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Teaching through subtitles for Bollywood films earns NGO \$50,000 from Library of Congress

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PlanetRead in Mumbai picked up concept from IIM Ahmedabad.

By Deepak Chitnis

WASHINGTON, DC: An India-based Non-Government Organization (NGO) has earned an award from the US Library of Congress for its efforts to increase literacy in India.

PlanetRead, based in Mumbai, created an innovative way to get youngsters in India to take up reading: by providing subtitles for their favorite Bollywood songs. The method is based on something called Same Language Subtitling (SLS), which uses an easy-to-teach vocabulary in the subtitles of popularly known songs and TV programs.

The goal of PlanetRead, according to its literature, is to create "a planet where everyone can read and have access to interesting and affordable reading opportunities in both his/her native or other language(s)."

The efforts of PlanetRead have earned it the 2013 Library of Congress Literacy Award, a \$50,000 cash prize. The award was created this past January to help alleviate the amount of illiteracy in both the US and around the world. By giving out the award, the Library of Congress hopes to spread further awareness of illiteracy as well as provide additional funding for those organizations, such as PlanetRead, who are doing all that they can to eradicate it.

The SLS methodology was originally created in 1996 by the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad.

So far, by using SLS, PlanetRead has reached out to nearly 200 million low-literacy TV viewers throughout India, according to the Library of Congress. The SLS-based curriculum that it institutes has already been adopted by several musical programs on channels such as Doordarshan.

PlanetRead is careful to make sure that they are using SLS on specific programs in each region of India, and creating subtitles in each region's own native language. A television promo for PlanetRead can be found below, which gives some insight into how SLS works, and the effectiveness of what PlanetRead is trying to do.

PlanetRead Spot



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