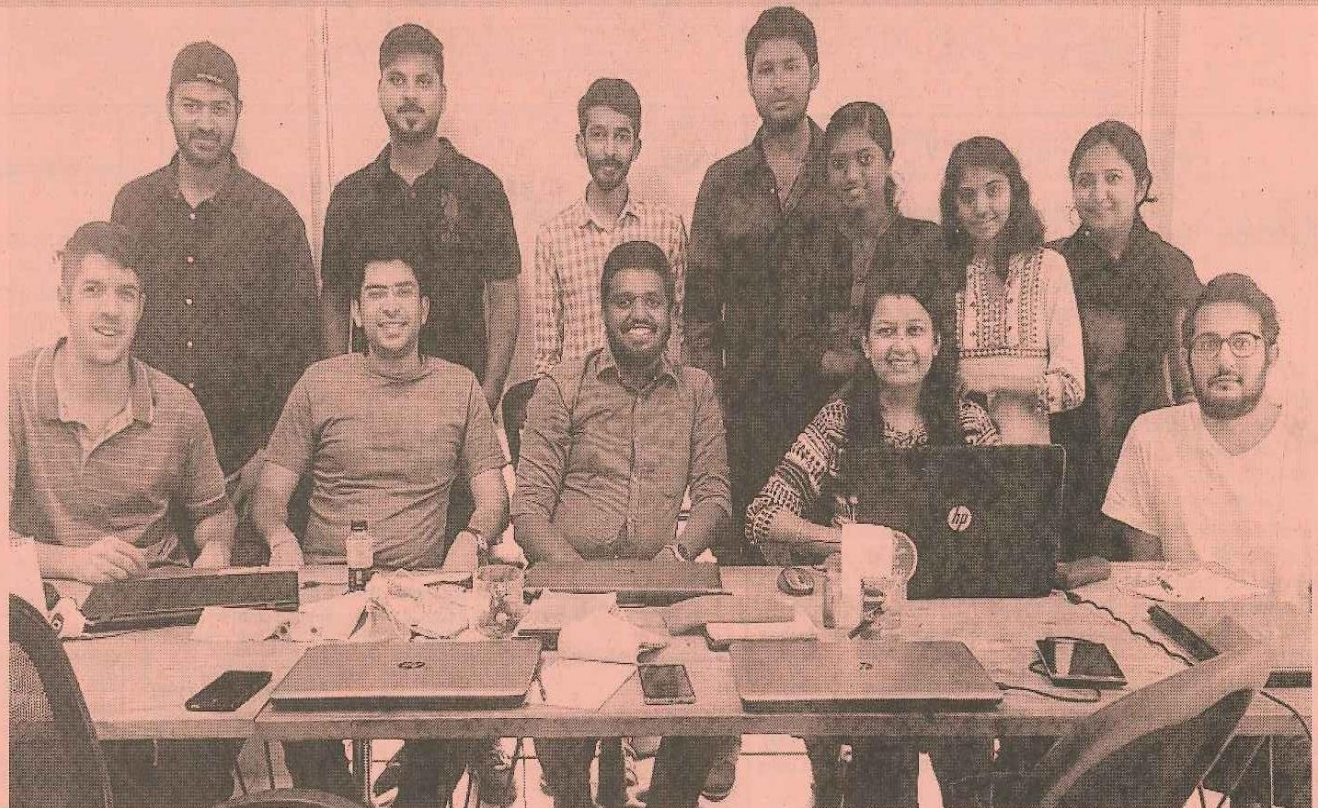


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Learn English on tap

Kings Learning has a spoken English app that allows users to enhance their employability, reports Nirmalya Behera



Arshan Vakil, CEO and co-founder of Kings Learning, with his team

The enguru app helped me improve my English. The conversation modules were my favourite part, they helped me practice a language I would use regularly. After completing my course, I was certified by Enguru with a good score. This was useful while applying for jobs," says Ishwar Kumar, a BCom graduate from Mumbai.

The app not only helped Kumar in enhancing his employability it also made him pay only when he wanted the certificate.

