in classroom practice and performance assessment.

### Why was the ASL Project initiated?

The project took place across every region in India for Classes IX and XI in all CBSE schools, and was an important initiative to prepare students for real life communicative demands in tertiary study and work settings. CBSE was committed to raising the standards of English language communication for all students. This addressed a pattern of otherwise able students having limited employment opportunities due to poor English communication skills. CBSE determined that the most effective way of achieving improved performance was to introduce a speaking assessment, and to provide associated teacher training and support.

### Project timeline and objectives

The ASL Project began in 2012 and ended in 2017. Trinity carried out teacher training with a focus on developing classroom management skills for the communicative classroom. Teachers also received guidance on how to assess spoken performance. The training was implemented using a cascade model, where a core group of teachers became Master Trainers who went on to conduct teacher training in their own schools, which included the following key targets:

Reducing teacher talk time and maximising student to student interactions	Setting up speaking activities efficiently	Enabling all students to participate in all discussions and speaking activities
Introducing learner-centred activities more relevant to the students, and knowing how to exploit them for speaking and listening development	Creating interactive classrooms with varied forms of spoken interaction between students	Training teachers in assessment of speaking and listening skills

The ASL was rolled out in 2013-14. It was targeted at 15- and 17-year-old learners, with a potential reach of the 2.5 million students who take English exams annually in CBSE classes IX and XI. The ASL was examined and assessed by the teachers in each school. Its introduction marked the first compulsory national testing of communicative English in India.

A series of studies to explore the impact of the project was conducted in 2017 and 2018. Trinity set out to discover how far the combination of training in communicative teaching skills and the introduction of the ASL are impacting positively on Indian teachers and learners in terms of their English language performance. We explored whether the project has led to positive impact in terms of improvements in teaching methodology and expertise in language teaching, and how this has impacted on student learning. Importantly, we were interested in whether the effect of the project was sustained after it had come to an end.

## How Trinity conducted the research

We took a blended approach to the research, using lesson observations as well as teacher self-reflection and stakeholder interviews. Researchers observed classes and interviewed teachers, students and heads of department in 2016-2017, and returned to re-observe the teachers in 2018. We also collected feedback data from Trinity training sessions and online questionnaires in which teachers reported on changes to teaching and learning in their schools following ASL training and implementation.

Using standardised data collection instruments, a total of 104 lessons were observed in 24 CBSE schools during the research period. Seventy-two teachers were observed and interviewed before and after lessons. A sample of students from each class were also interviewed as were heads of departments. All classes and interviews were audio recorded, and many lessons were also video recorded.

## What Trinity learned...

The teacher training was very well received. Comments from teachers indicate the effect it had upon their perceived role in the classroom (as a facilitator rather than instructor) and their attitude towards teaching English.

We found the project had a sustained impact, lasting into 2018 (our final observations with teachers). The key areas of impact were: what teachers teach and how they teach, how students learn, as well as the students' attitudes towards learning.

## What teachers teach

Teachers are now using concept checking questions, issuing clear instructions, fostering interaction, staying in English consistently, and encouraging student input.

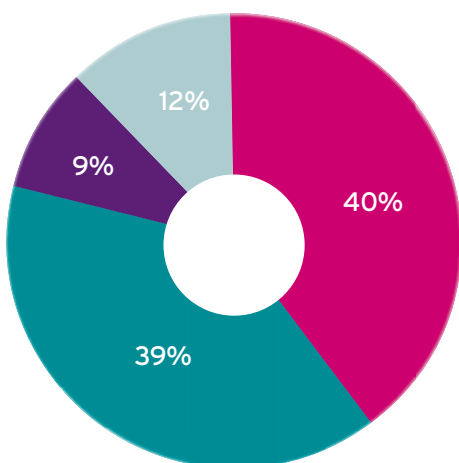
Teachers' confidence also has increased. They have reported being 'very confident' to 'highly confident' in the following interactive activities:

- ▶ Giving students plenty of authentic speaking practice.
- ▶ Knowing how to link speaking activities to the class learning outcomes.
- ▶ Knowing the best order in which to present new language to the students.

