



founder's note

“Without the humanities, great tech can not exist.”

This quote by Tracy Chou was the first thing that came to mind as I started penning this note for the first-ever annual report of THE Labs—and rightly so. It’s a quote that has stayed with me through the 11 years I spent building Gatuvit.

Those 11 years took me from coding desks to anganwadis and ashram schools in some of the most remote parts of Maharashtra. They grounded the techie in me by exposing me to the realities on the ground. They made me witness these two worlds growing apart.

But those years also did something else. Quietly, they nurtured the educator in me and gave me a rational lens to look at social impact.

I feel THE labs is, in many ways, the culmination of that journey. And as I reflect on the first year of THE labs, I am not sure if I can fully express how satisfied I feel, but I will give it a try.

What initially began as a vision for a school soon evolved into an afterschool program. As we engaged more deeply with the problem we were trying to solve, we realized that it demanded a solution that was both more focused and scalable.

Very soon I found myself working with Kedar over late nights and weekends—designing the program, hosting workshops with educators—distilling our many ideas into a sharp focus, building partnerships and visualising the organizational roadmap alongside Mayura, traveling to raise funds, teaching in the classroom, writing reflections, scouting locations for our first center and visualising it’s design.

Like many first years, it was exhilarating.

I’m incredibly proud of how far we’ve come in such a short span of time though. What began as a nascent idea, soon took shape as a pilot that delivered the kind of impact we had only imagined in the beginning. And alongside that, we raised the entire year’s funding—an achievement that speaks volumes about the belief others placed in our vision. From idea to a fully operational program, we came a long way.

I won't use this space to walk you through everything that happened over the year though—that's what the rest of this report is for. Instead, I want to take a moment to thank the people without whom none of it would have been possible.

First and foremost, Nilesh Nimkar—the person I've had the privilege of working closely with for over a decade, and someone who has shaped me in many ways. A mentor, a friend, and an inspiration behind THE Labs.

The ones who always showed up when we needed them, sharing their knowledge, time, and wisdom—Mitali Thatte, Vinay Tanksale, and the entire QUEST team.

Those who shaped the entrepreneur in me and were instrumental in bringing THE labs to life—Sandeep Rai, Pooja Chopra, Chahat Sanghvi, Abbas Dadla, and the incredible team at The Circle—their care, belief, and passion were more than I could have ever imagined.

Our early supporters and the team who chose to believe in just a wild idea.

And last, but never the least—Ruchita, Kedar and Mayura who are building this with me and are being such a strong force that they are!

I believe all these people are the true pioneers of something that the world desperately needs—bringing technology and humanities together. I hope, one day, it becomes the norm.

Mandar Kulkarni
Cofounder and CEO
THE labs



from global perspective

“

Teaching AI solely through a technical lens is no longer enough. While it's essential for young people to develop strong technical skills, they also need a grounding in the humanities to critically engage with the technologies reshaping how we read, write, think, and relate to the world around us. This is where initiatives like THE labs are not just valuable – they're vital.

THE labs stands out by introducing children to AI in a way that's both hands-on and deeply reflective. They don't just teach how AI works; they teach how to question it – ethically, socially, and philosophically. This balanced approach empowers students to become not just users or builders of technology, but thoughtful participants in shaping its future.

As global influence shifts and emerging economies come to the forefront, grassroots efforts like THE labs are doing the critical work of preparing the next generation for meaningful inclusion in global conversations. Their model deserves recognition, support, and replication on a wider scale.

”

Nadav Neuman
Head of Education
Sapienship



SAPIENSHIP

our vision

People
across all sections of society
have equal
political & economic
bargaining power
in the upcoming
technological upheavals.

our mission

Equipping underserved children with
mastery of AI foundations,
a humanitarian lens,
and
an entrepreneurial mindset
necessary
to claim a seat at the table.

