Providing 12-17 Week Transferable and Employability Skills to 30,000 Underserved
Learners Across 8 Countries – A Truly Cross Border System

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Abstract

Otermans Institute (OI) is a global micro-organisation upskilling unserved and underserved populations globally with the mission of making them employable. Currently working in more than eight countries, supported by UKRI grant funding, and having worked with governments of 3 nations, it is providing its pedagogy and training digitally to underserved and rural learners. OI aims to upskill 750 million learners, mostly rural, by 2025 and its delivery has proven successful in 3 continents which makes it truly cross border effective. From remote schools to foundation-run organisations to UNHCR supported camps in Iraq, 0I has supported over 35,000 unserved learners to date. Through immersive research across 3,200 kilometers in South Asia, 0I developed a blanket curriculum and teaching & training method that can upskill 200 million learners just in India today. The same system can be replicated in other Southern Asian countries and was deployed in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka where 80 million other students can benefit immediately. Currently, this system has been taken by governments in India, by the Department of Works and Pensions in the United Kingdom and was taken by the Technical Education Department of the Government of Afghanistan before the government fell. The original methodology of the research and curriculum development will be presented in the talk along with the latest results of its delivery with two separate rural cohorts from South Asia which was delivered in partnership with UNICEF.

Keywords: Upskilling, Underserved and Unserved Communities, Global Curriculum, Employability Skills, Transferable Skills

Introduction

Otermans Institute (OI) is a global company upskilling unserved and underserved populations with the vision of upskilling a generation and make them employable. Through immense research both in the literature as well as field trips to South East Asia, we identified that there is a skills gap which is the difference between the skills required for a job and the skills employees/graduates actually possess. In other words, there is a disconnect between the expectations of employers of the skills graduates have and the skills graduates have gained during their degree. Reducing the global skills and employability gap has been a challenge for social innovation for many decades. Whilst significant progress has been made, over 750 million potential learners still lack access to basic transferable and employability skills training which leads to unemployment or low-income employment all over the developing world (Mansour and Dean, 2016). In addition, across 10 countries in Asia and Africa, we have seen there is no soft skills and transferable skills training from a formative age which is making their young populations unemployable in Industrial Revolution 4.0.

OI is providing a possible and likely solution physically, digitally and using AI. From remote schools, foundation-run organisations to United Nations camps in Iraq, OI has supported over 30,000 underserved learners to date. OI is aiming to upskill a vast number of learners by 2025 to make them more employable. This paper describes the development and implementation of our blanket employability curriculum to upskill millions of learners.

Our research consisted of four stages (Figure 1):
1. We went to many different places mainly in South East Asia and observed classrooms and we spoke to teachers in a focus-group style to discuss their opninios and views on skills development of their learners.
2. We taught students ourselves in different school settings in South East Asia to find out the status quo.
3. We use research and best teaching practices from the UK such as team-based style learning, project-based learning, and interactive teaching and learning.
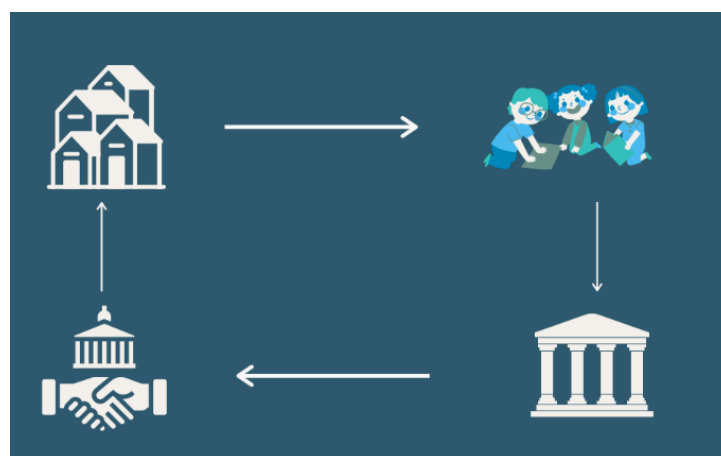4. We gathered insights from governments and NGOs.

Figure 1: Our immersive research.

Based on immersive research, we developed our global blanket employability curriculum. This curriculum consists of weekly online lessons over Zoom with learners. Learners can come from a variety of different countries but are coming from underserved and unserved populations/communities.

Method

In order to test the effectiveness and success of our blanket employability curriculum we collected and analyzed data. Our data collection using a triangular method (Figure 2):
1. Learner feedback: This was collected regularly via an online survey at the end of lessons.
2. Trainer feedback: This was collected after each lesson via an online survey.
3. Independent observer: This is data from our independent observer who pops in and out of the different breakout rooms to observe the lessons.

