HEART
HEALTH & EDUCATION ADVICE & RESOURCE TEAM

April 2016

The Challenge

Ek Step was formed in 2014 in response to the complex nature of education in India. Firstly, it addresses the growing learning gap. Results of the ASER survey 2014 showed that half the students in Grade 5 could not read a Grade 2 text or do subtraction.[1] Coupled with this are increasing demands from parents for higher quality education, and a very diverse student population in terms of socio-economic indicators, language and culture. There is also a limited window of opportunity – India is home to the world's largest youth population, which constitutes more than a quarter of the country's population. The country is also growing fast in terms of access to internet and technology.

Ek Step is a technology platform with a vision to enable universal access to good quality teaching and learning through tablets and mobile phones. It provides the framework for meaningful teaching methods such as concept maps, language models, games, stories and interactions etc. It is open source and invites collaborations from partners, who are typically ground-level non-profit organisations with years of experience in education services. Each partner has the ability to curate the platform for their programmes, populate it with their content, and record data as per their needs. This not only makes the platform relevant to a spectrum of interventions, but also capitalises on the vibrancy of knowledge and experience in the education sector in India. Ek Step also provides cloud-based analytics that help understand student performance and trends.

Ek Step focuses on students from low-income communities belonging to Grades 1-3, and on outcomes in literacy and numeracy.

The Impact

Ek Step is in its final stages of development and will be publicly launched in late-2016. However, the platform has tested successfully in a series of pilot runs. One example is the extensive use of Ek Step on tablets at the Pratham remedial reading week across seven states in India, with participation from thousands of children. Ek Step is currently working with a network of 30 active partners at different levels of content creation. It also aligns itself with NCERT and national and state-level curricula.

Research

Ek Step has adopted a research-driven approach from the beginning. It partners with experts in a diverse range of areas for inputs. Since the platform has not been launched yet, there has been no comprehensive impact evaluation. However, the team tests concepts internally as part of its pilots. Future research needs include creation of content that is effective and contextual, especially in the area of ESL (English as Second Language). There is also need to conduct impact assessments of pilot programmes.

Stakeholders

Ek Step is funded by philanthropic donations by Nandan and Rohini Nilekani, India's leading philanthropists. This is planned to continue in the foreseeable future, as more partners join the platform and take on responsibility of content (for example Akshara Foundation and Educate Girls). Globally, the conversation on technology in education is gaining ground, and large players such as Facebook and Amazon have announced plans to launch education platforms.

Some of the bottlenecks to Ek Step scaling up are limited access to smartphones/tablets among poor populations, as well as the need for high-level expertise among partners to create culture-sensitive content for such a diverse demographic.

About

This is a series of case studies produced by HEART for the UK Department for International Development. Programme experts were consulted in the process. Any views and opinions do not necessarily reflect those of DFID or HEART.

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http://img.asercentre.org/docs/Publications/ASER%20Reports/ASER%202014/National%20PPTs/aser2014indiaenglish.pdf