table of contents

<u>Program Updates</u>	<u>7</u>
<u>Phase-wise Approach</u>	<u>8</u>
<u>Image Classifier AI module</u>	<u>9</u>
<u>Image Generation AI module</u>	<u>11</u>
<u>Highlights from launch</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>From the keynotes</u>	<u>15</u>
<u>More from launch</u>	<u>16</u>
<u>Recognitions</u>	<u>21</u>
<u>Claiming a seat at the table - TUMO AI/Teens conference</u>	<u>22</u>
<u>In the news</u>	<u>24</u>
<u>Humans of THE labs</u>	<u>25</u>
<u>Team</u>	<u>26</u>
<u>Advisory Board & Mentors</u>	<u>27</u>
<u>Supporters</u>	<u>28</u>
<u>From funders' perspective</u>	<u>27</u>

program updates

PHASE-WISE APPROACH

Since there was no existing comprehensive curriculum for teaching AI to children in grades 6 to 8, we had to build one from the ground up. Our goal was to rigorously test both our curriculum and pedagogy in real classroom settings before considering broader implementation. So, in our first year, we took a step-by-step approach and rolled out the program in carefully designed phases -

Pre-Pilot - During the curriculum design phase, we tested select components with a small group of children to validate our direction and identify areas for improvement early on.

Pilot - Once a working draft of the curriculum was ready, we conducted a pilot in a low-income private school to assess its feasibility and relevance in a real classroom environment. During the pilot, we implemented two full modules, measured their impact, and used those insights to refine both the content and pedagogy.

Launch - We officially launched the program and began implementing the evolved version with a larger group of children. We plan to scale the fully tested curriculum more broadly in the 2025–26 academic year.

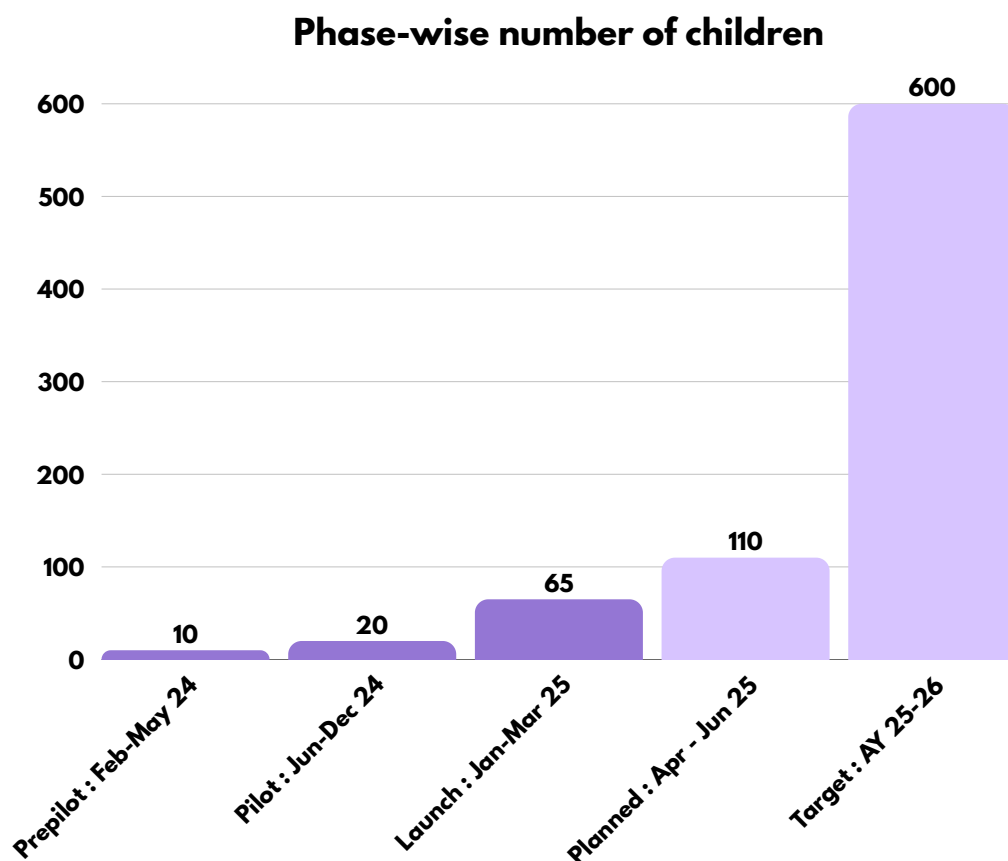


IMAGE CLASSIFIER AI MODULE

Implemented with - 65 children

Hours of input - 15

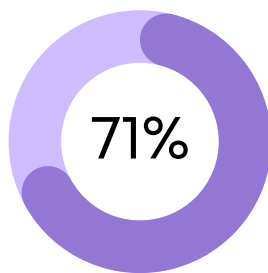
Image Classifier AIs are systems designed to categorize new images into predefined classes after being trained on a large set of labeled examples.

