Impact of the Home Learning during COVID-19 Pandemic in Malaysia: A Qualitative Review from Parents' Perspective

Norhayati Mohd Zain[1,2], Nur Anis Izzati Che Mut[2], Siti Hajar Norhan[3], Wan Muhamad Rifqi Wan Abdul Rahim[1]

[1]Department of Medical Imaging, School of Health Sciences,
[2]Research Management Centre,
[3]Psychology Department,
KPJ Healthcare University College,

71800 Nilai, Negeri Sembilan,
MALAYSIA.

*Corresponding Author:norhayati@kpjuc.edu.my

Abstract

Since the first nationwide Movement Control Order (MCO) was implemented in Malaysia to contain COVID-19 outbreak, it have imposed on behavioural health on the population including the children. Home learning is not easy and approachable to all children which came from different backgrounds especially in aspect of technology availability. They may find home learning is fun in the beginning, but after the prolonged closure of school, it may be different. Thus, this study has done to assess the impact of home learning among the children in Malaysia. A study was conducted through online interview sessions among 10 parents in Nilai, Negeri Sembilan from October 2020 until February 2021. Data were reviewed from the recording of the interview sessions, then they were grouped into categories and themes before reporting the findings. The results revealed that there are four main themes highlighted by the respondents as key impacts of home learning which are low academic performance, difficulty in concentration, lack of social interaction and activities, and stress-related behaviour. Thus, to ensure the good condition of the children during home learning, it is important for parents and school authorities to support and help them adapt to these new norms.

Keywords: *COVID-19, home learning, impact, parents, children.*

1. Introduction

The novel SARS-CoV-2 have dramatically impacted on people's mental health. This worsens with high number of cases and death day by day, and prolonged total lockdown implement in each country to prevent the transmission of the disease. It has not only affected the physical health of infected patients but also the psychosocial health of the uninfected world population, increasing depression, stress, and prevalence of anxiety symptoms (Xiao *et al.,* 2020; Silva *et al.,* 2021). In Malaysia, according to Health director-general Tan Sri Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah, from Jan 1, 2021 to June 18, 2021, the ministry's psychosocial support hotline had received 122,328 calls with 109,806 calls (89.4%) are psychological issues linked to matters such as unemployment, loss of income, family feuds and marital problems (DG of Health, 2021). This triggers the mental health problems among the people who's suffering the loss due to this pandemic.

The impacts can be felt across all populations and no exceptions for the young populations including students. A study by Huang and Zhao (2020), they identified that the younger population has a higher risk of triggering events related to anxiety when compared to the elderly. A longitudinal and cross-sectional online survey with the children age range 3 to 18 years old identified that children's mental and emotional wellness are significantly influence by COVID-19 pandemic, which the children experienced depressive symptoms, difficulty to concentrate, anxiety, and easy to get mad (Tambunan *et al.,* 2020).

The online learning is one of the factors that impact the children's behaviour health condition. The school closures, self-isolation, restrictions on movement required them to stay home and learn online during this pandemic worsen the mental health among children (UNICEF, 2020). After the breakdown of COVID-19 pandemic, most education sectors chose to conduct online teaching-learning as a way to prevent the virus from spreading. Dhawan (2020) mentioned that, there was no choice but to switch completely to online teaching and learning for many academic institutions that were previously hesitant to change their traditional approach.

Educational institutions in Malaysia also implemented online learning (Azahar, 2020) following the emergent COVID-19 situation. In face-to-face learning, teachers are the source of information for students and the dependent for quality of learning, however in online learning, the

quality of learning is strongly dependent on the teachers' level of digital training and their teaching style (Gherhes *et al.,* 2021). The readiness and challenges of online learning have been discussed in the previous studies (Qureshi *et al.,* 2012; Bali and Liu, 2018, Aboagye *et al.,* 2020).

Various of platforms and way of online learning approach have been suggested and introduce to the students such as movies, video lectures, tutorials, online conferencing sessions, online collaboration tools, online slide presentation, chat groups, text- and audio-based course, online glossaries, wiki pages and interactive visuals including questions (Kobayashi, 2017; Adanir *et al.,* 2020), however the impact of home learning has brought into question. Thus, these issues are important and the findings of this study will serve as baseline data for school authorities and ministry to develop a best way of learning methods in ensuring the children received their rights in education and at the same time their behavioral health are preserved.

