



SDI ACADEMY

Introduction



English Proficiency For All

Location: Singapore

Industry: Education & Technology

Founded in 2013

Image credit to Straits Times

Social Development Initiative (SDI) Academy was founded in 2013 by Sazzad Hossain, who is currently an undergraduate student, and Manas Punhani. SDI offers English courses to migrant workers. The course curriculum and textbooks are originally designed and written by Hossain, who can speak and write in Bengali. SDI's lectures and group activities for the foreign workers are held during weekends at the Yale-NUS campus in Clementi, and the venue is rent-free.

By partnering corporates and employers in the construction, manufacturing and shipping industry, SDI is working towards creating safer and more productive work-places. SDI recognises the threats and problems that language barriers and communication gap can pose to Singaporean companies and migrant workers alike. Therefore, SDI has developed a proprietary curriculum combined with advance teaching methodologies to provide a platform to connect local volunteers with migrant workers, thus improving assimilation of workers into mainstream Singaporean society.

Highlights

- 500 workers have graduated from SDI's courses
- SDI Academy won the 2015 DBS-NUS Social Venture Challenge Asia NUS-DBS Youth Entrepreneurship Award, and received S\$50,000 in funding
- SDI Academy was the runner-up for Manpower Hackathon 2015, a competition organised by the Ministry of Manpower

Social Problem

As the founder found out through interactions with the migrant workers, many workers do not have a good command of English. However, at the workplace, safety briefings or instructions are conveyed in English. As such, this increases the risk of workplace injuries, and at the doctor, workers with poor command of English likewise cannot describe their conditions adequately to the doctors.

Hossain, the co-founder, relates to the difficulty of learning English. He was originally from Bangladesh, and moved to Singapore when he was 11. Hossain had begun to conduct English classes when he was fresh out of secondary school, for three migrant workers from a bench at a park using his primary school textbooks. The workers enjoyed his lessons because they were free and conducted in their native language of Bengali, and soon there was insufficient space. Hossain therefore decided to obtain a proper venue and design a curriculum, and the idea of SDI was conceived.

Social Intervention and Impact Created

The course materials are specially written by Hossain to match the requirements at work for migrant workers. Hossain developed the curriculum after looking through about 150 language textbooks bought in Singapore and from Bangladesh. He also went to speak to workers and managers from the construction, shipping and manufacturing industries to determine common areas of miscommunication. He then developed his own course worksheets by using concepts from the textbooks and contextualised them by including practical information that the workers would need at work.



SDI Academy participants attending session at Yale-NUS College

Image credit to SDI Academy

More recently, SDI Academy has also created an interactive learning platform to empower migrant workers with English communication skills. SDI wishes to champion the cause of migrant workers by creating safer and more productive work-places. Using its proprietary curriculum combined with advance teaching methodologies such as team activities, workplace simulation and an industry-first Befrienders Program, SDI customises the classes to meet industry needs, ensuring workers are familiar with technical terms and operating procedures of their workplace.

Business Model

Currently, SDI's classes are taught with the help of experienced professionals fluent in English and the native language of migrant workers. SDI customises the classes to ensure workers are familiar with technical terms and operating procedures of their workplace. It now offers three types of courses: Everyday English, Academic English, and Executive English. So far, SDI has a robust pipeline for its Business to Consumer (B2C) model having trained over 500 workers.

Current Marketing Efforts

Online presence and social media

- **Facebook** (SDI Academy): 2085 likes, around 1 new post per week

Hossain, the founder, has also been a speaker at a TEDx talk, which can be found on Youtube. Straits Times has also written an article on SDI Academy's work.

Challenges Faced and Project Scope

Going forward, SDI wants to expand into the Business to Business (B2B) space. As part of this strategic shift, SDI requires:

- A marketing plan on how to position and brand itself to corporations and employers in the construction and shipping industry,
- Identification of the relevant marketing channels (PR) and generate demand from the B2B channel that enables SDI to win business and contracts.

Useful Links and Resources

Company Website: <http://www.sdi-academy.org/>

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/SDIAcademy/>

Additional references

TEDx Talk by Hossain

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fSKUbdMOqm8>

Manpower Hackathon 2015

<http://www.upsingapore.com/ideas/sdi-academy/manpower-hackathon-runner-up-sdi-academy/>

Youth on a Mission to Ease Foreign Workers Woes

<http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/education/youth-on-a-mission-to-ease-foreign-workers-woes>

Helping Migrant Workers Learn English

<https://www.yale-nus.edu.sg/newsroom/26-august-2015-helping-migrant-workers-learn-english/>