GLOBAL
SCHOOLS
FORUM

Impact Summary

Name of Organisation: Instill Education
Website: https://instill.education/
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Ask: $100,000

Innovation summary
Built on Instill's unique learning approach, Upskill comprises a learning management system with a library of modules that improve classroom and school practices, job boards and access to financial products. Our goal is to increase engagement with professional development content by connecting improved performance in the classroom with the potential for higher social, career or financial mobility through stackable microcredentials, job opportunities (thereby improving career mobility), or accessing products and services that will support them in their personal lives (such as affordable loans).
Organisation
Instill Education supports educators and aspiring teachers wherever they are in their education journey, by providing them with lifelong support and development to help them realise both their personal and professional goals.   Instill Education, based in South Africa, is a higher education institution accreditation by the South African Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). For 7 years, Instill has been leading school-based professional development to school leaders and teachers and develop instructional leadership systems in various school setting in South Africa, Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, and Nigeria ranging from public private partnership schools in South African townships to low cost private schools in Uganda in urban and peri-urban communities averaging 50+ students per class. Instill has been involved in a number of research pilots on blended learning and school-wide approaches to continuous professional development to determine effectiveness of different modalities to teacher and school leader instruction and coaching.

Innovation at a glance	
Countries	Ghana, Kenya, South Africa
Target group	Teachers and School leaders
Number of users	50,000+ users
Year established	2015

Type of organisation	Intermediary Organisation
Implementing Partner	Ghanaian National Teachers Commission (NTC), Kenyan Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), South African Council of Educators (SACE)

The problem

African education faces an existential challenge. By 2030, 15m teachers will be needed to address the continent's population growth and the wave of teacher retirement. At the same time, student outcomes have continued lagging - 61m learners are currently expected to reach adolescence without basic life skills. Improving these outcomes will be impossible without raising the quality of teachers and school leaders. While many interventions attempt to address the challenges of the educator workforce, most fail at 1 of 4 things: i) they primarily rely on donor funding with no path to sustainability, ii) they don't address the lifelong continuum from before one becomes a qualified teachers (~30% of African teachers are unqualified), earning their first credentials and going on a journey of lifelong professional development, iii) they don't meet the educator in their context (e.g. access to data, money, lack of incentives to PD), and iv) they almost never improve the social and career mobility of educators (and few actually improve outcomes). Traditional higher education models have continued to lag against this backdrop. For those lucky enough to enter a degree program, Initial Teacher Education appears to be theoretical and disconnected from the reality of classrooms. They require 1-4 years of learning before earning, leading to over 68% drop-out rate, primarily due to financial constraints. Capital intensive models limit the growth of admissions while online models have low quality. The solution isn't about scaling, growing existing offerings and creating more access; we need to reimagine higher education in Africa; we need to reimagine the educator workforce model for Africa.

The solution

Across the public, private and social sectors, there are vibrant, exciting, innovative, interventions addressing these challenges. Nevertheless, there is a hard truth that connects the collective struggle to scale or sustain interventions: interventions might have (some) impact in classrooms but we almost never improve the social and career mobility of educators. Without this crucial link, interventions will continue to depend on (too often fickle) donor or third-party funding. This is true of socially focused ventures (like Instill Education) who can't expect teachers to pay for programming. It is true of educator-focused ed-tech start-ups (like ours) who search for sustainable business models because they can't demonstrate the type of "value-add" educators will pay for. It is true for many progressive policy makers who struggle with the tension between funder and educator priorities.

We believe that a crucial asset that provides a path to a solution is the power of credentials that teachers and regulators care about, and can turbocharge their mobility. We believe in credentials that can be modularized and, over time, stacked towards a fully recognized credential. The benefit of this approach is plenty: it meets educators (aspiring and existing) where they are; allowing them to improve the practice and earn towards a recognized degree. It enables them to manage their financial constraints, and not having to choose between immediate needs to support their livelihood or to commit to a degree full-time.

Our approach is thus unique and reflective of that duality: technology and credentials. We are the only African startup that can both award university degrees (we are conditionally accredited as an independent, private higher education institution in South Africa focused on education) and provide career-long professional development to every educator.

Our digital professional development platform (Upskill@Instill) launched with ~50,000 teachers in Ghana (as well as Kenya and South Africa) earlier this year. Upskill@Instill is our integrated, multi-channel, mobile-friendly tool that underpins our approach and value proposition. Upskill provides educators with unique, practical, accessible, pedagogically rigorous skills and support to develop the specific competencies proven to improve learner performance, particularly in literacy and numeracy. Our platform is structured around "pathways", a collection of modules that allows educators to solve a specific challenge (e.g. drive engagement in a classroom); creating a playbook towards a classroom/school outcome while acquiring a variety of skills that may cut across from planning, behavior management, parental engagement (to name a few). Our module areas are inspired by the global evidence of what makes a great school/classroom environment, contextualized for an African context.

