

# Home becomes School

By Sng Ee Ping

**HOW EFFECTIVE  
ARE ONLINE  
LESSONS?  
WHAT IS YOUR  
EXPERIENCE  
LIKE?**



Online learning is not new, being widely adopted by schools globally even before the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the recent coronavirus pandemic accelerated the adoption of online learning on an unprecedented scale when school closures around the world forced learning to go online. Inevitably, the effectiveness and quality of online lessons came into question as schools scrambled to adopt digital technologies. How effective are online lessons? Can they replace traditional classroom learning? Now, as learning gradually returns to brick-and-mortar classrooms, it is perhaps timely to assess the effectiveness of online lessons and their place in a post-Covid world.

**This problem was especially glaring in certain regions such as the rural areas in Indonesia, where Wi-Fi access and electricity supply are sporadic and erratic.**

The pandemic revealed the lack of readiness of schools, especially in the early stages, and the

<sup>1</sup>digital divide within and across countries. With some schools offering nothing more than pre-recorded lessons, supplemented by lesson slides with minimal scaffolding and emailed assignments, doubts were cast on teachers' knowledge of digital pedagogy, and consequently, the <sup>2</sup>efficacy of online learning. The spotlight was also cast on students who did not have the devices and Wi-Fi connections necessary for effective remote learning. This problem was especially glaring in certain regions such as the rural areas in Indonesia, where Wi-Fi access and electricity supply are <sup>3</sup>sporadic and <sup>4</sup>erratic. Students in these places have missed many lessons, making online learning a poor option for them.

In addition, online lessons can be less effective for certain groups of learners and certain subject areas. Younger learners, who have shorter attention spans, are less



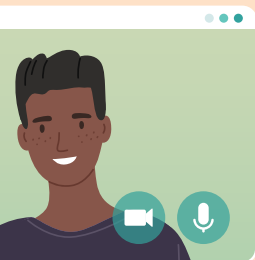
independent and less <sup>5</sup>adept at using digital tools, may not benefit much from online learning. Undeniably, the physical presence of a teacher still forms an integral part of their learning. There are also many limitations when conducting hands-on lessons such as Physical Education, Art and Music remotely. For instance, while a Physical Education teacher can demonstrate how a baseball can be thrown through a pre-recorded or YouTube video, he is unable to observe if a student does it correctly. The inability to practise the throwing techniques by playing an actual game of baseball also makes for a less effective lesson.

However, despite the shortcomings, online learning has a silver lining - it has the potential to make learning a more engaging experience. In Singapore, home-based learning (HBL) was introduced during the circuit breaker, Singapore's stay-at-home measure. The accelerated adoption of digital technologies during HBL created a flexible and stimulating learning environment for students. Students could feast on a buffet

of multimedia content and revisit them as often as they needed to. This allowed students to learn at their own pace. Furthermore, many teachers made good use of the digital tools available. Submitting homework and receiving teachers' feedback could come in various forms such as email, video and audio recordings, as well as collaborative platforms like Google Classroom and Google Drive. Moreover, to make lessons more appealing, some teachers gamified the learning experience, utilising online gaming platforms, with competitive scoring systems. The teachers also evaluated students' learning using game platforms like Kahoot!, which provided immediate feedback for students too, thus increasing the motivation of the students.

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For someone who is rather introverted and avoids speaking or asking questions in a traditional classroom environment, I found myself developing the confidence to speak during live-streamed lessons with my teachers on Google Meet. I was more willing to ask questions as I could use the chat



function to post my questions while lessons were being conducted. Expressing my opinions was also less daunting as I did not have 39 pairs of eyes looking at me. Furthermore, my productivity certainly increased when I could blast the air-conditioner on uncomfortably sultry days and sip my bubble tea, while listening to the live-streamed lessons. If I encountered any difficulties, I could text my friends on Google Hangout and get an almost instant response from them. Once, a slight mishap occurred during a live-streamed lesson. The circuit breaker in my house tripped and the internet connection was cut off. However, the recording function allowed me to view the lesson later and learn what I had missed. Pre-recorded lessons and other online resources are certainly beneficial in allowing me to learn at my own time and pace.

#### References:

1. The top 4 countries that have developed eLearning, from eLearning Industry, December 2017.
2. Will shift to remote teaching be boon or bane for online learning? From Inside Higher Ed, 20 March 2020.

## Word Bank:

- 1 **digital divide:**  
the very large difference in opportunity between people who can easily access computers and the internet, and the people who cannot
- 2 **efficacy:**  
the ability, especially a method of achieving something, to produce the intended result
- 3 **sporadic:**  
occurring at irregular intervals or only in a few places
- 4 **erratic:**  
unpredictable
- 5 **adept:**  
have a natural ability to do something that needs skill

All in all, the online experience has been rather positive and rewarding for me. However, I did miss the face-to-face interactions with my friends and teachers during HBL. Virtual interaction simply cannot replace physical human interaction, and the robust discussions and debates that often take place in a brick-and-mortar classroom. I believe face-to-face interactions are still necessary to nurture human qualities such as sharing, empathy and compassion. HBL does present some challenges but alternating HBL with traditional classroom learning might allow students to enjoy the best of both worlds. The pandemic has catalysed a new era of learning and teaching in a digital world. Schools will have to be ever ready for remote teaching should they need to close again during a crisis.



In the article, the writer concludes that post-pandemic, she would prefer schools to adopt a blended approach, with some lessons being taught online and some taught in the physical classroom. What are your views on this approach?