

'Language barrier'

Philadelphia immigrant parents tell tales of exclusion

PHILADELPHIA, Nov 23, (AP): Philadelphia parents who don't speak English say they've long been excluded from parts of their children's education because of language barriers, an issue that's only been exacerbated by the pandemic and the return to in-person learning.

Parents told The Associated Press stories of students being used as translators despite federal prohibitions, incorrect telephone translations or poor communication when their children were being bullied. Experts said Philadelphia is not alone, noting that many school districts have lagged in creating systems that treat non-English speakers equally rather than responding to complaints.

Philadelphia school district officials said the district has made a lot of progress in recent years, including

sending communication in parents' languages and hiring dozens of additional in-school interpreters called bilingual cultural assistants, or BCAs. They said the district has policies against using children as translators and robust guidance on how to request language help.

Still, problems persist.

Struggled

Mandy, who asked the AP not to use her last name, has a 10-year-old son with special needs. She struggled with whether to return him to in-person schooling, but ultimately decided the virtual option didn't offer enough support for parents who don't speak English.

Mandy said her biggest struggle with language access has been during special education meetings at her son's previ-

ous school. Even though things have improved since she transferred him to another school in 2020, she still spends hours translating documents into Mandarin because the district provides very few fully translated documents.

During one meeting, a telephone translator said she didn't know anything about special education and refused to translate, so Mandy started bringing a bilingual friend as a backup. Another time, a translator told Mandy the district was going to teach her son to "eat meat," which her friend quickly corrected, explaining the specialist was talking instead about goals for feeding therapy.

"It sounds like a comical incident, but it was really frustrating," Mandy said in Mandarin through a translator. "It feels like immigrant parents are deliberately excluded and pushed to the

margins."

Jenna Monley, deputy chief of the district's Office of Family and Community Engagement, said the office has issued guidance to school and district staff to transition to in-person interpreters for individualized education plan meetings when possible.

"I think that you are always going to find pockets of success. But there are some areas where things need to grow and improve," Monley said.

The Philadelphia school district saw an increase to more than 16,500 English learners in 2020 from around 12,000 in 2013, and Census numbers show nearly a quarter of people in Philadelphia older than 5 speak a language other than English at home.

Juntos, a Latinx immigrant advocacy group in South Philadelphia, did a phone survey of families around

March 2020 asking about their concerns related to the pandemic. Executive Director Erika Guadalupe Núñez said that, after basic needs, 99% listed schooling as their next concern, including how to get a school laptop or how to communicate with teachers who only spoke English.

"It was food, shelter, health - the key things they needed to feel safe and whole, and the very next thing was education," said Guadalupe Núñez.

Translate

She added that Juntos members have long talked about their children being pulled from class by teachers or principals to help translate at schools, which is against school policy and against federal rules.

"It's frustrating for so many reasons. We just want kids to be kids. And we

want them to stay in class and have the same opportunities to learn that English-speaking children have," Guadalupe Núñez said.

The US Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights, which receives dozens of parental language complaints each year, issued guidance in 2015 on the legal obligation to communicate with parents in languages they understand, saying neither students nor untrained bilingual staff should translate. It also says translators should know any specialized terms or concepts in both languages.

Monley said the office provides school and district staff with guidance on when and how to use BCAs or the other contracted translation options. Annual refresher trainings are only required for "key staff," which doesn't include most teachers.

Company concludes ZGI 6 virtual edition in collaboration with Brilliant Lab

Zain presents first comprehensive digital program for accelerating tech startups



Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, premiered the region's first Startup Innovation Digital Video Report, concluding the sixth edition of its renowned digital startups accelerator program; Zain Great Idea (ZGI) in collaboration with Brilliant Lab.

The event gathered Zain's executive management and the region's investment community along with 25 startups who made it to the final phase of Zain Great Idea 6. The Digital Video Report was screened at VOX cinemas in the Avenues mall, and saw the finalists, who represented 7 Arab countries, pitch their startups to investors and potential business partners from across MENA.

During the event, Eaman Al Roudhan, Zain Kuwait's Chief Executive Officer addressed the audience and startups: "This year we are celebrating over 10 years of Zain Great Idea. Without any doubt, it has been one of the most successful initiatives we presented in the Kuwaiti market as part of our innovation and entrepreneurship strategy".

