

AUB professor wins award for 'Little Engineer' invention

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AUB Engineering Professor and entrepreneur Rana El Chemaitelly emphasized the need to invest in young Lebanese minds and prepare them for the future.

Chemaitelly is the creator of “The Little Engineer” and was recognized as one of the Middle East and North Africa’s most promising entrepreneurs. She was awarded in June 2020 \$50,000 as start-up capital at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Arab Business Plan Competition, hosted annually by the MIT Enterprise Forum of the Arab Region, in partnership with Abdul Latif Jameel (ALJ) Company.

“The Little Engineer” is an after-school edutainment center which introduces kids and teens [age 4-16+] to pre-engineering courses such as robotics, physics, electricity, electronics, and renewable energy. Students enrolling in one of the offerings will visit the center once per week, for eight successive sessions, closing with a competition.

“The Little Engineer provides kids with social benefits. We are teaching kids how to work in teams and how to communicate with each other and be sociable instead of wasting their time browsing the internet,” she said.

She added that this project aims at teaching kids how to organize and complete their tasks on time. “We are teaching them perseverance so they have to complete every task before they leave. Moreover, we are teaching them how to troubleshoot their work and be consistent with what they are doing,” she added.

Chemaitelly came up with the idea when she was teaching a mechanical engineering course at AUB and was asked to give a robotics class. “I had to go to the internet and do some research about robotics in order to build my skills before giving the course. While researching, I was so surprised to see that kids in the United States were working on robots at a very early age,” she said. “This is how I decided to bring the topic to Lebanon, work on it further, and give this opportunity to our kids in this country.”

Chemaitelly added that another driver for this initiative was to divert her kids’ attention from the internet, play stations, and TV especially that she is a working woman. “I wanted to create a positive environment where they can communicate with others, build skills, and use the technology in a positive way.”

However Chemaitelly felt very surprised at the fact that she did not get any attention from the Lebanese government. “When I won the first prize I thought about my country and how I raised the name of Lebanon and when I came back and went on the internet I saw that everyone celebrated the second and third winners while here in Lebanon everybody is dormant,” she said. “I am working hard and in a very short time to franchise this company abroad which is considered a great asset for Lebanon because we are not importing a franchise, we are exporting it.”

But she thanked AUB and BankMed for backing her project. “I want to thank Associate Provost and Mechanical Engineering Professor Nesreen Ghaddar and BankMed for sponsoring 'The Kids and Teens Go Green' initiative,” she said. “They both pushed hard for The Little Engineer. And I will stay loyal to AUB and BankMed.”



She also criticized Lebanese banks for the lack of support provided to entrepreneurs in Lebanon. “Lebanese banks are not effectively supporting young entrepreneurs and even if you get a loan you are always asked for collateral in return,” she said. “Young entrepreneurs cannot provide collateral because they are starting with their businesses and banks should facilitate their tasks since they have financial experts who can track what they are doing and assess whether what they are doing is right or wrong.”

Chemaitelly is expecting around 850 Lebanese kids to enroll in her classes during the summer in the four centers located in Msaytbeh, Verdun, Aley, and Dbayeh.