

PILOTING QATAR'S FIRST EDTECH TESTBED: *THE JOURNEY TOWARDS BEST PRACTICE, SUSTAINABLE PARTNERSHIPS AND INNOVATION*



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Edtech testbeds can help address challenges and barriers for effective implementation of technology in educational settings, as edtech testbeds seek to provide “an environment to test and experiment with edtech solutions in a real-world setting” (Batty et al. 2019, p. 5).

In 2020, WISE launched its first edtech testbed pilot in Education City, Doha in an effort to accelerate the introduction of new innovation within this learning ecosystem. In doing so, we hoped to increase local practitioners’ understanding of edtech use and how it could be leveraged to overcome persistent problems of practice in the classroom. Developing a community of edtech specialists within Qatar and Qatar Foundation schools also presented a new opportunity to create a sustainable community of practice that could support innovative approaches to learning and capture improved practice.

The idea of establishing this type of network locally was also a key component of our overall ambition: developing a toolkit so that global partners could replicate similar initiatives in their own contexts.

With that said, testbeds are notoriously difficult to manage. Juggling the expectations of multi-level stakeholders, along with the task of delivering research is no easy feat to undertake, but we believed that with the right partnerships and always a bottom-up approach to implementation, we could begin to create a learning ecosystem capable of truly realizing the potential of technology.

Of course, for the 2021-2020 pilot, our testbed was forced to face an additional unique challenge – the onset of a global health pandemic. Schools and their teachers had to adapt to shifting sands of the crisis as it evolved; remote learning turned to hybrid and then back again without much notice, and at times the disruption to mainstream classrooms became insurmountable. In the midst of this, we remained focused on implementing new technology within selected schools and although there were significant challenges in doing so, these same hurdles proved to work to our advantage as we continued to adapt to the realities of learning online.

Key lessons that emerged from implementing an edtech testbed during the pilot phase included; (i) the importance of building relationships with school leaders early, and continuously revisiting expectations towards alignment, (ii) pre-testing the product prior to implementation to minimize technical difficulties and delays, (iii) identifying a champion or advocate within the school to motivate teachers to engage with a new product, and (iv) involving the edtech venture in the ongoing professional development of teachers.

At the close of this pilot phase, it became clear that there were more barriers in our existing systems than initially anticipated, decelerating the use of innovation in day to day learning. However, these barriers do not mean that edtech cannot have the impact that many, including the participating schools and teachers, had hoped for in the Qatari context. Learnings from this pilot will allow us to adapt and iterate our approach to testing and better anticipate future potential challenges. Ultimately, we expect this testbed to experience various iterations as we move closer to delivering our global toolkit. Each iteration will aim to address practitioner needs as they evolve and in turn, help create an environment where innovation, testing and experimentation are supported.

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