

Back to home-based learning

Challenges still exist as classrooms shift out of their four walls again

TWELVE schools were closed in the short span of Sept 20 to Oct 21, as Covid-19 cases spiked and red zones mushroomed overnight.

As the Education and Health Ministries sought to keep the pandemic out of schools and our students safe, online learning – and the issues related to its implementation – again took centre stage.

Parent Action Group for Education Malaysia (PAGE) chairman Datin Noor Azimah Abdul Rahim said online teaching has not improved despite Malaysia entering the third wave of the pandemic.

"In many cases, educators made no attempt whatsoever to interact with

learners.

"Merely posting links for students to self-learn is irresponsible and lacks integrity. As parents, we can only watch and shake our heads."

Most parents and students prefer having face-to-face learning in schools, especially those who are sitting for major examinations, according to Dr Mohd Radzi Md Jidin.

The Education Minister, however, noted that in areas where Internet connectivity is not an issue, parents were more comfortable with having their children learn from home. The difference in opinion (of the best place to learn) depended on the availability of devices and the Internet, he told a

press conference on Oct 20.

Child therapist Priscilla Ho does not think that having to return to learning online will be a problem for students.

"I don't think it would be too stressful for them because it is easy for children to adapt."

"Those who may not enjoy the return to school-based screen time are probably those who like being with their friends and those who prefer the school environment compared to staying home," she told *StarEdu*.

Students who were disinterested in schoolwork even before the pandemic hit, however, would also tend to skip their online lessons now that schools are closed, she said.

Such students would see online learning as a time to relax, have fun and play games.

She reminded parents to be alert and to ensure that their children are actually doing schoolwork when they are on their devices, and not playing games or chatting on social networking sites.

Parents, she said, should also make sure that the children have access to suitable learning devices.

"A mobile phone is not conducive for learning. It is too small and makes concentrating difficult." – By REBECCA RAJAENDRAM

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By REBECCA RAJAENDRAM
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THE second round of school closures has brought back some of the same difficulties students, teachers and parents faced when Malaysia experienced the first movement control order (MCO) back in March.

What is different this time around is that most stakeholders were ready and could transition back to home-based learning fairly easily.

The move was made easier with the release of a manual for teachers to guide them on conducting lessons from home.

As schools in red zones, in areas under the conditional MCO, or those with positive Covid-19 cases were ordered to return to teaching and learning from home, the Education Ministry's "Teaching and Learning From Home Manual" was released early last month.

The manual was developed to help teachers implement home-based teaching and learning (PdPR) as an alternative method in the new norm.

The Education Ministry Day School Management Division direc-

tor Datuk Mohd Jamil Mohamed said the 20-page manual serves as a guide for teachers and also enables students to follow the PdPR optimally.

This manual is also a reference for school administrators, district education office officers (PPD) and state education departments (JPN) as well as Education Ministry divisions.

By definition, PdPR is teaching and learning that is carried out at home, community centres or any other suitable location.

It can be done either online, offline or offsite in a structured and planned manner.

National Union of the Teaching Profession (NUTP) secretary-general Harry Tan said teachers and students are better equipped for online teaching this time around.

"However, the aspect of keeping students engaged is one that needs more research and improvement," he said, adding that the timeframe between the first school closure and the recent one is not long enough for the development of best methods and practices.

He also said parents who are at

Schooled from experience

Apply lessons from first movement control order to improve on school learning

The Discourse

home must keep an eye on their children when they're studying, to prevent them from skipping lessons.

"Parents should also interact with the teachers to find the right approach to help their children study online and the best way to effectively monitor their activities."

Educationist and former NUTP secretary-general Datuk N. Siva Subramaniam said: "Teaching is a critical profession and teachers must keep up with the times by adapting to online teaching, wheth-



Learn from home: Classrooms have emptied again as Covid-19 cases increase. **Stronger parental presence**

er we like it or not."

At the same time, parents, school heads and Parent-Teacher Associations should also play their part and be supportive of the teachers' efforts in keeping students interested in learning, he said.

Agreeing, Melaka Action Group for Parents in Education chairman Mak Chee Kin said many are now familiar with the many online learning platforms and have been continuously using them. While everyone is better prepared in the ways of the new normal now, there are bound to be students who will skip online lessons when they know that the teacher is not paying attention to them, he said. Teachers who struggle to control their face-to-face classes will find it even harder when their students move behind the screen, he said.

"Some teachers would just upload something for the students and leave them to watch the lesson for the whole duration (of the class)."

"This leaves students demoralised and unmotivated to study."

Child therapist Priscilla Ho encourages parents to keep a close eye on their children and to become co-educators with the teachers.

"Parents face the biggest challenge in making sure that students follow online classes and are not distracted," she said, adding that gaming, when they are supposed to be studying, is a bad habit developed during the first MCO.

"Children were also exposed to other social networking sites that could lead to social problems."

"Some children even lied about needing a mobile phone to do their homework but instead used it to play games. Most parents do not suspect anything amiss when they see a stack of school books next to their children."

While online learning is necessary, Ho said it is important for children to engage in activities that do not involve electronic devices

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outside of school hours.

“A two-hour Zoom class can be tiring. It is difficult even for an adult to remain focused what more for children who have a shorter attention span,” she added.

Ho said board games played with the other members of the family, especially siblings, are a good way to spend time away from the screen.

Some of her suggestions for education-based games are Scrabble and Bogger (to build vocabulary), Rummikub (to improve Mathematics, eye and hand coordination, and learn strategy) and Monopoly.

As for leisure-based activities, Ho said drawing together on the same piece of paper, making arts and crafts, cooking and baking are recommended.

Housekeeping can also help children learn family responsibilities, she said.

It is also important for teachers to draw up a timetable and keep

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National Union of the Teaching Profession (NUTP) secretary-general Harry Tan



parents informed of it. With the latest extension of the conditional MCO to Nov 9, Ho said parents need to stay vigilant so that their children do not fall behind in their education while they study from home.

If schools continue to remain closed, Mak said the Education

Ministry would have to consider homeschooling modules.

“There are many homeschooling success stories which we can learn from and implement,” he said, adding that a student who understands that importance of education in changing lives, can learn anywhere – even in difficult situations.