Young Lives X: Distance Learning for Youth in Asia

29.05.2020

Beginning of lockdowns

By April, countries in Asia began to respond to the COVID-19 lockdowns.

We have responded suspending our physical classes from March 13 onwards and focused on distant learning (via Young Lives X) as an alternative.

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As the basic infrastructure for the digital classroom was already in place, we were able to quickly build up a set of apps/tools for a richer digital learning experience.

While we have had to improvise in order to manage the challenges of students who are not used to independent/digital learning, we have at least been able to continue offering different learning experiences and support to our students and volunteers.

We also saw the opportunity to expand our digital classes in this time.

Features of Young Lives X

Digital classroom



Bite-sized



100% mobile friendly



No fees*



Online certificates



Lifelong learning



Community

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Programme statistics

Learning modules

5 sets of learning modules for Intermediate English created (15-20 hours of learning)

Our Pilot in Malaysia has 12 students, and we are increasing access to Myanmar and Laos

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Student Webinars
3 webinars (Malaysia-based)
Personal Finance
Problem Solving

Alumni Webinar (Myanmar & Laos)
1 webinar
10 alumni

We anticipate more webinars with a more regional approach, welcoming youth from Southeast Asia

Young Lives X tools

Our current suite of tools for the digital classroom consists mainly of these 6 apps/websites, with Google Classroom as the main platform from which we organise the flow of lessons.

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Flipgrid

iSLCOLLECTIVE

wizer.me

ZOOM

GrammarFlip

Connecting with the students in lockdown

We have maintained close contact with both classes via Whatsapp, social media, and other conferencing tools.

Beginners: The unexpected transition to digital was more abrupt and relied heavily on the main class facilitator to contact them regularly via Whatsapp and calls. The team also quickly put together a collection of suitable online worksheets.

Intermediate: Lessons were designed as a curated suite of digital activities assigned by topic in Google Classroom. Live Zoom sessions were scheduled where needed. A few of the most advanced students also in a separate discussion group with a team member and volunteer teacher to discuss current issues.

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Challenges: beginners

The unexpected transition to distant learning is a particular challenge for beginners.

Many of the beginner students do not have a solid enough grasp of English vocabulary to understand the process and instructions of working on exercises on their own. Some were unused to the exercises and found them difficult to complete. We worked around this by engaging the more advanced students' help to translate instructions, which helped to improve the flow of communication and increased engagement.

Other issues they faced were stress and concerns over uncertainties, especially over their finances, health and future.

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Challenges: intermediates

Technical issues were our main challenge, as well as pacing the learning to keep everyone on the same page.

While the transition to digital was smoother for this group, some had difficulties navigating technical issues, such as app bugs, not being able to log on or open links. Slow internet speed and limited phone internet data also became an issue, as activities include videos, graphics and downloading ebook files.

In the earliest phase of the MCO, the team also faced challenges in reinforcing the importance of social distancing, as some groups continued to hold services and prayer meetings at the time.

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Volunteers: roles

The volunteers remain active and have become a pillar of support in keeping the programme going despite unexpected circumstances.

The beginner class volunteers are the mainstay of the impromptu distance learning structure: each teacher actively engages with small student groups under the supervision of the facilitator.

As the intermediate students are slightly more independent, the other volunteers have been recruited to create webinars on various topics to engage with the students beyond their digital English experience.

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Volunteers: challenges and support

Since the lockdown, many volunteers have been working from home, and are often working longer hours than usual.

Amongst other challenges, beginner class teachers struggle to communicate with weaker students.

We also encountered situations where coordination became difficult due to the volunteers' fully packed schedules, and depression due to the isolation from the lockdowns.

To keep in close contact with them, we have both engaged with them individually as well as scheduled and carried out group calls to catch up and chat.

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Learnings from our digital experiment

	Learnings	Improvements
Student responses	Students without a basic foundation of English struggle to understand instructions and complete worksheets without intensive guidance.	The transition to independent learning was a difficult process for some. The digital learning experience should be designed in a way that allows students to gradually be acclimatised to independent learning, while allowing for individual learning paces.
User experience	Some students struggled with basic IT/phone function literacy, such as how to toggle phone settings to enable access to apps.	Basic IT competency is key to a fulfilling digital experience. The digital learning experience should also encompass not only English lessons, but also confidence-building, through constant positive reinforcement for successes and achievements.

Learnings from our digital experiment

	Learnings	Possible solutions
Technical	Freemium tools are limited in terms of what functions and features are on offer. In order to create a varied and fun experience, we resorted to using a variety of apps and sites, which makes the technical aspects more clunky and difficult to navigate.	The possibility of working with other tech-based organisations to build a platform based on user-experience feedback from our students.
Finance	Funding and technical expertise is needed to create a platform that is fully able to give students a meaningful learning experience without losing the social element.	We are in the process of looking for partnerships, collaborations and funding.

Relief coordination

Young Lives Malaysia first got involved with crisis relief efforts when one of our volunteers initiated a fundraising campaign for our students.

From there, we were approached by the head of the Kachin refugee community to reach out to their community as a whole.

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Notes

While we were a part of the coordination process, Young Lives was not directly involved in the overall fundraising and distribution of aid.

Our main role was to assist with coordinating based on a verified list of families who requested aid, as a go-between the refugee communities, NGOs, and the Catholic church.

Thank you!