During this module, children worked on 16 projects to train Image Classifier AIs for various usecases.

After intervention of this module the children were expected to achieve following competencies -

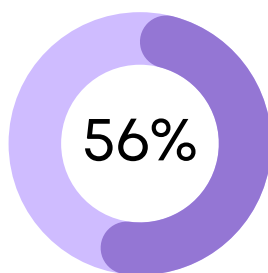
- *Curating a high quality dataset to train an image classifier AI for a given use-case*
- *Reasoning for the errors made by an image classifier AI in terms of presence/absence of data*
- *Using relevant historical facts about evolution, benefits and hazards of image classifier AI to build an argument*

Below are the outcomes of our intervention -



children achieved
the expected level of
proficiency (n=65)

6 months after the intervention, we tested for the retention in 18 children and below is what we found.



children had retained
the expected level of
proficiency (n=18)

Retention of the proficiency level of the remaining children will be tested in September 2025.

IMAGE CLASSIFIER AI PROJECTS

Children trained an image classifier AI for various usecases such as identifying sign language, classifying plants, decoding numbers, etc.

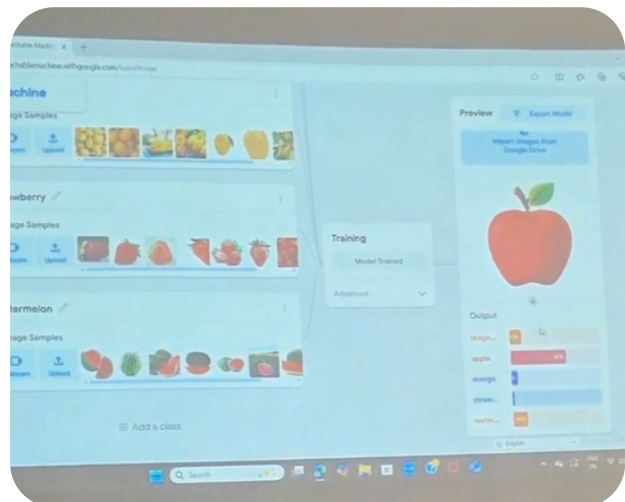
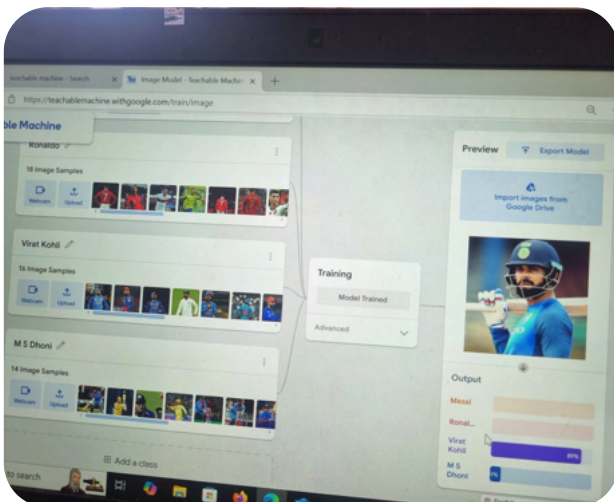
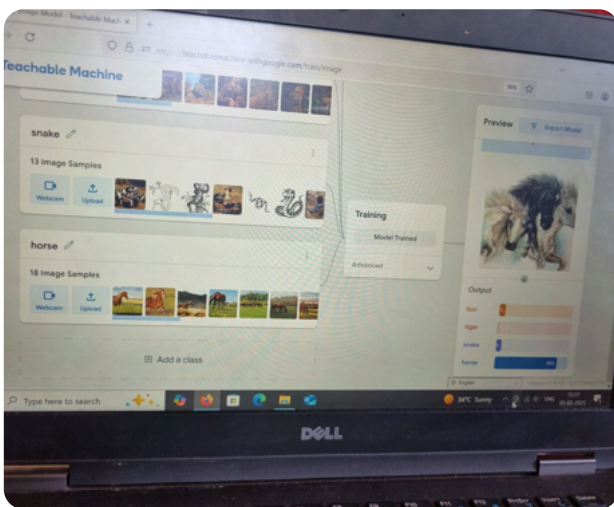
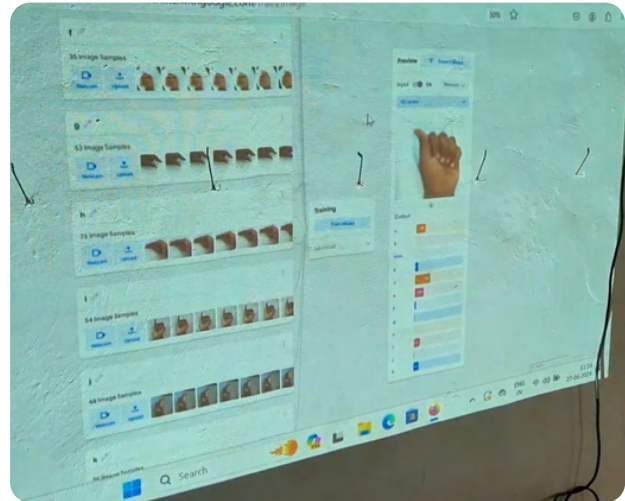


