

Address of Pr- Salim- Daccache s.j., rector of Saint—Joseph University- of Beirut at the CME conference on digital innovation in higher education, on Thursday, March 2, 2023, at the François Bassil Auditorium.

It is an important moment that we are living today in order to reflect on the status of digital technology and its role in educational institutions and especially in higher education. Firstly allow me to express the following points: the first to salute the great achievement of CME, the implementation of a computer software SI2 for the management of academic affairs in partnership with the USJ. I would like to associate two names that were the basis of this innovation, Mr. engineer Youssef Charbel and Mr. Professor Dani Mezher. It took their determination, their faith and their skills to develop an extraordinary and much needed product to meet an increasingly pressing need of our university to manage its academic and administrative domain. I cannot forget the many developers who have worked several, day and night for the success of this beautiful tool which is today between our fingers and our hands.

it is true that success is seen in the product that is installed and to which our entire current base, hundreds of millions of characters, is being transferred. Success is at the same time an active and visionary partnership which has enabled not only the release of a product but

to commit the University by the quality of what has been achieved in the path, already practiced of digital transformation. It is clear: the motto of CME “reimagine innovation” is not a slogan to sell a product, but to make the best future. Therefore, the Next-Gen student-centric SIS (Student Information System) is offering 360-degree overview of all institutional management aspects, with actionable insights. This modular platform is a purpose-built, cloud-enabled, universal solution for schools and universities, big or small. It helps manage one or more campuses, ensures operational excellence, with flexible configurations, while providing superior learning experiences.

I would like to congratulate CME and USJ for having been able to lead this partnership and continue to implement it for a long time with tact and common interest. With this program, in its practical aspect, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) play an active role in shaping the solution roadmap and incorporating the services they need for success. And, to make a positive impact, a share of revenue is reinvested to support students in their education journey. The result is before our eyes and we are proud of it.

Dear Friends, we are invited to reflect on a current topic that consists in exploring the role of technology and innovation in the field of education, obviously in the management of the life of the student and the teacher from a to z, but also and especially on the digital

transformation that now affects education itself. In this sense, the question of exploration will have to concern many domains.

In fact, throughout history, education has undergone significant changes, and the technology has played a crucial role in its evolution. We at Saint-Joseph University of Beirut realized the important role of technology in education decades ago.

We invested in the needed technology infrastructure to support a wide range of digital learning resources and tools, and our gathering to launch this new student Information system developed by the Lebanese Tech CME Offshore Lebanon with USJ team aims to help our institution meet upcoming challenges. Moreover, we did foster a culture of innovation and experimentation, to encourage faculty and staff in exploring new ways of using technology with the aim of supporting teaching and learning. It is for this purpose that we established in 2005 a Unit dedicated to New Educational Technologies to ensure monitoring, keeping up with new developments and teachers training.

Technology has been a disruptive innovation for education, as it has fundamentally changed the way we teach and learn. Every time USJ was seizing the opportunity to move forward beginning by:

- Adopting LMS way before 2005 allowing professors to create and manage digital content, collaborate with colleagues, and track student progress more easily,
- then implementing Zero Paper Policy since 2017 in order to diffuse Digital Culture,
- to the shift from traditional classroom-based learning to online and hybrid learning models during 2020 health crisis. That was assured in a very effective way allowing our students to access education from anywhere and at any time upon their convenience.
- and recently with ChatGPT this newly designed AI-powered app that has garnered over 5 million subscribers within 5 days. We at USJ did not bury our heads in the sand and ignored this innovation and we are considering ways that will help our faculty and our students to take the best advantage of this tool.

There is both anxiety and excitement around these latest tools for teachers, staff and even students. While some are worried about what it will mean for their jobs, others are excited about the new possibilities it could bring. It is unanimously agreed that the future of jobs and the future of education are interconnected, as education plays a critical role in preparing individuals for the jobs of the future.

As automation and AI (Artificial intelligence) is increasingly taking over routine tasks, the value of soft skills such as creativity, collaboration, and communication is becoming more important. We at the USJ emphasize on the development of these skills, along with critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, to prepare individuals for the jobs of the future. At the Entrepreneurship Center, students have access to entrepreneurship competitions, hackathons, coaching, working space, networking events and workshops. All of these with the objective to foster innovation, experimentation, collaboration and empathy to create sustainable solutions for healthier, more resilient, and more equitable future.

Innovation and technology are already having a significant impact on the future of education, and the potential for further positive change is enormous. Improved access to education, personalized learning, enhanced collaboration and communication, innovative teaching methods supported by technology, data-driven decision-making... are some examples how innovation and technology are impacting positively the future of education.

As we move towards a more technology-driven education system, we are also aware that it is important to address some challenges in order to ensure that all students have equal access to high-quality education which is the mission of our University. One of the biggest

challenges is the digital divide, the potential for technology to exacerbate inequalities in education and concerns around data privacy and security.

The USJ has taken the first step but the road remains long. "A journey of a thousand miles always begins with a first step", they say. 2 years separate us from the year 2025, which could be the year when the digital revolution contribute to consolidating the pioneering role of USJ in teaching and research.