

Executive Summary

1. With the funding support from the Equal Opportunities Commission, The Speech, Language and Reading Lab of the University of Hong Kong conducted a study titled “Creating a Barrier-free Online Learning Environment for Primary School Students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in Hong Kong”. The study objectives were to:
 - Examine the difference in the effectiveness of online learning between primary school students with SEN and their age-matched typically developing peers;
 - Identify the difficulties and psychological impacts faced by teachers and parents in assisting students with SEN with online learning;
 - Identify the challenges and the psychological impacts that students with SEN experienced in online learning and the variations among SEN subtypes; and
 - Evaluate the effectiveness and feasibility of online learning content and online learning tasks for students with SEN with reference to the SEN subtypes.

2. To achieve these objectives, we adopted quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches to collect data through a questionnaire study and semi-structured in-depth interviews with local teachers, students and caregivers. A total of 932 participants including 506 caregivers, 254 students and 101 teachers took part in the questionnaire study while 25 pairs of caregivers and students and 21 teachers participated in the semi-structured in-depth interview study. Our participant consisted of students with different SEN who exhibited different levels of challenges during online learning.

3. Overall, students with SEN demonstrated lower online learning attitudes and online learning effectiveness as rated by students, teachers and caregivers. Furthermore, our study also found students with SEN exhibited difficulties in aptitude, online learning performance, interaction and learning transfer.

4. Relative to typically developing students, six major barriers in online learning for students with SEN identified in the current study include (1) inadequate and difficulties for school to provide school support; (2) lower self-discipline in

learning; (3) more easily being distracted during online lessons; (4) lower willingness to learn; (5) more restricted interaction with teachers and classmates; and (6) difficulties in maintaining the knowledge learnt. Nevertheless, three major facilitators were also identified in online learning for the student with SEN. They were (1) sophisticated use of technology, (2) higher engagement by the feedback from the interface, and (3) exploration of their interesting topic online. Failure to address the major barriers may affect the long-term learning outcome of the students with SEN and result in a negative learning experience. Thus, different stakeholders should work together to mitigate these barriers and to promote a socially inclusive online learning environment.

5. To promote a socially inclusive online learning environment for students with SEN, it is important that the government, schools, teachers and caregivers work together to strategically (1) develop an online game-like platform for learning different subjects; (2) establish a unified learning platform and online learning support system; (3) organize sharing workshops on successful online teaching experience at the across-school level and within-school level; (4) encourage teachers to attend SEN-related profession development; (5) provide additional learning support service to students with SEN, and (6) foster effective communication between teachers and caregivers