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Experiences of parents toward children's online learning at home

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Abstract

The online learning has had a profound impact on education. Due to the sudden closure of schools during the lockdown, many schools have started online classes to keep up with the teaching and learning process. Plus, this has become a struggle for parents working from home since they also have to ensure their children's education at the same time. This research has been conducted to investigate the experiences of parents regarding children's learning at home. The study involved 10 participants, who were the parents of 6-year old children in a preschool located in Meru, Klang. A qualitative study was conducted as interviews with semi-structured questions were asked of the participants. Data was collected from 10 parents, which fell into criteria selections. Five themes emerged from the data analysis, which are; online learning implementation, impact of using gadgets, guidance and support from parents, technical difficulties in online learning, and difficulties in keeping children's attention. However, the findings of the study cannot be generalized and do not represent the whole population of preschoolers' parents in Malaysia about the experiences of parents towards their children's learning at home. Appropriate measures should be adopted in order to provide essential learning skills for children at home so that they will be able to understand the lesson as well as proceed to the next level of education.

Keywords: *Online Learning, Experiences of Parents, Involvement of Parents, Challenges of Parents*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

With the rapid adoption of educational technology and computer-assisted learning, distance learning is gradually becoming more and more common, and online learning has developed into an attractive way of learning (Wang et al., 2022). Online learning is defined as "learning experienced over the Internet" in a synchronous or asynchronous environment, where students interact with teachers and other students at a time and place convenient to them (Singh & Thurman，2019). Online learning is a type of distant education that involves the use of technology as the medium for the learning process, with all instruction supplied exclusively via the internet (Siemens et al., 2015). This implementation of online learning is dependent on the individual education, such as the institution or professors. In addition, students have access to online learning materials, such as activities, recorded teaching sessions, and many more, through the online platform (Stauffer, 2020). The main part of interaction with the teacher in online learning is carried out using modern information technologies: The Internet, computer telecommunication, national and cable television, multimedia, training systems, so a distinctive feature of online learning is the use of developed information and resources provided by modern information technologies, which provide the learner with the opportunity to acquire the required knowledge on his own （Amanlikova，2022）.

However, without the guidance and assistance of their parents, preschool children cannot implement online learning for early childhood level and kindergarten easily and independently. Young children need direct involvement from parents to accompany and guide them to participate in online learning. Parents are expected to guide their children to learn from home and replace the role of teachers at school. They need to provide learning facilities such as gadgets and access to the internet. As a result, this stressed the importance of parents in reaching learning objectives for their children's education (Sari & Maningtyas, 2020). Antipkina & Ludlow (2020) proposed a holistic concept of parental involvement, which they viewed as a continuum of parenting behaviours, from those representing lower levels of involvement to those representing higher levels of involvement. However, there are some barriers to parental involvement in the implementation of online education. Some parents struggle to understand the materials offered, have a difficult time instilling an interest and motivation in their children, and have limited time to be with them during the learning lessons since they have jobs to complete. Furthermore, parents lack adequate resources and experience problems accessing digital media and connecting to the Internet (Sari & Maningtyas, 2020). In addition to situations caused by distance and other personal factors, parents' concerns are thought to be influenced by: reluctance to support their children in online learning or learning at home; lack of access to technology and the internet, or insufficient forms of technology for children with SEN; and financial difficulties (UNESCO, 2020).

At the same time, parental concerns and control over children's vision due to

increased screen time can also exacerbate parents' unpleasant experiences of engaging children in online learning (Ku et al.,2019). Additional challenges include low parental involvement in children's homework, insufficient protective equipment given to children by their parents, inconvenient access to the home network, and parents' failure to equip children with adequate learning devices (Mukuna & Aloka，2020).   A lack of parental involvement in their children's education may have an impact on their education and development. According to Ceka and Murati (2016), parents have an important influence in their children's education and development. Hence, parents must be aware of their responsibilities in terms of their children's physical and intellectual development, as the family environment plays an essential role in children's educational work (Emerllahu & Dali, 1998; Ceka & Murati, 2016). Lawrence & Fakuade (2021) also confirmed this view with their study on the level of commitment to online learning and the role of each factor in contributing to the commitment of 1407 learners to online learning. Its study concluded that parental involvement played an important and positive role in learners' commitment to online learning. That is, a child's ability to learn is largely dependent on the parent's ability to provide this support (Rubene, 2018). This supported the social situation of the family, whether children can be provided with digital devices to access learning content at home, whether children have the opportunity to set up their own learning space, or whether parents have the opportunity to monitor the learning process (Daniela，Rubene & Rūdolfa，2021).

