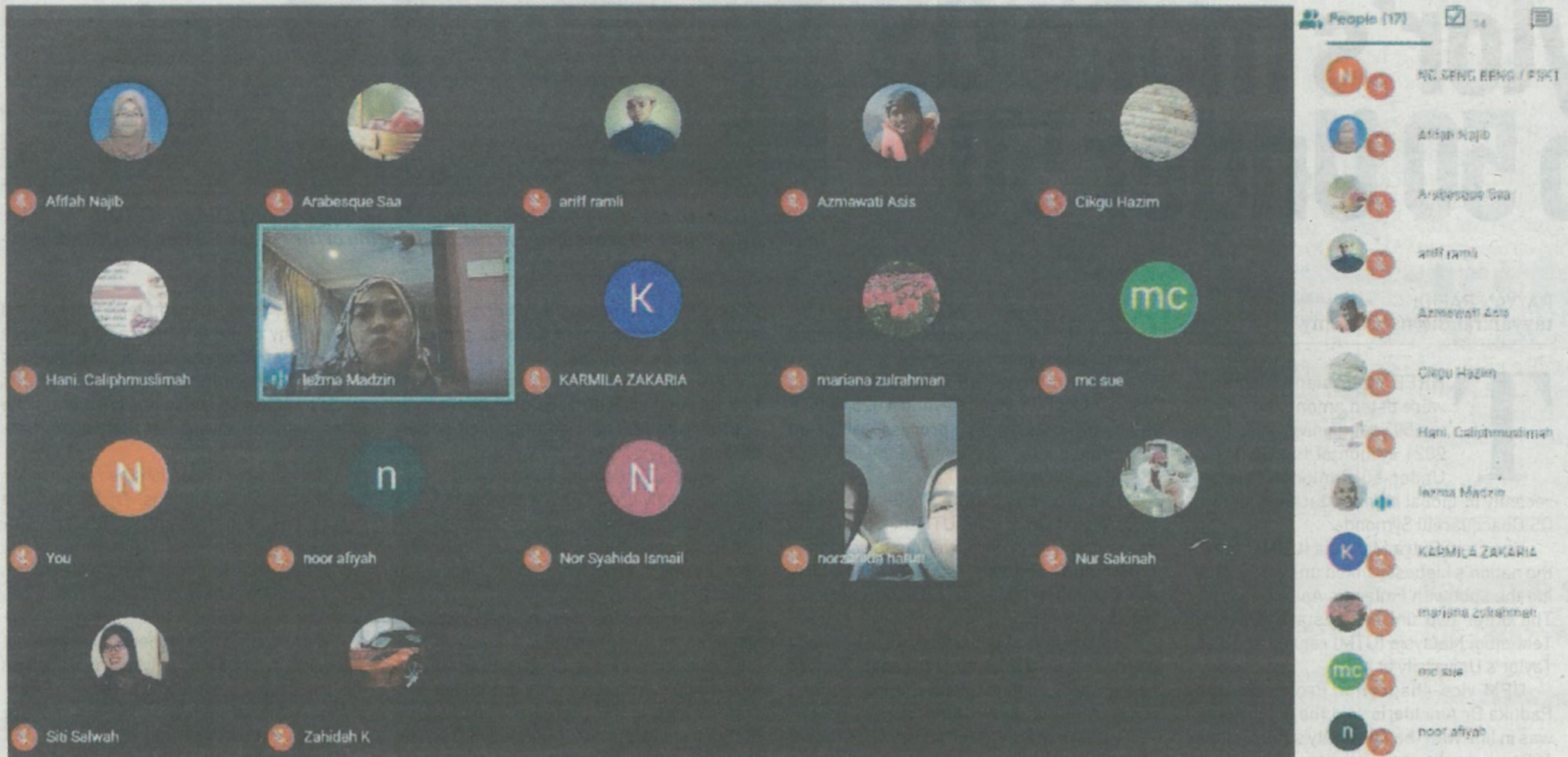


# Making the best of online lessons



To reduce distractions, the microphone function should be muted during an online lecture.

