Dossier

Report on Digital Transformation in Oman

An **OER** OMAN ECONOMIC REVIEW

Presentation

DIGITAL
TRANSFORMATION
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RISE OF THE DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM

IN FOCUS: Networking • Customer Experience • Intelligent Cloud • Cyber Security • Hybrid Model • Internet Of Things

The Classrooms Of The Future

Dr. Baby Sam Samuel, the outgoing Chairman of the Board of Directors, Indian Schools in Oman, talks about the digital disruption in the education sector and how the schools managed to successfully implement the remote classroom model

What are the major challenges that you had to face and how did you manage to bridge the gap from classroom to virtual classes?
A virtual class cannot really emulate the all-round development that classroom instruction can provide. Nevertheless, as the situation prioritized safety and health, the next best solution was to offer socially distanced, remote learning that also provides as much of a holistic educational experience as possible, given the many limitations.

As we transitioned to virtual mediums, most of our teachers did not have prior experience with remote teaching. However, this was quickly resolved with specific trainings to faculty on teaching and learning using online platforms.

Many of the initial hurdles we faced were related to the technological learning curve and the access to digital tools, especially among parents and students. To solve this, every school had dedicated focal contact points for parents to address their technical queries related to remote schooling and troubleshooting. This, along with the continuous interaction with the class teachers, enabled parents to understand and adopt the technologies used.

Another concern we observed was the lack of availability of multiple devices at home for each child, because of which simultaneous classes would affect siblings. However, this issue was overcome by re-shuffling of students and offering multiple timings such

that class timings did not overlap for siblings. Once these issues were sorted, the next set of challenges were about ensuring that students were able to have focus and attention. But our teachers have been amazingly adaptable, bringing the same sense of solemnity to online learning as would have been present in classrooms.

Altogether, it has been a process of continual improvements based on constant feedback from students and parents.

Can you tell us how the digital technology and advancements have impacted students and trends in the classrooms?
In general, we have witnessed a surge in the acceptance and adoption of digital platforms over the past year, with e-commerce and communication tools becoming a bigger part of our lives.

The current generation of children are already digital natives, ever more familiar with various technologies than their parents. With a year of online classes, they now seem to have become even more adept at digital tools, having been given free rein to explore and master new technologies. Schools, teachers and students have also used the tools creatively to bring about extra-curricular engagements. It is a testimony to the power of technological advancements that our schools were able to bring in renowned resource persons from across the world to connect and engage virtually with our students and faculty.

The shift from in-person schooling to remote schooling has also definitely changed the perception about schooling and learning among students and parents. The engagement and participation on the part of students in their learning have boosted or at least sparked a shift from teacher-led learning to student-led learning. At the same time, there has also been an increased appreciation for teachers, as parents have witnessed firsthand the efforts taken by the teachers to manage a virtual classroom.

Can you enlighten us on the trainings and the investments that were involved, and more on the reluctance to adapt to the changing environment?
Although remote schooling was a new concept to almost all our stakeholders – teachers, parents and students, there was no reluctance or resistance from any of them. On the contrary, our teachers were visibly passionate about the transition to ensure their students' academic continuity. They were quick to evaluate & develop lesson plans that suited the virtual platforms.

It was also remarkable how they were supported by the parent community and even students as the teachers, and in fact, all of them were learning on the go.

Our faculty were given formal training sessions on online teaching as well as on the various aspects of digitalization. Nevertheless, most of the learning would have been on the job

Dr. Baby Sam Samuel

as they began classes last April, almost immediately after the schools were closed.

Indian schools in Oman are non-profit unaided community schools, and therefore, it is not easy to implement high budget solutions. Nevertheless, in order to ensure safety and effectiveness, we moved from free to professional versions of various software and applications wherever possible, including Zoom.

As mentioned above, so far, the schools have completed a full academic term online, including multiple assessments, examinations, extra-curricular activities and events as in a regular school year. Surveys of parents reveal high satisfaction with the efficacy and effectiveness of online classes.

From important to essential, digital disruption and transformation is what lies ahead. Your views on the same.
It is pointless to resist digital. Our future is firmly entwined with technological innovations like Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Autonomous Machinery and more. Hence, we can definitely expect more digitalization and more transformations in teaching and learning.

Equally important is the social, peer aspect of classroom learning, which is at the heart of education and growth, especially for young kids. As far as classes in the immediate future are concerned, it is likely to be in some form of blended learning, offering the benefits of both remote schooling and classroom instruction.

It is also important to remember that ultimately it is not the tool that is important but the way the tools are used. Schooling and education need to change from rote learning to applied-learning, from teacher-led instruction to self-enabled learning, and from defined academic duration to life-long learning.

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