2. Methodology

2.1 Study design and population

Permission was obtained from the Institutional Review Board with a registration number (KPJUC/RMC/SOHS/EC/2020/314). This qualitative study was conducted amongst the parents in Nilai, Negeri Sembilan. A total of 10 respondents, consisting of parents were selected by using the purposive sampling method. The participants had a child from pre-school until the tertiary level with Malaysia-based curriculum. The results of this study are important because they provide an insight into clear condition of their children during home learning in this pandemic era.

Announcement of the project were done via electronic platform such as WhatsApp application and email. Interested potential respondents will respond to the announcement and communicate with the researcher. If the parent meets these requirements, the researcher may contact them to validate their participation in this study and the date for an interview was set. The interview was conducted through Google Meet to abide with the SOP of COVID-19. Prior to the interview, respondents were given clear explanations about the study and informed of their rights. Respondents had verbally consented to participate prior to any data collection. Respondents were assured that all information would remain confidential.

2.2 Construction of interview script

A self-developed and structured questions was developed by the researchers after the literature and guidelines were reviewed to provide a questionnaire framework. The self-developed interview questions were established in Malay, and then translated into English. Then, it was presented to the experts for evaluation and to check if they were clear and understandable for the respondents.

2.3 Data analysis

The data obtained were independently examined to form the theme and sub-themes. The data obtained were independently examined to form the theme and sub-themes. The data analysis followed the procedures outlined by Neegaard et al. (2009). The researcher ensured all data collected were adequate and completed before starting to review the recording from the interview sessions. Then, researcher organized the transcription material into groups by taking the text data and grouped the sentences into categories and themes before reporting the findings. Table 1 summarizes four main themes highlighted by the respondents as key impacts of home learning.

Table 1: Impacts of Home Learning

Themes	Thematic Statement
Low academic performance	Inability to engage in online classes
	Too much of homework and pack schedule to catch up
	Limited reference
Difficulty in concentration	Limited space and unconducive surrounding
	Lack of facilities
	Distraction with other things
Lack of social interaction and activities	Loneliness
	No physical engagement and activities
	Addiction to electronic media and gadget
	Weight gaining
Stress-related behaviours	Boredom
	Prolonged isolation in home

3. Results and discussion

Home learning during this pandemic might be the only way to contain the transmission of COVID-19 especially in schools, however after the prolonged home learning, the children may face some impact from them. The longer time children remain out of school, the greater loss and harm will be faced by them (Sarwar, 2021). According to Minister of Education Malaysia, Dr. Mohd Radzi Jidin, the ministry was aware of weakness in online learning because home-based learning method is something new among teachers, students and parents (Nawawi, 2020).

3.1 Low academic performance

The respondents reported significant low academic performance among their children due to this home learning, as they unable to engage in the online classes. The children are not ready to adapt to this new online learning and the knowledge the gain much lesser compare to face-to-face class. With no examination, the respondents in this study felt that it may affect the children's motivation to perform in their academic. Furthermore, this led them to feel less interest in their study. For instance, the respondents in this study state that:

My children are used to conventional learning, so it is difficult for them to adapt to this new online learning (Respondent 6).

In school, I am sure my children able to get at least 80-90% of knowledge due to face-to-face medium, but online learning I can say they get only 30-40% from the information given by the teacher (Respondent 7).

For me, school children are not suitable for online learning, they need to gain proper education in schools. It is challenging for them and my children are not ready about this. Plus, I worried no examination will affect their motivation and they become less competitive (Respondent 9).

After long time learning from home, my children become less interest in study and they are using their mind lesser on study (Respondent 4).

In previous study, reported that the students preferred the traditional learning method and dissatisfied with the implementation of virtual learning (Selvanathan, 2020). A study by Engzell *et al.* (2021), reported that students made little or no progress during home learning. Kapasia *et al.* (2020) found that lockdown made significant disruptions in students' learning experience. Dissatisfaction of online learning at home are shown when the respondents in this study also clarified that their children having difficulties due to too much of homework and the packed of schedule. This also been faced by the respondents in the study by Jan (2020), which reported that the task in school is lesser than during home learning. Due to limited time, the respondents state that their children need to rush up in catching up everything.

The syllabus become challenging and children feel like it is too rushing to catch up everything in short time (Respondent 1).

The schedule for each subject is too pack so I need to help my children in arrange them (Respondent 2).

My children facing a difficulty to handle numerous of tasks, and need a guidance from me (Respondent 7).

