

The Reality of Home-Based Learning During COVID-19: Roles of Parents, Teachers, and School Administration in Promoting Self-Directed Learning

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ABSTRACT

Home-based learning (HBL) can promote self-directed learning. However, teachers and parents must nurture and equip children with the necessary skills to be independent, self-directed learners. This article explores the challenges that students, parents, and teachers faced in HBL during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, and it examines the types of support that primary school students, parents, and teachers need to enhance the effectiveness of HBL.

Keywords: COVID-19, home-based learning, self-directed learning

Distance education is the most feasible and common pedagogical approach adopted by schools and teachers across the globe during the COVID-19 pandemic (Sali, 2020). Teaching and learning at the primary schools have been conducted in home settings, which is known in the literature as Home-Based Learning (HBL). Research does show the key benefits of HBL are that it promotes independent, self-directed learning because students are able to learn and review materials at their own pace (Martin-Chang & Levesque, 2017). However, the reality is that HBL poses challenges to students to learn and become self-directed learners, and parents have the added pressure of having to closely guide their children to learn and become self-directed learners in HBL (Gan & Bilige, 2019; Martin-Chang & Levesque, 2017). This means teachers must support both the students and parents during HBL, and this can only be possible if teachers also get appropriate support from school management. This

article explores the challenges that Singaporean primary school students, parents, and teachers experienced in an academically oriented education system during COVID-19 HBL, and it examines the types of support they need to enhance the effectiveness of HBL in future.

CHALLENGES FACED BY STUDENTS, TEACHERS, AND PARENTS

Students, especially those at a young age, may not be ready to be independent and self-directed learners. Students learn at different rates, respond to learning differently, and their ability to understand instructions and self-directed learning vary (Lesaux et al., 2015; Reddy, 2018; Van Deur, 2008). This means the level of support and guidance that teachers and parents need to provide will vary. HBL can only be effective if teachers work with parents in partnership to support students in their learning and nurture them to become self-directed learners (Minke et al., 2014).

Teachers from around the globe have been given resources to help them understand online education pedagogies, curriculum designs, lesson delivery, digital learning, and possible educational technologies to facilitate teaching and learning in HBL (e.g., NIE/NTU, 2020 for Singapore; AITSL [n.d.] for Australia; AACTE [n.d.] for the United States). While these resources are extremely useful for teachers to learn about how they should design a curriculum and deliver online lessons, the resources provide little guidance on how teachers should equip students with the necessary study skills to learn independently and how they could become independent, self-directed learners. More importantly, the resources do not highlight how teachers should work with parents to promote learning and support their children's wellbeing.

In reality, teachers in Singapore have heavy teaching workloads and administration duties. Teachers have to plan and conduct multiple classes in a day, strategise how to teach and engage with approximately 20-40 students per average class, grapple with technical difficulties, and provide emotional support for their students (Reactor School, 2020). Therefore, it is not always possible for teachers to provide support beyond online lessons.

Parents also play vital roles in children's learning during HBL. Beyond the challenges of having to help their children with schoolwork, parents also have to support and monitor children's mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing during HBL. In fact, research reveals the successes of children's wellbeing and academic achievement rely heavily on parental guidance (Gan & Bilige, 2019; Martin-Chang & Levesque, 2017; Melhuish et al., 2008; Minke et al., 2014). For parents to provide appropriate support, they will need to work closely with the teachers to find out the teachers' instructions on technologies and tasks for

students, teachers' expectations, and even strategies to teach their students how to learn the materials during HBL. However, it is impossible to get accurate instructions when teachers assume students themselves can pass on the necessary information to their parents.

TEACHERS' AND PARENTS' ROLES IN SUPPORTING STUDENT LEARNING

Ultimately, students' social and academic development relies on teachers' and parents' ability to support children in their learning journey and nurture them to become independent, self-directed learners. This means teachers should work with parents to understand how they can support their children in their schoolwork (Minke et al., 2014).

