



Background and Prior Experience:

We are who we are today because of our formative experience as a group of individuals building schools in the slums of Islamabad in 2011, where we taught, fed and clothed children from the streets of Islamabad to give them an opportunity to improve their lives. In these initial years, we fell in love with teaching but also became hyper-aware of the intensity of the problem with education in Pakistan. This led us to a nationwide search for answers as to why the education system is in shambles. By travelling across the country and living and teaching in small towns and villages we were able to identify the problems: i) engagement - students rarely if ever liked being in school, ii) lack of contextualization - most of the curricula seemed foreign to them, iii) learning in a language foreign to children living in the rural areas - most teachers have to use english textbooks while children only speak their native languages, and iv) stunted learning levels - as revealed in reports by ASER, the World Bank and many other organisations over the years.



At Orenda, we are teachers before being entrepreneurs or tech optimists. After our experience teaching across the country we knew that engagement could be done better - we'd done it in our classrooms. We also knew pedagogies could be structured better - we'd gotten children in our classrooms to read and write ahead of their peers.



Around the same time, we began to see (both in stats and in our own lived experience) the spread of technology across Pakistan. We saw this as an opportunity, and this resulted in the formation of the Taleemabad series - an exciting and interactive form of education for primary school children. Taleemabad was first piloted in 12 of the most underperforming public schools in Vihari and Thatta for a year in 2017. By the end of the year, there was a 70% reduction in dropouts and the children who studied using Taleemabad content performed 31% better in tests than a control group in similar schools who did not use Taleemabad.



We treat teaching as a science, and content delivery through digital means an even rigorous application of that science. Each episode of ours went through a meticulous engagement test called the Stallings Classroom Observation method. Children in focus groups are made to do pre and post-trial tests to measure learning gains. From 2015-2016 our company made and discarded over 4000 minutes of animation - simply because they did not perform.

The series has now found a natural home in the Taleemabad App, which contains assessments, games and quizzes to measure learning. In the app, academic learning is accompanied by socio-emotional learning; there are components on personal safety, health and hygiene and developing empathy and tolerance. Our obsession with data continues in the app, where childrens' education journey are mapped and their competencies analyzed. If a child struggles too much, a customer support resource from Taleemabad calls the parent.

Currently, an offline version of Taleemabad has been deployed in Rajanpur to help 200 girls continue their education beyond the primary level. Baseline tests of the girls in the program were conducted in December, and due to the lack of quality education available to them at the primary level, these girls showed signs of stunted learning levels. However, there are encouraging signs of improvement. Final exams are yet to be conducted but anecdotal evidence points towards strong improvements, with girls reporting that they have begun applying their learning, in some cases even helping their fathers with the household finances.



Our work has won us recognition from the Queen of England in the past, and has now earned us an endorsement from the Ministry of Education in Pakistan. We were the winners of the National Education Challenge 2020, and at the 'Oscars of Education' awards organized by Wharton Business School in London last year, we earned a bronze medal for 'Best Education App' among thousands of submissions. In 2020, we have also been awarded the Global Citizen Waislitz Prize for our work in transforming education in Pakistan. Our work has also been featured in New York Times in the past year and this year our founders were named in the Forbes 30 under 30 list as leading young social entrepreneurs.



Apart from external validation, Taleemabad has also been rated very highly by the parents and students who use it. Our current rating stands at 4.6/5 (an approval rating of 92%), with many parents commenting about the app's effectiveness in helping their children gain critical numeracy and literacy skills.

In the past 5 years, we have gathered a team of experienced curriculum developers, assessment specialists, data analysts, designers, developers, and animators. These team members have also often travelled to rural Pakistan together, engaging with students and teachers, and understanding their pain points. As such, they are well equipped to design and produce an educational platform that can begin to solve these problems.

Our session lengths for the platform are also something to be proud of. On average, every single time the app is launched (and it can be launched multiple times in a day), children spend a minimum of 9.5 minutes in it. This session length is better than that of YouTube in Pakistan, and sets us up to engage and re-engage one million+ students in a meaningful and academically beneficial manner.

We truly do believe that our prior experience of teaching, working in rural areas and understanding the pain points of students, having a pre-existing platform that is considered beneficial by parents and students, and having a demonstrated history of using content to improve learning outcomes and reducing dropouts are some of the reasons that we are primed to deliver impact at scale

In the Context of COVID-19:

Even before the pandemic hit, Pakistan's education system was struggling. Around 22.5 million children were out of school, while those in school reported extremely stunted learning levels, with 48% of 5th graders being unable to read a sentence in their native language, and 66.8% not making the transition from primary to secondary grades successfully.

Since the pandemic has hit, school closures have resulted in all students being temporarily out of school. For the duration of the pandemic and its accompanying lockdowns - estimated to last anywhere between the next 6-12 months, education is going to take a further hit. Already, fearing a further slide in graduation numbers, primary and elementary education departments in various provinces have decided to promote all children to the next grade - a decision that might be necessary but which will ultimately only worsen stunted learning levels as students reach higher grades.

Ultimately, however, it is not just that students are going to fall behind. Some of them may not return at all, and girls are especially vulnerable - as highlighted by a recent Malala Fund report that states up to 10 million more secondary school age girls could be out of school by the time the pandemic is over.

Digital Education offers a promising way to mitigate the losses, both in terms of keeping learning levels progressing, and preventing students from dropping out. According to recent numbers, out of the 70.9 million children in Pakistan, close to 40.4 million have access to television, and 24.5 million have latent access, i.e. digital access through a parent's mobile phone/device, while close to 1M children own their personal device. Together, this is a substantial number of students that can either be reached through television, or through their parents smartphones.

Recently, our learning series called Taleemabad was picked by i) the Federal Government for daily broadcast on a special new channel called 'Teleshool'. The channel is free to air and is run

by the national broadcaster, ensuring a reach of roughly 54 million people, ii) Taleemabad is also being aired on a Provincial cable channel called 'TaleemGhar', launched by the Punjab government, and iii) Taleemabad is also available on a content aggregator called IIm Exchange, launched by the LEAPS study faculty at Harvard. Our placement on these channels, plus a very strong surge in growth (35,000 new users joined the platform in April, compared to 2500 in February) means that we can begin to have quite a serious shot at reaching substantial numbers of children with Television, or latent smartphone access.

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