Home learning requires involvement of parents during the learning process because without their guidance, supervision and support, it will not effective especially among young learners (Cai and Wang, 2020; Zhang *et al.,* 2020). This led the respondents to lend their hand in helping managing the schedule of their children. However, this becomes a difficulty for the working parents to manage their children and at the same time managing their children schedule. For instance, the respondent stated that: "Not only me but all working parents found it difficult to handle children's classes and in the same time to do work. If children are a teenager, it may become easy, but as for me, my children still in school, so I need to monitor them fully." (Respondent 9). This is supported by previous study, that it was gruesome and stressful for working parents as they need to monitor their children and also attend their official duties for work (Jan, 2020).

During home learning, the children need to learn by themselves without monitoring from the teachers. Thus, they are facing the lack of reference. The respondents stated that their children facing a problem when they do not know certain subjects and with their lack of abilities in understanding and answering their children, they unable to help. This led to the children become less motivated to finish their homework and do it carelessly. For instance, the respondents in this study stated that:

My children unable to receive fully what they learn online. So, when they unable to understand certain subjects, we unable to help them as we also do not know about that (Respondent 2).

My children facing problem in certain subject such as mathematics, since I left it behind for a long time, I become difficult for me to teach them (Respondent 3).

The source given by the school is not enough for the student and parents (Respondent 4).

The teachers only give homework but there are no guidance and references for me and other parents, so it is difficult for us to teach our children and increase the burden for us. I can saw my children unhappy to do their homework but there is nothing I can do (Respondent 10).

This is supported by the interview done on a student, where they preferred the face-to-face learning in class because in class, they able to ask directly to teacher but they found it difficult in home as their parents unable to help (Roslan, 2021). In a study by Daniela *et al.* (2021), reported that there was a very low level of support in the form of online courses for both children and their parents on the use of digital learning materials, thus parents organized themselves according to their own understanding and provided support to their children to the best of their own ability, therefore, student's learning outcomes depend on parents' ability. Parents with lower level of educations also felt that they were not able to assist their children in studying (Abuhammad, 2020).

3.2 Low academic performance

Home environment is also mentioned in the study by Chandra (2020), which 85.1% of respondents responded their satisfaction on current home environment for online education. In this study, the respondents clarified that they also found that their children had difficulties in concentrating during learning. This is due to limited space and unconducive surrounding. Thus, the children become less motivated and affected their productivity studied at home.

The limited space makes my children become less interest to study (Respondent 1).

The condition in home with lot of noise distract them to focus during online class (Respondent 3).

My home surrounding as it is not conducive could affect the productivity of my children focus and learning experience (Respondent 6).

Furthermore, the respondents reported that their children tend to get distracted during the online learning from other things in their surroundings and do other things during the class. This led to them feeling bored and unfocused during class. Young people tend to consider themselves good at multitasking, however listening to a lecture while use of social media (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok video) cannot be done at the same time because these tasks are complex and very demanding and use the same area of the brain which is the prefrontal cortex (Schmidt, 2020). The finding in another study also stated a long period of time, they faced difficulties to focus while learning through the computer (Amir et al., 2020). This causing the respondents feel that their children unable to learn properly at home.

My children become playful during online class, after a few minutes they want to eat and rest (Respondent 1).

My children only able to focus in class less than hour, then they become restless, keep coming down to drink, taking paper and others (Respondent 2).

My children sometimes lost their focus during class and they tend to do other things such as WhatsApp and Facebook (Respondent 3).

I don't think my children get proper education during online class because they easily get distract by other things in home (Respondent 9).

With lack of facilities to support on their learning at home especially in aspect of internet availability make it harder for them to focus in learning. The limitation of technology are the barriers for this online learning. It is reported that most students in rural schools did not have mobile phone and faced difficulty in online learning (Yeoh, 2020). Thus, these barriers also may be face by other students in previous studies (Yiong et al., 2008; Dhawan, 2020). In this study, the respondent specifically mentioned that: "Even though I already have internet but still the internet connection is not strong enough for my children online learning" (Respondent 7). Another respondent state that: "The preparation in home is not as enough in schools especially internet connection, so it become a barrier for the children" (Respondent 9).

