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Online Learning Supports in Times of Pandemic: From Parents' Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to identify the difficulties faced by parents in providing educational support for online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia. A quantitative approach was used, and 100 respondents participated in this study. The selection of respondents was made randomly based on several criteria. Data were collected online based on close-ended and open-ended questions related to home learning and parents' struggles. The study identified three major themes, which are personal, technical and financial challenges. All the variables based on these challenges are interrelated, have significant correlations, and mutually influence each other. The results show that the mean for variable personal challenges is at a moderate level ($m=3.22$), the mean for technical challenges is at a high level ($m=3.77$), and the mean for financial challenges is at a moderate level ($m=3.55$). This proves that there is a significant relationship between personal, technical and financial challenges. This study shed light on parents' struggle to provide educational support for online learning during the COVID-19 outbreak in Malaysia. To overcome it, some revisions and modifications are required, including finding ways to provide assistance from schools, teachers and the government. The implementation of new laws, regulations and suggestions may assist the parents in enhancing the perceptions that parents have in handling situations in challenging times. Other than that, there is a need to study further the role of the community and the NGOs in helping parents overcome future struggles.

Keywords: learning support, online challenges, online learning, parents support, pandemic

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Introduction

In 2019, the world was shaken by the outbreak known as the Novel Coronavirus, which is also known as COVID-19 (World Health Organisation, 2020b). The virus was eventually identified in Wuhan, China (World Health Organisation, 2020a). The COVID-19 outbreak has had a drastic and severe impact on people around the world, especially in Malaysia. The pandemic harmed the health of countless numbers of people, claimed many lives, disrupted schooling and training, and damaged economies worldwide, including Malaysia. As a result, the Malaysian government decided to enact the Movement Control Order (MCO), which had a significant negative impact and presented difficulties for the country's educational system, forcing a switch to online learning (Yeap et al., 2021). Teaching and learning sessions are no longer conducted as usual at school. The sessions are required to be conducted remotely and on digital platforms such as Google Meet and Zoom.

In 2020, the Ministry of Education implemented learning programs on media, including TV and the Internet, with the support of well-known media and entertainment groups in Malaysia (The Star, 2020). The Ministry cooperates with media organisations to provide TV broadcasts on educational content for elementary and middle school students. These initiatives are commendable, but parents are responsible for ensuring that their children fully participate in e-learning exercises provided by teachers during this period. Efforts are made to give internet packages, aid children in comprehending the information, and participate in finishing tasks or examinations that the teacher assigns in order to accompany and support children's learning processes at home (Lase et al., 2022).

There are various constraints encountered in order to implement online learning (Nordin et al., 2021). Parents have to play an essential role in ensuring that their children can cope well with the new way of learning. Parents' readiness is essential as parental support has an influence on students' academic performance (Amanor-Mfoafo et al., 2020). Although many researchers suggest using e-learning as a very useful tool for distance education and as an easy way to reduce the number of students and teachers who travel between their residences and learning institutions, the quality of teaching through e-learning improves enormously depending on the types of e-learning system used (Amanor-Mfoafo et al., 2020). The provision of facilities is also important in implementing this distance learning process, such as providing devices, educational applications and even access to the Internet (Nordin et al., 2021). One of the biggest issues children in Malaysia have with online learning is poor Internet access or the lack of devices in a household. Students in more remote areas of the country face other barriers in accessing online learning (The Star, 2020). The underprivileged children do not have the financial capabilities to purchase gadgets or computers. During the pandemic, there was a decline in children's learning motivation and cognitive abilities (Lase et al., 2022). Furthermore, UNESCO (2020) stated that implementing online learning may be challenging for parents with low socio-economic status.

Objective

Hence, this small scale research aimed to investigate the parents' struggles in providing educational support for online learning during COVID- 19 pandemic in Malaysia.

Literature Review

As studies of the COVID- 19 pandemic and online learning are concerned, scholarly analysis on the topic is substantial in volume. Notable studies are found in a number of seminar papers, including articles and journals. Existing works in literature present general analysis, either as a whole or just one aspect in detail, focusing on elements of online learning experiences among teachers and students.

Much attention has focused on explaining the impact of COVID-19 towards the education crisis during the pandemic. Most governments around the world temporarily closed educational institutions to contain the spread of the covid-19 pandemic since schools are centres for children for social activity and human interaction (Bhamani et al., 2020). The flare-up has also affected the education system worldwide and has changed the lives of 1,576,021,818 students in 188 countries (UNESCO, 2020). Schools and universities worldwide were forced to go into a lockdown and had to switch the learning methods from physical classes to online learning and digital tools as replacements (Bhamani et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2020; Zainol et al., 2021). Countries like China, Korea, Mexico, Rwanda, Iran, Peru and Thailand were using massive open online course (MOOC) methods, and lessons are either delivered through apps, television or other media (Bhamani et al., 2020).

