Azerbaijan Ministry of Education's Intervention in Secondary Education

Quarantine

Azerbaijan, a country with a population of 10 million, has 1.5 millon students and 150,000 teaching staff in 4,500 primary and secondary schools. As the country was hit with COVID-19 pandemic, a national quarantine was announced on March 3 that resulted in closure of all educational institutions. For the first time in the history after the World War II the educational process was interrupted nationwide for a substantial period of time.

TV Lessons

Following the school closure, the Ministry of Education examined various strategies to mitigate the challenge. No student should be left behind in terms of access to educational resources was the number one priority. On March 11, the Ministry launched "Lesson Time" project on a local TV channel, "Madaniyyat TV". Soon after the second TV channel, "ARB Gunash", joined the initiative. As of today, the Ministry of Education has produced more than 1,600 lessons that cover all grades, subjects and topics to be taught during the period of quarantine.

Virtual School: Registration

To address the challenges in education caused by the new reality of social distancing, on April 2 the Ministry of Education launched the Virtual School project in collaboration with its long-term partner, Microsoft Corporation. Microsoft Teams platform was selected as the learning management system.

Students and teachers are provided with the opportunity to self-register on the Virtual School (virtual.edu.az) system using their national or student identification numbers, emails, and mobile phone numbers. The system checks each applicant against the Ministry of Education's internal systems, and if the person is a current student or teacher, it allows registration on Microsoft Teams. An applicant receives login information within 48 hours.

Qeydiyyatdan keçin

ŞAGİRD QEYDİYYATI   MÜƏLLİM QEYDİYYATI

Şagirdin fərdi identifikasiya nömrəsi (FİN) / UTİS ID *

FİN nömrəsi / UTİS ID

Şagirdin doğum tarixi *

Doğum tarixi

Şifrəni bərpa et

DAVAM ET

Virtual School: Learning Environment

Virtual School is a safe learning environment for students. Only the students enrolled in Azerbaijani schools are allowed to join the School. The same checking process is applied to teachers.

Upon entering the system, the students are organized in (a) large groups of 4,500 students of the same grade and (b) their own school classes:
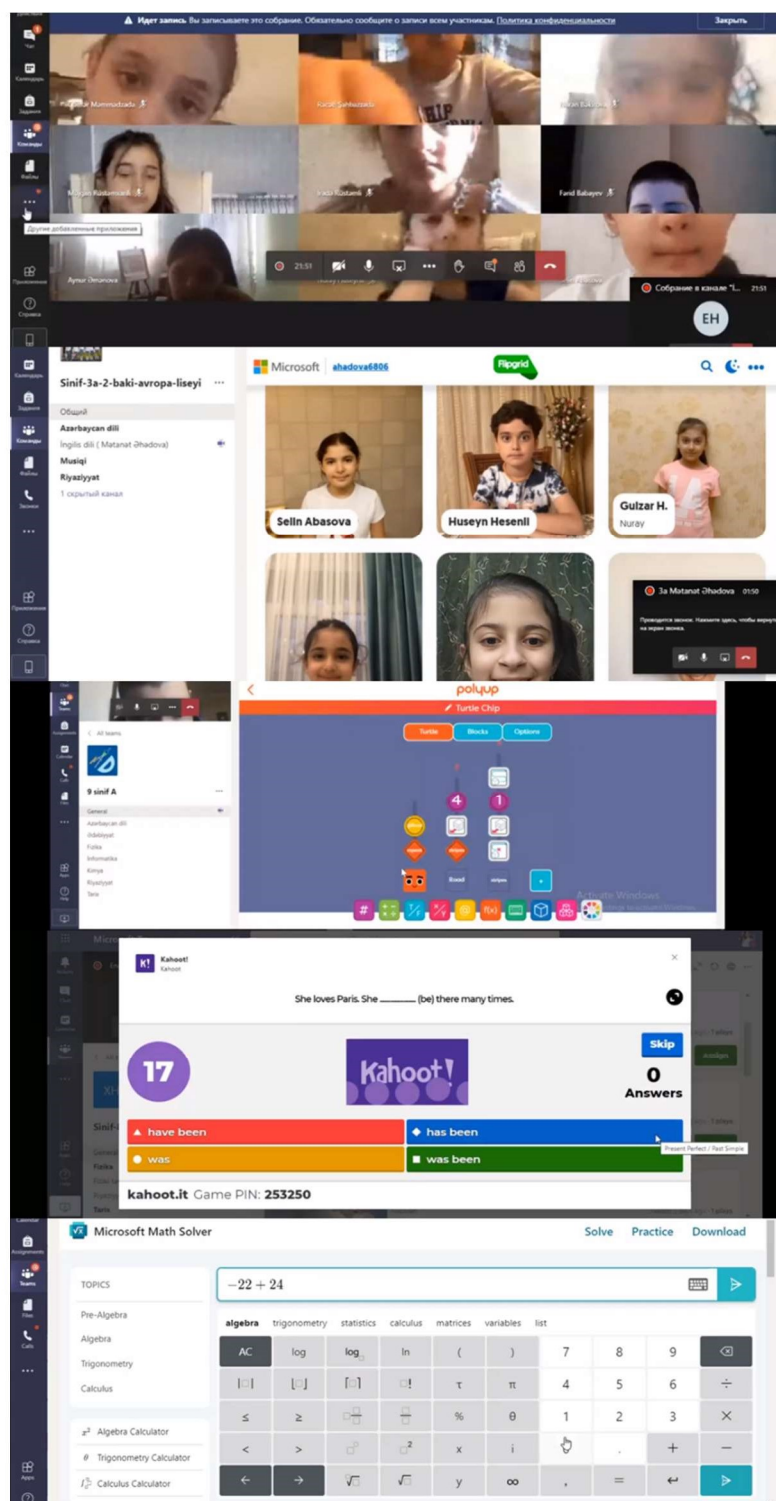
a) Through the channel of large groups, the Ministry of Education provides students with tests and content relevant to TV lessons on a weekly basis. The large groups also contain Microsoft and third party educational resources such as simulators and dynamic content by Flipgrid, MakeCode, Kahoot, Minecraft, Lego Education, and others.

