Chapter 1

Challenges and Opportunities of Online Learning Amidst the COVID−19 Pandemic in Brunei Darussalam

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ABSTRACT

Educational institutions in Brunei have transitioned into an online mode of learning due to the pandemic of COVID-19 that challenged the education system, forcing educators to change their method of teaching. The aim of this research is to investigate the challenges and opportunities risen from online learning during the pandemic. Brunei is one of the few countries that did not enforce lockdown measures but enforced strict measures to contain the pandemic. The pandemic has greatly affected the government, businesses, and the educational institutes of the nation. Challenges include digital transformation and educational operability while opportunities emphasize on technological innovations and reassessing the education system.

INTRODUCTION

Educational institutions (schools, colleges, and universities) in Brunei Darussalam incessantly practices and are based on traditional systems of learning which is face-to-face interaction within a classroom between students and the teacher (Dhawan, 2020). Although in some cases, blended learning is increasing in application globally, it is difficult to move away from the traditional methods of learning. The unexpected global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic sent shocks throughout the world. With social distancing enforced globally, it has negatively impacted learning opportunities in educational institutions where these institutions faced difficulties in coping with the formidable conditions. These conditions have highlighted the importance of scenario planning which are needed for educational institutions. The pandemic has disrupted all aspects of education all the around the world, including in Brunei Darussalam. The difficult state of Brunei in the pandemic offered a stern challenge to the education system of Brunei. This situation forced education personnel of Brunei to transition from traditional methods of teaching to unchartered waters of online learning mode of teaching in a limited time frame. The sudden change of learning modes also impacted other factors that were key in the transition between learning modes which are the students and the parents. Due to the pandemic, educational institutions in Brunei were forced to remain closed temporarily.

While it was uncertain to resume normal teaching in Brunei due to social distancing measures enforced by the government and the ministry of health in hope to combat the pandemic. The sudden transition from face-to-face learning to online learning have posed challenges to students and lecturers. Thus, with social distancing in place, it negatively influences learning options nationwide. Online learning was constantly discussed to address the learning issues due to the pandemic. Few controversies related to e-learning proved to be a valid stumbling block with regards to the current state of Brunei. While the pandemic proved to be a difficult time for educators, students and parents within the education system. It also provided hope of moving forward with the use of technology and innovation for educational institutions. The circumstances require understanding and solidarity of every nations education workers in order to preserve and protect the students, communities, staff and the nation generally.

This objective of this research is to identify the challenges and opportunities of online learning in Brunei with the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is interesting to identify these factors that are unique from other nations' struggle towards adapting the online mode of learning. While opportunities from online learning can be used to improve and strengthen the education system of Brunei. The rest of the research is organized as follows: the next section is the literature review supporting the research, research methodology before presenting significant timeline of online learning in Brunei, followed by the challenges and opportunities of online learning. The last section of the research consists of the conclusion and recommendations for future studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Online Learning or E-Learning

The progression in technologies and the Internet have considerably altered the way of life of individuals and have produced an immense shift in numerous areas (Nadikattu, 2020). McBrien et al. (2009) argued that the development and innovation in technology have enabled remote learning or education effortless

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