

Back to school: When benchmates turn founders in learning tech space

■ HEMAMALINI VENKATRAMAN

CHENNAI Learning Matters is an edutech company looking at raising a pre-seed funding of Rs 10 cr to spur its growth plans. The Bengaluru-based start-up offers educational products that do away with the drudgery of knowledge delivery. One such product is 'Tara', a virtual voice teacher developed in-house. This leverages the Alexa-platform, enabling the firm to cater to educational institutions in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala.

A few months ago, the company successfully rolled out a 'communicative English' module using Tara at the Sri Kanchi Sankara Vidhyalaya Ganapathy Agraharam, Kumbakonam. Now, the firm is planning to enter Madurai and replicate a similar exercise by the month-end. Saraswati Ramamoorthy, Co-Founder-Chief Product Officer, Learning Matters, told DTNext.

Saras (short for Saraswati) along with her school mate turned Co-Founder and COO Gowri Mahesh, and CEO Co-Founder G Ramamoorthy, started the enterprise in 2016.

Saras brings over 18 years of experience in developing early childhood education programmes, teaching in the US and managing digital content projects. With two MS degrees from Purdue University (Child Development and Special Education), she has extensive exposure to the field of education. Six years ago, she returned to India and connected with Gowri, her friend from PSSB Chennai.

"With our third core team member G Ramamoorthy (an engineer turned entrepreneur), we decided to embark on a mission to make high-quality education accessible through granular and specific products. Our intent is to have outcomes that impact learners in a holistic way. We have four products, the Star Teacher programme, the Star Teacher Tool Box, Tara and Kenjine, enabling us to provide tailored solutions. These work in tandem to change the classroom environment," she said, tracing the evolution of an entity, aiming to deliver solutions in schools located in semi-urban and rural areas.

Gowri (who has a Masters' degree in IT and a certification in General Management from IIM-K) goes on to add that the product focus of Tara is targeted at first generation learners. "One has to look at the socio-economic pyramid and contextualise learning through engaging formats. Our in-house product uses the Alexa platform for delivery of learning modules," she said.


There is a huge demand for instruction in the English medium. Be it private or government schools, in semi-urban or rural locations, the challenge remains the same for both sectors as vernacular languages are the norm of communication. "Chil-

dren struggle from Class 6 to 8, unable to cope with competitive examinations, thereafter. We have adapted the Common European framework of languages to make Tara a robust offering, and to build competencies," Gowri said. She points out that there are other exercises at schools too, where various facets of education, be it training teacher on pedagogy delivery or moving from rote learning to student-centric activity-based learning, that are available from the company.

For a year, 30 hours of intervention at a school using video conference as a tech interface or audio-visual module via cloud-based platform or non-tech platform (touch and feel/tactile material - Kenjine) or the tool box, an activity kit, have worked well. "Concepts explained through activity and games - say a game of Snakes and Ladders or Tic-Tac-Toe have helped memory aspects of learning across subjects," she sought to point out.

The digital platform or the Star teacher pedagogy training, in some cases, lets a single instructor tackle multiple subjects. "There are instances of not having multiple teachers for teaching subjects. A science teacher may have to don the hat of a mathematics teacher in schools which have resource constraints," Gowri said.

The products are built bottom up, with the company catering to private, affordable and free schools to those that seek more feature-driven products. "We conducted a one year programme at Sevalaya in the outskirts of Chennai, which is the typical market we address. Our products are scalable and are virtual reality compatible, but that's not a necessity. The 'bells and whistles' are part of the product portfolio, when affordability is not a deciding factor," chips in Saras. In 3.5 years, Learning Matters has trained 600 teachers touching the lives of 8,000 students in the three southern states and also Daman, a coastal town, north of Mumbai. On the pricing front, the company is focused on operational optimisation so that it can make it more affordable to Re 1 a day from the current charges of Rs 150 per student per month.

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Co-Founder-Chief Product Officer,
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Gowri, Saras and Ramamoorthy