IMAGE GENERATION AI MODULE

Implemented with - 18 children

Hours of input - ~105

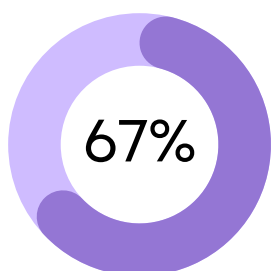
Image Generation AIs are systems designed to generate entirely new images by taking a text prompt as input.

During this module, children worked on 12 projects which spanned from finetuning AI models to researching about biases in various AI models.

After intervention of this module the children were expected to achieve following competencies -

- *Predicting the data sub-set that must have helped the AI learn in order to generate given image*
- *Reasoning whether AI would be able to generate an image for a prompt if it is trained on a specific training dataset*
- *Giving high quality prompts to get the required image from Image Gen AI*
- *Fine-tuning a default version of AI so that it can create and contextualize new objects and styles*
- *Telling the difference between human cognition and Image Gen AI cognition*
- *Becoming aware of one's own biases, the sources of those biases and impact of various biases prevalent in society on individuals and communities*
- *Measuring biases in AI using statistical methods and comparing various AI models based on how biased they are*
- *Making predictions about the potential benefits and hazards of Image Gen AI*

Below are the outcomes across above competencies after our intervention -



children achieved
the expected level of
proficiency (n=18)

Retention of the proficiency level of these children will be checked in July 2025.

IMAGE GENERATION AI PROJECTS

Children worked on projects to make AI inclusive by finetuning it's outputs.

Before

After

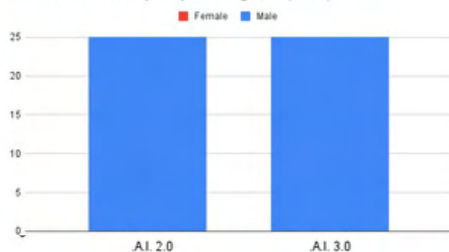


Children
trained the AI
for फुलपाखरू

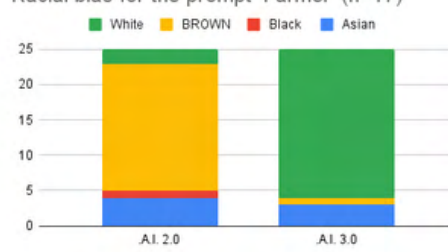


Children worked on projects to compare two AI models by measuring biases in outputs.

