

# MCO detrimental to those with learning disabilities

THE movement control order (MCO) was a necessity. But it was detrimental to the learning process of students, particularly those with learning disabilities.

Universiti Putra Malaysia Faculty of Educational Studies dean Prof Dr Samsilah Roslan said research on Covid-19 effects showed increasing psychological distress suffered by the general population as well as high risk groups.

UNICEF also found that students with disabilities are often overlooked in priority setting and fund allocations during health emergencies, she added.

"Social isolation and physical distancing, combined with negative socio-economic impacts, can affect people's mental health, especially those from marginalised groups who have already been struggling to access available resources and supportive networks even before the MCO."

Noting that children with special needs require special support and educational approaches, Prof Samsilah said online learning proved to be challenging for children with physical, visual and hearing disabilities, to name a few.

"There was no access to special educational interventions or therapies when the facilities were temporarily closed. The trained



**Importance of the great outdoors:** Prof Adams said the prolonged stay at home due to the MCO has affected special needs children's mental and physical health.

professionals were not able to reach them due to movement restrictions.

"Lack of assistive devices to accommodate their special learning needs might affect their abilities to continuously benefit from a supportive learning environment."



**Structure required:** Prof Samsilah said a comprehensive guideline and resources such as suitable material and trained personnel are needed to improve special education.

The pandemic was a unique experience to learn from, she said, adding that special needs children, their parents and family members have received first hand experiences on what to expect and how to calmly react during the lockdown.

Stressing on the need to

improve the special education sector, Prof Samsilah said families of special children should compile their experiences and propose suggestions to the relevant bodies for action to be taken.

"This might include providing more informative materials in braille, inclusive portrayals of individuals with special needs in the media, and engaging those involved with special needs communities when preparing SOPs for organisations.

"A comprehensive guideline needs to be put in place, along with resources such as trained personnel. Individual Education Plans (IEP) that we normally have for every special needs student should also include learning in unexpected times such as the Covid-19 pandemic."

Universiti Malaya Faculty of Education senior lecturer Prof Dr Donnie Adams said the prolonged stay at home has affected special needs children's mental and physical health.

"The MCO has limited their social spectrum to only their family members, hence a lack of social exposure. Communication skills were also affected over the past three months due to non-exposure to peers and teachers at school.

"They would have forgotten most of their training from school and lost touch with routine.

Children with autism, for example, have great difficulty adapting to a change of pattern, causing them to throw tantrums."

He, however, noted that some special needs children did improve on their soft motor skills such as writing and colouring, while parents have attained more experience and skills to train and coach their children at home. They will be better prepared for such events in the future.

"The effects would depend on the parents' roles during this prolonged leave of absence from school," he pointed out.

He added that the MCO has taught both parents and teachers that they need to work collaboratively to achieve the child's targeted learning objectives, as teachers begin to focus on project-based learning and create teaching materials to suit the learning needs of every child.

More technological tools such as mobile applications are used now.

There are also parents who help create teaching materials such as flashcards at home.

"For children with limited or no Internet access and devices at home, perhaps teachers could help prepare worksheets according to the syllabus and either post them to their home or request for parents to fetch from the school," said Prof Adams.