Factors affecting the quality of online learning While the shift to online learning has become part of many education systems around the world, it is recognised that the level and manner in which technology is used to achieve quality in online learning varies. This level depends on many factors, including the parties involved in implementing this form of learning (Duraku & Hoxha, 2020).   Therefore, Bhamani et al. (2020) investigated the experience of online learning. They noted that the transition from traditional learning to online learning was tough for the parents because the tools utilized for learning were different, such as textbooks to computers. Peer-learning opportunities are also affecting home learning as a result of the loss of physical classes.   Because of online learning，the parents reported that their children were depressed about their children's access to schools, meeting friends, and participating in sports. The absence of engagement with peers and the physical world has altered the social and emotional development of younger children (Ewing & Cooper, 2021). Due to the lack of social presence, children with haematological polymorphism feel unappreciated and de-motivated (Ryan, 2021). Many children prefer classroom collaboration to online collaboration because they value the immediate support of classroom interactions and proximity to teachers and peers (Agung, Surtikanti & Quinones，2020).   The results of Cui et al.(2021) indicated that 90.7% of the students in their study sample showed high or moderate enthusiasm for participating in online courses; however, the majority of the students did not perform well in their online learning sessions and post-course assignments. Children who struggle to understand the content of online programmes have

higher levels of mental health difficulties and a higher risk of borderline mental health problems (Zhou et al.,2022). A study by Maggio et al. (2021) even found that online learning led to a negative impact on the mental health of children and parents. As Arnott & Yelland (2020) pointed out the challenges in understanding 21st century childhood and integrating new technologies into children's learning culture.

Parents' beliefs and attitudes towards early digital and online learning have polarised over the last decade (Dong，Cao & Li，2020). On the one hand, many parents recommend that their children be exposed to different online learning technologies from an early stage of development (Gjelaj, Buza, Shatri & Zabeli, 2020). Maningtyas and Sari (2020) conducted study on the role of parents in distance learning. The study discovered that as parents' education levels increased, they became more open in their thinking about education and how to educate their children. Based on the findings and analyses, parents try to increase their children's enthusiasm for online learning at home with satisfactory level of involvement. In addition, parents provide helps in their children's daily tasks and also manage their children's play and study at home. Meanwhile, Novianti & Garzia (2020) has also conducted a study on parental involvement in online learning, the study shows a sample of 148 parents from first and second grades of primary school students, displayed that 81.7% parental involvement in monitoring their children's online learning time, the role of parents in accompanying their children's online learning was 80.4%, supervising their children's online learning time 71.8%. identifying their children's online learning difficulties at 69%, and providing online learning facilities at 64.8%. This study shows that most parents are involved in their children's online learning activities.

On the other hand, the main concerns of parents were: frustration with the timeliness of online course interactions; concerns about students' understanding of online courses; an annoying increase in the burden of adult responsibilities; concerns about children's eyesight; insufficiently detailed instructor explanations; and concerns about a decline in students' interest and attention to online courses (Cui et al.，2021). Some parents believe that online learning is not as effective as traditional learning in early childhood education settings, and that the lack of an engaging learning atmosphere and social interaction for young children leads to poor learning outcomes. (Dong, Cao & Li, 2020). Parents should be able to take on the role of their children's learning partners at home in the face of the changing educational practices of online learning, yet the truth is that not all parents are prepared for this new task (Novianti & Garzia，2020). According to Garbe, Ogurlu, Logan, and Cook (2020) a study was conducted on the experiences of parents in terms of their involvement in their children's online learning.The goal of the study was to investigate parents' experiences and issues during online learning while engaging their children in online learning as schools transition from a typical classroom learning environment to online learning. According to the data collected, the parents had difficulty managing their work, home, and teaching obligations because the majority of the parents required to work and could not be a full-time position to

support their children's online learning.