Our platform enables the creation of communities of learning that reinforce a sense of commitment. Additionally, we sometimes augment our digital offering with blended learning opportunities for educators wherever they are in their journey, currently focused on inductions and school leadership development (as a template for stacking credentials towards a degree).

Upskill serves as our baseline for experimentation. While early adoption and engagement on our platform is high, we are starting to answer important questions that will drive better policies across the ecosystem including: what incentives will drive adoption/engagement including i) what are their existing behaviors around learning and PD, ii) what incentives (financial and non-financial) drive more engagement and adoption, iii) does our premise based on stackable micro-credential actually drive a willingness to pay, iv) do our programs drive improvements in classroom practices and eventually outcomes.

Impact

- As of August 2022, there have been over 50 000 users on the Upskill platform
- Upskill has an average NPS of 56, while almost 1/3 users fully complete modules with a submission.
- From a test group, 91% started the recommended course, 50% of the participants reached halfway before dropping out, and 30% completed the course and made a submission.

Highlights - *any standout details such as awards, milestones*

- We have recently been accepted as one of four businesses in the WISE Edtech Accelerator, starting later in September 2022.

- We are a Mastercard Foundation Edtech Fellow

- We are an Injini Accelerator Programme graduate

Sustainability/Revenue Model

The needs of educators on the African continent are myriad and complex, and as such there is no single business or revenue model that we believe will both meet the requirements of our target market and enable us to be a scalable, sustainable organization. We believe that a hybrid business model will enable the delivery of a strong value proposition to our users, whilst delivering the impact that we need to see in classrooms. We have several hypotheses as to the ultimate structure of our business, and we are working to test these hypotheses in a systematic and rigorous manner. We outline below the hypotheses and structures that will ultimately comprise our business model.

The first is our distance higher education business. This is, in its most simple format, a traditional B2C model whereby students pay for a degree either directly or via student financing. This model sits at the core of our business as it represents a tried and tested value proposition. Given the critical undersupply of university seats and the desperate need for better trained teachers, this is the business model against which we have raised our current rounds of investment and see it as highly scalable across the African continent.

Alongside the higher education business, we have also launched Upskill, a freemium online platform which over the course of this year will have over 100 000 users, and over time many millions. This year, we have launched through a B2G model, partnering with the Ghanaian government (and soon to follow in Kenya) to reach teachers with our online training platform. As yet this business model is not revenue generating as it is still in the pilot phase. Whilst currently grant funded, our ultimate goal is to test the long term viability/sustainability of the platform and eliminate our reliance on grant funding.

We believe that a platform of this scale has many opportunities for innovation, particularly when it comes to revenue generation. Our current hypothesis is that a SaaS subscription model for educators and a marketplace for those who can benefit from an educator audience will drive a path to sustainability. The SasS model (currently funded through grants) provides either a B2C or B2G freemium model. Teachers get access to free content, and pay a monthly subscription fee to get their "professional development points" against the national framework set against the framework + access opportunities to earn a credential (once sufficient modules are completed) + access to financial or career opportunities. The marketplace would enable potential partners to access our large teacher audience including for rewards (for commercial partners), recruiting (for school hiring), financial solutions tailored to teachers themselves (e.g. an end-of-month gap loan for teachers committed to PD and needing to bridge the gap to payday).

We are starting to run experiments to understand some of these incentives and will refine over the course of 2022.	

Funding to date	● Mastercard ($850,000 USD) (Grant funding) ● ~$800,000 in generated revenue since inception ● ~$2m raised from investors
What they're looking for	100,000 USD
Why they need funding	● Over the past 7 years they have tested blended and online models. Currently Upskill is purely online. They have scaled to 50k users in Q3 2022 and are currently testing engagement and incentive strategies before scaling further. The Ghanaian NTC is pushing them for nationwide launch in Q3/4 2022. They have a good understanding of the complexities involved in scale, and they seek to scale across all four scale dimensions outlined by Cooley and Linn (2014). ● In Kenya, they are working with 3 County Governments to onboard all ECD teachers (standard scale). ● They then plan to expand to all 42 Counties in Kenya (horizontal scale). ● With approval from the KICD and TSC (anticipated early Q3), they will then start onboarding primary and high school teachers and school leaders nationally (vertical scale).

Why they made our shortlist	

The team setup is particularly strong, and their fundraising potential is good. They have good partners and are testing steadily. Instill presented a great application and presentation. There is clear strength in the desirability component; they were able to effectively articulate their problem and tell us why their solution was appropriate.