Education is believed to educate and raise children to be healthy and resilient, where it can give skills to the people to participate in shaping the personality to be more sustainable in the future. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused an emergency shift from traditional learning to distance learning at all education levels. Because of that, millions of students were affected by the closure of schools in several countries. This has changed the students' education, their families, and the teachers as a whole (Misirli & Ergulec, 2021). Thus, during the pandemic, all lessons had to be delivered online. Thorough instructional design and development were needed to create a productive learning environment throughout the teaching and learning process (Ergulec, 2019). Although there was much attention given to the challenges of online learning according to the students' and teachers' perspectives, it also gave a

tough routine to parents whose responsibility was to ensure the learning process of their children continued smoothly during the COVID-19 era.

Parents were regarded to be among the most significant individuals in a virtual learning environment since they were the ones who were physically there with their children, and their support was crucial for students' development (Misirli & Ergulec, 2021). Furthermore, homes became a new place of learning for students during the COVID-19 pandemic, requiring parents to provide several things such as digital technologies and proper study places or desks. This new circumstance placed a significant burden on the caregivers and the parents (Chang & Satako, 2020; Dong et al., 2020). Besides, parents also struggled to provide educational support for their children during the virtual learning process in times of pandemic. Lack of access to technology, low confidence in technology and lack of interest in using the technology made their situations more challenging (Misirli & Ergulec, 2021). This has become a difficult routine for parents who are working either full-time at the office or online at home as they need to ensure their children's educational needs are good. Brooks et al. (2020) mentioned that quarantine caused a psychological impact on not only children but also parents. Some working parents felt burdened and exhausted as they did not have enough time to monitor their children's progress and to keep them focused during online learning sessions (Astro Awani, 2020).

From the various literature on online learning during the era of COVID-19 pandemic, it can be concluded that there were challenges among students and teachers during the temporary closure of schools. However, studies on the parents' struggles in providing educational support for online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia, particularly on personal, technical, and financial challenges, are few. There are still gaps in research on online learning support in times of pandemic from the parents' perspectives. This study intends to fill this gap.

Methods

This research used a quantitative approach by focusing on parents and focusing around Melaka, Malaysia. The data collection method of this research was an online survey. Questionnaires were prepared in Google Forms and distributed to respondents via online platforms such as social media, WhatsApp, email and suchlike. The questionnaire was designed as a research instrument to find answers to the questions posed specifically in the context to meet the objectives of the study. The instrument was adapted from Osorio-Saez et al. (2021) and self-designed to match Malaysian context references that emphasise two main factors; parental engagement and acceptance and confidence in the use of technology.

This study proposed two hypotheses:

Ho: There is no relationship between personal challenges, technical challenges and financial constraints with parents' struggles in providing educational support for online learning during COVID- 19 pandemic in Malaysia.

Ha: There is a relationship between personal challenges, technical challenges and financial constraints with parents' struggles in providing educational support for online learning during the COVID- 19 pandemic in Malaysia.

The questionnaire used consisted of four main parts. Part A was for the respondents' background information, with demographic questions including age, parental information, employment status, gender, monthly household income and many more. Part B was about personal challenges, Part C was about technical challenges, and Part D was about financial challenges. Section B included multiple-choice questions with four items, while Section C and Section D included questions that used 5-point Likert scales in making measurements. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability value for the survey was $\alpha = .70$.

The study used simple random sampling. It involved a sample group of 100 respondents. The respondents of the study are parents. 100 parents with children attending online learning activities at home during the COVID-19 pandemic responded to our survey. Respondents are from various races, backgrounds and demographics.

Findings

The study's findings for each question will be presented in detail to get a clearer picture of the essence and research questions, especially in the context of achieving research objectives. At the same time, the mean classification of respondents has been divided into three levels of mean classification level with a scale as low (1.00 – 2.33), moderate (2.34 – 3.67) and high (3.68 – 5.00). The main purpose of establishing the mean classification is to categorise the study's results to certain levels and facilitate the researcher to label the study's findings. With a specific scale, the summary of the study results is more accurate and can be coordinated with other parts.

