Secure platforms crucial for effective online education

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By **SANDHYA MENON**

THE closure of schools due to the Covid-19 pandemic has caused a surge in the usage of online platforms as educational tools to ensure student learning is not disrupted.

However, embracing e-learning hasn't been easy for many parents who question the security of these platforms which puts their children at risk of hacks and other security threats.

Parent Syeba Yip's 12-year-old son was in the midst of a lesson on a video conferencing app when his account was hacked and lewd pictures were sent to his contacts in the session.

"It happened repeatedly. Institutions should invest in secure software and teachers must be technologically equipped to effectively implement e-learning, " she said, adding that parents, students and teachers must learn to adapt to e-learning but it must be executed well and according to high safety standards.

Companies should look into upgrading their platform's system, while schools must provide tools such as touchpads for their teachers to draw and explain the subject matter to their students via video, she added.

E-learning drives Celest Thoi's 14-year-old daughter to wake up early, be disciplined and be on time for her lessons in spite of the movement control order (MCO) but she isn't convinced that digital learning is safe and the lessons effective.

"My daughter switches off between lessons sometimes if she's not interested in the subject. One of her lessons was also hacked into once where the hacker circulated indecent pictures.

"Besides, how effective are online classes? How does the school assess its impact and what precautions are in place to prevent hacking any other security problems plaguing online platforms?" she asked.

Taking students' online safety seriously, streaming service dimsum entertainment's content is screened first before it is made available on its digital platform, its chief marketing officer Lam Swee Kim said.

As a parent, her concern with e-learning is the type of advertisements displayed, the hackers who could potentially expose her children to inappropriate content and child predators.

Hence, taking extra step to ensure safety for young users of its eTuition content, is a priority.

"Our education content is advertisement free, too, which means that students are less likely to be hacked or served with unwanted videos and images, and unsuitable content, " she said, adding that dimsum's eTuition streaming service which covers the syllabus from primary and secondary schools provides a secure environment for digital learning.

With the MCO in place, Lam said students can keep up with their studies through the platform's animated and visually-rich content.

Its thought-provoking educational content enables students to think beyond the confines of their classroom, she added.

"We collaborate with recognised education service providers and experienced, qualified tuition teachers to ensure the content is aligned with the current education system syllabus.

"Subjects covered include beginners' words, numbers and greetings for preschool kids; Mathematics, Mandarin, Science, English and Bahasa Melayu for primary school students, and English for Science and Technology, Business Study, Additional Mathematics, Biology, Chemistry and Physics for secondary school students."

dimsum entertainment is a Malaysian subscription video-on-demand service, operated by SMG Entertainment Sdn Bhd, which is part of Star Media Group.

The public can check out the streaming service at dimsum.asia.Yayasan Generasi Gemilang (GG) director of services Nick Foong said the need to ensure online safety is always prevalent but now more so than ever as there could be a need to increase screen time for students due to e-learning.

GG is a foundation focused on improving the lives of under-served children, and families, by increasing their access to quality education.

It also holds cyber wellness, financial education, leadership, and character building, activities.

Students deserve to have a safe and secure environment to learn, Foong said, and everyone involved in the process must do their part to ensure the integrity of the system and programme.

Both parents and schools are responsible in guaranteeing students' online safety, he said.

"Parents play a vital role in introducing technology and managing screen time with their children.

"It isn't just about keeping them safe online but more about helping them navigate their world. Parents must be responsible by keeping up with new technologies, knowING what their kids are doing online and noticing signs in your children if there may be a problem."He advised parents to teach their children what is acceptable and what's not when using technology at home.

Schools must ensure their e-learning programmes are password-protected, he said, and that the passwords and meeting IDs are not publicly distributed but sent directly to parents.

E-learning is the way forward, Melaka Action Group for Parents in Education (Magpie) chairman Mak Chee Kin said.

Everyone, however, must equip themselves with sufficient knowledge of online learning to keep up with the latest learning opportunities.

But current e-learning platforms, he said, must be made more secure.

"Responsible government agencies should find ways to make it safe for students and teachers to conduct their teaching and learning in a secure environment.

"The onus is on them as parents can't do much, " he added.

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