

The Aga Khan Academy Mombasa transitions into online learning

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students-at-AKA-Mombasa-are-enjoying-their-online-classes-as-it-gives-them-more-time-to-be-with-their-family-and-do-their-lessons-and-work-at-their-own-pace Photo Source [Aga Khan Academy Mombasa](#)

By Anusha, Anusha Lalani, Communications Fellow at Aga Khan Academies, Mombasa, Kenya.

Since 16 March 2020, the Aga Khan Academy Mombasa has been closed due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. Within two days after the government's announcement to have all schools closed, the Academy managed to send its 260 residential students back to their home countries, such as Uganda, Pakistan, Tanzania and more. While students were on their way home, Academy teachers underwent extensive professional development within five days in relation to online learning.

One week later, on 23 March 2020, the online 'doors' to the Academy opened and all classes were fully transitioned online, ensuring learning was ongoing. Although the shift was challenging for both teachers and students at first, the transition has become much smoother for all.

"Students' lives have been turned upside down by the coronavirus pandemic," said Head of Expressive Arts department Stella Wangu. "Learning is the only sense of normalcy that the kids have and it keeps them busy and occupied."

AKA Mombasa teachers and students have been able to continue their learning through video conferencing, online meetings and chat. Through platforms like 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 they have made to their students with voiceovers.

“Screen sharing is a really good way of teaching for when everyone is far away from each other physically,” said Year 8 student Muborak Davlotshoeva. “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.”

ManageBac, the Academy’s online portal for assignments, grades and more used by teachers and students, is also continuing to be utilised by all. 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. However, a lot of students really seem to enjoy seeing their peers’ and teachers’ faces via video call as they transition to distance learning.

“Students look forward to meeting their friends on Zoom,” said Year 2 teacher Enitta Olang’. “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.”

The shift to online learning has proven to also be a learning exercise for both students and teachers, as they discover what works and doesn’t work so well.

“This change has been challenging but exciting,” said Diploma Programme Coordinator and English teacher Shouquot Hussain. “I am learning and perfecting a new skill in technology, and as teachers, being a lifelong learner is our primary credo.”

Aside from learning how to navigate online classes, AKA Mombasa staff, parents and students have faced other challenges since the switch to virtual learning, such as poor Wi-Fi connectivity, power outages, sharing workspaces with other family members and more.

To alleviate some of these challenges, the Academy provided its high financial aid students, and some teachers, with mini modems to take home, which includes WiFi and data. Classes for the Academy’s Senior School were also moved to begin at 9 am instead of 8 am due to time differences in places like the Democratic Republic of Congo. All of this has enabled the Academy, especially its teachers, to continue staying in contact with their students, whether that be through checking in on their academics or their well-being.

“During my first online class, I only prepared to Zoom with my students for the first 10 minutes,” Stella Wangu said. “However, my students begged me to keep the Zoom session on for the whole lesson. The students are so used to working with the teacher

present. They felt like me ending the Zoom session was me leaving them on their own, which is something they are not very used to. I just couldn't get myself to end the session on them."

Aside from seeing their friends and teachers, students are also missing their access to physical activities.

"I miss playing and swimming with my friends at the Academy," said Year 4 student Neil Vanderhoeven. "But through online learning, I am happy that I can stay with my family longer and I have fun learning on the computer and iPad"

Although swimming can't be done virtually, Academy teachers have been encouraging students to show their teachers how they are maintaining their physical health and fitness.

"(During my daughter's online Physical Health and Education class) I listened to roll call and observed my daughter during PHE and was amazed, all without pressure," said a parent of a Year 9 student.

An additional perk both Academy students and teachers have found of online learning is that students have the ability to learn at their own speed through different ways.

"Students can learn at their own pace and we are able to use multiple approaches to avail learning materials to the students," Stella Wangu said. "This makes learning more accessible to more students than in a regular classroom."

AKA Mombasa parents have also been very supportive in ensuring their children have the necessary resources so their online learning is a success. Parents also said they appreciate the online learning because it allows them to really see what their child is learning on a daily basis.

"The online learning has been very well organised by the teachers," said a parent of a Year 9 student. "These online learning sessions have been very helpful and have kept our daughter busy too! We really appreciate the hard work that the teachers are putting in at this difficult phase; they are the heroes for our children. I think this is one thing we need to congratulate AKA Mombasa for."

Although the students may not be in the Academy physically, thanks to technology, relationships are being maintained, learning is continuing and lessons are being learned.

About the Aga Khan Academy Mombasa

The Aga Khan Academy Mombasa, a programme of the Aga Khan Development Network, is the first of a network of 18 planned academies to be established across Africa, Europe, South and Central Asia, and the Middle East. Each is designed to provide a world-class education to exceptional students who possess strong leadership potential.

Admission to the Academy is based on merit, and financial aid is available to ensure access for students with demonstrated need. Pluralism is a core value of the educational programme at the Aga Khan Academy, whose student body reflects the full diversity of East Africa and includes students from all socio-economic backgrounds. The Aga Khan Academy Mombasa is an International Baccalaureate (IB) World School, offering an IB curriculum that is locally rooted and globally relevant. Academy graduates consistently earn places and scholarships at the world's top universities. In December 2018, the Academy marked 15 years since its founding.

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