The purpose of the study was to investigate parents' perceptions of their children's online learning. The researcher was interested in learning about parents' experiences of teaching their children at home and learning online. The main objectives of this study were to investigate the experiences of parents involved in their children's online learning, to investigate parental involvement in teaching their children at home, and to identify the challenges faced by parents in dealing with their children's online learning.

2.0 METHODS

2.1 Research Design

The study was an exploratory qualitative research. The research focused the lived experiences of parents toward their children's online learning at home. Therefore, descriptive phenomenological research design was utilized in this study. Phenomenology helps us in comprehending the significance of people's lived experiences. Smith (2018), a phenomenology study examines what people experienced and focuses on how they perceived a phenomenon. This study focuses on descriptive phenomenology with describing the essential characteristics and structures of phenomena rather than interpreting or explaining them. The findings of the study are merely based on the straightforward and vivid descriptions of the participants. This study used a purposive sampling technique with a few criteria for sampling selection, including parents of 6-year-old children who have been learning for at least a year at the specific preschool, parents who used online devices at home, and parents who spent time with their children at home during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. A total of 30 parents were contacted with the permission of the center operator. However, only 15 people responded to the message, and 10 parents had matched the sampling criteria and reached the data saturation. Appointments were scheduled for interviews to take place, and the parents were advised of the most convenient interview format for them. A set 15 open-ended questions as well as their demographic information such as age, number of children, and parenting status. The prepared questions were open-ended so that participants might expound on their experiences and explanations. Some of the questions were derived from prior studies, such as Bhamani et al (2020), Sari & Maningtyas (2020), Lubis A. & Lubis Z. (2020), and Garbe et al (2020).

The interview was conducted through face-to-face, video conferencing and phone call personally between the interveiwer and parents. All of the respondents' interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. As a result, the researchers decided to conduct this study in order to learn about the experiences of parents of preschool children aged 6 and under.

Because some questions were prepared ahead of time before meeting with the intended samples, the study was done as a semi-structured interview. Furthermore, the researcher had prepared questions "on the spur of the moment" based on what happened in the context of the discussion in order to generate in-depth and different responses (Kumar,

2014). Furthermore, each session of the interview was videotaped individually, and note-taking was employed to jot down crucial points during the interview. In addition, a phone interview was done in case the interviewees were unable to attend the scheduled meeting.

2.2 Data Analysis

The data in this study was analyzed using qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis. The data is summarized into categories and themes using qualitative content analysis (Warren, 2020). In this qualitative study, the data was analyzed by arranging the interview transcripts, and the method of analyzing qualitative data included categorizing the data (Wong, 2008). Furthermore, categorizing or coding the data is the most critical stage in the qualitative data analysis process, according to Wong (2008). Furthermore, triangulation from data collection was conducted from three sides: the researcher herself, an expert, and the other party is from the instructors' side, whether to check or offer any input to the responses. Theories were employed as foundational theories and to categorize the themes.

3.0 RESULTS

From the findings, it was revealed that five themes emerged from the data collection. The themes are; online learning implementation, impact of using the gadgets, guidance and support from parents, technical difficulties, and difficulties to keep children's attention. Ten parents were interviewed in order to know in depth about their experiences for their children's learning as they need to stay at home during lockdown.

