

'Bring back books'

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Time to make reading a habit again, academics say

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READING is crucial in ensuring students do well in school.

Based on her experience of having been a researcher for over three decades, Universiti Malaya Centre for Research in International and Comparative Education director Assoc Prof Dr Vishalache Balakrishnan said having books at home, and parents who enjoy reading, can make a difference to whether a student is successful academically.

"Surrounding a naturally curious child with books from an early age is essential to expanding their knowledge.

"They might have a short attention span but they will keep flipping the books, especially those with pictures and colours, and start asking questions," she told *StarEdu*.

Even children raised in the digital era need to cultivate a reading habit as it is "the most effective way to gain knowledge", she said, stressing on the importance of bringing back books.

She, however, stressed that reading must be deep and interactive, fun and joyful, reflective and empowering.

Reading for the sake of reading and merely being surrounded by books are not enough.

Vishalache said children need a role model – in this case, adults at home who are avid readers themselves and who make it a point to read to the children at home.

"Most children prefer to watch the television or play digital games. If parents are educated, and they understand the importance of inculcating the foundation of education through reading, they would answer the children's questions, read along with the children, and invest in books suitable for the cognitive development of the children," she said.

Universiti Utara Malaysia College of Arts and Sciences School of Education senior lecturer Dr Muhammad Noor Abdul Aziz said if students do not enjoy reading, they would



Early access: Students who are also avid readers are more likely to perform well academically. – Filepic

house an entire library at home as books are no longer confined to physical sheets of paper bound within thick or paperback covers.

E-books, he said, are just as beneficial – if someone is actually reading them.

Reading is pivotal for children and being read to is equally important, he added.

The former teacher said about 30% of his students had their parents read to them when they were younger.

"This is evident in the way they answer questions when asked," he said.

The ability to raise questions, he said, is an indication that students are confident of voicing their opinions.

This leads to creativity in both writing and speaking – coping with the syllabus then becomes easy.

Doing well in school, he said, is unlikely if parents are not present in their children's lives.

"I have seen parents who spend most of their time working. The lack of time spent with their children results in students who have little interest in studying," he said.

Stressing that time and support from caregivers and teachers are crucial for academic success, he said these factors give students the confidence and motivation to strive harder.

He also called on society to make reading a habit again.

"There is plenty of research that points to a correlation between reading and success in school," he said.

According to a recent study by Dr Kimmo Eriksson from Mälardalen University College, Sweden, access to books is a better predictor of whether a student will score in exams, as compared to access to the best teachers and learning resources.

The study, published on Nov 22, analysed the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) scores for almost 600,000 students from 77 countries, including Malaysia.

What is "successful education"?

According to Unesco, education includes gaining and applying knowledge, skills, and values. If we go by what most philosophers say, a successful education is achieved when cognition, emotion and action are all on par i.e. a holistic education. Excellent results in examinations are usually not my priority but when students are holistically aware about the importance of education in order to become better and more civilised human beings, they study hard and do well in school examinations and in real life too.

Universiti Malaya Centre for Research in International and Comparative Education director Assoc Prof Dr Vishalache Balakrishnan



A successful education is what we give children so that they are able to make a living, be good citizens and give back what they can to those in need. It relates to the philosophy of education which wants to create an all-rounder – successful spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, physically – who can contribute to the betterment of society and the nation.

Universiti Utara Malaysia School of Education College of Arts and Sciences senior lecturer Dr Muhammad Noor Abdul Aziz



be struggling to keep up in all class subjects.

This was evident during the Covid-19 pandemic when students had to be independent and learn from home.

"With remote learning, most of the children had to learn on

their own because they could not go to school.

"They may need to search for information on their own and if reading is not their forte, how can they complete their homework?" he said.

Parents, he said, need not