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Empathy for educators

Better mental health and digital support needed, stakeholders say

SCHOOLS have been actively conducting online lessons for almost eight months since the Covid-19 outbreak.

This method of teaching and learning will continue until face-to-face lessons resume when schools reopen on Jan 20.

Much of the attention has since been on students' access to gadgets and Internet connectivity to ensure a smooth and effective transition from chalk and talk to online learning.

But that's not to say our teachers have been sidelined from receiving adequate support.

According to the recent "Overview of Findings from a Survey of Ministries of Education on National Responses to Covid-19" report, more than half of high-income countries surveyed have recruited or are recruiting additional teachers to support remote learning or reopening.

The survey, which included Malaysia, was jointly conducted by Unesco, Unicef and the World Bank.

Its results, the report stated, allows for sharing of "experiences and good

practices during the world's largest global experiment in education".

In each country, the survey questionnaire was completed by Education Ministry officials responsible for education planning at the central or decentralised levels, the report stated.

The first round of the study was completed by ministry officials in 118 countries between May and June, while the second round included 149 countries between July and October this year.

About 89% of countries that responded to the survey stated that their governments offered support to teachers.

"This support most frequently took the form of instruction on how to deliver lessons through distance learning,

The Discourse

"About two-thirds of high-income countries offered special training consisting of strengthening teachers' ICT skills and innovating their pedagogical approaches to delivering learning contents," the surveyed read.

Interestingly, psychosocial and emotional support, an often overlooked aspect, was another measure provided to teachers.

The measure was given in more than half of high and upper middle

income countries, and in 26% of lower middle income countries, the survey found.

In some cases, social media groups carried out peer support and exchanged best practices between teachers.

Protect teachers' mental well-being

This, Malaysian Mental Health Association president Datuk Dr Andrew Mohanraj said, is vital as the psychological distress faced by teachers are often ignored.

The profession, he told *StarEdu*, is a highly stressful one.

"Teachers are often blamed by parents as well as school management for students' poor performance.

"The pandemic has also taken a toll on teachers' mental health.

"They are facing challenging times in trying to make students' learning experience as optimal as possible while struggling with other impacts of Covid-19 on their family

life," he added.

Agreeing, English language teacher Dr Sirhajwan Idek, said teachers are capable of exploring alternatives and adapting to new norms but they need support to stay motivated and energised when delivering online lessons.

"Staring the screen for long hours is exhausting. Teachers also need someone to confide in so that we can remain focused.


"By providing us with an avenue to turn to for support, we are able to engage in conversation and share our thoughts and feelings.

"This is crucial in helping us feel like we are not alone and that help is available if we need it," he added.

National Union of the Teaching Profession (NUTP) secretary-general Harry Tan said the ministry has provided help for teachers but there are many challenges as teachers often shun the help given.

They fear reaching out will stigmatise them, he said.



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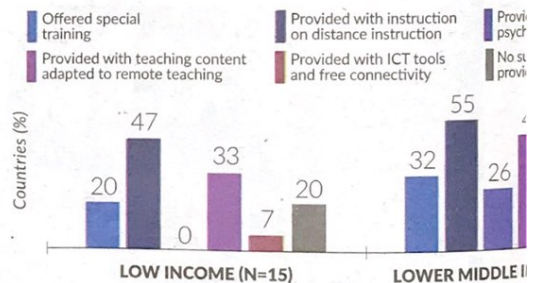


Keeping a balance:
Dr Andrew said the teaching profession is a highly stressful one and so, having peer support groups is vital.

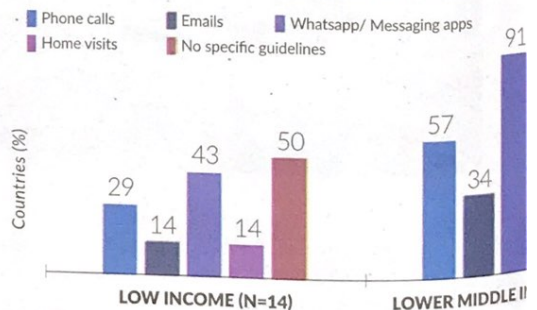


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Support provided to teachers (by income group)



Communication modalities between teachers



Note: N means the total participating countries in the survey.
Source: Unesco's study titled Overview of Findings from a Survey of Ministries of Education

omy to carry out teaching and learning methods that are most convenient and effective for their students, said Global Teacher Prize 2020 Top 10 finalist Samuel Isaiah, is one way the ministry continues to provide psychosocial and emotional support to teachers.

"On top of that, the ministry's decision to bring forward major examinations has eased the strain on teachers," he added.