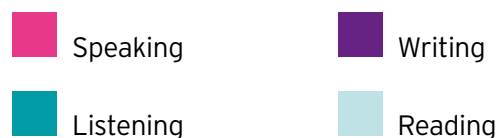
*ASL training has opened up a whole new world for me. I have learnt how much fun it can be to teach [a] language. You keep learning new things without tiring yourself. It is much more fulfilling than the regular teaching-learning process: it has innovation, creativity, originality, collaboration and one makes friends for life.*

**Teacher**

% of lesson time (2018)



More lesson time is now being spent working communicatively in all aspects of the English class with speaking and listening activities occupying almost 80% of class time.

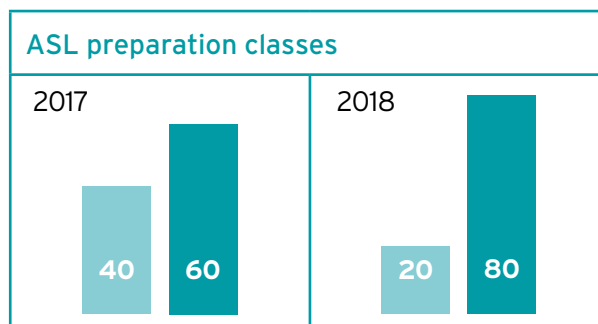
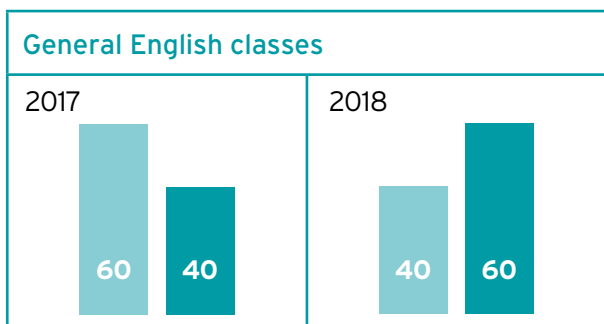


## How teachers teach

In **general English classes**, the balance of observed teacher-talking time versus student-talking time has steadily changed from an average of 60:40 in 2017 to an average of 40:60 in 2018. In the **ASL preparation classes**, the observed balance has tipped even further towards student-talking time, where the average in 2018 was 20:80, up from 40:60 in 2017.

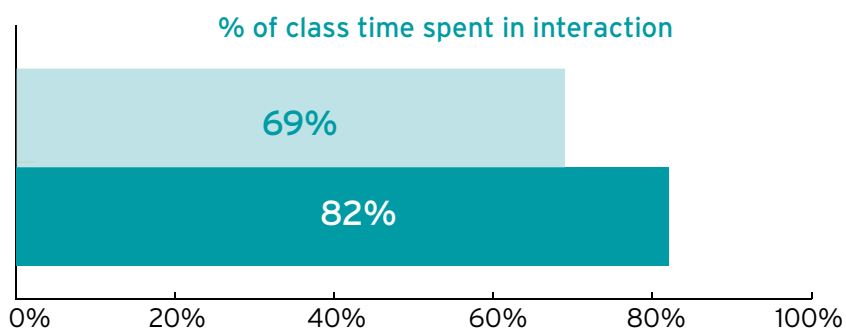


Ratio of  
teacher-talking time (■)  
versus  
student-talking time (■)



English classes are also far more interactively oriented; students are very frequently given opportunities to speak in class and engage in group or pair work.

