Education Changes during the Pandemic within Malaysia and Indonesia: A mini-observation

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to provide an overview of the changes in education within Malaysia and Indonesia. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated changes in society, but more specifically in education, forcing students and teachers alike to adapt to online learning. This paper will focus on 1) the changes within Malaysia in education and 2) the changes in education within Indonesia. Education is one of the more pressing issues in which the global pandemic has massively affected. This paper hopes to draw light to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic towards issues pertaining to the education sector that has been affected by it, within the Malaysian and Indonesian scope, highlighting some of the changes within these sectors while urging for a greater emphasis on the implementation of safer and secure methods in the management of a crisis of a similar magnitude.

Keywords: COVID-19, education, Malaysia, Indonesia

1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a shift in the practices of education throughout the world. Education encompasses more than just classroom teaching. Not only does education vary in its types, but it also varies in its functionality. Professor H. Mahmud Yunus, when attempting to define education, states that education revolves around choices made about the effort in aiding children, intending to better their knowledge and principles that can lead that child to their fullest potential [1]. Professor Yunus' understanding of education is what Malaysia and Indonesia try to highlight in their education structures and policies to better provide for their people. The framework of education in Malaysia consists of a persistent focus on universality–giving all children beginning at the age of seven access to the schooling system in Malaysia. Malaysia is unique in that it operates on a 6 + 3 + 2 + 2 model [2]. The model means that every child in Malaysia will undergo six years of mandatory primary education, after which they will attend three years of lower secondary education, two years of upper secondary education and pre-university studies that can take two years to complete. This formal education system in Malaysia is compulsory only at a primary level, ensuring that every student in Malaysia can grasp basic speaking, reading and writing skills. In Indonesia, the process of education is similar to that of the approach of Malaysia. The Indonesian Education system comprises four parts: elementary, junior secondary, senior secondary, and higher education [3]. Only elementary education and junior secondary education are considered mandatory in Indonesia, allowing students to attend school

from Grade 1 to Grade 9. This formal schooling system in Indonesia is not too dissimilar to that of Malaysia, making these two countries excellent candidates to draw comparisons from regarding the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on their respective education systems.

The COVID-19 pandemic took the world by storm. The coronavirus (CoV) comprises many viruses that can cause many symptoms, ranging from the common cold to shortness of breath or pneumonia [4]. According to the World Health Organization [4], the first reported case of the coronavirus outbreak was on the 31st of December 2019 at Wuhan, China. This outbreak sparked the entire nation of China and proceeded to spread around the whole world, affecting countries like Malaysia and Indonesia. The first reported case of the COVID-19 outbreak in Malaysia was on the 25th of January 2020, tracing it back to three Chinese nationals who had been in close contact with a COVID positive person from Singapore [5,6]. Since then, COVID-19 cases have been on the rise, with fluctuations in the number of infected people in Malaysia and the number of deaths. As of the 1st of August 2021, Malaysia has had an astounding 1 130 422 cases in total [7], with more than 10 000 cases per day and a rising death toll.

In Indonesia, the first case of the COVID-19 outbreak was reportedly on the 2nd of March 2020, with two infected people who had been in contact with a COVID positive person from Japan that tested positive in Malaysia [8]. The cases of COVID-19 have been fluctuating in Indonesia, with both downward and upward trends to indicate the probable waves of the COVID-19 outbreak. As of the 1st of August 2021, Indonesia has confirmed 30 738 positive COVID-19 cases and 1604 deaths [9]. The increase in the COVID-19 cases in both these countries affects not only the people who succumb to it but also the policies in place regarding

education. There is an inherent problem stemmed from the Coronavirus outbreak that has caused a paradigm shift in how schools and societies operate. Before the pandemic, schools operated physically; students were allowed to go physically to school and return home after, giving them adequate time to study and play. Due to the pandemic, students now have to go through the teaching and learning process on a virtual platform, forcing students to go through online learning. On the 16th of March, the Jakarta Governor, Anies Baswedan, announced the closure of schools [10]. This closure forced both teachers and students to quickly adapt to technology and online learning to prevent a backlog of knowledge amongst students in their education system. Only recently did the Jakarta Education Agency start its second phase of reopening schools in early July 2021 with strict compliance towards governmental protocol in preventing the spread of the COVID-19 virus [11].