Table 1

Mean Value

Section	Mean Value	Level
Section B (Personal Challenges)	3.22	Moderate
Section C (Technical Challenges)	3.77	High
Section D (Financial Challenges)	3.55	Moderate

The statistical analysis showed that the mean for respondents' personal challenges of parents' struggles in providing educational support for online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic was 3.22 (m=3.22). With reference to the mean classification description mentioned above, the results of the statistical analysis of respondents' perceptions are at a Moderate level.

Based on the mean value, it shows that personal challenges and financial challenges are at a moderate level, while technical challenges are high. This data indicate that these challenges can affect online home teaching and learning for students. The role of parents in understanding these challenges and current preparation is important. Factors that greatly influence this challenge are technical aspects involving teaching aids and the suitability of appropriate aids. Poor internet connectivity is a common occurrence. There is no doubt that internet facilities are essential, but the network provided must be able to support children's teaching and learning activities. The preparation of appropriate tools and fast internet facilities lead to a solution to this challenge. In addition, in terms of financial factors, this technical preparation requires adequate financial distribution. Each family must divide the priority for these basic needs, especially from the aspect of using money to buy tools and provide Internet, tools and facilities suitable for their home environment. Likewise, the awareness and knowledge of family members are important as a catalyst to an excellent learning environment.

Table 2

Section C - General technical matters dealt with by parents in providing educational support for online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic.

No	Item	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Not Sure		Agree		Strongly Agree		Mean (SD)	Level
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
1	The Internet connectivity at home is sufficient to ensure	5	5	16	16	11	11	30	30	38	38	3.80 (1.247)	High

	smooth online learning sessions.												
2	The devices that I provide for my child's/children's online classes are compatible and convenient for him/her/them.	3	3	18	18	16	16	34	34	29	29	3.68 (1.16 2)	High
3	I am able to access the link(s) provided by my child's / children's instructor(s).	3	3	11	11	18	18	37	37	31	31	3.82 (1.08 6)	High
Mean Range: High (3.68-5.00), Moderate (2.34-3.67) and Low (1.00-2.33).													

Since the school closure was unexpected, parents would need to deal with general technical matters. According to Table 2, for the item "The Internet connectivity at home is sufficient to ensure smooth online learning sessions", most respondents strongly agree (38%), and 5% strongly disagree. For the item "The devices that I provide for my child's /children's online classes are compatible and convenient for him/her/them", it showed the majority agreed, with a percentage value of 34%, and the least strongly disagreed (3%). For the third item, "I am able to access the link (s) provided by my child's / children's instructor (s)", the majority agreed with a percentage value of 37%, while 3% strongly disagreed.

The Internet has many effects and changes on individuals or organisations based on their respective considerations. It will have a good effect if we take advantage of it in the right way, and it will have a harmful effect if it is the other way around. The Internet can provide many benefits in terms of education, knowledge and communication. An impact on globalisation, then the concept of a digital divide often occurs. In the academic field, teachers can use free applications such as Google Classroom, Zoom, Google Meet and many other facilities. Many new interactive technologies are emerging nowadays. This format is meant to encourage interactions between students and teachers or professors where students can learn by doing, receiving feedback, and continuing to improve their understanding, as well as gaining new knowledge from a wide range of technological sources (L. Petrides, 2002). In some studies, online learning has several advantages, including flexibility, which enables students to adapt to the obstacles encountered during online learning either in terms of time and place. In addition, students can also choose a learning experience that suits them. This effect has a direct impact, and often individuals or communities who are deficient in computer access, training and online resources will be affected by this digital gap. The digital divide refers to the boundary between individuals who have the opportunity to access technology and those who do not. These limitations include education level, income, ethnicity, geography, infrastructure and ability. The digital divide can affect the standard of the economy and education. The Internet also creates significant differences in society: between the rich and the poor, the information rich and the information poor, between those who can enjoy the use of the Internet and those who do not enjoy the use of the Internet due to lack of ability or education to use innovations. Nowadays, the world of the Internet has provided opportunities for students and teachers to use the Internet as an interactive medium to deal more quickly and effectively. The use of the Internet can improve the well-being of their lives and improve the education support system. The Internet also increases comfort and convenience in daily affairs, including teaching and learning at home.

Table 3

Section D - General financial matters dealt with by parents in providing educational support for online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic.

No.	Item	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Not Sure		Agree		Strongly Agree		Mean (SD)	Level
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
1	I could afford all necessary equipment, including Internet connectivity and compatible devices, for my child's/children's online classes during the Covid-19 pandemic.	4	4	15	15	29	29	28	28	24	24	3.53 (1.132)	Moderate
2	I could afford the expenses needed, including the Internet service bill, to facilitate my child's/children's online classes during the Covid-19 pandemic.	4	4	19	19	20	20	29	29	28	28	3.58 (1.120)	Moderate
Mean Range: High (3.68-5.00), Moderate (2.34-3.67) and Low (1.00-2.33).													

