



DOST EDUCATION

Dost Education is a US-based EdTech nonprofit working in Early Childhood Education in India. Dost Education supports parents, regardless of their literacy level, to increase their child's early learning and development at home. Dost translates evidence-based practices in early childhood development into short and accessible audio content that contains actionable steps parents can take to support their children's development.

In communities where Dost operates, children come from low-income families. They possess limited exposure to resources and opportunities for growth and development during their early years due to the low literacy levels and socioeconomic status of their parents. This places them at a disadvantage in comparison to their peers when they enter primary school and can negatively influence their academic and life outcomes in the long run.

To address this issue, Dost Education developed a 24-week program for parents of children between 3 and 6 years old, covering areas such as cognitive development, socio-emotional skills, and school preparedness. The program's theory of change has been developed in collaboration with the Centre for the Developing Child at Harvard University. It rests on the premise that incorporating small science-backed behavioral nudges and actionable steps into their daily routine will enable parents to support their children's cognitive development, which will, in turn, have a positive impact on both short and long term academic and life outcomes. The program is delivered in Hindi through daily 1-minute podcasts over phone calls ("phonecasts"), which suggest activities that can be done at home to help prepare a child for school. In addition, before the pandemic, Dost Education's part-time workers offered in-person assistance via field visits conducted by volunteers.

In response to the pandemic, Dost Education created a 6-week COVID-19 module to address the stress and anxiety faced by parents as a result of the pandemic and to provide reliable facts and

share hygiene techniques based on WHO recommendations. Parents can also access one-on-one support from a mental health wellness helpline.

Dost Education started with 300 users in 2017 and currently has more than 54,000 users with more than 40,000 users in its COVID-19 module.

SOLUTION

Criteria	Category	Details
Technological Readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic Phone/ SMS • Intermittent Internet-connectivity 	Ek Tara uses Phone Calls, SMS and WhatsApp to share lessons and tasks with their students depending on their access to either technology.
Content availability	No	The school uses the IFERB projects created by EAA, which are under a Creative Commons License.
Personalization	Yes	IFERB content is adapted for the context of the community.
Interactivity	Yes	Learners engage with teachers
Mode	Asynchronous	After a scheduled call with the teacher, students perform the tasks required on their own time.
Feasibility to replicate		
Time	Medium	Dost Education has made several iterations of the system they use over the past years. Currently, the organization is working on setting up a remote child assessment model.
Effort	Medium	The effort needed to develop and share content, promote the program in beneficiary communities, and provide one-on-one support is

		tremendous. Dost uses the help of volunteers to implement the program.
Money	Varies	The implementation cost will vary depending on the location of implementation and the number of users. Costs to operate the system include the cost of running the server, hiring a developer to maintain it, and the call air time cost.

FOLLOW-UP AND IMPLEMENTATION

Enrolling in the program is as simple as a phone call. Parents interested in enrolling in the program have to call a phone number that is published and distributed within target communities. Before the pandemic, Dost Education distributed pamphlets with their volunteers to reach as many parents as possible.

Each week, parents receive four 1-minute phone calls that are focused on a theme or topic such as colors or sequencing. Dost also provides Social and Emotional Learning content and activities that focus on concepts such as understanding and managing emotions, safe/unsafe touch, and building empathy that target both parents and children.

Criteria	Category	Details
Preparedness of teachers to design and facilitate learning	N/A	In this program, content is developed and shared with parents by the program staff in collaboration with Harvard University's Center for the Developing Child. Volunteers are trained to promote the program and provide support to parents but do not design content or implement the suggestions directly with children..
Availability and ability of parents or caregivers to facilitate effective home-based distance learning	Yes	Given the nature of the program, parents can assume the role of educators even if they are illiterate owing to the personalized nature of the content shared. On average, parents have completed up to grade 10.

Monitoring and evaluation capacities

Monitor distance learning processes	Yes	Dost Education conducts surveys via phone calls and touch-tone response quizzes. They conduct baseline and ending surveys with beneficiaries.
Track the access to courses and engagement	Yes	Dost Education has built a robust monitoring and feedback system of automated surveys, phone-, and household parent surveys through which they can track gains in parent knowledge and attitudes about early childhood education. 35% of parents that sign-up for Dost become highly engaged super-users.
Assess learning outcomes	Yes	Dost has combined research and rapid cycle design processes with building a model that fits parent's needs, making it engaging and effective. The program model is developed in collaboration with leading early childhood research labs like the Stanford Center for Education Policy & Analysis and the Harvard Center for the Developing Child. Dost Education found that after 1 month of using Dost, parents who categorize play and stimulation activities as "learning" as opposed to rote memorization (which is the prevailing belief), increased by 70%. Additionally, 60% of parents report changing their behaviors when nudged by Dost, primarily in areas of talking, singing, playing, and behavior management.
Sustain immediate distance learning responses for achieving long-term goals	Yes	The solution that Dost Education provides relies on supporting parents with early childhood education to achieve long-term cognitive and developmental benefits in their children.

IMPLEMENTING CHALLENGES

Community outreach was the biggest challenge facing Dost Education after the spread of COVID-19 in 2020. Due to COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, Dost Education faced difficulties in reaching parents given the limited mobility of field staff. When lockdown restrictions were lifted, confirmed COVID-19 cases in Delhi, where most Dost users and staff members reside, increased. Since Dost users live in densely populated areas, Dost field staff avoided field visits, further limiting the organization's ability to promote the program and support parents on a one-on-one basis.

TAKEAWAY LESSONS

Despite the difficulty faced in reaching new parents during the pandemic, Dost Education's digital outreach and partnership development activities have enabled the organization to reach new users by leveraging the platforms of large foundations and organizations. The pandemic did not have a major impact on education delivery for the beneficiaries. Dost Education took the opportunity to educate their beneficiaries on COVID-related information. Further, the agility of Dost's systems and operations has made the transition to remote work for its program staff rather seamless.

The Dost Education solution is a distance-learning solution in instances where parents cannot afford early childhood education centers but are available to educate their children. Early childhood education for Dost beneficiaries happens at home with the help of dedicated parents. Dost has developed a real alternative to the in-person early-childhood schools and centers in a low-cost and distance learning setting.