Remote Learning at Omar Bin Al-Khattab College

Omar Bin Al-Khattab College (OBK) School, as a branch of Al Makassed, responded to this crisis by launching distance learning to all grade levels from K2 to 12. This new method of teaching required a lot of preparation. OBK took all the necessary steps to ensure readiness for teachers, staff, and students in order to provide a genuine virtual learning. Yet, "real change takes place in deep crisis". Our huge team started working hand-in-hand to accomplish this mission, by including all stakeholders from the IT department, HODs, teachers, administrators, as well as the students and their parents.

In March, all OBK teachers attended in-person workshops on how to use Edmodo and Microsoft Teams. They created channels with teachers grouped according to class level in order to collaborate and provide a space for discussion.

Since our school is a showcase school, most of the teachers are Microsoft Certified Educators; hence, the majority of OBK teachers have already worked on Microsoft Teams with groups of students throughout the year. OBK also provided laptops for the staff that needed them, thereby ensuring the everyone is able to operate remotely.

Al Makassed went a step further to help facilitate online teaching by offering all staff a stipend for at-home internet access.
Preparations also involved students and parents. The hardest mission was helping them access Teams, since most of our parents have poor technology literacy. However, through providing them with various kinds of assistance including step-by-step tutorial videos explaining how Teams work, we were able to overcome this hardship.

Although the online teaching- learning process took over suddenly, all of the staff was equipped to start their online mission in a very short period of time. We were prepared to start this journey and achieved a lot of progress.

An emergency plan was set in which all requisites (objectives and skills) were distributed into weeks.

Conducting the sessions was done as follows. School scheduled the learning sessions. Then teachers notified the students on a weekly basis of the timing of their sessions by sending Teams notifications. Teachers also coordinated and discussed the content with the coordinators and colleagues through online meetings.

Preparations also demanded materials. Teachers started using various PowerPoints, videos, links, audio texts, word files, active inspire flipcharts, online materials, etc.

Students were provided a weekly agenda through a link posted on the school's official Facebook account. Each agenda included links, videos, online interactive games, and targeting worksheets (designed to target the objective/ skill being taught).

The kindergarten department at OBK launched a series of videos on the Edmodo educational platform. The purpose of these videos was to facilitate children through a variety of extra-curricular activities (challenges, psychomotor activities, kitchen activities, crafts…)

 During distance learning, we experienced the following:

• Conducting online coordination sessions with the teachers

• Sharing interactive lessons through Microsoft PowerPoint.

- Providing online assessments through teacher-created videos on PowerPoint. The video allows students to replay the content and is available whenever they need it
- Sharing links of videos from different educational websites to introduce lessons to learners and perform multiple exercises, as well as online quizzes
- Preparing different worksheets to help students master the objectives.
- Sharing online games from educational resources to encourage students to join and challenge themselves.
- Providing students with assignments to complete. Students turned in their assignments for teacher's feedback

Although online teaching and learning has been thrust into the spotlight under unfortunate circumstances, it has potential for growth. A key advantage to online learning was students could complete their sessions in their own time and according to their own schedules. Recorded lessons made it easy for anyone with an internet connection to access everything they needed.

Studies have shown that children extensively use their senses to learn. Making learning fun and effective through the use of technology is critical and this is what was done during our online sessions all classes.
Students found it fun since they did not have to wake up early to get ready to go to school. Moreover, teachers were being accommodative and took extra time to help learners understand the topics.

We believe that for those who do have access to the right technology, there is evidence that learning online can be more effective in a number of ways. Some research shows that on average, students retain 25-60% more material when learning online compared to only 8-10% in a classroom. This is mostly due to the students being able to learn faster online; e-learning requires 40-60% less time to learn than in a traditional classroom setting because students can learn at their own pace, going back and re-reading, skipping, or accelerating through concepts as they choose. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of online learning varies amongst age groups and the general consensus on children, especially younger ones, is a structured environment is required because kids are more easily distracted.

For our school, online learning is a success. For teachers, it was a great opportunity to use Teams and its functionalities or other technologies. It also provided an opportunity to practice the 21st-century skills. Moreover, teachers had to prepare interactive materials to meet our students' needs. Our teachers tried to cover the curriculum requirements as much as possible.

As for the students, we noticed their effective experience using technology and Teams, positively interacting with the teacher and classmates, and being engaged all the time during this difficult situation. Online learning also required them to be highly self-motivated and have strong time management skills. We should also capitalize on the parents' positive involvement and follow-up.

Nevertheless, with every new situation, challenges arise. While implementing online teaching, we faced many common difficulties also experienced by global educators. Students without reliable internet access and/or technology struggled to participate in digital learning. Internet connection and availability was a hindrance that prevented some students from attending the sessions regularly. As we know, online education depends on several factors and robust connectivity is at the top of that list. Lastly, one of the main challenges in Lebanon is the lack of electricity and unstable availability which impacts both teachers and students.

With this sudden shift away from the classroom in many parts of the globe, we wonder whether the adoption of online learning will continue to persist post-pandemic, and how such a shift would impact the global education market. While some believe that the unplanned and rapid move to online learning will result in a poor user experience that is not conducive to sustained growth, others believe that a new hybrid model of education will emerge, with significant benefits. Yet, this experience shows that the integration of information technology in education will be further accelerated and online education will eventually become an integral component of schooling.