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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 & Satoko, 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 on 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:

- a. 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.
- b. 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

This section presents the study's findings based on the three domains explored: personal, technical, and financial challenges. These findings correspond to the research questions and are reported using descriptive statistics. Each item was rated on a five-point Likert scale, with mean scores interpreted based on the following classification: *low* (1.00–2.33), *moderate* (2.34–3.67), and *high* (3.68–5.00).

Overall Mean Scores Across Domains

As shown in Table 1, technical challenges recorded the highest mean score ($M = 3.77$), followed by financial ($M = 3.55$) and personal challenges ($M = 3.22$), both of which fell within the moderate range. These results suggest that while all three domains present concerns, technical barriers are the most significant in the context of parents' support for online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic.

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

Technical Challenges (Section C)

Table 2 presents item-level data for technical challenges. The results show that 68% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their home internet was sufficient to support online learning ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 1.25$). Similarly, 63% of parents reported that the devices provided for their children were compatible and convenient for online use ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 1.16$). A comparable percentage affirmed that they were able to access the online links shared by teachers ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 1.09$).

Table 2

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

Item	Disagree (%)	Not Sure (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Mean (SD)	Level
1. The Internet connectivity at home is sufficient to ensure smooth online learning sessions.	5	16	30	38	3.80 (1.25)	High
2. The devices I provide for my child/children are compatible and convenient for online classes.	3	18	34	29	3.68 (1.16)	High
3. I am able to access the link(s) provided by my child's instructor(s).	3	11	37	31	3.82 (1.09)	High

Financial Challenges (Section D)

As presented in Table 3, both financial items yielded moderate mean values: $M = 3.53$ ($SD = 1.13$) for parents' ability to afford necessary equipment, and $M = 3.58$ ($SD = 1.12$) for their ability to cover ongoing internet-related expenses. While more than half of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with each statement, a significant proportion remained uncertain (29% and 20%, respectively), suggesting underlying financial strain.

Table 3

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

Item	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Not Sure (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Mean (SD)	Level
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	15	29	28	24	3.53 (1.13)	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	19	20	29	28	3.58 (1.12)	Moderate

These findings suggest that although many families managed to allocate resources for online learning, financial constraints remain a source of pressure. Investments in internet service and digital devices require trade-offs with other household priorities. Parents' ability to provide consistent support often depends on their financial planning and resource availability.

Correlations Between Challenge Domains

Table 4 summarises the relationships between the three challenge domains. A significant negative correlation was found between personal and technical challenges ($r = -0.545$, $p < .01$), and between personal and financial challenges ($r = -0.389$, $p < .01$), indicating that higher levels of technical or financial support are associated with fewer personal struggles. Notably, technical and financial challenges were strongly and positively correlated ($r = 0.709$, $p < .01$), suggesting these domains are often interdependent.

Table 4

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

	Technical Challenges	Financial Challenges
Personal Challenges	-0.545^{**} ($p = .0001$)	-0.389^{**} ($p = .0001$)
Technical Challenges	—	0.709^{**} ($p = .0001$)

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

Synthesis of Findings

Overall, the findings indicate that technical challenges are the most prominent obstacle to effective parental support for online learning. While personal and financial challenges remain relevant, they are strongly shaped by access to technology and digital infrastructure. The interdependence of these factors suggests that addressing one domain (e.g., providing subsidised internet access or digital devices) may alleviate stress in others.

These findings are consistent with studies such as Agaton and Cueto (2021), who observed that parents faced significant difficulties navigating online education due to limited resources, unfamiliarity with digital platforms, and financial insecurity. Accordingly, targeted interventions must be multidimensional strengthening both infrastructure and parental readiness to enhance the home learning environment and promote equitable educational outcomes.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study revealed that personal, technical, and financial challenges are significantly interrelated, with each domain exerting influence on the others. These interconnected factors shape the capacity of families to establish and sustain an effective home-based educational support system during periods of school closure, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The strength of the correlations particularly between technical and financial challenges underscores the compounded nature of difficulties faced by parents in managing their children's online learning.

The findings suggest that parental support is not only dependent on attitude or willingness, but also on structural enablers such as access to stable internet, compatible devices, and sufficient financial resources. Technical readiness emerged as the most pressing concern, highlighting the importance of digital infrastructure in ensuring uninterrupted learning. Financial capacity, while moderate on average, proved essential for sustaining technological readiness. Both domains were found to influence personal stress levels and perceived capability among parents, suggesting that families with fewer resources may face compounded disadvantages.

In response, it is imperative for families to adopt a coordinated and proactive approach. This includes understanding their roles, anticipating the educational needs of their children, and fostering an environment that mirrors the support structure found in physical schools. Social relationships within the family particularly between parents and children are key to building resilience and maintaining educational continuity. Mutual understanding, shared responsibility, and open communication can foster a supportive atmosphere conducive to learning.

The pandemic has exposed and, in many cases, widened the digital divide in Malaysia. As noted in this study, many parents were still grappling with technical challenges as late as 2021. The Movement Control Order (MCO) further complicated this landscape, intensifying the demand for parental involvement in digital learning. Parents' readiness, both in terms of digital literacy and emotional resilience proved critical in ensuring that their children's learning continued with minimal disruption. This study is limited by its sample size and geographic focus on Melaka, which may not fully represent the diverse experiences of families across Malaysia. Future studies should consider larger samples and include qualitative interviews to explore parents' narratives in greater depth.

In conclusion, strengthening the home education support system requires more than individual effort. It calls for collective action across households, educational institutions, and policymakers. Providing accessible technological resources, offering training for parents, and recognising the diverse realities of family life are essential steps toward building a more equitable and resilient educational ecosystem in Malaysia. Future research should further explore long-term strategies for supporting families beyond emergency remote learning contexts, especially in preparation for future disruptions.

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Conflict of Interest

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

Author Contribution Statement

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Ethics Statements

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

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