b) Through the school class channel, students can communicate with their teachers and classmates. Once the class teacher activates his/her account, all students join their existing classes automatically. Such technical arrangement creates a seamless opportunity for teachers and students to find each other online and continue their lessons from where they stopped.

The Virtual School offers a wide range of features necessary for effective distance learning and teaching. Students and teachers can interact through the dashboard announcements and this interaction may be observed by school administrators. By means of video calls, teachers and school principals can connect with as many as 250 students in a single call or host live events with up to 10,000 participants. Microsoft Teams has no time limits on the length of calls in comparison to other video conferencing solutions.

Because students are organized in their respective classes, teachers do not need to search for students or share any links through other messaging channels prior to the event. By recording video lessons, teachers ensure all students including those who missed classes have access to lessons later on.

Teachers and students can jointly plan their schedules to guarantee perfect timeslots for lessons. This feature was particularly well received in remote areas, where families usually have a single gadget in a household. The Assignments and Grades features integrated into the platform allow teachers to develop various types of quizzes and tasks to be submitted by a certain deadline. File sharing and integration with Microsoft Office 365 products facilitate group work and knowledge transfer.

Virtual School: Key Figures

From its inception, the Virtual School received high public and media attention in Azerbaijan. In a month and a half 1 million teachers and students self-registered in the platform. The project reached all regions of the country though in some areas registrations covered 80% of all students and teachers. The self-provisioning strategy proved to be successful as students and teachers joined the platform on their own will and within technical capabilities.

A dedicated entity under the Ministry of Education, the Bureau on ICT for Education, worked closely with Microsoft and the local companies BestComp, AzEduNet, and Edumedia to ensure technical support and troubleshooting. In partnership with a local continuing education center "Innovative Technologies in Education", the Ministry provided online training for 14,000 educators who required necessary IT skills. Moreover, a series of training videos were developed to support a wider audience of educators and students.

In agreement with Azerbaijan's Ministry of Transportation, Communication, and Higher Technologies, a local mobile network operator Azercell provided 30,000 teachers with mobile internet access. AzEduNet provided mobile data traffic to 10,000 educators that used other mobile operator services.

Virtual School:
Way Forward

The introduction of the Virtual School project facilitated rapid digitalization of the education system in Azerbaijan. Within a very short period of time, a large number of students and teachers migrated their classrooms online. The digital content and data that are being developed as we progress lay a solid foundation for informed decision-making. The availability and ease of sharing materials developed by teachers allow students from vulnerable and less advantaged areas of the country access the same quality content as their peers in downtown areas.

A country-wide implementation of the platform provides tools and data sets for the Ministry of Education to improve the education system through the targeted actions at higher speeds and efficiency. The Ministry of Education's strategy helped maintain teaching and learning process during the crisis while supporting the Government's efforts on social distancing.

Indirectly, the audience of the portal can also help the small and medium businesses involved in educational services to come out of economic crisis. Moreover, SMBs involved in the Virtual School would be better positioned to operate transparently due to a range of reporting tools available as part of the platform.