Teachers must support students inside and outside the classroom in HBL to ensure students are able to learn effectively. Teachers should also provide clear instructions, communicate to the students the learning goals, inform students of expectations, inform students on how to meet requirements, provide feedback, explain content to enhance students' understanding of concepts, organise learning activities to scaffold materials, create learning opportunities to demonstrate and reflect on learning, and provide constructive feedback in lessons. Teachers must also monitor children's progress and provide constructive feedback inside and outside the classroom throughout HBL (Pascarella & Terenzini 2005; Dumford & Miller, 2018). In other words, a teacher's job is more than just delivering content and lessons. Importantly, beyond the teaching, teachers should instruct students on learning strategies and provide encouragement so students can become responsible, self-directed learners (Reddy, 2018). Studies report successful self-directed learners are those whose teachers provide clear instructions, set goals, give appropriate resources, set timelines, and allow students to evaluate projects. More importantly, guidance is given in teacher-student conferences (Ashworth, 1983; Martin-Chang & Levesque, 2017) beyond simply passing on information in a large class of 30-40 students. For example, teachers should teach students effective study skills on how to study particular subjects and the appropriate media of learning, where to study, how long to study (like start/finish dates), and how to pace their learning—all so students can prepare and understand ways to apply and process information (Reddy, 2018). Teachers should also closely monitor students' progress and conduct teacher-student conferences to provide feedback.

Furthermore, teachers must support student learning by working more closely with parents so that parents also know the teachers' expectations and monitor children's progress at home simultaneously. Research shows that positive relationships between teachers and parents are an important factor in

promoting learning success (Minke et al., 2014). This is because parents are able to provide better support for their children once they know teachers' instructions and expectations on children's behaviours and academic performance. Ideally, teachers should communicate information to parents via teacher-parent conferences, as a class, or on a one-to-one basis.

Parents also play a crucial role in supporting children during HBL. In addition to navigating through online learning platforms with their children, parents must also support their children in learning. Research shows the success of children's learning depends on parents' interests and involvement in helping their children with school-related assignments; responding to their children's academic achievement; communicating with their children about school-related issues; providing conducive learning environments (Mora & Escardíbul, 2018); guiding children through the learning processes; and transmitting their educational philosophies, expectations, and values to their children (Suizzo, et al., 2014).

Finally, teachers need to be supported by school management. The schools must also support teachers by providing them with:

- *Training on how to navigate through technologies for teaching.* There may be differences between how teachers deliver content and engage students in online and face-to-face lessons, so it is critical for teachers to learn how to design lessons that can be delivered via online platforms with multiple functions. Schools can provide resources and invite professionals to train teachers how to use various functions on platforms such as Google Docs, Microsoft Teams, and Zoom to engage students in class and monitor students' engagement and understanding of skills and knowledge taught through set inside/outside class activities. It would also be useful if teachers could provide instructions to students and parents so they know how to navigate through the online platforms.
- *Training on how to equip students with self-study skills and how to guide them to become independent, self-directed learners.* For example, teacher trainers can advise and share evidence-based best practices on how teachers should give students clear guidelines and expectations of tasks, collaborate with students in goal setting, teach students strategies to monitor their own progress as they guide them through learning, and provide students a safe space to learn and demonstrate their understanding of knowledge and skills.
- *Peer support so that they can share challenges and good teaching practices.* For example, schools should create communities for teachers to share their experiences and literature on effective and ineffective teaching practices so they can learn from each other. Schools should also

encourage teachers to meet parents so they can give parents updates on their expectations; students' progress; and how to support their children academically, emotionally, socially, physically, and mentally.

- *Time off from administrative/extra-curricular activities to meet with parents in individual or group conferences to update on instructions and students' progress.*
- *Support on mental wellbeing.* School management should encourage informal social interactions between staff, between students, and between teachers and students, even though these interactions can only be done online. School managers should regularly contact and support the teachers, parents, and students because connectivity is important in reducing the feeling of isolation. This also provides opportunities for schools to identify at-risk students who may need more support. In addition, schools should also engage in professional counselling services to promote self-care and support for teachers, parents, and students.

CONCLUSIONS/ IMPLICATIONS

In conclusion, this essay highlights the importance of teachers' and parents' role in supporting and nurturing children to become independent, self-directed learners. Though implementing effective teaching practices in HBL may be challenging, it can be effective if teachers work with parents so that parents can also understand and provide the necessary support that their children need in HBL. Consequently, a lot of additional work and stress is also imposed on teachers beyond the normal teaching hours and duties, so schools must support teachers by appropriately offloading them with time and ensuring that teachers are able to partake in professional development courses to learn best practices in supporting students and parents.

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