

PLENARY LECTURE

Educating Children and the New Norm

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.31344/ijhhs.v5i0.295>

The lockdown from March to November 2020 in its various forms have seriously impacted education of children, both nationally and internationally. In Malaysia; more than 1 million students were affected and 100,000 teachers and 20,438 members of school support staff were forced to stay at home.

UNICEF noted that 24 million children around the world will drop out and students from vulnerable communities will be particularly and failed to return to class. This has forced almost all education providers to switch the education deliveries online. While some of the more established educational institutions which are more prepared than others, sailed plainly through this switch, a sizable majority found this switch a devastating blow to the delivery of education especially to children.

The Parent Group for Education, Malaysia reported that 66% Malaysian children do not have good internet connectivity at home and the Ministry of Education also reported that 37% do not own devices for online learning. The outcome of these is almost predictable. 20% children were discovered to have lost interest in schoolwork and become demotivated while 7% have indeed dropped out from school. Although most children are no stranger to handphones and other devices, the use of these for education is daunting. For the first 10 weeks of the MCO, online teaching is noted to be *ad hoc*, random, unstructured and even non-existent. Timetable was created in May but not strictly adhered to by teachers who are not familiar with technology. The Ministry of Education set up a free portal such as www.eduwebtv.moe.edu.my and the Digital Educational Learning Initiative Malaysia (DELIMA) as immediate mitigation. The future and the new norm for education is predictable and we have no choice. Online education delivery has to be strengthened by firm efforts to boost connectivity. School digital packages should consist of laptops or tablets, with video cams, telecommunication towers, especially in the rural areas must be built urgently. Mini and micro credentialing of children and teachers must be held to train them on the basics of online teaching, while more immersive applications are being prepared. We have little choice.

Keywords: children, education, new norm, Digital Educational Learning Initiative Malaysia (DELIMA)