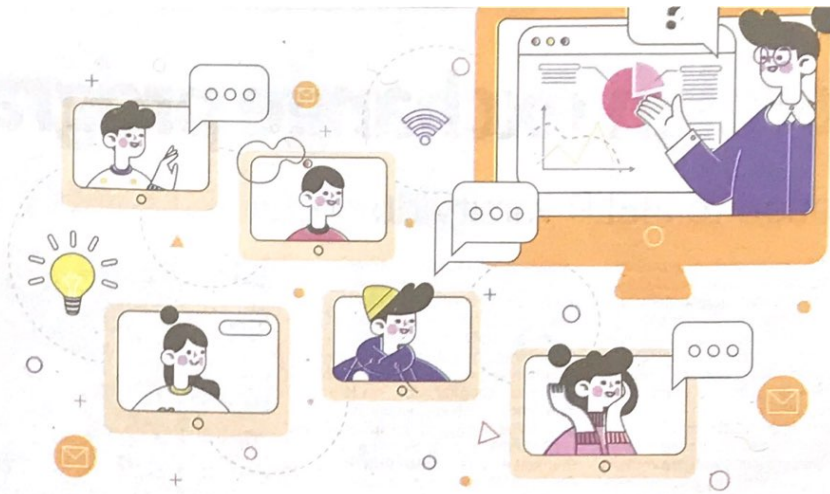
A wishlist

The ministry, acknowledged Tan, has run numerous online courses and provided platforms for teachers to upskill.

"They are trying their best to retrain teachers but due to time constraint and budget limitations, they are not in a position to compete with other advanced countries at the moment.

"While there are similarities between Malaysia and other countries in the assistance given, we find that assistance to parents and caregivers for them to aid the teachers in distance learning is still lacking," he added.

He appealed to the ministry to increase its allocation for online teaching, maintenance of schools, upgrading infrastructure, providing teaching aids such as ebooks and looking into teachers' needs in the form of mileage claims and venue



rentals for co-curricular activities:

Universiti Malaya's Faculty of Education senior lecturer and teacher-trainer Dr Zuwati Hasim said: "As much we want our teachers to deliver, there's a need to look at the facilities they are provided with to carry out their lessons effectively".

Establishing teaching labs – including pre-recording of lessons to be accessed by all teachers and students – is a way forward, she opined.

Policies to support teachers:

- In addition to the pre-existing staff, one in three countries recruited additional teachers to support remote learning during closure of schools and their reopening, mostly high and upper-middle-income countries.
- 66% reported their teachers receiving instructions on how to operate and deliver their lessons through remote learning
- About two-thirds of high-income countries offered special training consisting of strengthening teachers' ICT skills and innovating their pedagogical approaches to delivering learning contents
- More than 60% of high and upper-middle-income countries report having provided teachers with content adapted to remote teaching
- Psychosocial and emotional support was another measure provided to teachers.
- One in three countries provided their teachers with ICT tools and free Internet connectivity to facilitate their work during school closures.
- Three-quarters of responding countries reported that teachers were required to continue teaching during school closures, with significant differences by income group.
- Over 90% of high and upper-middle-income respondents, compared to 60% of lower-middle-income and 39% of low-income respondents, required their teachers to continue working.
- Globally, most countries encouraged teachers to interact with students and parents through messaging apps.
- More than half of high-income countries have recruited or are recruiting additional teachers to support remote learning or reopening.
- 89% of countries said their Education Ministries offered support to teachers, most frequently by providing instruction on how to deliver lessons through distance learning.
- One in four countries reported recruitment of additional staff such as cleaning and administrative personnel during the reopening of schools.

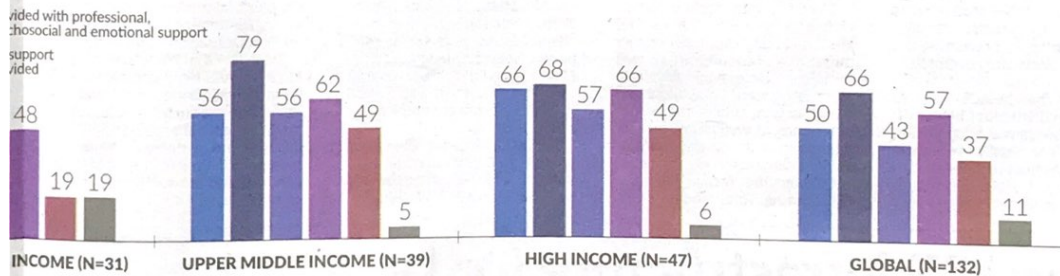
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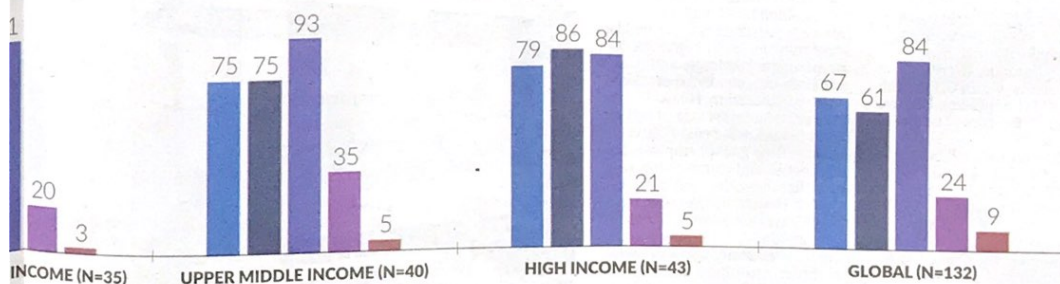
Sirhajwan said while capable of exploring apting to new norms, to stay motivated and delivering online lessons.



Additional help: Tan said assistance to parents and caregivers for them to aid teachers in distance learning is still lacking.



Teachers, student and their parents/ caregivers



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