Based on Table 3, for item 1, "I could afford all necessary equipment, including the Internet connectivity and compatible devices, for my child's/children's online classes during COVID-19 pandemic", the majority of respondents were not sure (29%), and 4% of them strongly disagreed. The item "I could afford the expenses needed, including the Internet service bill, to facilitate my child's/children's online classes during COVID-19 pandemic" showed that the majority agreed with a percentage value of 29% and the least strongly disagreed (4%). Financial challenges showed that the average level was moderate.

Therefore, in order to have good support for online learning at home, parents need to consider these two factors (awareness and preparation action) that contribute to children's performances. The role of parents is one of the contributors to the education system at home. Furthermore, these data clearly show that having an awareness and strategic preparation on education among family members can improve the educational support system in families. This can be seen as it is known that all respondents live with their children. The role of parents in creating a good social environment needs to be taken into account, as well as teacher-student relationships in helping to develop themselves and improve their education system at home. Each family needs to set up their own home education system, like a schooling system, and this also has to do with family relationships. The findings show that awareness can contribute to an excellent understanding of learning and relevant education processes and influence a person's well-being. To some extent, the respondents' environment in the context of social relationships, especially the role of family members, affects the well-being of life. Respondents also consider the needs of internet usage to be taken into account. All parties, from small institutions such as family institutions to

large ones, need to monitor their internet usage activities and respondents' social education relationships. Parents need to know their children's performance and capability and, at the same time, take care of their children's needs and will. Therefore, with this, they can create and provide educational support for online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 4

Correlation between Section B (Personal Challenges), Section C (Technical Challenges) & Section D (Financial Challenges)

	Section B – Personal Challenges	Section C – Technical Challenges	Section D – Financial Challenges
Independent variable	Correlation (r) (Standard Deviation)		
Section C – Technical Challenges	-0.545** (0.0001)	-	0.709** (0.0001)
Section D – Financial Challenges	-0.389** (0.0001)	0.709** (0.0001)	-

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 shows the three main challenges, namely personal, technical and financial challenges, as well as the relationship of these three variables to the home education support system during the pandemic. It shows that there is a correlation between each of the variables, and the findings show that there is a significant correlation between personal challenges and technical challenges ($r = -0.545$), while subsequent data show that there is a relationship between personal challenges and financial challenges ($r = -0.389$). Each item distribution indicating correlation is inversely proportional. Meanwhile, there is a significant correlation between technical and financial challenges with correlation values ($r = 0.709$).

Life during the pandemic and endemic is now heavily influenced by the needs of technology and the Internet. Challenges in online learning at home are dependent on the use of the Internet. There is no doubt that the use of the Internet is a major medium that greatly affects the lives of students today. However, it is also indisputable that internet use is still essential in various matters. The purpose and requirements of internet use vary according to the situation. Based on Table 4, all variables have a strong significant correlation. Thus, it can be concluded that personal, technical and financial challenges affect the parental support system for student education during a pandemic. A study by Agaton and Cueto (2021) mentioned that parents had faced many challenges from new learning modes in virtual settings, delivery instructions, unsatisfactory learning results, financial problems while working for the family during curfews while struggling with the use and availability of technology and personal problems regarding health, stress and learning style. The relevance and relationship of each of these challenges can affect the management of a family's lifestyle, the question of preparation and provision of facilities, services and learning tools, as well as family financial management factors.

Discussion and Conclusion

Overall, this study found that all the variables based on these challenges are interrelated, have significant correlations, and mutually influence each other. The family's implementation of the educational support system is also related to personal, technical and financial challenges. The findings show that each challenge's relationship is relevant and can influence a person's way of life. Therefore, every family must be prepared, try to understand the situation and be positive in helping to form the perfect quality of education, just like in school. All members of the family institution need to jointly monitor and manage in accordance with conducive suitability as well as social relationships between parents of other

family members, including children. They need to know about their role and, at the same time, care about the needs and the will of their children. Thus, good well-being and a good support system are guaranteed. In 2021, the parents' struggles in providing educational support for online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia were still there, especially for the technical matter. Parents' readiness was very important in determining the continuous learning of students when the Movement Control Order (MCO) took place due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Parents needed to equip themselves with technical knowledge and willingness to provide educational support for online learning and assist their children during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) have declared that no competing interests exist.

Author Contribution Statement

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Our publication ethics follow The Committee of Publication Ethics (COPE) guideline.

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