



THE STATE OF PALESTINE

Every Child Learns

UNICEF Education Strategy 2019–2030

Learning and skills development; systems strengthening and innovation - Life skills and citizenship education through Experiential Learning Objects Bank (xLOBs)

Problem: Reliance on traditional teacher-centred approaches and passive learning have left Palestinian learners ill-equipped for the challenges they face in their individual lives, the job market, and their communities. The need for mainstreaming life skills and citizenship education into the national education system, is recognized in the Educational Development Strategic Plan (EDSP) 2014-2019 of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE) of Palestine.

Solution: Following a national analytical mapping, a roadmap was developed for mainstreaming life skills and citizenship education within the national education system of Palestine. The roadmap has facilitated development of appropriate policies and programmes for promoting life skills and citizenship education in the State of Palestine and is ensuring the scale-up of current pilot initiatives, including the development of innovative student-centred pedagogical activities and teaching and learning materials.

Learning Objects: An innovative approach for integrating life skills in learning and teaching

With the aim of providing practical support for teachers in shifting towards more learner-centred approaches for effective integration of life skills, Birzeit University in Palestine in partnership with MOEHE and UNICEF, initiated the development of a national 'Experiential Learning Objects Bank' (xLOB).

Learning objects are a set of innovative pedagogical activities and resources used to enhance teaching methods within classrooms and to improve students' life skills and learning outcomes. Each learning object is designed to stimulate active learning and develop core life skills such as critical thinking, creativity and problem solving.

The learning objects consist of three key ingredients, which, when combined, produce an effective educational process:

1. **Learning resources** that can be delivered physically in the classroom or across the network;
2. **Learning activities** and applications of the knowledge in contexts that are meaningful and stimulating to students (learning activities are where learners internalize and reinforce what they learn);
3. **Instructional strategies** that glue and integrate the different elements of the learning object together. These strategies are designed to stimulate active learning, provide innovative learning spaces, support deep learning, and develop soft skills.

The learning objects are fully aligned with the requirements of the Palestinian curriculum since they are designed to help students achieve the same learning objectives set by the Ministry. They enable teachers to use interactive teaching methods, resulting in improved learning outcomes. This approach is currently integrated within the newly released Palestinian curriculum for Grades 1 through 4.

Through the Learning Objects Initiative, 280 learning objects (LOBs) were developed for first and third grade students (Phase I) and 280 for Grades 2 and 4 (Phase II) in Math, Science, Social Sciences and Arabic. In all, 500 teachers, 100 principals and 100 supervisors in 100 schools were trained and the programme benefited around 10,000 students. In Phase III (May 2019-June 2020), 240 learning objects will be developed for Grades 5 and 6 with an additional 400 teachers and 100 principals trained. The objective was to form a team of master trainers at the Ministry level who would lead the training of teachers from other schools to implement xLOB in their respective schools. There is now a trained team of 28 Ministry of Education supervisors who can train additional teachers and provide ongoing mentoring to those from of Phase I and II.

Examples of using learning objects in the classroom

Traditional approach: The teacher delivers a lecture, writing down relevant laws and formulas related to electricity and solving physics problems based on these. This approach develops procedural knowledge among students but does not necessarily facilitate conceptual understanding or the application of the concepts to everyday life.

xLOB approach: The learning journey starts with the presentation of a real electricity bill to the students, who are invited to reflect together on a number of questions: What do the different numbers on the bill represent? What is the size of the family who received this bill? What is VAT and why should we pay it to the government? Next, students are invited to estimate their family electricity bill for the coming month, based on their electrical appliances and usage. Then they begin developing a plan for reducing their bill, reflecting on the advantages of doing so.

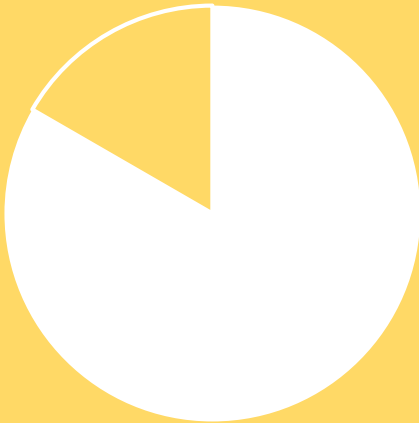
Source: National Consultation on Life Skills and Citizenship Education in the State of Palestine Workshop (5-6 July 2017).



Photo: courtesy of Birzeit University
Children learning about different tree leaves, small rocks and various soil types.



Photo: courtesy of Birzeit University
A boy observing a leaf textures closely when learning about how plants absorb water and light.



Children whose teachers used learning objects showed improvements in 10 out of 12 life skills compared to those in the control group.

Impact, challenges and lessons learned

Since the beginning of the project in 2017, teachers have faced challenges in assuring parents that the new teaching methods would not replace the curriculum but, in fact, enhance it. Birzeit University facilitators also had to convince some teachers that the new teaching methodology is effective and that teachers themselves will benefit from adequate and continuous support and training in its use. This support is delivered through the mentoring and coaching component led by trained supervisors who provide follow up and mentoring to an assigned number of teachers within his/her district.

Strong support from school principals and supervisors was needed at the onset of the project to help engage both parents and teachers. Active engagement with the MOEHE from the very start of the programme has been paramount to its success.

Evaluating the impact of the project on teachers and students has been highlighted as a priority to inform the development and advancement of the programme. An initial evaluation conducted in 2018 by Birzeit University and the MOEHE, indicates that participating teachers appeared to be more motivated, self-confident and cooperative with students. The programme also indicated a positive impact on students: pupils appeared more motivated to learn and were more involved in the educational process. Additionally, children whose teachers were using learning objects in the classroom demonstrated greater knowledge about 10 of the 12 life skills compared to children whose teachers were not using them.

Source: Birzeit University and the MOEHE, Palestine, (2018) "Study of the impact of the application of learning objects on the development of life skills in Grades 1-4 and on teachers' performance in the teaching and learning process in Palestinian government schools."

Next steps

Currently, an additional 240 Learning Objects are under development to reach up to 400 teachers and 1,000 students for Grades 5 and 6 across the West Bank, bringing the overall total to 900 teachers and 11,000 students. The aim is to have a virtual resource bank available to all teachers to produce learning outcomes more closely aligned to the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. The MOE is working closely with Birzeit University for the scaling up of xLOBS methodology in Palestine, scaling up to all government schools, which has the potential to reach 47,458 teachers and just over 1,000,000 students. Moreover, several countries in the Middle East and Northern Africa have shown great interest in the xLOB Initiative and are considering integrating its methods in future education programmes.

Cost Effectiveness:

The Experiential Learning Objects Bank has reached 11,000 students and 900 teachers for a cost of US \$620,000.

The Experiential Learning Objects Bank is an example of how innovative approaches to teaching and learning contribute to the goal that **"Every Child Learns"**.

For more info, please contact:

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