

CAN TECHNOLOGY-BASED LEARNING IMPROVE EMPLOYMENT RATES IN INDIA?

This is the first blog in a two-part blog series on a program developed by the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation and Sattva Consulting to expand English-language skills to address employment challenges in India. This blog will focus on the challenge this program aims to address, how the program was developed, and how the outcomes of the program will be measured.

When Madhu Kumari travelled to Bangalore from Jharkhand for a vocational training course at Unnati in December 2017, she barely spoke a few words of English. However, 50 days later, she is now working at HDB, a non-banking subsidiary of HDFC bank, as a call center employee. Madhu's customer-facing role requires English proficiency – a skill that Madhu learned through her hard work with Unnati's technology-led program.

When Madhu started studying at Unnati, she needed skills to increase her chances of employment – and she isn't alone. The Government of India worked with research company Aspiring Minds to conduct the National Employability Report-Graduates 2013 study. The study revealed that nearly half of Indian college graduates are considered unemployable because of their English language and cognitive skills. A college degree is supposed to be a pathway to employment and stability. But in India, where 55 percent of the population is under 30 years old, a lack of English-speaking skills is standing in the way of success.

Solving this challenge can be complicated. For many families, it isn't as simple as getting an English-language tutor or enrolling their kids in English classes. High-quality English teachers are often hard to find and too expensive to retain for low-income families. Even families who can afford an instructor find it difficult to sustain lessons because of an in-person, classroom-based teaching model that leaves many students

behind who cannot attend courses because of work and family responsibilities. That's where our project comes in.

The Michael & Susan Dell Foundation partnered with Sattva Consulting to identify organizations like Unnati that are working to help youth in India gain employment. While major employers in India agree that English proficiency is important for their customer-facing and administrative entry level positions, many existing employment programs do not include English-language lessons in their models.

In her journey to find employment, Madhu chose to attend Unnati's short-term vocational training programs. Students are placed in jobs at the end of their training courses. The organization's focus is primarily on providing technical skills development for retail and administration jobs. With the help of the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation and Sattva, Unnati added a technology-led English-language proficiency program as a new part of their employment training program. The goal of the English-language program is to provide:





Personalized learning for each student based on their current English-language knowledge and skills, as opposed to a one-size fits-all approach, and Content that can be accessed at the student's convenience.

Three other organizations like Unnati have been identified as partners, with hopes to create a comprehensive program across India to provide apps and other technologies to help teach English-language skills to improve employability of students. The purpose of the program is to find the extent to which technology solutions can be effective language learning tools. It aims to find apps and learning models that can be scaled across different learning environments.

The main questions that this program will seek to answer include:

Do technology-based solutions help improve the Spoken English Skills (SES) of youth between the age of 18 and 22?

What specific capabilities and features have the highest impact on improved skill outcomes in youth?

Does improved SES result in increased chances of employment?

The program started in August 2017 and will run for two years in six states, impacting approximately 15,000 students across the country. The participants of the program are all students in their final year of college who are between the ages of 18 and 22.

In our next blog post, we will share the feedback and lessons we learned directly from Madhu and her classmates at Unnati, and how those lessons ladder up to larger insights into how we develop and implement technology-based solutions to improve SES across India.

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