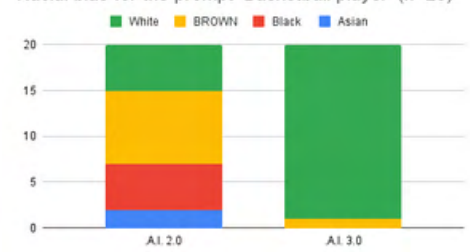
Gender bias for the prompt "Firefighter" (n=25)



Racial bias for the prompt 'Farmer' (n=17)



Racial bias for the prompt 'Basketball player' (n=20)



Children educated the community by demonstrating how fake news are created



highlights from launch event

launch on 26th january 2025

Our vision is a society where everyone, across all sections, has equal bargaining power and what other day could have been more apt than the republic day of India to officially launch THE labs!

We took our first step towards our vision when

Kamaladevi Awate, Co-Director Of Maharashtra SCERT,

Sandeep Rai, Founder and CEO, The Circle India

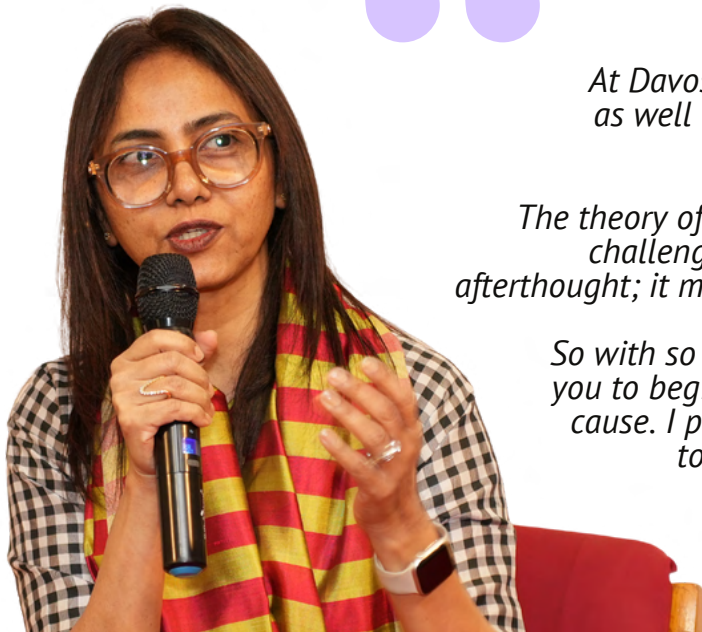
and

Neelima Thota, Founder, Sah-karta, Ex-Asia Lead, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

together launched our first physical center!

Flip through to catch more highlights from the launch event!





At Davos, the World Economic Forum emphasized about AI as well as the risks. So I can see THE labs is moving in the right direction—starting right from the last mile.

The theory of change is often easier to achieve though. The real challenge lies in the theory of scale. And it shouldn't be an afterthought; it must be part of the journey from the very beginning.

So with so many like-minded people in the room, I encourage you to begin discussions on building a collective fund for this cause. I pledge to be the first donor in it and humbly appeal to all of you to join us in forming a strong collective.

Neelima Thota

NEP 2020 talks about interdisciplinary learning, problem solving, creativity, collaboration as essential parts of education. Many other government initiatives such as INSPIRE award, hackathons also promote the idea of children creating tech based projects to solve social problems and presenting them at district, state and national levels. In this context, an initiative like THE labs makes a lot of sense.

I learnt so much about AI by just listening to these children today. I liked the emphasis on understanding not just the positive aspects but also the negative consequences of AI, and the importance of human connection.

I would encourage THE labs team to propose this program to our core committee so that this initiative is taken to the state level and all children are benefitted through it.

