

Empowering Young Minds through Computer Literacy

Project Location: Lahore, Pakistan

Sponsoring College/University: Gettysburg College

Student: Shanzae Sarwar (Home Country: Pakistan; College/University: Gettysburg College)

Project Dates: March – July 2021

Background & Importance

Child labor has always been a common occurrence in the streets of Pakistan. From an early age, children from impoverished families are expected to work and contribute towards the living expenses. Enrolling in school is simply not an option for these children as their families can barely make ends meet and spend all their income on necessary goods such as food and clothes. The Federal Bureau of Statistics and National Child Labor reported that approximately 19 million children below the age of 14 are employed in labor.¹ Moreover, according to *UNICEF*, an estimated 22.8 million children ages 5-16 are out-of-school, placing Pakistan second globally for the highest unenrollment rate in the world.² Even if students from impoverished backgrounds are enrolled in public schools, they are unable to keep up with the rigor of schoolwork. Discouraged by both their families and schools, these children are never able to receive the basic education which is their fundamental right.

Partner Organization

In 2011, a college student started a nonprofit organization known as '*Dream to Education for All*' (*DTEFA*), which is located in Lahore, Pakistan. He started this nonprofit after he saw the positive impact of his tutoring lessons to his house cleaner's son. The purpose of this organization is to equip underprivileged children with basic skills in Languages, Arts, Sciences and Mathematics. It recruits college students who go through several training workshops after which they are well-equipped to teach classes in summer camps. Every summer, the camp enrolls 100 students ranging from grades 1 to 5. Classes are taught on beginner level material in the Languages, Arts, Sciences and Mathematics. The purpose of this summer camp is to equip students with a strong foundation in general knowledge skills and to lay the groundwork for more advanced coursework. At the conclusion of the summer camp, there is a small graduation ceremony for the students to celebrate their achievements and give them a renewed sense of confidence in their academic abilities. In addition to conducting summer camps, *DTEFA* uses its building space as a small public school, *Qadam Community School*, during the schoolyear. This school has hired instructors and has a total of 150 students enrolled, below the age of 11.

Project Details & Goals

After reaching out to *DTEFA*, I realized that they lacked computer coursework in their summer camp curriculum. Although they have the space for a computer lab, they do not have the funds necessary to buy computers. The goal of this project is to build a computer lab for students so that they can familiarize themselves with basic computer skills. With the *Davis Project for Peace* grant, I will purchase fifteen computers for the lab. Some of the funds will be used to set up a wireless internet network. Moreover, I will also purchase a set of computer textbooks that will provide students with a visual understanding of beginner computer skills. These textbooks will be loaned to the students with an understanding that they will be returned at the end of the summer. I have designed a comprehensive curriculum to be covered during this summer camp. It will cover the following topics: functions of a keyboard, operating a mouse, computer maintenance, safe and smart internet use, digital painting, Microsoft Word and basic Excel functions. To further cultivate an environment of digital literacy, I will purchase three projector screens that will be installed in three classrooms to help the instructors teaching Science, Language and History classes. The purpose of multimedia projectors is to provide visual aide that will better help the staff to conduct classes. To cover the cost of additional expenses in excess of the Davis grant, I will organize a fundraising campaign with the goal of raising \$100. I believe that this project will instill students with a curiosity for technological skills and innovative thinking. As students familiarize

¹ "Child labor in Pakistan." *The Express Tribune*, October 22, 2019, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2084376/6-child-labour-pakistan-3/>.

² "Education: Giving every child the right to education." *UNICEF Pakistan*, <https://www.unicef.org/pakistan/education>.

themselves with basic computer skills, it will give them the confidence to take initiative and further build on their skills.

Timeline and Activities

March-April: I will organize a fundraising campaign on campus with the goal of raising \$100 to cover the additional expenses for my project.

April: I will contact *DTEFA* and finalize the details of the computer curriculum for the summer.

Mid-May: Upon arriving in Pakistan, I will purchase 15 computer sets, as well as prepare volunteer(s) for their participation in the project.

1st week of June: I will set up all the computer systems and install a wireless network service.

2nd week of June: Along with the volunteers recruited by *DTEFA*, I will facilitate computer classes. The first week of lessons will begin with the basic functions of a keyboard and how to operate a mouse.

3rd week of June: This week will introduce students to safe use of the internet and how to discern fraudulent sites.

4th week of June: We will teach students how to explore Microsoft Paint and Photoshop.

1st week of July: Students will be introduced to the different toolbars of Microsoft Word.

2nd week of July: Students will start learning basic functions of Microsoft Excel.

3rd week of July: This week will provide a comprehensive overview of all the concepts learnt during the summer. There will also be an award-giving ceremony recognizing those students who showed the most dedication and hard-work.

Future Impact & Sustainability

i. Sustainability during the summer

This project will be sustainable as my partner organization has agreed to provide the resources in maintaining the computer lab even after the conclusion of the *Davis Project for Peace*. Their resources include the support and time of trained staff volunteers who will teach classes in the summer camp. This will ensure a lasting impact of my project and enable the computer lab to be used by students every summer. Moreover, my partner organization has also agreed to provide funds for any yearly repairs or upgrades to the computer software systems. At the conclusion of the summer camp, the students will return their computer textbooks so that they can be loaned to the next group of students in the following summer camps. In addition to the basic computer curriculum discussed above, *DTEFA* has also agreed to further improve computer literacy by including more advanced material to their course every summer. This will allow students to return and build upon the knowledge that they have received the previous summer.

ii. Sustainability during the academic year

Rather than keeping the computer lab obsolete after this summer, I have talked with *DTEFA* to ensure that this facility will be utilized throughout the academic year. As mentioned above, *DTEFA* uses its building space to run a small community school, *Qaddam Community School*, during the rest of the year. *DTEFA* has agreed to let the students of *Qaddam Community School* use this computer facility during the academic year. Although the *Davis Project for Peace* grant will cover internet service for 6 months, *DTEFA* has agreed to provide internet service for the remainder of the year. This will allow the maximum number of students to benefit from this new facility. I believe that this project will cultivate an environment of engaged curiosity and learning for students from underprivileged backgrounds. The knowledge that students learn this summer will equip them with essential computer skills and give them renewed confidence in their own learning potential. This new facility will not only serve as a space for learning life-long skills but also as a hub for creative thinking.

About the Author

I am currently a senior at Gettysburg College with a double major in Economics and International Affairs. I grew up in Lahore and came to the United States for the first time in 2017 to pursue my dream of attaining higher education in a liberal arts institution. Growing up, I had to fight for my right to obtain education, especially since girls are discouraged from pursuing higher education in Pakistani society. The possibility of attending Gettysburg College would never have been possible without financial assistance and scholarships. With the help of the *Davis Project for Peace* grant, I want to play my part in helping other students pursue their goals and aspirations.