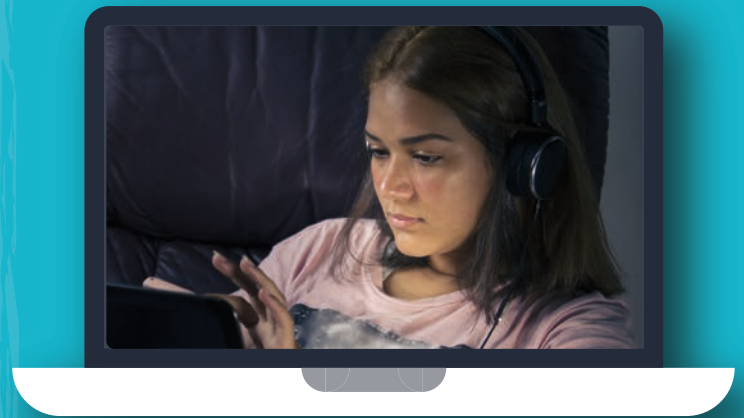
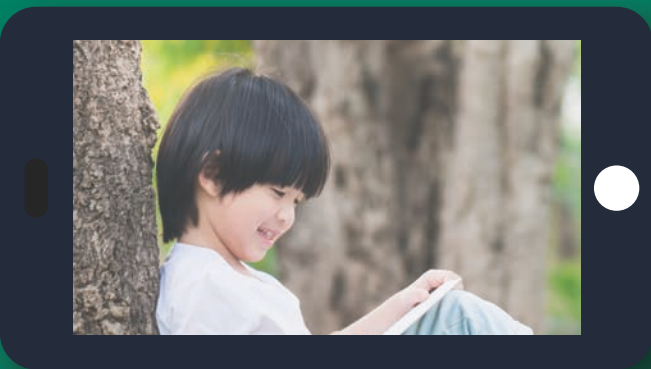
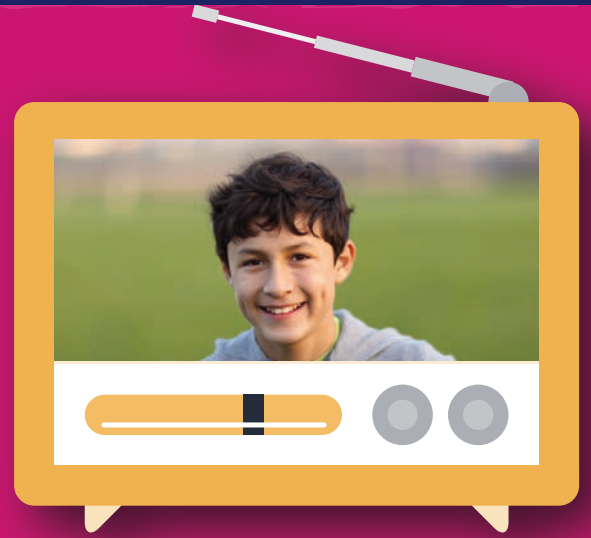


Education continuity during the Coronavirus crisis

Egypt:

منصة المذاكرة الرقمية على بنك المعرفة المصري
للمراحل الابتدائية و الإعدادية و الثانوية و أسلوب تقييم جديد
(K-12 Egyptian Knowledge Bank Study Portal and
new form of assessment)

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(K-12 Egyptian Knowledge Bank Study Portal and new form of assessment)

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The coronavirus crisis led schools and universities to rapidly transition to a distance-learning mode, via the Internet, television or radio. This series documents some country initiatives that ensured education continuity for all using technology and provided support to teachers, students, and their families.



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General description

In the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, all schools across Egypt were shut down starting March 15, 2020. As of March 19, 2020, the Ministry of Education and Technical Education (MOETE) announced the launch of a new study portal, <https://study.ekb.eg/>, an offshoot of the existing Egyptian Knowledge Bank (EKB), that would provide all students from K-12 access to all their lessons via interactive videos, games and presentations. Meanwhile, MOETE partnered with Edmodo to provide teachers a platform to communicate with their students, and to allow teachers to hold virtual classrooms.

Prior to March 19, the [Egyptian Knowledge Bank](#), catered mostly to Secondary One and Secondary Two (Grade 10 and Grade 11) students, together with Higher Education researchers and students. The K-9 student body had only a handful of resources that were not well-curated on the EKB. Now and starting March 19, they had every single lesson in their curriculum mapped to the new study portal.

The new study portal organised all the scattered material on the original EKB platform, and organised them by grade-level and by lesson title.

On March 26, 2020, the Minister of Education announced that for Grades 3 to 9, the traditional end-of-year exams determining whether students can move to the upper grade would be replaced with end-of-year research projects that were due on May 1. Grades 10 and 11 had already shifted to electronic testing, on the tablets given to them by the Ministry, as part of the reform (for Years 10 and 11), and the complete transformation (known as Education 2.0 for years K-2) that had already been taking place since 2018. Grade 12 students (the last cohort to be tested using paper and pencil) were scheduled to sit for their exam physically amidst extreme precautions for COVID-19.

The fact that the end-of-year exams had been replaced with research projects was not a mere logistical solution due to the COVID-19 situation; it was actually part of the Ministry's vision of Education 2.0 and an opportunity to expand it to more grade levels. For the first time, the parents and students of the Egyptian public school system were exposed to the idea that exams are not the only means of assessments, and that learning could be measured in ways other than memorising material, and then sitting for a test to reproduce them on paper. The research projects also required that students use their knowledge and skills from various disciplines and subjects: Arabic, maths, social studies and science – another new concept for most Egyptian students and families.

