

Umeed Ki Kiran
Pakistan
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The project goals

The goal of the project was to improve literacy rate and bridge income inequality in Pakistan by encouraging and mentoring children from underprivileged backgrounds to pursue their education. The project aimed to use innovative methods of education to develop and promote a love of learning in children from under-privileged backgrounds and give the children *Umeed Ki Kiran* (A ray of hope) that they can excel in the world of academia despite their financial background.

The initial recruitment process and challenges

The project was started immediately after my graduation from Kalamazoo College on June 18th 2014. I flew back to Pakistan, where my family had already gotten a room constructed at the top of my family home to be used as a classroom for the project. Recruitment of quality volunteers as teachers was slightly challenging. There was no portal to advertise the volunteer positions and I mainly used word of mouth and personal invitations on social media to recruit volunteers. All volunteers had prior experience working for social justice projects and tutoring.

In order to get the most deserving students, I contacted two local charity schools to send their most deserving students within the age of 5-12 years to the summer camp. Although transportation and food was provided, there wasn't enough interest from the schools or parents because of security issues in Karachi. A safer, more cost effective method was recruiting children from the neighborhood areas on an invitational basis. During the recruitment process of tutors and students, I also shopped for class room supplies, including books, educational games and stationery from a variety of stores in Karachi.

The summer school project

Once the initial obstacles of recruitment were overcome, the Umeed Ki Kiran project was extremely successful in achieving its goals. The students were divided in groups of five according to their skill level and assigned to a tutor. There were twenty students, five tutors and two visiting tutors involved.

The students learnt vocabulary words and English phrases through colorful picture illustrated books. They were introduced to critical and analytical thinking skills by question and answer exercises. They read popular story books and then watched the movie version of the story. A discussion and presentation session was conducted for each story. Similarly students learnt math and science skills through interactive lesson plans that involved games and visual media for reinforcement. There were introduced to puzzles and Legos to improve their problem solving skills and creativity.

A major issue with most of the children was a lack of confidence. However, with the help of music, theater and dance games it was easily overcome. It was amazing to see the profound impact of such art activities on the student's self-confidence and engagement in class.

Students were also repeatedly counselled along with their parents on the importance of education in their lives and the plethora of opportunities, education will open up for them. There were character building exercises organized for the students like the neighborhood cleanup activity, which taught the values of helping and giving back to the community to the children.

Sustainability

Due to the political instability and security issues in Karachi, the students weren't taken on field trips. The money saved from the field trip expenses and the transportation expenses was used to admit those children to school that weren't already enrolled, by the end of the summer. The money was also used to set up an after school tutoring camp for students in the class whose parents have no formal educational training to help the students with school homework. Additional funds from family and friends are being raised to continue the after school tutoring camp and also to help pay the school fees the participants of the camp.

Project's contribution to Peace

The project is inspired by the cause of Malala Yousafzai from Swat, Pakistan who was shot in the face by Taliban for going to school. One of her famous quotes is "I want to say to the world, you must try to get an education because it is important. If the new generation is not given pens, they will be given guns by the terrorists"

The dropout rate of the students from the lower income community is extremely high. The lack of support system at home because of illiterate parents and the teaching methods employed at their schools are to be blamed. Government schools in Pakistan provide sub-standard education and engage in beating the children as a form of corporal punishment. The rote-learning methods of education combined with the dry course content fail to capture the students' attention, making them drop out of school. For these little children, playing in the sand and begging for money on the streets is more fun than going to school, only to be yelled at, beaten and ridiculed. As a result, they stop attending school and get trapped in the vicious cycle of poverty. Illiteracy and poverty then become the breeding grounds for crime and terrorism. Education at grass roots level for the lower income strata of the society is the only way Pakistan can break away from the shackles of crime, terrorism and patriarchy. The project successfully motivated its participants to pursue their education by developing a love of books and learning in them. The children were provided with undivided attention and constant encouragement from dedicated tutors who gave the students the confidence and hope that they can excel in academics despite the obstacles they face.

Education at grass roots level for the lower income strata of the society is the only way Pakistan can break away from the shackles of crime, terrorism and patriarchy -Komal Khan