Dr. Kamaladevi Awate



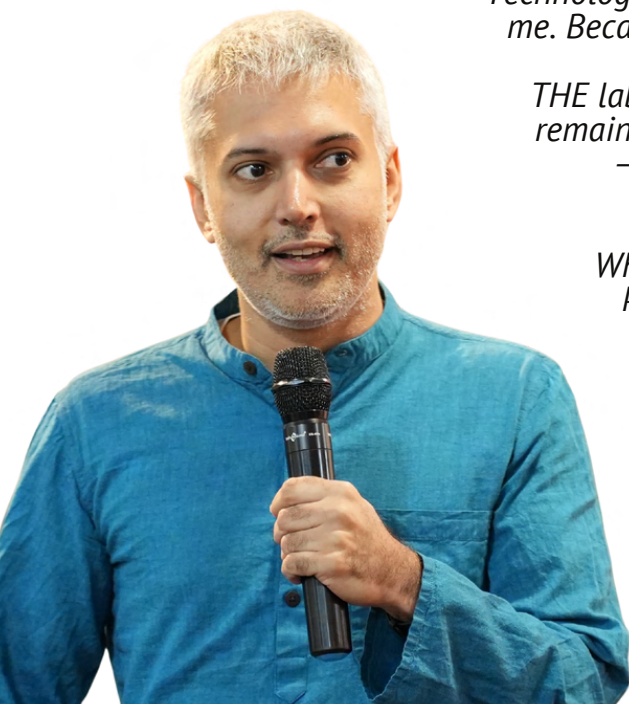
'Technology automates inequality'—when I heard this from them, it struck me. Because most of us see AI disrupting the world, yet we just sit back.

THE labs has the courage to act differently. They refuse to let children remain passive observers. Instead, they're putting kids at the forefront—giving them the power not just to consume a rapidly changing world, but to shape it.

When I went to their classrooms, I saw that power firsthand. I saw kids engaging rigorously in finetuning AI models, distinguishing what was fake from what was real, and much more. I was mindblown, thinking: Wow. This indeed, is a social currency.

My biggest hope is that THE labs empowers all kids with that social currency—to steer the AI revolution.

Sandeep Rai



more from launch



Suyog Patki, an angel investor, revealed **AI wala Vinit**—a YouTube channel started by one of the children from our Pilot Intervention.

Prof. Samar Nakhate, ex-Dean of FTII inaugurated **Kikinak Art Club**—an activity that will run every Saturday at our community center



Shaheen Mistri, Founder and CEO of Teach for India and Founder and Board Member of Akanksha Foundation led **Aarohan**—the graduation of the children from THE labs pilot and their transition into next module.

CHILDREN'S PANEL DISCUSSION

Alok Rajwade, an actor and director, moderated a discussion with three children from THE labs - Sarvesh, Ditya and Manasi on Image Generation AI and its impact.

[Watch the entire panel discussion here](#)



SUPPORTER'S PANEL AND PILOT IMPACT REPORT LAUNCH

Chahat Sanghvi moderated a panel discussion on 'AI, future of work and the role of THE labs' with our supporters - Jayanti Phalke, Mitali Thatte, Madhuri Kudekar and Ashwath Bharath. The panel then published the pilot impact report.

[Read the impact report here](#)



Shreyash and Purva

showcased how they have finetuned AI to generate image of a chandrayaan rover



Ditya

explained how AI's cognition
is different than human
cognition



Sarvesh and Yashika
debunked fake news and
demonstrated how they are
generated



Sandhya, Glory, Kartiki and Tejas
showed how to write
high quality prompts



recognitions

claiming a seat at the table

Manasi Prasad, a student from the THE labs's pilot, was invited as a panelist to an international AI/Teen conference organized by TUMO in 15 cities across the world and hosted by Shikha Academy on 15th March 2025. While the entire proceedings of the conference were in English, Manasi, who was seeing a city like Mumbai for the first time, spoke confidently in Hindi about her research on biases in AI and raised thought-provoking concerns about the overuse of AI by teens.



[Watch live streaming](#)
[on YouTube](#)



TUMOAI

 **SHIKHA**
— ACADEMY —

more from tumo ai/teen conference

Kedar Marathe was the jury for the AI project competition held at the conference.

Mandar Kulkarni gave the keynote speech.

THE labs team conducted a workshop on 'Decoding AI's Brain' for the teens.



