A Shule Direct Experience

I read Eckhart Tolle's The Power of Now about two years ago but only grasped the lessons from the book these last two weeks. One thought that has stuck with me is how to be fully present. 'Whatever the present moment contains, accept it as if you had chosen it. Always work with it, not against it.' I am thinking of you and how this experience has brought us closer than ever before. As we seek collective efforts to control and contain Coronavirus but witnessing gracious acts of humanity transcending race, geographies, governments and religion. I hope you are keeping well and doing all you can to keep others well.

Working from Home

In the same spirit, at Shule Direct we have been working from home. Being fully digital while providing digital learning platforms on web and mobile for Secondary School students in Tanzania. As management, we took considerable measures to ensure salaries were paid in advance to support staff adjusting to this new set of work-life circumstances and provide internet data bundles so that they stay connected, not just for work, but with their loved ones. Our resolve as a team is unshaken with everyone understanding how this moment, with schools closed and students having to learn while at home, calls for our support.

User - Centered

We pride ourselves to always design with the user and this time around we asked ourselves, what can we do for our users to make them learn effectively at home? Our primary users are students but keeping them at the center we have taken considerable measures to factor parents, teachers, schools, both private and public and the Government to support their relationships and arrive at the end objective that brings us all together, improving learning outcomes.

Digital Platforms

For students, our platforms are able to offer the entire Secondary School curriculum for 13 Subjects, available on web, app stores and offline quizzes on mobile SMS, a partnership between UNICEF Tanzania's U-Report and Shule Direct available by texting Makini to 15070 from all mobile networks. Through these digital platforms they are able to take online quizzes, revise past papers, learn study notes, discuss, subscribe to their favorite teachers and ask questions to Ticha Kidevu, a virtual teacher powered by artificial intelligence.

Parents can receive their children's activity and performance reports and access different parenting tips and resources to support learning at home on the parents' dashboard. For us, this is one of the silver linings of this attack, we are witnessing how parents are involved in their children's learning journey and no longer leaving it to be a teachers' forte.

The role of teachers has been significantly redefined, offering a supportive and facilitating role than our typical classrooms. It is also making us redefine our teachers resource center which previously supported teachers with tools and skills such as lesson plans and teachers' guides towards classroom teaching. However, with teachers and students apart, we are enabling students to still subscribe to their teachers and receive learning content and assignments from them. To this effect, we have been developing templates and tools to support over 50,000 teachers to teach online that can be supported with an online Learning Management System for their school.

Government and Ed-Tech

Particularly proud of Government efforts to ensure students are staying safe by closing schools, providing COVID19 awareness info for students but also providing their e-library hosted at the Tanzania Institute of Education covering Primary, Secondary and High School curriculum. To leverage almost 200,000 registered students on Shule Direct web and apps, we have integrated the e-library with the platforms to ensure they can access qualified resources.

New Platform

We do not want to leave anyone behind. We are now working hard with partners to develop an SMS and IVR (Interactive Voice Response) to support Primary School students across Tanzania who cannot typically access digital web and app platforms on smartphones or other web enabled devices. We will be keeping you updated as we move on to start creating educational resources for an entirely new market, Primary Schools.

These are extraordinary times. Once this nightmare is over, things will not return to normal. Our normalcy has been disrupted and digital cultural techniques are proving practical. Collectively, we are more humane than my memory can recall. You and I will defeat this virus by washing our hands, staying at home and extending acts of kindness to others in all ways possible.

In Service,
Faraja