Al Roudhan continued: "Throughout a decade, ZGI has empowered, trained, and invested in over 1,500 passionate Kuwaiti and Arab youth, and the program contributed to creating numerous job opportunities in the regional tech-startups arena by accelerating over 100 businesses."

Al Roudhan announced: "Investments in ZGI startups are well over KWD 6 million (USD 20m) to this date, and 30% of our alumni now own thriving and active businesses to this day across local and regional markets. 40% of these businesses have raised capital."

Al Roudhan noted: "Unsurprisingly, digital transformation was the prevailing success story for the vast majority of our alumni throughout the program's history. At its core, ZGI was always a tech-startup accelerator program, and the huge demand for this area of entrepreneurship across Kuwait and the region only proved that Zain's vision of achieving digital leadership was on the right track".

During the event, Zain Group's Chief Investment and Digital Transformation Officer Malek Hammoud introduced the recently launched Zain Ventures brand: "Zain Ventures was established to complement the existing



Eaman Al Roudhan

Eaman Al Roudhan:
KWD 6 million of investments in ZGI startups to date

investment portfolio of Zain Group and open the door to future investment opportunities in the venture capital, FinTech and Tech World, focusing on digital innovations in the fast-growing electronic services and startup ecosystem"

Hammoud continued: "Zain Ventures is one of the key elements of Zain Group's '4Sight' strategy. Investing in the world of venture capital provides Zain with a vast range of opportunities to diversify and expand its reach in the surrounding ecosystem. Over the years, Zain has expanded its relationship with regional and international venture capital funds supporting their portfolio companies whenever appropriate".

Hammoud further explained: "The ZGI Accelerator program bolsters Zain Ventures' vision to capitalize on regional startups as we continue our active engagement in direct strategic investments in a variety of promising startups from the region and afar, offering them support on multiple fronts including a wide geographical reach and progressive customer base for expansion growth opportunities".

ZGI 6 witnessed a new chapter in the story of the program, as the ZGI 6 alumni were the very first of Zain's own entrepreneurs to have completed an entire ZGI program in a 100% virtual setting. This, by no means, has been as easy feat.

While past ZGI participants had the benefit of physically learning from the world's best academics at San Francisco, London, and Barcelona, ZGI 6 participants had to navigate through the uncharted waters of e-learning and remote collaboration. Technology has

Malek Hammoud:
program bolsters Zain Ventures' vision to capitalize on regional startups and digital innovation

undoubtedly played a vital role in making this process less challenging, but the entrepreneurs' perseverance and dedication were the main elements behind their success.

Zain Great Idea 6, being an all-virtual program, exceeded expectations in terms of numbers. In spite of the remote setting and unprecedented situation, 170 ambitious applicants applied, of which 114 took part in the virtual bootcamp and 60 bright minds qualified to the Super Saturday phase. In the end, 25 dedicated finalists from 7 different GCC and Arab countries made it to the final phase and pitched their great ideas to potential investors and business partners.

ZGI 6 has also seen the highest-ever turnout of female entrepreneurs in the program's history, adding to the impressive track of triumphs during the past decade, directly contributing to what Zain calls the biggest startups network in the region, with almost 20-million-dollar capital in and capital out in accelerated startups.

Zain strongly believes in the crucial role played by private sector organizations in supporting social and economic sustainability projects. The company is committed to printing a positive impact through all its activities, and this has led it to embrace the most influential topics in the community, perhaps most importantly the support of youth, entrepreneurship, and innovation, not only in Kuwait, but across the entire region.

Brilliant Lab founder and CEO, Neda Al Dehani, said: "In spite of the pandemic, Zain insisted on launching the 2021 edition of ZGI virtually in an endeavor to support startups and entrepreneurs, and we took the call to be a part of the program yet again to continue our mission to accelerate Kuwait and MENA startups towards success".

Al Dehani announced: "As part of ZGI 6, Brilliant Lab and Rasameel Investment Company have created a USD 5 million fund to invest in successful startups that are part of the ZGI program".