In Malaysia, however, education remains online, with several attempts at reopening schools and colleges. However, due to the increase of cases in Malaysia, the future of Malaysian education is yet to be sure [12]. Because of the uncertainty in the number of cases in Malaysia and Indonesia, many students and teachers are left in limbo as they are still unsure of the types of educational protocol and standard operating procedures required to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Many students face online learning issues, such as the lack of Internet access and technological devices during online learning [13]. Teachers face similar issues in regards to their adaptability in the usage of technology and their methods of conduct, specifically in regards to how students are graded and assessed [13]. However, both governments have addressed the barriers related to online learning. This article will detail the issues, governmental efforts, and

effectiveness concerning online learning in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

2. METHOD

This research is descriptive research with a literature method. The population of this mini-observation is Malaysia and Indonesia. This research study is about education changes in both countries during the COVID-19 pandemic in the past year.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1 Education changes during the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia

In the specific instance of Malaysia's educational system, behavioural changes provide a slew of problems for which there are no immediate remedies due to the pandemic. With the impact of the COVID-19 on the education sector at the primary, secondary, and post-secondary levels, the introduction of various current educational technology did not necessitate physical presence in teaching and learning. Consequently, a revolution of teaching and learning from home emerged, employing technical advancements such as internet connection.

According to Leow et al. [14], online interactions had a varied impact on pupils. Nasir et al. [15] found that an indirect interchange of knowledge and experiences induced communal participation and a sense of belonging, whilst an indirect meeting alleviated students' apprehension of sharing information. However, some students could not grasp these ideals in cases where the conversation was too overpowering, impassioned, or lacking in professionalism. Online methods additionally were seen to hinder students' inclination to ask inquiries. The synchronised nature of the online discussion was deemed unsuitable for satisfying the demands of each participant in a group. Simpson [16] described a similar problem, suggesting that students who dealt

well with the flow of discussion can unintentionally put others at risk of feeling alienated and losing self-confidence. Students primarily depended on self-study to face adversity in online classrooms, as stated by Rovai & Downey [17], especially during the pandemic. Hence, educators were urged to describe the learning plan before the class hours and offer the required materials for students to prepare adequately [18].

There is a gradual transition in the Malaysian education institutions, from traditional classrooms to virtual ones. Aside from basic computer equipment, personal computers and laptops, the readiness of resources such as swift internet connections and present-day IT platforms became increasingly important as teachers and students opted to online or distant learning to fulfil social distancing measures imposed on campuses.

For primary and secondary students, the Ministry of Education had provided the Digital Educational Learning Initiative Malaysia (Delima) platform to provide various resources for teachers to support online teaching and learning. Digital textbooks have been uploaded on Delima. Educational videos were uploaded on the EduwebTV portal and shared by teachers in the CikgooTube portal [19]. As for the post-secondary level, respective universities and their faculties have introduced initiatives to ensure the students, especially the freshmen, can cope with e-learning, like the usage of Microsoft Teams.

Financial resources may be a critical component in dealing with and recovering from acute crises [20]. The unexpected closure of campuses put significant and unforeseen financial obligations on students forced to leave on short notice. As a result, emergency relief money in the form of soft loans or private contributions would assist students with day-to-day expenditures, allowing them to continue their studies. The government also

provided financial help called e-Belia, rendered to selected students.

During the Movement Control Order period, the Malaysia Internet Exchange (MyIX) association, which is part of the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC), recorded a peak of 532 gigabytes per second (Gbps) in intermetal traffic, compared to the previous record of 500 Gbps set in 2019 [21]. As a result, MCMC discovered that internet traffic flow rose nationwide, as Rizzato, Fenwick, and Fogg predicted [22]. The average 4G download speed in Malaysia has decreased, indicating that increased data usage has increased internet traffic congestion and a decrease in download speed. The Minister of Communications and Multimedia stated that telecommunication providers are constantly working to increase network coverage in areas with poor internet access. According to the Malaysian prime minister, Malaysians should be granted 1 Gigabyte of free data per day during the MCO period to enhance students' and educators' virtual learning.

Teachers' efforts in providing pupils with e-learning became critical. Other parties, including the government, universities, and schools, were also required to play proactive roles in assistance, engagement, and financial assistance. For example, students required some financial assistance to spend on IT gadgets. Nonetheless, not every individual could afford laptops or tablets, particularly families with financial and geographical constraints.

The implications of COVID-19, particularly in the Malaysian education system, recognised the challenges associated with virtual education at home, technical equipment, and internet bandwidth. In reality, despite current obstacles, the local public's sense of consciousness and togetherness in pursuing the educational process made it bearable. As a result, courier services, comparable to conventional distance learning techniques for persons without internet connection in rural regions, are encouraged to send or receive educational materials, ensuring that no students are left behind.