Education continuity was thus ensured by expanding significantly the bank of educational resources to cover the entire curriculum in all grade levels, by providing teachers and students with a communication platform, and by changing the final exam of grades 3 to 9 to an end-of-year multidisciplinary research project.

Main problems addressed

The main problem addressed by this initiative was the provision of education continuity beyond the school closure on March 15. The study portal together with the change in the form assessment allowed for the continuity of learning and assessment despite the shutdown of schools.

The initiative was particularly interesting because it introduced new concepts to Egyptian students and families. First and foremost, it introduced the concept of assessing students' learning via other means than final exams. Second, it promoted a multidisciplinary approach to learning by combining several disciplines and skills in the end-of-year research project. The COVID-19 crisis allowed for the acceleration of an ongoing reform process trying to move Egyptian education away from its strong emphasis on memorisation and teaching to the test and promote teaching and learning for understanding, including understanding the connections between the knowledge acquired in different subjects.

Mobilising and developing resources

While the new study portal, and the new form of assessments from Grade 3 to Grade 9 were in response to the COVID-19 situation, they could build on both the existing Egyptian Knowledge Bank, and on the Education 2.0 vision of transforming the school system in Egypt to one of learning and teaching for understanding. All end-of-year exams are now either done electronically (grades 10 and 11) or rely on a multidisciplinary project rather than a test (grades 3 to 8).

Some new resources needed to be developed:

- A new sub-portal of the EKB catering to grade levels that were not previously strongly represented on that platform was developed in four days. It includes a multitude of resources including videos, interactive games, and interactive presentations all mapped to the lessons in the curriculum. Most of these resources were already on the EKB, but were not organised by grade level nor were matched to the existing lessons in the curriculum. Now they are.

- A new platform allowing teachers and students to communicate was established within 10 days thanks to a partnership with Edmodo: it allows each teacher to communicate with students in their classes in a private and collective manner, either through its virtual classroom feature or through written communication – and allows students and teachers to communicate in a secure environment.
- New guidelines for the end-of-year assessments for students in grades 3 to 8.

Fostering effective use and learning

One strong incentive for students and families to use the resources and continue to learn lay in the fact that end of year assessments were maintained, even though their format was changed. Students had to work on their research projects using the study materials available on the new EKB study portal – also leading teachers and parents to get involved in the process. Teachers were provided with guidance on the Edmodo platform, and the level of interactivity of the resources on the EKB helped facilitate their role with the students. Also, the Ministry of Education made sure to communicate every change that was introduced clearly on the ministry's social media pages, and on the various TV networks.

Implementing challenges

Speed of execution. A first implementation challenge related to the lack of time. The new portal was set up within four long days, which required continuous work from the EKB team and the support of partners of MOETE. This was the same with the Edmodo website, which had to be put in place very quickly. This implied that some imperfections had to be addressed after the launch of the new platforms. For example, there were a couple of glitches on the Edmodo website where the students were supposed to create their accounts to submit their research projects, but they were addressed right away.

Supporting the use of the platforms. A second implementation challenge was the lack of teachers' and students' habits to use platforms. Beyond communications with teachers and families, the MOETE set up hotlines for complaints and troubleshooting. This feedback loop allowed the MOETE to improve and assess the offered services.

Changing the assessment mindset. The larger challenge was having the parents and families accept the concept of assessment through a research project. One solution that had come through the social media channels was to end the year without any form of assessment, and to have MOETE come up with a formula that would calculate an end-of-year grade for students without having them assessed at the end of the academic year. This was discarded by the Minister who insisted that no student would move up a grade without being assessed. Another challenge was that most of the students were not familiar with what research entails; what citing references is, or what plagiarism is. There was a whole new lexicon that students, parents, and, in some cases, teachers, had to understand.

Addressing the digital gap. Finally, there was an additional challenge for those families who were unable to submit their projects online; the MOETE provided learning materials through TV channels, and they were also given the option of submitting hard copies of the research projects physically in schools.

Monitoring success

By the first week of May, the new portal had around 80 million page views, while Edmodo had a total of 15 million students registered, 1.2 million teachers, and 1 million parents, with around 2.5 million virtual classrooms held. Both the study portal and the Edmodo websites allow for continuous monitoring of their users.

By the May 15 deadline, 15 million research projects were submitted.

Adaptability to new contexts

This solution was implemented across Egypt for the entire population of Grade 3 to 9 students (around 17.5 million students). This is just clearly a solution that can be implemented at scale.

In terms of the study portal, this solution could be considered for any context that deals with a large number of students who have access to the Internet, or who could be supported to get online access. In Egypt, the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, for example, offered students data sim cards for free.

As for using the research project as a tool for assessment, this could be implemented even in the absence of access to the Internet.

While these solutions were implemented in response to the school closures due to COVID-19, they are solutions that can and will outlive the crisis in the case of Egypt. In fact, these solutions expedited the vision behind the ongoing transformation of education in Egypt.

Key points to keep in mind for a successful adaptation

1. Make use of existing resources and existing expertise
2. Do not function in an emergency mode only but propose solutions that serve your overall strategic vision for education's future
3. Be ready to troubleshoot any problems that arise along the way
4. Be sure to offer solutions that are accessible and implementable by all students
5. Make use of existing partnerships
6. Collaborate with other sectors and government entities to come up with the best and most affordable solution for students
7. Do not compromise on the students' learning

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Comment on the series is welcome, and should be sent to edu.contact@oecd.org.

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