3.3 Lack of social interaction and activities

The things that worried by most of the respondents is their children's social interaction. The respondents reported that the found that their children felt the loneliness due to no physical engagement and activities with the friends. Suryaman *et al.* (2020), reported that students faced many obstacles in a home learning environment, and one of them are limited interaction or socialization between and among students. Furthermore, according to Amir *et al.* (2020), communication and interaction in a group discussion are not often feasible in the virtual learning method. This led the children become passive. This is evident when the respondents mentioned that:

My children become passive as no outdoor activities allowed (Respondent 1).

My children missed their friend actually, and even though they met their friend through online class, they don't feel the hyped (Respondent 2).

My children become bored as they unable to play with friend, no interaction with friend so this may affect their thinking (Respondent 7).

Furthermore, the addiction for gadgets becoming worse among the children. This cannot be prevented as they unable to do outdoor activities. Adolescents in the study by Fernandes *et al.* (2020) generally have increased their use of social media sites and streaming services. Even before the pandemic, adolescents are population with high use of social media and internet (Kircaburun and Griffiths, 2018). However, The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission's Internet User Survey 2020 reported the number of children age ranged between 5 to 17 years that using the Internet has increased from 18.4% in 2016 to 47.0% in 2020 and only 34.4% of parents use parental control to safeguard their children on the Internet (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, 2020).

One of the respondents shared that: "My children love outdoor activities such as football but they unable to do so and they become more addicted to gadget and computer" (Respondent 2). The other respondents shared that it may affect on the children's health and development. This situation raising a concern as this may lead to cyber-crimes, destroys the family institutions and health issues such as eye infection and stress (Makhbul, 2020). Mamun *et al.* (2020) also suggests that being addicted to the internet increases the likelihood of anxious and depressive symptoms.

My children become less active and their body becoming weak and increased body weight. This is not good for their growth (Respondent 3).

It gives negative impact for children because these activities are important for their development and psychomotor skills (Respondent 9).

3.4 Stress-related behavior

The shift from face-to-face to online learning at home required children to be more independent. One of the respondents stated that "…. my children facing the stress from the numerous of assignments and classes. They facing high pressure to submit assignments" (Respondent 5). The respondents state that their children tend to feel tired and this may trigger the stress. The prolonged isolation in home and boredom may make it worsen.

Copeland *et al.* (2021) reported that the pandemic affected students' behavioural and emotional functioning which were caused by isolation, economic or health effects, and uncertainties. It is reported that students feel anxiety, boredom, sadness, and isolation and this impacted the way they learn, completing their tasks and motivation to study (Barrot *et al.,* 2021). In this study, the respondents specifically mentioned that:

My children having stress as they unable to go out from home (Respondent 4).

My children are facing some stress to adapt to home learning. Out of 10, I give 8 for his level of stress (Respondent 6).

I can see my children having a mood swing. Sometimes they feel happy sometimes not. This makes me worry (Respondent 10).

Overall, unavoidable closure of schools has impacted several aspects throughout this home learning period and children are still coping with the new norms, thus they require support in managing this during the pandemic. A short course or counselling sessions may be helpful for parents and children. An awareness and knowledge on managing this pressing situation is highly needed (Amran and Jamaludin, 2021). This is also suggested by Selvanathan *et al.* (2020) that parents and children to be educate on behavioural health to improve their coping skills.

Besides, school authorities also can play their role in providing support health education and discuss the wellbeing of mental health with their students to help increase awareness about these behavioural health (Bates *et al.* 2020; Singh *et al.* 2020). Thus, it is suggested to develop a policies that covered on public mental health system, flexible strategies that can be adapted in schools, developmental stage of the children and other aspects related to children and adolescents (Singh *et al.* 2020).

4. Conclusion

The press conference on 12th September 2021 by Minister of Education Malaysia, Dr. Radzi Jidin on school reopening has shed light on the education among the children. A proper plan has been detailed by Ministry of Education Malaysia such as the 50% enrollment of students in class, grouping the students in two groups, the rotation schedule on face-to-face and online class, Standard of Procedure (SOP) such as wearing face masks, good air ventilation, and others. This able to counter the negative impact of home learning-based education currently facing by these children. This study had highlighted a few impacts of home learning on the children; thus, it is important to

build an awareness on importance of behavioral health among these populations. The findings from this study also may develop the awareness of parents on the conditions of their children during home learning. Furthermore, there are currently uncertainty on the situation and the home learning are still use after the school reopening for half of students. Thus, ensuring the good condition of the children while the education keep ongoing during this pandemic are necessary.

Acknowledgement

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