For the purpose of this paper, we focus on the data collected in the following countries to test the effectiveness of our employability curriculum:
a. Afghanistan and UN camps in Iraq (underdeveloped communities)
b. Remote schools in Pakistan and Sri Lanka (developing communities)
c. NEET learners in the UK (developed communities)

Figure 2: Our methods

Results

Learner feedback:
Results from the learner feedback showed that i) learners across the different countries now understand more about transferable skills and ii) that they are very satisfied with the programme (Figure 3 and 4).
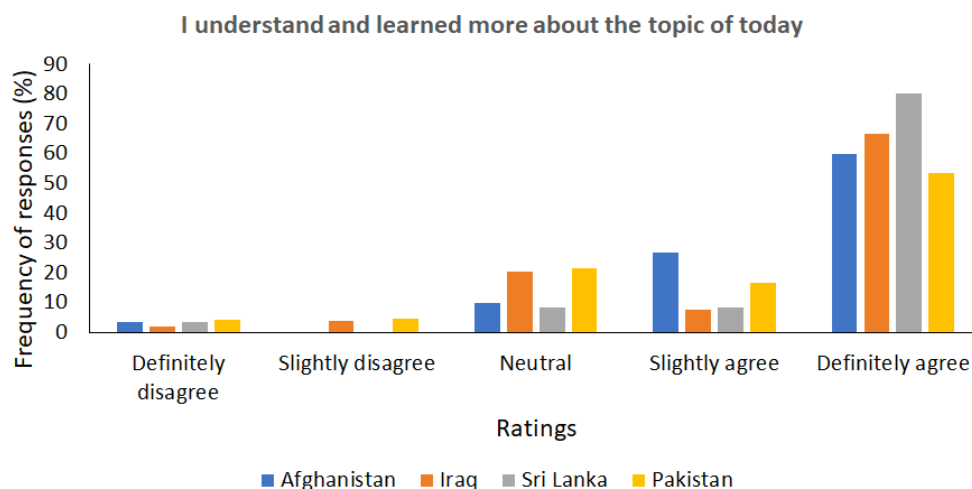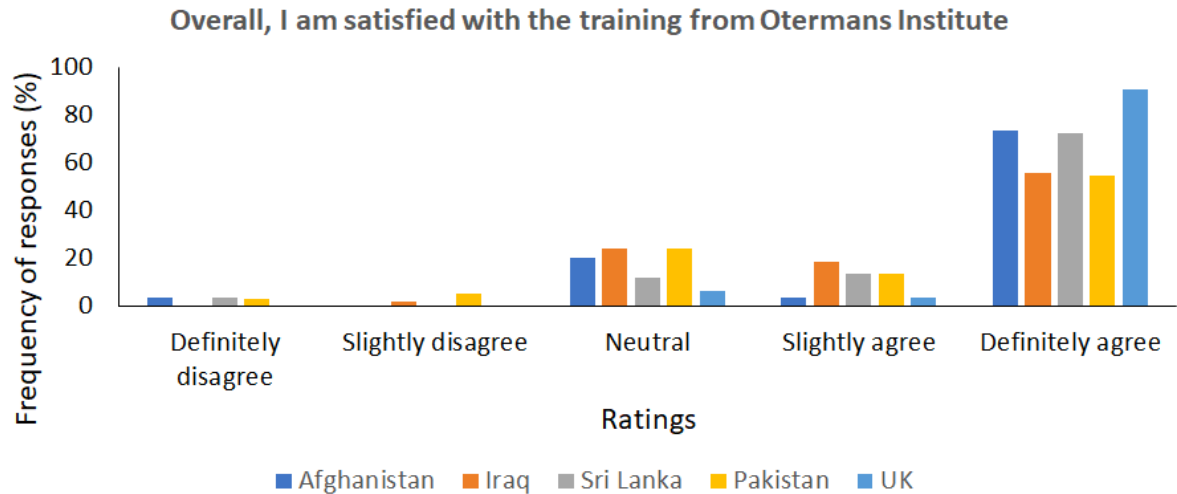

Figure 3: Learner's understanding of the topic.

Figure 4: Learners' satisfaction with the programme.

In addition, learners were also asked to describe the programme in one word. Overall, all responses were very positive and learners showed enthusiasm for the programme which main consisted of 'very good', 'excellent', and 'amazing' (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Learners' one word about the programme.