Table 1 Summary of the themes and transcription

Theme	Details	Transcription
Online Learning Implementation	Parents Agreement on Online Learning	*"For me, I do agree and disagree because children their focus are not much, only short amount of time. They just did the work for few minutes then they played. In my opinion, it is better to learn at preschool"*
		"I really did not agree. But there's nothing that we can do. Because we don't want our children to be left behind. But it's just that we as parents to teach children at home is difficult".
		"It is quite helpful compared to when she has nothing to do at home, playing with phone all day"
	Parents' Opinions Regarding Online	*"It (online learning) did not help that much. Since at school children everything from their teacher. So when they are at home, my child did not afraid of me and take me seriously. Hence, my son did not complete his*

	Learning Helpfulness	*homework."*
		"It can be helpful, but I think it will also depend on the child himself"
		"But if just got the tasks, and ask them to do, then they will hold their phone, do the task for a while and then they will do other things such as playing games, watching YouTube and so on. Because they want to play, doing online learning is the excuse for them to play."
Impact of Using Gadgets	The Effects of Gadgets Towards the Children	*"But with online learning at home, we can see his laziness. Because when at home, the phone is use frequently to play games."*
		".... they do sleep late. Because since they don't need to go to school, they will wake up a bit late, and will sleep late at night. No matter how much I talk or nag, it was hard to tell them to sleep on time."
Guidance and Support from Parents	Opinions of Parent Regarding Working and Non-working Parents	*"If the parents are not working, then it's okay. But then if working parents, we have many things to do. We need to settle our work, as well as need to think about their homework. But if we really stay at home, do not have any work, then we can be with the children. For example, for a housewife, then maybe she could do it. But if we are working, it is hard to do so."*
		"The challenging part is that there is no time. I need to cook, do the laundry and do lots of things. And when she was learning and I was washing the clothes, then she will call for me. 'Mom, mom. Come here'. So I need to leave what I was doing or the cooking. It was so hard."
	Parents' Older Children Taking Part in Online Learning	*"So when my children want to refer to me, sometimes they need to wait for my second son to came back home from work."*
		"For me, I have my own online class timetable, so if I have class at 11.00 am, his sister will bring him upstairs to monitor him."
Technical Difficulties on Online	Parents with Technical Issues	*".... the line of internet connection is slow"*
		"Because of that, we had to buy a printer So we just print and do the work. Her teacher sends homework through phone, so if she uses my phone, I have a lot of work. So I

Learning		*needed to buy her one. I just forward all the messages to her. I bought two tablets for each child. Even worse, also with the internet spending. So online learning is really not applicable."*
Difficulties in Keeping Children's Attention	Children That Refuse To Stay Focus During Learning	*"And when the teachers assign many pages for her homework because of the long holiday, she just did a couple of them only such as only 1 or 2 pages. The teachers already gave the activities to do. It's just that we as parents do not pay much attention due to our work."* *"He is unable to stay focus as he is learning. There are so many distractions."* *".... when they are doing their work, at the same time they will play. So when they did not understand what to do, that's why they turn to play games. They are using excuses. Her focus on learning is just temporary. Once she does not understand something, she will start to do other things."* *"It is really hard to let her be consistent as much as possible. When she started to do something, she will be very excited, but then to finish it until the end, she won't complete it."*

3.1 Online Learning Implementation

From the findings, it is revealed that all the participants viewed online learning by using WhatsApp application. Since the research is a case study, the implementation of online learning at the preschool is the same for all the children. The parents mentioned that they need to pick up some books from school to bring home. Plus, the tasks were given by the teachers through WhatsApp groups according to the age of the children. Sometimes the teachers will ask to take pictures of tasks done by the children. And there were other activities such as the parents need to record the children's reading and their recitation of certain sentences from the Holy Quran. The recorded video will be forwarded to the child's teacher.

Most of the parents stated that they preferred their children going to school to learn rather than online learning. These respondents also mentioned that the online learning mode was actually hard and burden to them. Most of the parents stated that the online learning was not really beneficial to their children, as some children did not do the tasks given by teachers. If the children did not learn at home, then they might not be able to keep up with the lessons later on.

3.2 Impact of Using the Gadgets

The respondents stated that since their children need to learn through online, they need to use

gadgets such as phones or tablets to get the information from the teachers through WhatsApp application. However, the use of gadgets had given impact towards the children. In the interview, several parents mentioned that it affected the children's sleeping time and they refused to learn. In addition, with the usage of gadgets for online learning, children took this opportunity to play games in the electronic devices. Plus, since the children played games at home during the pandemic lockdown, it affected their usual sleeping time. Some parents also said that their children had become lazy since they stayed at home and always playing games.