MURNIATI ABU KARIM  
murniati@nstp.com.my

**A**S universities put classes on hold until the end of the year, lecturers and students are forced to adopt online teaching and learning with little to no preparation at all.

The sudden venture into remote education may present unique challenges to both academics and students. Physical and mental preparation are crucial to navigate the world of e-learning.

Universiti Sains Malaysia School of Languages, Literacy and Translation senior lecturer Dr Alla Baksh Mohamed Ayub Khan said there were some things that students needed to be aware about online lectures.

"First is to obtain reliable technology and good Internet connection. Where there is a will, there is a way.

"Students should try their best to attend synchronous (real-time interaction) sessions and participate in asynchronous (without real-time interaction) activities.

"Next, strike a balance and stay focused. Things can be different at home compared to the environment in hostels and rented houses near campus.

"They may have to help their parents and family members with chores and errands.

"However, the onus is on them to find time and space to focus on their studies. Communication and understanding among family members are of utmost importance here.

"Students also need to stay motivated and organised. They should not feel discouraged in meeting many deadlines for different courses.

"At times, there may be technological glitches. But I am sure lecturers are aware of this, and therefore, should give allowance to students.



**I make use of social media platforms to assist my students to learn better. For instance, every week, I will select two students to record video reflections of that week's lecture and upload it on the class Facebook page.**

**DR ALLA BAKSH MOHAMED AYUB KHAN**  
Universiti Sains Malaysia School of Languages, Literacy and Translation senior lecturer

"Lastly, be active in online lectures. In face-to-face settings, some do consult their lecturers immediately after the lecture is over, but such thing rarely happens online.

"However, I urge students to be brave and try to engage in discussions with their lecturers," he said.

As for real-time sessions such as teleconferences, he encouraged students to be punctual or, better still, log in to class earlier.

"It would be good if students could dress up properly too.

Those who have no issues with their cameras or bandwidth are advised to turn it on so that the lecturers may not feel odd as there are live faces on screen.

"It is hard to identify who is speaking when it involves a large class. Therefore, students need to introduce themselves before speaking up during the video conference.

"Some lecturers prefer having students ask questions in the chat box, whereas some prefer oral interactions."

Alla Baksh said normal lectures were conducted in a formal setting. But in online classes, a blend of formal and informal teaching and learning could be more effective.

"I make use of social media platforms to assist my students to learn better. For instance, every week, I will select two students to record video reflections of that week's lecture and upload it on the class Facebook page.

"Almost every one of them is engaged in social media, mostly for entertainment. When we tap on those platforms, chances for them to respond positively are higher."

Universiti Putra Malaysia Faculty of Computer Science and Information Technology senior lecturer Dr Hizmawati Madzin had started conducting online lectures since 2015 and now, with the university closed, she ran her classes

fully online.

Hizmawati shared a few tips to create a sustainable and engaging distance learning experience.

According to her, the key to a successful online class was proper planning.

"Plan the lessons by chapters. Think ahead about the types of materials that are suitable and how to assess the students' understanding.

"Next, create the digital teaching materials in creative ways.

If the lesson requires a video, the suitable duration is not more than six minutes as students can easily lose focus.

"Do monitor students' progress and give flexible time for them to access the materials. Be sure to regularly ask the students' condition and give them ample time to complete and submit the assigned tasks.

"At a time like this, don't expect students to submit their assignments on time as some of them may not have access to a good Internet connection.

"It is also advisable for lecturers to create digital materials that are of low capacity or small file size so students can download them easily," she said.

Hizmawati added that in keeping students' motivation high, she usually allocated extra marks for those who actively participated in lectures.

"When teleconferencing, the students should be told to mute their microphones or else there would be distractions due to many people talking.

"In Zoom, however, there is a 'raise hand' function for students to ask questions."

She said while students were responsible for completing their assigned tasks, parents' cooperation was also needed to monitor the students' progress at home.