Understanding improvements in students’ foundational learning via Top Parent

This fact sheet captures key findings of a summative research study conducted for Top Parent (TP), a parent- and child-facing vernacular app for parental engagement and foundational learning for children. The study was conducted in partnership with Central Square Foundation and Saajha Foundation.

Background
- Research shows that parents can play a critical role in ensure a child’s readiness for school and for life. However, previous surveys have shown that in low-income communities, parents have said that they don’t feel ‘Saksham’ (capable) to support their children’s education, and may lack the confidence and capacity to meaningfully support their child in the learning process.

Focus
- Parental engagement and foundational learning through technology: Top Parent is a free, direct-to-consumer mobile solution designed to deliver age/guidance-specific content using multimedia to parents and children (2-8 years), which is linguistically and culturally relevant. This content is supported by engagement strategies like customized nudges, incentives, rewards, etc., that are aimed at improving usage, app retention, and learning outcomes.

Methodology
- Partner with Saajha to segment ~250 households to download Top Parent
- Conduct pre-test with 250 households
- Support treatment groups via WhatsApp, IVRS and inbound calling (volunteers calling parents)
- Segment randomly into three treatment groups
- Conduct pre-test with 250 households
- Display the Top Parent intervention over 24 weeks

Key findings
- Learning outcomes: Statistically significant improvements in numeracy skills observed for intervention group children between pre- and post-test, with children from grades 1 and 2 seeing improvements in higher order competencies, such as word problems. Mixed results are seen for literacy.
- Parental attitudes, however, did not necessarily improve as a result of increased knowledge.

Engagement interventions
- WhatsApp nudges were cost-efficient and showed higher effectiveness at producing app engagement than other mechanisms, with 50% parents engaging after a WhatsApp nudge. The average number of app engagements post-nudges were 2.4, compared to 0.5 for IVRS and inbound calling (volunteers calling parents).

Research questions
- To what extent do the additional user engagement interventions lead to improvement in app usage, parental engagement, and learning outcomes?
- What is the relationship between parental engagement and learning outcomes, and unpacking the effectiveness of TP in increasing parental engagement and child learning?

Implications and way forward
1. Tech-led learning at home that supplements in-school learning is promising for learning gains in FLN in India. Early results also indicate that a tech-led program, such as Top Parent, can be effective in improving learning outcomes for girls in particular. Engaging parents meaningfully as we move forward will be key to unlocking adoption and engagement in an at-home setting.
2. Tech-led parental engagement and capacity building can be enabling to increase knowledge of best practices for parenting and learning at home. However, Edtech organizations still need to figure out how to move the needle on attitudes and practices in the home – further research on strategies for sustained behavior change through technology is recommended.
3. Low-tech messaging platforms like WhatsApp are promising and cost-effective tools for increasing engagement on EdTech at home, and providing timely nudges/reminders to parents. Further research on content, timing, and personalization of nudges is recommended.

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