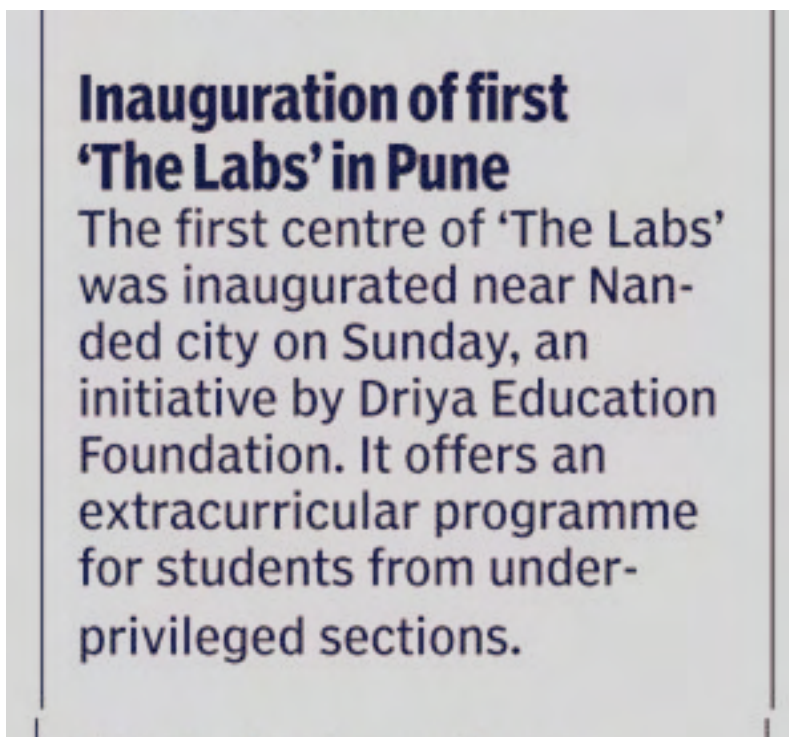
In the news

Media coverage about THE labs IN THE LAST YEAR



Our launch event and work was covered by The Times of India and Maharashtra Times

Read one of the coverages [here](#)



Empowering young minds: How 4 friends are teaching AI in low-income communities

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Pune: "Why are firefighters always men? Why is a black, old, fat woman never the first image when we ask for a person?" These were some of the sharp questions posed by 11- to 14-year-old children learning about artificial intelligence (AI), its reasoning, and its biases.

As part of Pune-based THE Labs, a not-for-profit organisation founded by four friends, these children from low-income communities are not just learning how AI works but also how to challenge and reshape its inherent prejudices, how to train

it, how to leverage it, and how to evaluate it.

Since June 2024, its first cohort of 20 students explored AI through image classification and identification, learning how machines perceive the world. Now, they are gearing up to train large language models, equipping themselves with skills to shape AI's future. A new batch of 30 students has joined.

THE Labs is a non-profit after-school programme blending technology, humanities and entrepreneurship. It was founded by tech entrepreneurs Mayura Dolas and Mandar Kulkarni, AI engineer Kedar Marathe, and inter-

STUDENTS ENTHUSED BY HANDS-ON PRACTICE

THE Labs is a non-profit after-school programme blending technology, humanities and entrepreneurship. In June 2024, it launched a pilot at a low-income English-medium school in Khadakwasla.

Its first cohort of 20 students explored AI through image classification and identification.

They compared outputs from two AI models, identifying gaps such as underrepresentation of marginalised identities.



Students first learned about classifier AI and image generation AI

disciplinary artist Ruchita Bhujbal, who saw a gap — engineers lacked exposure to real-world issues, and educators had little understanding of technology.

"We first considered building a school, but the impact would have been limited. Besides, there were logistical hurdles," said Dolas, who is also a filmmaker.

Kulkarni's acceptance into The Circle's incubation

programme two years ago provided 18 months of mentorship and resources to refine their vision.

In June 2024, THE Labs launched a pilot at a low-income English-medium school

in Khadakwasla, training 20 students from standards VI-VIII (12 girls, 8 boys). With no dedicated space, they conducted 1.5-hour morning sessions at the school. Students first learned about classifier AI — how AI identifies objects — and image generation AI, which creates visuals based on prompts.

Through hands-on practice, students discovered how AI's training data impacts accuracy and how biases emerge when datasets lack diversity. They experimented with prompts, analysed AI-generated images, and studied errors. "We asked them to write prompts and replicate an

image, and they did it perfectly. That is prompt engineering in action," Dolas said.

