

## **Georgetown Alumni Educate Hundreds of Children in Pakistan Using Cartoons**

In the face of classroom demolitions, natural disasters, and low school retention rates, two Georgetown University in Qatar (GU-Q) alumni are making a difference by educating hundreds of children in Pakistan. Their startup, Orenda, uses cartoons and digital streaming technology to bring school curriculums to four and five year old children living in some of the country's most at-risk areas.

Using relatable cartoon characters living in an imaginary place called 'Taleemabad' (Urdu for 'Education City') and complementary work books, co-founders Haroon Yasin (SFS '15) and Ahwaz Akhtar (SFS '16) are working to make learning fun and engaging for children who are at risk of dropping out of school.

Using data monitoring technology, the Orenda team is able to observe the performance of its students in real time and gauge their impact on dropout rates. Recently, they launched their program in eight low-performing schools in three districts across Pakistan and found that all the districts showed improved test scores. One district's results even increased by 58% thanks to their engagement with the program.

After classrooms were destroyed as part of the Pakistani government's slum demolition and relocation project over a year ago, the entrepreneurs switched to a digital curriculum. Thanks to the proliferation of mobile internet and smart devices like cellphones, students can now follow along at home to avoid falling behind on lessons.

"This curriculum is hosted online, from where it can be either downloaded for offline use, or streamed live. This enables us to sidestep the need for physical brick-and-mortar schools, in situations where they cannot be built," explained Yasin.

"Right now, we are teaching English, Urdu, mathematics and general knowledge," he said. "Since these subjects are taught through cartoons, we also use storytelling to impart lessons of empathy, kindness, and emotional well-being."

Thanks to a crowd funding campaign last year, Orenda was able to expand to reach over 540 students in the country and surpassed their goal of 500 students. They also grew their team from five to 13 members, and produced and distributed around 3,000 Taleemabad text books. The books, which were designed to work in conjunction with the cartoons, were given to nursery school students in underprivileged areas to aid their learning.

Building on the success of their work last year, a new campaign seeks to help the project reach students who have no access to formal education. These students either dropped out of school early or never enrolled, and many have been displaced due to floods, earthquakes and war.

“When children are displaced, they do not have access to schools, and hence are at the high risk of becoming a lost generation,” said Yasin. “We have designed our digital learning system in such a way that any child can study anywhere.”

More information about the expansion campaign and details of the program are available on Orenda’s Facebook page and website (<http://www.orendaproject.org/>).