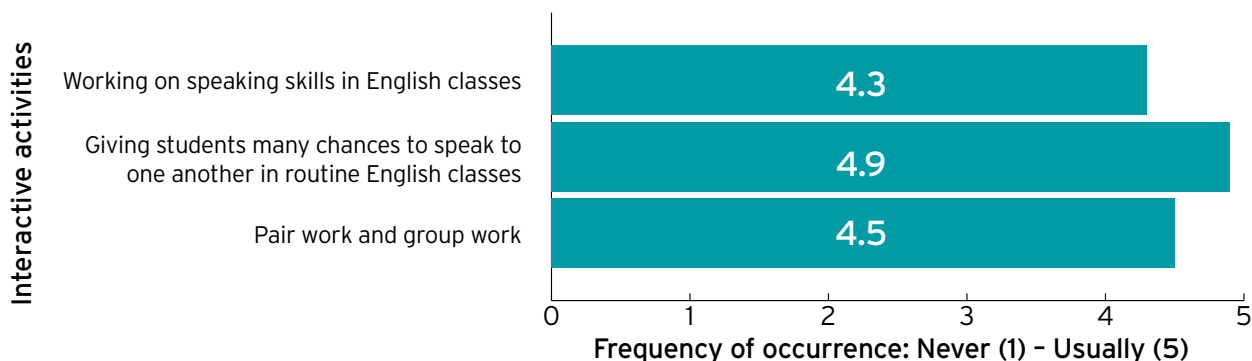
■ 2017 ■ 2018



## How students learn

English classes have become much more interactive and students increasingly learn through participation in communicative activities:

### Interactive orientation in English classes (2018)



## Student attitudes towards learning

Student attitudes towards English classes are extremely positive: 100% of the students who were interviewed agreed that lessons had become more interesting and enjoyable. Moreover, learners are more confident in using their English communication skills for the study of other subjects.

## What teachers say about Trinity training for the ASL

### Dolly Dhawan • New Delhi

- ▶ My Trinity training has been a transformational learning experience for me. To begin with, it equipped me with pedagogy to engage students in my classroom teaching. The activities focused on the generation of language in the classes where English is the second language and where the majority of learners are first generation learners. The classroom management techniques and endless ways of grouping the learners make them more participatory while maintaining discipline.
- ▶ Preparation and delivering of lessons by me has become an enjoyable task. My lessons have evolved – from being lecture-based and teacher-centred to highly interactive lessons which engage me and my learners in a pleasant way. Planning my lessons makes me think of innovations and techniques, thereby expending my time, energy and thought towards the creation of a congenial learning environment in the class.

### Mamta Saluja • New Delhi

- ▶ ASL has been a great boon for teachers of English. English being a language is a skills-based subject, and by ignoring the skills of speaking and listening in the classroom, a great injustice was being done. Our teaching and assessment only targeted reading and writing. ASL brought not only the assessment of speaking and listening but [as] a consequence resulted in the teaching of speaking and listening in the classroom, thereby restoring the balance.
- ▶ The ASL training equipped me with lots of tools and strategies to teach speaking and listening skills to my students. After the course I could integrate speaking and listening more effectively in my classes.
- ▶ The lessons now delivered by me have become crisper, more meaningful and very specific. I am able to include a lot of variety in terms of instruction and am able to empower my learners most of the time by giving them full control of the class. My students use the language more now and feel confident.

### Cherry Goyal • Bengaluru

- ▶ I truly believe English classes to be talking classes. One can never become proficient in a language in a silent classroom where the teacher takes the lead. ASL has been an eye opener to most of the English teaching fraternity, to understand the ratio of TTT: STT [teacher-talking time to student-talking time]. I ensure I provide more opportunities to my students to talk more in the classroom, to help them develop good language skills. My students communicate well in English and also participate confidently in video conferences with schools across the globe.
- ▶ ASL has brought a transformation in ELT [English language teaching], in preparing the learners for real life and helping them understand the functions of language, to being able to respond appropriately in a situation. Some of my former students still connect to me for interview practice before their job interviews to gain more confidence in speaking. The students are definitely talking more, and they really enjoy it. They like the English class because not only do they get to express themselves in the class but they also feel better equipped to express themselves outside the classroom. This has led to greater confidence and an overall improvement in their personality.

## Trinity's mission statement

Trinity College London believes that effective communicative and performance skills are life-enhancing, know no bounds and should be within reach of us all. We exist to promote and foster the best possible communicative and performance skills through assessment, content and training which is innovative, personal and authentic.