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CLASS ACT

How schools make use of e-learning tools in classrooms

Sarwat Nasir

The days of traditional classrooms — one teacher, dusty classroom desks, and claustrophobic four-walls are long gone — it's the era of virtual classrooms. A growing number of schools in the UAE are adopting e-learning platforms, which is helping enhance the quality of student education.

Khaleej Times spoke to a number of schools on how they have introduced virtual classrooms and other e-learning tools, where students can get their homework and classwork online, interact with other students and take part in educational discussions. E-learning platforms have become popular over the years as an education delivery and management tool for academic institutions. It allows students to learn beyond what is taught in a classroom and be able to engage with their peers and teachers online.

The GEMS Wellington Academy in Silicon Oasis for instance, is using several virtual learning environment platforms, such as Fusion and Pamoja.

"We use them to assign tasks, set collaborative learning experiences, share learning resources, to collect and mark student work and to support game-based learning. For example, Fusion is a virtual learning environment where students are assigned to virtual learning spaces, one for each class," said Helen Loxston-Baker, the teaching and learning lead practitioner at the school.

"Here they can access the resources and tasks for each lesson as well as see their home learning assignments. They can also upload work for teachers and share learning experiences through online forums."

However, one of the most pioneering e-learning platforms the school uses is Pamoja, which allows students to attend virtual classes online. These interactive online lessons include screencasts from teachers, multimedia presentations, as well as live sessions via Skype.

The platform also hosts blogs, forums, and web-based documents that ensure students reflect on their learning, all while collaborating with peers and teachers locally and globally.

Wired in the right path
In some schools, the e-learning platforms are also helping to issue exams and reports to their students. At the Swiss International Scientific School in Dubai (SISD), students use an online software to write all of their essays and to get their reports.

"The Internet is connecting people and resources all around the world. At SISD, we are moving towards building a connected school,"

said Amir Yazdanpanah, the head of innovation technology at SISD. "I envision in the next couple of years to have collaborative real-time learning. For example, our students in Dubai can interact with students in China and scientists in Switzerland to design a product."

Classrooms are becoming less restricted to the physical location they are in, as e-learning tools support learning that take place anywhere and anytime. As we become more experienced at using Ed Tech tools, we will implement learning activities that were never possible before."

Get reading online
Besides essays, reports, exams, learning and teaching that have gone online, books are also available

to students through technology.

The Dubai British School Jumeirah Park is gradually moving away from textbooks and are adopting more online resources, including smart books.

"A good example is our science department who have invested in the online version of the 'Exploring Science' books. This gives our students the ability to access the

books on their iPads and laptops in and outside of the lessons," said David Talbert, the head of technology integration at the school. "The smart books are more interactive compared to the books and as we are a school who is working to becoming more paperless this is a great resource in helping us achieve that."

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Classrooms are becoming less restricted to their physical location as e-learning tools can support learning that take place anywhere.

Hybrid learning
A combination of offline learning — face-to-face traditional tutoring — and online learning, widely known as 'blended learning' is the method mostly used in the UAE. Student attend classes, and then supplement by completing their online multimedia coursework.

Students share their knowledge learned through online platforms with others in their classrooms. They also collaborate with each other for student group activities relying on information gathered from online resources.

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Helen Loxston-Baker, lead practitioner, GEMS Wellington Academy,

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Amir Yazdanpanah, head of innovation technology, SISD

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David Talbert, head of technology, Dubai British School Jumeirah Park

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Why students find smart learning process helpful

Trisha Sayani
Grade 4
Gems Our Own English High School, Dubai

Smart learning and e-books can play a very important role in education in today's world. My school is implementing smart learning wherever possible. We have the BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) programme, in which we can bring our own tablets from home and use it for activities and research. We have also been told to do research and activities in the form of challenge questions at home as homework.

Samay Dadlani
Year 6
Gems Wellington School

Textbooks have been replaced by tablets and computers in classes and everyone is connected to the Internet. Our e-learning class have an e-box attached with the TV and remote and we can navigate through the study material loaded on e-class. With Internet, YouTube, Skype, Twitter, smart-boards, blogs and podcasting tools pupils can submit their questions electronically and children can complete homework and read digital textbooks.