Al Dehani continued: "This has

ZGI:
a decade of one of the most successful initiatives to support tech innovations and sustainability in region

led Brilliant Lab and three other investors to invest an undisclosed amount in BnchrPlus, a ZGI participating startup that specializes in E-Automotive Industry Services. The investment values BnchrPlus in excess of USD 3 million, with the startup forecasting revenues to exceed USD 10 million in the next two years".

The telco's much-anticipated program that attracted over 170 startups from the Middle East and North Africa was undertaken in joint collaboration with Brilliant Lab, Kuwait's top startup accelerator service, and Mind the Bridge, an innovation center based in Silicon Valley, USA.

The program offered a refreshed opportunity for local talents and the region's entrepreneurial community. Throughout six successful editions, the program has empowered, trained, and invested in hundreds of creative and driven Kuwaiti and Arab youth, of which many now own thriving and active Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) to this day in local and regional markets

Zain is well aware of the crucial role played by private sector organizations in supporting social and economic sustainability projects. Springing from its growing commitment towards practicing its social responsibility, the company is committed to printing a positive impact through all its activities. This has led Zain to embrace the most influential issues in the community, including the support of youth, entrepreneurship, and innovation.

The following is a quick summary of the 25 startups that starred in Zain's Startup Innovation Digital Video Report:

- amaakin, Kuwait, Platform that helps you to communicate for booking venues for various events.
- TANFEES, Oman, Online therapy and counseling platform app for adults, couples, and parents.
- FULLTACT, Egypt, App that automatically updates and organizes your devices contacts list, and enables you to share all your contacts details while in a private and secure manner.



Company premiered first video report showcasing tech startups and digital innovation

Sixth edition witnessed 170 startups, 25 finalists, and highest-ever turnout of female entrepreneurs

- Ketabiik, KSA, A marketplace for selling used items by choosing a location, taking a photo, and selling new or old products.
- TDALAL, Kuwait, App that combines eastern and western gifting traditions, through introducing gift registries into the local market and digitalizing the local concept of "Gattieh" - (split payment).
- QURBA, Egypt, A new social network focused on food and foodies.
- SNATCHR, Kuwait, A platform that aims to be the place where one can get the best apparel and accessories at outlets.
- Hayi, UAE, A UAE app that provides neighbors with an exclusive platform to connect, share information and befriend those in the community.
- BNCHR+, Kuwait, A car service that allows customers/companies to request and receive car maintenance whenever/wherever they are with just a few clicks.
- BRANPER, Tunisia, The new age of surveys that delivers heavily-loaded dashboards with KPIs, to help companies; grow sales, tailor their loyalty programs, predict behavioral trends.
- SWEECH, UAE, A peer-to-peer marketplace that allows car owners to rent out their cars to other commuters.
- SCARLT, UAE, An e-commerce fashion platform that offers high-quality dresses at affordable prices to women in the region.
- tamarran, Bahrain, A home-grown sport management software and booking app used by gyms, fitness studios, sports academies, personal trainers, and recreational centers.
- breez, KSA, An AI-powered wireless building intelligence system that helps increase comfort and reduce energy consumption and operational costs.
- DHANA, Kuwait, A children growth tracking online platform.
- LOY CLUB, Oman, An apps that helps large enterprises with the existed customer loyalty solution to monetize the unredeemed loyalty points that are trapped in their balance sheet.
- oostoor, Tunisia, The first B2B marketplace dedicated to Retail in Tunisia.
- BAZAARA, UAE, A peer-to-peer social marketplace platform for buying and selling preloved clothing, accessories, and home goods in the GCC.
- PAWARABIA, Bahrain, A web and mobile app for pet owners, providing them with e-commerce and booking services.
- SHALAOONLINE, UAE, An on-demand streaming platform that offers tailored fitness and meditation programs.
- TRENJH, KSA, A platform that empowers local farms and vegetable shop owners to find their customers and market their products.
- PUNCH, Kuwait, A loyalty platform that allows SMEs to launch their custom loyalty program instantly.
- REHLA, KSA, One of the leading innovative apps in KSA that offers a new transportation solution for long distances.
- CC (ConnectedCommunity), UAE, An app that bridges the gap between residents of a community and management by initiating early communications.
- crowdpowered, Bahrain, Crowd Powered launched the Sunpreneur initiative in 2021 to help drive the adoption of solar photovoltaic power across the MENA region.

