



How to Choose THE Learning Centre to Prepare Your Child for O-Level

By Ai Ling and Sean Chua

GCE O-Level is an important national examination which determines the junior college or polytechnic your child will further his studies in. This will indirectly have an impact on his career path and options.

These days, there is a strong need for students to get additional help from tuition to complement what they learn in school because schools are setting more and more difficult questions in their tests and exams. Very often, we observed that some of these questions are testing students beyond their required syllabuses as stated on the Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board (SEAB) website.

Having said that, we do not think students should have tuition for every subject; instead they should only seek help for those core subjects that they are really struggling with. (Let them have some FUN TIME, please).

In general, if a student is consistently scoring As (A1 or A2) in the subject, there is no need for him to attend additional tuition classes because he has already grasped the key concepts. He just needs to work on more exam-based questions and clarify them with his school teachers or friends when necessary.

For students scoring B3 and below, it means that their understanding of the concepts of a particular subject is not strong enough. This is when learning centres play a crucial role in bridging the gap to prepare them for their O-Level examination.

Choosing a learning centre can be a challenge for parents.

With such a wide variety of learning centres in Singapore today, parents have a difficult time deciding a suitable one for their child's needs.

Here are some factors to consider when choosing THE learning centre to prepare your child for O-Level:

1. General or Specialised Learning Centre

First question you may want to find out is whether the learning centre is a subject-matter expert or teaches all subjects.

"Specialised learning centres are like medical specialists whereas general learning centres are like general practitioners (GP). If you have a persistent heart problem, who will you choose to see? A cardiologist or a GP?"

The same applies when it comes to choosing the learning centre. If your child needs help in a certain subject, say Chemistry, you should choose a centre that specialises in Chemistry.

You may want to consider twice when it comes to learning centres that claim they specialise in ALL subjects and offer classes from Primary School to Junior College level. Such centres are usually open by profit-driven businessmen instead of passionate educators.

2. Quality of Teachers

This is another important factor that parents must consider. Many learning centres are operated by businessmen who have minimum understanding of education. They tend to employ teachers on a part-time basis who often have to juggle your child's academic needs with their own job commitments.

You need to check if the teachers are full-time professionals or hired on a part-time basis. Students take time to adapt to the teachers' methodologies and they become frustrated and lost when they face frequent changes of teachers at the learning centres. Does that sound familiar?

Some questions you should ask about the teachers when you check with a learning centre:

- Are they full-time professionals or part-time teachers?
- What is their academic qualification?
- How long have they been teaching?
- Are they familiar with the current syllabus?

If the teachers are authors of GCE O-Level Ten Year Series, assessment books or textbooks, it will be a huge bonus! You will be assured that they know the syllabus thoroughly and are updated with the latest examination trends.

3. Proven Track Record

Many learning centres only advertised the results and testimonials of their top-performing students but do not tell you their overall cohort performance.

It is important to find out if most of their students have improved in their results or only a selected few elite students have done well.

You can also ask them for the performance for the past few years to see if they are consistent in helping their students improve.

4. Structured Programme

Many learning centres in Singapore adopt the "drilling approach" and ask their students to memorise certain concept maps or do lots of assessment books and past year examination papers. This approach may be suitable for small group of students (those who already have a good understanding of the concepts) but does not benefit those who are weak with the concepts.

Imagine asking a student who is weak to do an exercise of 10 questions. He would probably get 9 out of the 10 questions wrong! Instead of helping him, the exercise will only diminish his interest in the subject.

Thus, it is important for the students to understand the fundamentals well before getting them to try lots of questions. Less is more! The aim is not to do more, but to understand the underlying concepts thoroughly.

Specialised learning centres have a more structured programme and customised teaching materials that are carefully designed to guide their students to master the subject i.e. from understanding the fundamentals to excelling in exam-based questions.

They have their own teaching methodologies which may incorporate analogies, storytelling and everyday life examples to engage the students' interest and make the lessons more effective.

They also teach their students strategies to strengthen their problem-solving skills and time-management during examinations.

5. Passionate About Education

Is the learning centre passionate about helping ALL students to improve or does it only accept high achievers to uphold their "A" grade track record? As reported in the Today Newspaper, there are some centres that only accept "bright" students through their placement tests which Mountbatten Member of Parliament Lim Biow Chuan dismissed as "marketing gimmicks".

6. Communication Channels

How many times have you felt frustrated that learning centres do not communicate your child's progress to you? By the time you manage to talk to the teacher, your child may have already failed his examination in school.

Look for a centre that emphasises on following up! This is extremely important as your child will constantly need your encouragement and support in recognising his efforts. Lesson progress and challenges that your child face should be communicated to you regularly so that you can understand your child's learning needs and be in a better position to support him. Your child's success depends on your commitment too!

7. Additional Learning Platforms

These days, Generation Y students spend a lot of their time on the internet, computer or smartphone. If the learning centre has useful e-learning portals such as academic websites and teaching videos, it will be a great way for your child to channel his time from social media chatting to learning useful examination tips and solving exam-based questions. Some centres also encourage their students to email questions to their teachers so that any doubts can be clarified instantly before the next lesson.

No matter which learning centre you choose, it is important to do your due diligence and check with your child periodically on his learning progress in the centre.

We wish you the best in choosing THE learning centre that will truly help your child to prepare for the O-Level examination in October.

! Today Newspaper 'Sorry, your child is not bright enough', 3 January 2012



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