



TutorVista.com – Teacher, Teacher anywhere

TutorVista.com has built a business model where tutors from across small towns in India log in from their homes and help students across the world. This model offers 24/7 personalized help to school children in the US, UK and South Korea.

It is 4:15 am in India. Or rather, “Expect 15” for Sujatha Nataraj in TutorVista.com’s lingo. In 15 more minutes, Nataraj, an English Teacher who lives in the mining township of Neyveli in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, will say hello to her first student for the day. At Expect 30 (that’s 4.30 am for the rest of us) she will greet her student and wait for another ten minutes within which the student will respond. Her student could be from anywhere in the world - US, Canada, UK or Korea.

Her student for the day is Gaurav, a 6th grader who lives in California in the United States. By 4:30am, while Nataraj has been preparing for the lesson, Gaurav has returned from school and has made himself comfortable and he is ready to take the lesson he has requested for.

TutorVista.com’s technology platform connects them together even though they live in opposite parts of the world. Nataraj and Gaurav talk to each other using VOIP which is an internet telephony facility. Simultaneously, they share a whiteboard - both write and doodle on this common screen that is simultaneously displayed on their computers.

TutorVista.com’s platform also gives Nataraj the requisite information on Gaurav’s school syllabus.

TutorVista.com’s technology platform connects students and teachers together even though each group may live in opposite parts of the world.

Nataraj is one of Gaurav’s preferred tutors. She began teaching him to write compositions and is now teaching him some grammar. Gaurav’s mother, Lalitha Murali, is happy. “He used to get very poor grades. His English grades are now in the nineties” she says. Gaurav’s trouble began when he shifted to a private school in Los Angeles - the school expected very high standards of him but he could not cope and was getting very poor grades. “We tried all kinds of tutoring

companies. I have spent a fortune on tutoring -- Probably over \$6,000. It just did not work out. I would also have to drive him all over the town. I then read about TutorVista.com and bought a new computer. This works just fine," says his mother.

TutorVista.com's platform essentially connects highly qualified teachers in small towns across India with students across continents who want personal help. In markets where the company operates, it has turned the economics of tutoring on its head. Gaurav's mother has to pay TutorVista.com just \$99 a month for unlimited tutoring. In return, Gaurav gets personal attention from highly qualified teachers, whom he gets to choose, even while he enjoys the comforts of his own room. Compare that with \$40 an hour that his mother would had to pay at Sylvan Learning for a tutor who would take 3 or 4 students at the same time. She would also have to drive him over to the center and back.

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It's a win-win for the tutor as well. Nataraj enjoys teaching just one student at a time and will get paid at least Rs 75 (around US\$2) an hour. The rate goes up as her skill level goes up. It also does not interfere with her daily chores at home. "Everyday is different" she says over the phone excitedly. A popular teacher, Nataraj has many students – there's Shaurya Gupta a 7th grader is brushing up on reading comprehension with her ahead of his SATs (Scholastic Aptitude Test). Another 7th grader, Idris, signed up when his family moved from Somalia to the US.

Occasionally, adult students schedule lessons with her. "Some Koreans have done this. They want to read a current interest topic – Barrack Obama and Hilary Clinton for example. The idea is for the non-English speaker to improve reading or her accent. It gets interesting. I just have to listen or just read sometimes. One day somebody wanted to be read something about Gandhi" explains Nataraj.

TutorVista.com supports many subjects. Seventeen-year-old Adam Bahlke, an 11th grader from Canada gets help with his math. Bahlke is one year ahead and is now home-schooling. He gets his lessons from the South Island Correspondence school which follows the distance education curriculum of British Columbia, the district he lives in. When he needs help with his calculus or physics he schedules a session with TutorVista.com. "I can tell very quickly if a particular tutor works for me and then I schedule lessons with just those" says Bahlke.

"I just love teaching math. This is an adventure. The world is at my desk now"
– Narinder Singh, Math Tutor from Ludhiana

The teenager actually prefers tutors from India. "In Canada they go half-half. They expect you to understand a bit and also to remember formulas that

you memorized just two weeks ago. But Indian tutors help you re-arrange a problem any way you want. It is more structured. It works out better” he says. One of Adam’s tutors is Narinder Singh, a Ludhiana-based math teacher, whose day job includes teaching in a school and taking tuitions. “I just love teaching math. This is an adventure. The world is at my desk now” says Singh who is a preferred tutor with many students. He logs in 7:15pm Indian Standard Time and works till 11:30pm.

Ubiquitous, reliable communication networks create experiences like these for 650 tutors, most of them in India, and 20,000 students across the world. In Adam’s case, the network is helping him take control of his own course, pace and time - perhaps this is really an indication of the future of schooling. If schools cater to the average student, then others like Adam who is an above-average student, may just prefer to home-school with a service like TutorVista.com and do other things in the time that they spend in school.

What makes the model so successful is that several of TutorVista.com’s “clients” are reporting higher grades. Clement Joe, an 11th Grade student in the Riverwood School in Atlanta (US), is one such example. He logs into TutorVista.com for two hours every day and gets help with his homework assignments in math, history and language arts. Over the last two years, his grades have moved from below to above average.

All this sounds very easy. Put a student and a teacher together into a chat room and bingo! - both will understand each other. In reality, it is a lot more complicated. TutorVista.com has built an academic platform which has the syllabus for every single state in the US. Earlier, a tutor could be effective only if she was familiar the school system – which made it difficult for remote tutoring to function. Now she just has to use the company’s knowledge management platform. “To teach Gaurav to write I used a technique called Persuasive Mapping which is supported by an online tool. This was available” says Nataraj. “Sometimes I also download material from sites recommended by TutorVista.com.” she adds.

TutorVista.com also continuously rolls out training programs for its tutors. After a rigorous selection process, tutors are trained on the

For many teachers, TutorVista.com opens up a whole new way of working. This, for thousands of students, is also a whole new way of winning the academic race

TutorVista.com platform and to use neutral accents and American words. They are also trained on their subject though that takes longer. “Punctuation and writing style are different. I have just been through a two week training program on how to grade essays for SAT exam practice” says Nataraj. “We are tested every three months. I have to take a test every three months where I answer 12 to 15 questions. We also get regular feedback every 15 days and we are rated on a scale of 1 to 5 on a few parameters” says Singh.

What makes it easy and keeps the training costs low for TutorVista.com is again the power of the network. All training is done using the Webex platform. Teachers are trained online by a remote trainer using the same technology that they are expected to use to help students. They also compare notes and exchange ideas with other tutors from their batch, whom they have never met physically, through group chats and buddy lists. "I have friends in Erode and Delhi now" says Nataraj.

True to its name, the service has created a whole avenue of opportunities for the teaching community, says K Ganesh, CEO, TutorVista.com. Including, in some cases, employment for tutors with physical challenges which made it difficult for them to work outside home – these tutors can now reach out across the world, he points out. It really is a whole new way of working. This, for thousands of students, is also a whole new way of winning the academic race.