3.2 Education changes during the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia

The COVID-19 pandemic forced many nations to extreme circumstances, testing their strength and resources in handling such a devastating condition. Many nations are now faced with the possible challenge of harnessing the wisdom and decision-making skills to better aid their nations with the struggles of the ongoing pandemic. Solutions to new problems have to be addressed quickly and effectively in order to better handle the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Indonesia, as one of the biggest nations in the Southeast Asian region must strive to alleviate its people from the problems of the pandemic [23]. Similar to many other countries, Indonesia has been at the brink of the COVID-19 pandemic. Indonesia has been coping to ensure that their education system remains operative, despite the significant adjustments needed to be made due to the current circumstances, namely substituting the orthodox version of learning (face-to-face and physical) to online and distant learning [24].

The Indonesian Minister of Education and Culture, Nadiem Makarim, established four national learning programs, naming these four education policies under one umbrella term called "Merdeka Belajar". Merdeka Belajar translates to freedom of learning, with the objective to allow students to learn as freely as they can and to learn calmly without stress. The Merdeka Belajar initiative is practiced in a manner whereby teachers and administrators alike pay attention to students' natural talents, without urging them to gain mastery or proficiency in their field of knowledge, external to their skills and talents. Each student is created a portfolio to streamline their passions and pursuits [24].

The Merdeka Campus policy is a continuation of the concept of Merdeka Belajar. The implementation of Merdeka Belajar is only a ministerial change, not a change subjected by Government Regulations or Laws. The four primary points of this policy include [24]:

1. The launching of new study programs
2. Higher education accreditation system
3. Flexibility for universities to become PTN-BH
4. The ability to obtain rights to study for three semesters away from the initial study course

Some of the initiatives from the Ministry of Education in Indonesia include the urge to ensure effective practices and strategies of the Merdeka Belajar (Learning Independence) policy, where teachers are given the necessary freedom to pursue education in its most essential form, taking into consideration the established curriculum and its most important lessons and teaching so that students would not feel burdened to uphold their education during the time of a global crisis [23].

Many regions across the Indonesian diaspora have taken it upon themselves to close down some of the schools in their respective area to further prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in their regions [24]. The unexpected change from physical teaching and learning to online distant learning developed changes in the conduct of teaching and learning, particularly towards written, taught and assessed curriculum, because of the pressure of limited resources available at homes and the implementation of the available resources to be used to conduct online learning. This shift in the teaching and learning of students will also alter the way in which assessments are conducted, particularly in the three major parts of assessment, which are assessing, recording and reporting. These parts might not look similar to the previous terms, further pressuring educators to take the

necessary measures when assessing students so as to provide them feedback that is true and accurate to their skills and abilities, given the current situation of the COVID-19 pandemic [25].

It is to be expected that many students will continue to study at home for safety and security of their health and well-being. Hence, for these students, the Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC) has fixed many support initiatives and plans to ensure that their students are not left behind in the education process. The MOEC has created many different distant-learning friendly portals to aid the home learning experience for many of its students. Such portals include the "Rumah Belajar" portal, where it can be readily accessed through   the   website learning.kemdikbud.go.id.

Some of the other well-noted initiatives by the Indonesian   government   include   the accessibility of learning resources, digital classes and virtual laboratories. Question banks and online learning centers have also been formed to better equip teachers, specifically those practicing early childhood education, teachers in elementary schools, junior high schools,   senior   high   schools   and   also vocational and other similar schools. Some of the partners of the MOEC created several online learning platforms, namely Smart Class, Ruangguru,   Sekolahmu,   Zenius,   Quipper, Google Indonesia, and Microsoft. Each of these platforms are publicly accessible and free [24].

What is interesting in education during a pandemic is the emergence of several online seminar activities. These online meetings utilise virtual media and applications that are now starting to trend, such as Google Meet, Zoom, and other such applications in several teaching and learning activities held at schools and universities. Activities such as webinars, Zoom seminars and other similar activities are

building popularity across various places and universities in Indonesia [26].

4. Conclusion

Conclusively, COVID-19 has plunged Indonesia and Malaysia into various such dilemmas, including in the education sector. Nevertheless, these complications do not mean that there will be massive drawbacks occurring in our education systems. In turn, it encourages students to grasp more knowledge through online learning. However, there might be some obstacles amid the new current learning mechanism. To cope with the new method, the governments of Indonesia and Malaysia have constructed several solutions such as an online learning platform and financial support, ensuring no institutional neglect of students. Society has also adapted to use the internet for webinars, extending beyond the academic setting and into formal employment. Even though numerous problems might restrain students from their optimum learning state, governmental efforts to address the gaps in education exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic are continuously implemented in both countries. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in education should be explored in further detail in the near future to accurately discover the efficacies of educational policies during the COVID-19 pandemic on both teachers and students alike.

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