Hurairah Faatimah Muzammil
Gems Our Own English High School

Being at par in the 21st century, all schools have initiated e-learning and smart books. It ensures that students are taught the safe and correct use of the technology. I think it makes us better, independent, social yet safe, smart and liable individuals. It is a good start into the tech world and increases our knowledge about both school education and cyber safety, giving a kick start to be apt with the challenges of the world.

Lamya Juzer Gandhi
Our Own English High School, Dubai

Our school is using e-learning to allow students to access homework, worksheets and tasks assignments. They have an app to better connect students with coursework and engage parents on a platform they're familiar with. E-learning is more effective, has quick delivery time on a large scale and lower environmental impact by eliminating the need for paper.

Next Week's Topic

Can the presence of animals in the classroom aid learning?
To get featured, send us your views on the topic, along with your school name and high-resolution photograph to *education@khaleejtimes.com*

Advantages of e-learning	Consistent instructor presence	Quick communication	A higher knowledge retention rate	Unique testing methods	Time and money saving	Reduction of carbon footprint	Self-assessment tools	Freedom and flexibility

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Dubai Cares helps Kenyan teachers update skills

DUBAI — Introducing technology in academic institutions has aided pupils and teachers in advanced countries such as the UAE, however, it has absolutely changed lives for the better for people in third world countries like Kenya.

With the help of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), humanitarian organisation, Dubai Cares changed the life of Lydiah Nyambura Kimani, a teacher. They helped her transform into a "21st century teacher" with the help of Information, Communications and Technology (ICT).

The education system in Kenya

has faced discrepancies for many years, according to Dubai Cares. There is a severe lack of training and qualification of teachers, resulting in poor quality of learning for students.

Kimani is a Grade 2 teacher at the Ng'ombeni Primary School in Kwale County. She teaches a classroom consisting of 76 children. With the help of the Dubai Cares programme, she was trained to integrate ICT into teaching and learning practices.

She attended a 12-day training at Waa Primary School where she covered seven modules. This train-

❝ Students are excited to learn with the use of ICT tools as it effectively assists their understanding with the help of pictures and information from all around the world.❞

Lydiah Nyambura Kimani, teacher, Kenya

ing programme enabled Kimani to shift from the basic knowledge and curriculum to a more advanced teaching style.

"I am now a confident teacher with ICT skills as now my classroom does not consist of basic hardware but more advanced technologies that opens new horizons for an effective learning environment," Kimani said.

"Students are excited to learn with the use of ICT tools as it effectively assists their understanding with the help of pictures and information from all around the world, along with fun activities and software to enhance their learning.

"So far the children have read about 10 digital English and 12 Swahili stories. I am grateful to

Dubai Cares for empowering me on ICT skills that has become the greatest vehicle for change for all teachers and learners in Kenya".

Dubai Cares, in partnership with AKDN, has improved learning outcomes of more than 119,600 students in primary education through the use of technology in education. The programme focuses on testing and validating models and methods that are cost-effective, efficient and relevant, to help the government in fulfilling its own ambitions and plans for ICT capacity and use in schools nationwide.

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Online learning methods are perfect for the millennial mind frame

Sirish Kumar,
co-founder and CEO, Telr - an online payment solutions company used by academic institutions

An emerging trend you will see is in the field of education is the implementation of virtual class-

rooms. I think that is leapfrogging from what have been in the west — where traditional classrooms were the way to access education. Earlier, education was accessible only to the privileged few and digitisation will remove this trend that we have seen in the past.

There are two ways of education that has been happening — a course-led education, and which is meant for employees working in

the corporate sector. There is also a third type — vocational education — which continuously ensures that the education taught will be relevant to their career choices. Countries like Switzerland have done exceedingly well in that area.

I also think education is a true way to attract different nationalities. Just like medical tourism that attracts patients across boundaries because of their advanced

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technology, education tourism should also attract students from different parts of the world.

Another noticeable trend is the ease of submitting homework virtually through e-learning plat-

forms. Students have a limited time frame to answer questions on these platforms and it is very well aligned with the millennial mind frame. They have specific timelines which they are attracted to,

and then switch to another topic. Even if they are in Latin America, South America or the UAE, students can connect through an online platform to do group activities or homeworks and submit the same immediately.

You will also see more digital universities and other digital platforms coming up in the next decades where anyone can subscribe and be a student.