3.3 Guidance and Support from Parents

According to the parents, most of them are involve with teaching and learning at home with their children. However, they need to be present to monitor and teach their children about the tasks given all the time. Some of them stated that when they did not pay fully attention to them, they tend to do other things and did not complete their homework. Most of the parents did not plan any timetable or schedule for the children's learning. But some of them did set a certain time limit to control their usage of devices. Moreover, majority of the parents did not do additional activities at home as the tasks given by the teachers already more than enough. Some of the working parents stated that they did have much time to sit and educate their children. They that if non-working parents would have it easy to teach their children. However, the non-working parents in the study were all housewives, and they said that even though they were not working, there were still many things that they need to do such as house chores, taking care of younger children and so on.

One parent argued that she was dissatisfied on why she should teach her child at home when it was not her job. She stated that it would be the teacher's responsibility to teach children, even though with the closure of the preschool. She said:

"Even I cannot teach at home. I mean, I had done things more than a mother should have. I'm not a teacher. I don't have the obligatory to teach her at home. It's not my job. Teachers should be the one to do that."

From the interviews, one parent stated that her son was unable to read. She had taught him reading at home during the lockdown. Thus, her child able to read fluently when he came back to school. The theme categorized from the findings was guided by the sociocultural theory by Vygotsky (1978). From this theory, parents or older people can scaffold the children, in order for them to master a skill through Zone Proximal Development (ZPD). The parent taught her son to read at home when the school could not teach him reading directly.

3.4 Technical Difficulties on Online Learning

In this study, there were technical difficulties with parental support and involvement in their children's online learning. Several parents mentioned that their internet connection was slow. Plus, according to another parent, since teaching and learning cannot be done in the

classroom, her child tended to be shy to ask questions to the teacher, especially when the line was stuck suddenly. Apart from the line network is slow, a parent said that she need to buy additional devices for her children including the internet fees because of the online learning and due to they could not go outside to print any worksheet.

Besides, one parent said that she only had one preschool child while the other child was still a toddler. So she did not need to share the gadget. Also, the other parents mentioned that all of their children have their own phones and laptops as they have older children at higher level of education. Plus, their internet connection was also good and did not have any problem such as did not have Wifi or lack of mobile data.

3.5 Difficulties to Keep Children's Attention

According to the parents in this study, they all reported that their children were unable to concentrate while engaged in online learning. Some parents tried their best to keep the children engaged in doing the tasks and activities. Some of the parents also mentioned that they try to persuade them by offering rewards so they would learn. One parent said that she threatened her child when she refused to complete her work. Also, in order to keep the child from getting bored, a parent stated that she placed her son's favourite toy beside him, so he would stay focus for a little while. Moreover, parents were unable to monitor their children all the time as they have their own professional work to do. Some parents reported that their children had been playing games during online learning.

Several respondents also stated that the children could only pay attention to what they are learning, only for a couple of minutes. Then, their minds would start wondering and they lost their focus. In addition, according to some parents, children were unable to stay ocus because they did not understand the tasks that were assigned to them. Because of the absence of parents to explain about the subjects or activities, children avert their attention towards other things such as playing with their gadgets.

4.0 DISCUSSION

From the findings, the implementation of online learning in the preschool where the study was conducted, was by using WhatsApp. Teachers send texts to the parents via message to inform about the tasks that children to complete. Pre-schools use the platform for children's learning only, but are still considered online. Online learning is an educational process that takes place over the Internet. It is also a form of distance education which provides learning experiences for students, both for children and adults (Kim, 2020). In addition, online technologies have become the social, cultural, and personal artifacts that inhabit the contemporary child's 'multimodal lifeworld' (Arnott & Yelland, 2020). In other research articles, learning at home also referred to home-based education or 'home-schooling'. This is considered a phenomenon of teaching and learning at home. This 'home-schooling' requires partnership between school and parents in order to support children's education

while staying at home (Fontenelle- Tereshchuk, 2021).   As online learning takes place in the home environment, it requires parental involvement throughout the teaching and learning process, especially for young children, and cannot function without parental guidance, supervision and support (Cai & Wang，2020).

