

'KEEP DIGITAL TEXTBOOKS OPTIONAL'

Expert: When more homes have stable Net access, the use of e-textbooks will increase

NST - 13/3/2022 CP8. B.

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PRIMARY schools are not prepared to fully adopt digital textbooks for teaching and learning, an education expert said.

Dr Anuar Ahmad, from the Centre of Community Education and Wellbeing at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, said using digital textbooks in classrooms should be optional for now.

"Teachers can use e-textbooks offline if the need arises in classrooms.

"However, for now, students still require physical textbooks for reference.

"When more households enjoy stable Internet access over time, the use of e-textbooks will naturally increase," he told the *New Sunday Times*.

The use of digital textbooks is one of seven strategies announced by the Education Ministry to resolve the dilemma of heavy schoolbags for pupils.

The ministry also agreed to install lockers at double-session schools for students to store their books.

The lockers will initially be provided for Years One, Two and Three pupils and will be arranged for upper primary pupils by next year.

Students in single-session schools now keep their books in classroom desk drawers.

Students will be taught a maximum of four subjects per day.

Only two exercise books are allowed for each subject, with each book not exceeding 80 pages.

Lauding these strategies as effective short-term measures, Anuar urged the government to review the curriculum for pupils to end the issue of heavy schoolbags.

The curriculum, he said, contained an excessive number of subjects with densely packed syllabuses, forcing pupils to lug heavy schoolbags.

Alliance for Safe Community chairman Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye said the ministry's decision would benefit the health and safety of pupils.

"Carrying heavy schoolbags places young children at risk of developing spinal issues or other health conditions in the later stages of their lives, so this decision contributes to their wellbeing.

"However, headmasters should identify places to set up the lockers. If possible, they should install the lockers on the ground floor.



Dr Anuar Ahmad



Datin Noor Azimah Abdul Rahim

"As for the use of e-books, teachers must ensure that students without Internet access have alternative means to get their learning materials," he said.

Parent Action Group for Education president Datin Noor Azimah Abdul Rahim backed the use of e-textbooks and said the onus was on school leaders to fine-tune the implementation of the new guidelines.

"Teachers barely encouraged the use of e-textbooks in the past.

"But in the new normal, most students have the devices to access these e-books.

"The use of e-books can be backed by physical textbooks, which students can use at home for reference."

Students, she added, should be allowed to attend school in sports attire on days that they have physical education lessons to reduce the items that they had to carry.

The heavy backpack problem first surfaced in 1994.

Since then, the ministry has launched three surveys — in 1994, 2008 and 2018 — to find solutions to ease the burden on pupils.

In 2000, the Education Ministry released a circular that instructed schools to discontinue workbooks for Years One, Two and Three pupils.

Upper primary pupils, meanwhile, were allowed to only have one workbook for Bahasa Melayu, English, Mathematics, Science, as well as Mandarin or Tamil for vernacular school students.

A similar directive was issued in 2014.

The ministry, in 2018, said textbooks accounted for only 28 per cent of a school bag's weight.

The remaining 72 per cent comprised stationery, uniforms, food, the bag itself and other items.