

# Need to monitor impact of online varsity classes

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Contrary to the conventional system, flexible and hybrid learning system requires students to attend physical classes for only a number of semesters, and attend online classes from home for the remaining semesters. - NSTP file pic

**LETTERS:** Following the announcement by the higher education minister in June, local public universities are getting ready to implement flexible and hybrid learning system in the new semester that starts in September and October.

Contrary to the conventional system, flexible and hybrid learning system requires students to attend physical classes for only a number of semesters, and attend online classes from home for the remaining semesters.

The system promises several advantages, such as giving students the flexibility to adjust their learning activities to suit their schedules, thus allowing them to work part time while studying.

Aside from that, it can also reduce the tuition fees that they have to pay, while lowering their cost of living by removing expenses related to transport, food and accommodation during the non-physical semesters.

Online semesters can also overcome the problem of inadequate on-campus off-campus accommodation for students by lowering the student population.

Also, students need not travel to and from classes, which exposes them to the risk of getting involved in unexpected incidents, like accidents.

All of these benefits would hopefully entice school-leavers to pursue tertiary education. Nevertheless, the system is not without flaws.

A study published in *The British Journal of Educational Psychology* found that students who attended online classes had lower concentration and engagement rates compared with conventional lectures.

This may be exacerbated if the instructors are not skilled in the use of online teaching technology, especially for those who teach courses such as mathematics and science, which require more than mere lectures.

As a result, students might feel less confident in their ability to learn things, thus negatively impacting their self-esteem.

Another study by researchers at Lingnan University in Hong Kong found that online classes negatively affect students' communication and collaboration skills.

The study suggests that online classes contribute to low self-discipline, especially among those who have the tendency to procrastinate and leads to low motivation.

The absence of a strong support system and close monitoring at home would aggravate the problem, and to some extent also contribute to cheating in tests or exams.

All these negative effects would have a bearing on the quality of graduates and, in turn, their level of employability.

Employers are not willing to accept students who do not have a good grasp of their studies, and unsatisfactory interpersonal skills and discipline.

The negative impact of online classes is not only limited to the students themselves, but can also affect the campus economy.

As the number of students in campus decreases, small businesses there will see fewer customers.

The ministry's decision to implement online classes for only a number of semesters is prudent. It should, however, be carefully scrutinised through medium-and long-term studies to provide a comprehensive picture of the effects it brings.

This will enable us to improve the system from time to time.

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