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Some schools have seamlessly taken to virtual teaching to ensure continuity of the learning process.

E-learning to the rescue of Aga Khan Academy learners during pandemic

BY WINNIE ATIENO

With all universities, secondary and primary schools closed due to the coronavirus pandemic, e-learning has relieved many parents, pupils and students in the country.

As the government continues to urge learners to embrace broadcast lessons, many learning institutions have adopted e-learning.

At the Aga Khan Academy, lessons continue uninterrupted after the institution shifted to online learning. The school said online lessons has also proved to be a learning experience for both students and teachers, as they discover the benefits and challenges.

On March 16, the Aga Khan Academy Mombasa was closed after the government announced closure of all learning institutions due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Send home

Within two days, the school send its 260 residential students back to their home countries such as Uganda, Pakistan, Tanzania and others.

Later, the teachers went through extensive professional development in online learning and on March 23, the online classes began with all classes fully transitioned.

Although at first the shift was challenging for both teachers and students, the transition has become much smoother for all.

"Students look forward to meeting their friends on Zoom. They have demonstrated the use of raising and lowering their hands when they want to talk online. They are also learning to be quiet when it's not their turn to speak," said year two teacher Enitta Olang.

Head of Expressive Arts department Stella Wangu said students' lives have been turned upside down by the pandemic

"Learning is the only sense of normalcy that the learners

have and it keeps them busy and occupied," she said.

Teachers and students have been able to continue with class work through video conferencing, online meetings and chat.

Through platforms such as Zoom, Google Hangouts, Microsoft Teams and WhatsApp, teachers can see and speak to their students, share their screens with their students and record their lessons for others to watch later. Other teachers have also been recording their lessons in advance and sending PowerPoint presentations to their students with voice-overs.

"Screen sharing is a really good way of teaching when everyone is away from each other physically. It's nice how teachers can share their screen and use it as a virtual 'white board' to write on, type on and teach us overall," said year eight student Muborak Davlotshoeva.

ManageBac, the school's online portal for assignments which is used by teachers and students, is also being utilised.

Teachers are able to conduct live lessons with their students for a certain time, but can also choose to set tasks and activities for students to complete offline with the assignments posted on ManageBac or in Google Classroom.

New experience

"This change has been challenging but exciting. I am learning and perfecting a new skill in technology," said Diploma Programme Coordinator and English teacher Shouquot Hussain.

Further, staff, parents and students have faced other challenges such as poor WiFi connectivity, power outages and sharing workspaces with other family members.

But to alleviate some of these challenges, the academy provided its needy students, and some teachers, with mini modems to take home.