Trainer feedback

Results from the trainer feedback show that teaching our curriculum across borders is effective as trainers reported that i) learners are very engaged (irrespective of background) and ii) the vast majority of lessons went very well (Figures 6 and 7). Trainers reported on a range of activities that worked well during the lessons showcasing the effectiveness of our teaching methodology. Activities that worked best were the quiz at the end of the lesson, interactive activities and discussion (Figure 8).
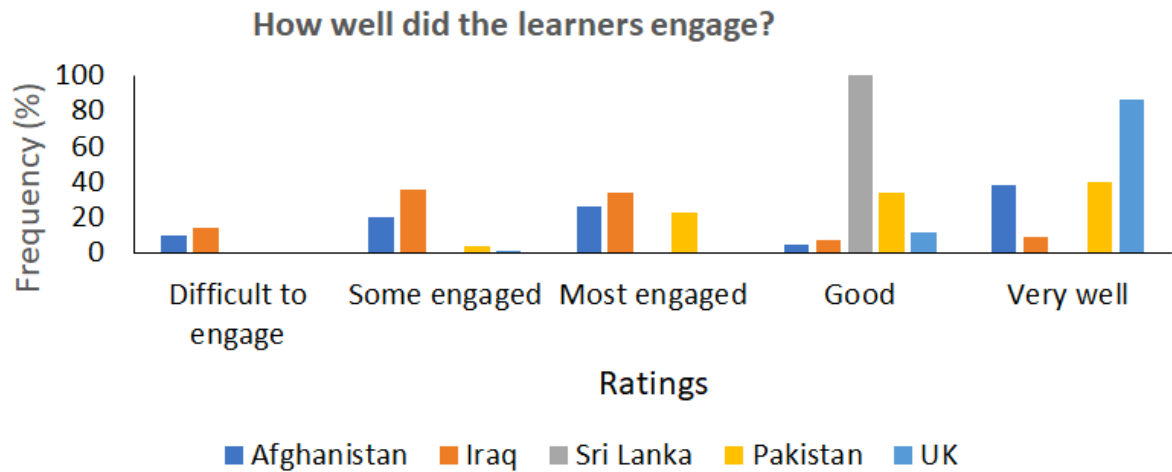
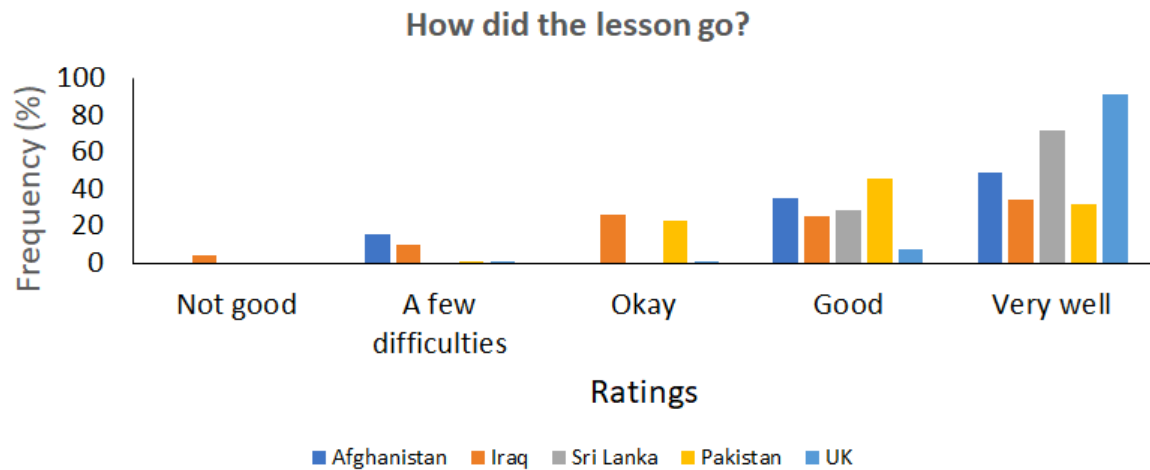Figure 6: Trainers' feedback on learners' engagement.
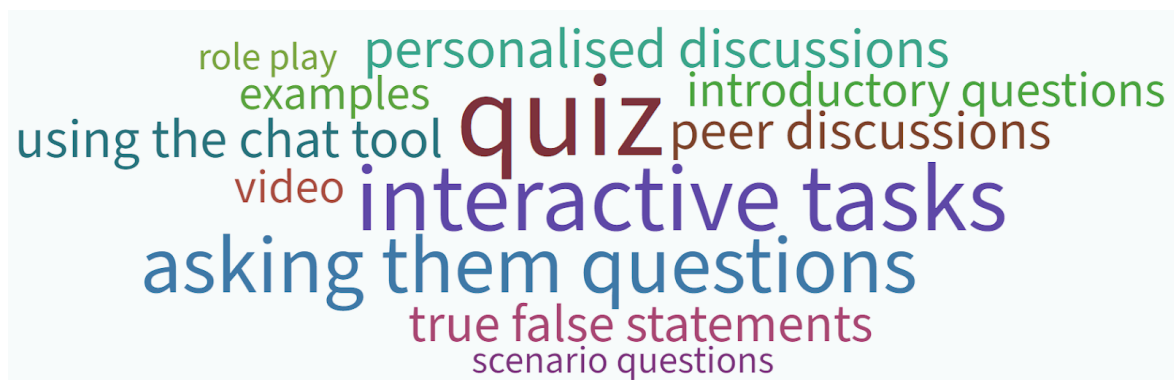

Figure 7: Trainers' feedback on the lessons.

Figure 8: Trainers' responses to activities that went well.

Conclusion

We have supported over 30,000 unserved learners to date ranging from foundation-run organisations in Afghanistan and UN-camps in Iraq (underdeveloped) to remote schools in Pakistan and Sri Lanka (developing), to NEET learners in the UK including with the UK Government (developed). Results show that our employability curriculum and training method is a truly cross-border employability training system.

References

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