A key takeaway was AI bias. Students compared outputs from two AI models, identifying gaps — such as the underrepresentation of marginalised identities. "For example, children realised that a black, fat, older woman was rarely generated by AI. They saw firsthand how biases shape digital realities," Dolas added.

Parents and students are a happy lot too. Mohan Prasad, a construction worker, said he is not sure what his daughter is learning, but she is excited about AI and often discusses its importance at home.

ses its importance at home.

Sarvesh, a standard VIII student, is thrilled that he trained an AI model to identify Hindu deities and noticed biases in AI searches — when prompted with "person", results mostly showed thin white men. "I love AI and want to learn more," he said. His father, Sohan Kolhe, has seen a surge in his son's interest in studies.

Anandkumar Raut, who works in the private sector, said his once-shy daughter, a standard VI student, now speaks confidently during presentations, and is more outspoken since joining the programme.

humans of the labs

Team



Gaurav Athavle
Shared CFO



Jitamitra Kulkarni
Facilitator (Part-Time)



Kedar Marathe
Co-founder and Chief
Program Officer



Mandar Kulkarni
Co-founder and
CEO



Mayura Dolas
Co-founder and
Board member



Parikshit Vishe
Operations Associate



Ruchita Bhujbal
Co-founder and
Board member



Seema Chavan
Facilitator



Shrikar Vartak
Consulting Accountant



Snehal Gund
Facilitator and
Project Lead



Sunidhi Datar
Intern



Vaibhavi Mulay
Social Media
Consultant

Advisory Board



Ashwath Bharath

Sr. Director
Teach For India

[LinkedIn](#)



Nilesh Nimkar

Director & Trustee,
Quality Education Support Trust

[LinkedIn](#)

Mentors



Avani Patki



Neelima Thota



Nikunj Jhaveri



Rita Nag Choudhari



Shantanu Ghosh



Suyog Patki

Supporters



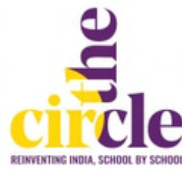
RAPID CIRCLE



PubMatic

TOLL

SYSTEMS+



Individual Donors

Abhijit Deshpande
Aniruddha Kulkarni
Avinash Chavan
Harish Padaki
Jayashree Dolas
Jayesh Dolas
Jidnya Shah
Kaivalya Mulay
Ketaki Narayan
Kiran Gaikwad
Manish Malviya
Meghna Kulkarni
Mitali Thatte
Omkar Khair
Parul Ganju

Prakash Kulkarni
Prasad Kulkarni
Rajan Kulkarni
Reshma Hajite
Rishikesh Kulkarni
Sanket Ghorpade
Sanket Jere
Satsheel Altekar
Sneha Hinge
Snehal Jere
Sunil Kulkarni
Tanuj Nagrani
Umesh Kulkarni
Vaishnavi Kulkarni
Vilas Shigwan

When they came to us with this idea, the person I was when I walked into that room was not the same as the one who walked out. My entire thought process had changed.

In tech, we're always chasing what's new—but they were addressing the root causes, the real problems out there. I felt the least we could do was support them.



Madhuri Kudekar
Managing Director, Rapid Circle India



from funders' perspective



You hear so many pitches in CSR where they really glorify everything. And you have to take it with pinch of salt.

But when these guys came in, it felt different. They weren't just talking from their heart, but they had done some groundwork. They had a very nice presentation, however, it had a lot of data. They were not flamboyant at all. They were not trying to sell anything.

So it was more of, you know, the connect which they were able to build because of their simplicity and authenticity.

Jayanti Phadke
Ex-Asia Head, HR, TOLL





Visit us

THE labs, B-2, Second floor, Karle Empire, Karle Chowk,
Nanded City, Sinhagad Road, Pune 411041



Follow us



Get in touch

we@thelabs.org.in | +919762203292

“

For every dollar and every minute we invest in improving artificial intelligence, it would be wise to invest a dollar and a minute in developing human consciousness.

”

YUVAL NOAH HARARI