The teachers are not available to teach the children at home. Thus, the responsibility of an educator falls to the parents' shoulders.One of the parents mentioned that since doing the online learning, she had been teaching her son until he could read fluently. Even the preschool teacher was shocked when he came to school as her son was actually known for slow learner. This shown that parents play an essential role in children's academic achievements, and their commitments are the key to improve education. Research suggests that parental support is a significant factor in students' academic success (Amaral, 2007). This is confirmed by the findings of Bokayev, Torebekova, Davletbayeva & Zhakypova (2021), where the age of the parents and the level of family income were positively correlated with parental satisfaction with online learning, and there was a statistically significant correlation between parental satisfaction with the quality of education and assessment of the competence of teachers and readiness for online forms of learning.   In addition, according to Wolbert, Ruyter & Schinkel (2018), an appropriate attitude of parents towards their children's improving is characterized as an attitude of hope, and reasonable expectations when handling with less ultimate goals, which a person can oversee the expected outcome. Parents' guidance and involvement can help the children to improve and polish skills in education.

Parents had faced many challenges when handling children for online learning. Because of the technical issues, parents had struggled to deal with their children. From the interview, one parents said that her child fought with her older siblings because they need to use electronic device for online learning.   Another parent also experienced as she need to buy new phones and printer for her children's learning at home.As a result, new interactive technologies in terms of smart mobile devices and accompanying apps are also gaining attention with the development of online education in the field of pre-school and early primary education (Dorouka, P., Papadakis & Kalogiannakis,2020). In addition to this, while the majority of parents were involved in monitoring, teaching or technical support activities with their children, those involved in any online learning activities reported increased stress （Sonnenschein，Grossman & Grossman,2021）.

Furthermore, another theme was the difficulties to keep the children's attention. The respondents stated that their children were unable to stay focus as they were learning or doing their tasks. Many parents report that their children need ongoing support throughout the day to access education and stay healthy and safe (Toews, Hanreddy & Mahoney，2023). Theory of selective attention by Broadbent (1958) is related to this theme. Selective attention is the process of focusing and concentrating on important information while ignoring distractions which are the unimportant stimuli is critical to almost all the cognitive processes

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(Bater & Jordan, 2019). For some very young children, the online learning process becomes more difficult as the children encounter obstacles such as difficulty in maintaining concentration and being easily distracted, therefore, they do not actively participate in the learning process. The aim of this study is to explore the behaviour during the online teaching and learning process in an early childhood class (Akbar & Tohar，2021). Thus, children in this study were 6 years old, so they tended to stray their attention to something else in short amount of time.Despite the challenges of implementation, a number of advantages were recognised in terms of the need to move to distance or online learning, highlighted by the opportunity to make rapid progress in the area of digital education (UNESCO, 2020).

5.0 CONCLUSION

This study reveals parents' experiences of their children's learning at home during online learning.This study could provide information regarding the diversity of online learning implemented in Malaysia. Public society usually only aware with learning though online by using ZOOM, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom and so on. With this study, they could gain information on how some preschools manage their teaching and learning session. This study provides insights into the experiences of Meru as a result of parental involvement in learning their children at home. Even though the experiences of these parents might be related with many other parents in Selangor or throughout the nation, this study is limited statistically due to the contextualized sample size. Therefore, the findings of the study cannot be generalised and do not represent the whole population of pre-schoolers' parents in Malaysia about the experiences of parents towards the children's learning at home. Some recommendations for future studies regarding this topic, the researchers could provide more in-depth approaches such as focusing on certain groups. Also, unstructured with a lot more questions could be used to describe the experiences of parents to get extra insight regarding the matter.

In conclusion, online learning has been implemented in order to continue children's education regardless of the situation. Online learning has been a substitute to the conventional schooling methods, which should be made effective in providing essential learning skills to the children at home with the limited available resources. Parents should be given guidance and help the children to understand the resources given by the school to avoid them from falling behind in education. Plus, children would be able to improve their learning with the involvement of parents. Thus, online learning and home learning implementation could be improved to strive for the fullest achievement and potential of the children.

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