The Enguru app is the flagship product of Kings Learning, a start-up founded in 2014 that offers employability-focused English language and communication skills through technology products. The Enguru app offers a 40-hour programme and allows users to learn both general spoken English and employability-focused conversational English.

It has about 2 million users till date. More than 120,000 users use the app in a month.

"Available in 28 languages, Enguru teaches English in the mother tongue, from the basics to more complex industry-specific functional English that improves employability," says Arshan Vakil, chief executive officer and co-founder of Kings Learning.

The company offers two enguru apps, one for

individuals and the other for enterprises.

Kings Learning on August 31 raised \$2.5 million from the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation and other investors.

"English has become a ticket to enter the booming knowledge-driven job economy of India. However, a few have access to quality English language training. Almost half of the graduates in India, primarily from underprivileged backgrounds, are considered unemployable in most of the sectors due to lack of spoken English skills. Thankfully, mobile internet explosion, supplemented by exemplary work, undertaken by technology-driven organisations like Kings Learning, is helping address this problem. We are excited to support Kings Learning's efforts in their journey ahead," said Prachi Windlass, education director (India) of the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation.

Opportunities

Kings Learning sees opportunities in the 250 million non-English speaking Internet users in India, with 20 million being added every quarter. enguru's core focus is on young adults who

make up 75 per cent of mobile internet users in India. That gives it an audience of 187 million, growing by 15 million every quarter.

The English language training market in India is estimated at \$4.67 billion, with 60 per cent of that coming from vocational and corporate training, a focus area for Enguru.

Enguru's tertiary audience comprises users from Asia, the West Asia and North Africa. Digital English language training in Asia is expected to reach \$1.6 billion and \$215 million in the West Asia by 2018.

Business model

Kings Learning has two revenue streams, certificates and premium features, and corporate training and recruitment through enguruJobs.

The company plans to sell certificates on the app that will be mailed to users and offer various premium courses. "There will be an option to purchase a certificate at the end of every level. This certification can then be used to apply for different jobs on our app itself. Varying certificates 'unlock' jobs based on the English proficiency required for that job function," Vakil adds.

FACT BOX

Founded: 2014

Area of business: Provides employability-focused English language & communication skills training

Funding: \$2.5 million

Investors: Michael & Susan Dell Foundation, Village Capital and other US-based tech investors

App downloaded: Two million times

Active users: Over 120,000 monthly

The corporate training programme is a subscription-based model in which companies use Enguru as a training tool for employees and the enguruJobs platform allows clients to post various jobs and link them to different Enguru certification levels. "We started this company as an offline English training business, which we still run, and leveraged synergies with the app," says Vakil.

Challenges

"English learning is a space we know. The biggest challenge is going to be finding the optimal way of monetising this demand in order to create a sustainable business," says Vakil.

"A perpetual challenge when scaling up is building a strong team. As the team becomes larger it gets more difficult. So that is always a challenge that keeps me up at night," he adds.

Road ahead

The start-up plans to sell 50,000 certificates and is planning to bring 150 companies on board by the end of this financial year. Kings Learning has 25 companies using its services. It is also planning to add 0.5-1 million users every month.

EXPERT TAKE



AJITABH BANERJI
principal, ASK Pravi, a mid-market PE firm, which has invested in education

Evolution of language service space

English is the de-facto global transactional language. With the working population in India being exposed to global companies directly, knowledge of conversational English has today become a necessity.

Apps such as enguru acknowledge the permanence of regional languages and make conversational English available at people's fingertips. However, the ability to monetise such services is yet to be

established. Certification courses typically make money only when there is a brand value associated with it, which would entail a significant investment in building that brand, either through the B2C route or the B2B route. It would, therefore, be interesting to see how the investments (whether in Kings Learning or in the Tiger Global-funded Culture Alley) get utilised.

The popularity of services such as

Google Translate also shows that the multilingual machine translation services are increasingly being relied upon globally and provide direction for the evolution of the language service space.

With the need for learning languages (especially English) established and the technology available, we need to see whether the mass working population is inclined to pay the 'right' price for such a service on their relatively low-priced smartphone, working on a relatively low-cost data plan.