
The Impact of COVID-19 Towards Development of Teaching and Learning in Brunei Darussalam with Specific Reference to Kolej Universiti Perguruan Ugama Seri Begawan (KUPU SB)

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Introduction

Globally, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced schools and universities to close and that has impacted an unprecedented number of academicians, teachers as well as the students. Without any exception, Brunei Darussalam too, nevertheless has been affected by this pandemic. In Brunei Darussalam, there is only one teacher training university which is called *Kolej Universiti Perguruan Ugama Seri Begawan* (Seri Begawan Religious Teachers University College) which is also known as “KUPU SB”. This article will analyze the impact of COVID-19 in the development of teaching and learning at KUPU SB.

The Brunei Health Ministry announced that the sultanate’s first COVID-19 case was detected on 9th March 2020. Since the number of cases was increasing rapidly, on 17th March 2020, the Ministry of Health declared that “any individual arriving in Brunei,” including a Bruneian coming from abroad, would have to “self-isolate” for two weeks or would face a penalty of “imprisonment up to a period of 6 months, or a fine up to \$10,000. Or both” (Bodetti, 2020).

Apart from enforcing some laws, on March 23 2020, the Ministry of Home Affairs further tightened restrictions that already amounted to some of the toughest in Southeast Asia, blocking all foreign entrants as well as entry to restaurants (Bodetti, 2020). To contain and prevent the spread of COVID-19, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs announced school closure on March 11th 2020, about one week before the school holiday period (Othman, 2020). This included all international schools, primary and secondary schools, colleges as well as the Institute of Brunei Technical Education (IBTE) under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education; as well as schools and university such as

KUPU SB which are under the jurisdiction of Ministry of Religious Affairs (Othman, 2020). Since then, activities such as mass gatherings as well as social meetings were all prohibited. Physical distancing and personal hygiene were advocated and publicly emphasized for all citizens in Brunei Darussalam. Via social media, the public was frequently reminded on maintaining a high level of personal hygiene and frequent hand-washing with clean water and soap or by using disinfectant such as hand-sanitizers. The government has shown the “One National” approach in containing and breaking the chain of COVID-19 infection. (Suhaili, 2020)

Actions Taken by Kupu Sb in Containing the Spread of COVID-19

One of the first critical actions taken by KUPU SB in containing the community spread of COVID-19 was the closure of the university to all of its students. All of the learning activities as well the assessments were shifted to online mode. Students who underwent “Teaching Practice” in schools were asked to shift their classroom activities to online learning as well. Students and staff were reminded to maintain good hygiene by washing and sanitizing their hands regularly. All meetings were shifted to online ones either by Zoom Online application or by MS Team software. Apart from these measures, KUPU SB, as one of the religious higher educational institutions in Brunei Darussalam, also highly emphasized to its staff and student to recite a special prayer after the five times daily prayer. The role of spirituality is very dominant in the everyday life of the students and lecturers at KUPU SB. For instance, before the lecture started at 8 o’clock in the morning, every academic staff was instructed to recite a prayer at the main *Surau* (prayer hall) of the university.

On the 6th of April 2020, the Ra'es¹ of KUPU SB issued a statement advising staff and students to combat the spread of COVID-19 (Ra'es Office, 2020). The statement began by giving a self-reminder to be pious towards Allah, The Almighty God, who created the universe. It also reminded the students to strengthen their faith (*iman*) by increasing their religious practice and deeds (*amal*). The statement also highlighted the importance of student's responsibilities in continuing their studies with sincerity by continually reading and expanding their knowledge especially in the area of Islamic studies, for their own practices apart from educating their families as well as the public. He also urged the students to support and follow the regulations given by the government of His Majesty Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam in combating and controlling the spread of COVID-19. The statement also urged students to develop their intellects by publishing some writing especially in the area of health and cleanliness in battling the spread of COVID-19 (see Appendix 1).

The Impact of COVID-19 in Teaching and Learning at KUPU SB

The outbreak of COVID-19 had great impact on the teaching and learning activities conducted at KUPU SB. On the 21st of March 2020, KUPU SB took precautionary measures by firstly announcing its closure to all of the students who were undertaking several courses at the university (see Appendix 2). This was to ensure that the infection would be well contained. The health, safety and well-being of the students and staff were the institution's top priority. Due to its closure, the relevant government authorities had asked all of the education institutions including KUPU SB to come up with their respective Business Continuity Plan, or BCP. All educational institutions decided to suspend face-to-face teaching and learning for students so as to prevent the outbreak of COVID-19 in the country.

Even though, KUPU SB announced its closure on the 21st of March 2020, all of the teaching and learning activities were carried out on-line by using several applications which were deemed reliable by the lecturers and the students. Due to the sudden closure,

¹Ra'es is the highest position at KUPU SB's main administration. It is equivalent to a Rector and the Vice-Chancellor. The Chancellor for all of the public higher education institutions and universities is His Majesty The Sultan of Brunei.

according to the released media statement from KUPU SB (Kolej Universiti Perguruan Ugama Seri Begawan, 2020), students were asked to contact their respective lecturers regarding the applications used for learning, either through their telephone numbers, WhatsApp, text messages as well as through emails.² It was also stated that the subject time-table would remain unchanged.³ Apart from that, the hostel facilities for all of the local students were closed until further notice by the university authority.⁴ From the observations made, most of the lecturers were using the Zoom online applications. After about a month, Microsoft Teams (MS Team) were introduced to all of the lecturers and students. Prior to the implementation of the MS Team, all lecturers were given a short workshop on the operation of MS Team. This would enable the lecturer to familiarize the "tools" and applications provided in the MS Team. Even though, the MS Team were initiated by the Ministry of Education, some of the lecturers and students preferred to use the Zoom online application. However, there are some advantages and disadvantages in using Zoom. Apart from the feature of screen sharing between the lecturer and the students, lecturers are also able to request some responses either through the group messages or through direct response by enabling the microphone as well as the camera of the students. Thus, continuous responses are possible provided that the wireless connection is in good strength.

Steps Taken During the De-Escalation Stages

Before the re-opening of the semester on the 3rd of August 2020, KUPU SB took several actions. One of these actions was by releasing a press statement on 23rd of July 2020 as a guideline for the staff as well as the students of KUPU SB⁵. According to the press statement, the learning session would be conducted in two modes. The two modes were either online teaching or normal teaching, that is, teaching face to face. If the course had more students than the number of capacities allocated in the lecture hall, an online teaching would be implemented. If the number of students did not exceed the number of capacities

²Closure No.ii from Media Statement released by The International and Public Relations Office, KUPUS SB on 21st March 2020.

³Closure No. iii from Media Statement released by The International and Public Relations Office, KUPUS SB on 21st March 2020.

⁴Closure No. iv from from Media Statement released by The International and Public Relations Office, KUPUS SB on 21st March 2020.

⁵Press Released statement released by International and Public Relations Office, KUPU SB on 23rd July 2020.

allocated in the lecture hall or the classroom, then the class would be conducted face to face.

Every student and staff who wanted to enter the university would be required to have their body temperature taken by the authorities allocated at every entry to the university. Apart from that, scanning the QR Code provided by the university through the “Bru-Health” phone application was a requirement for every staff and students before entering the university. This would ensure the health safety monitoring for staff and students at the university. Apart from that, the university staff and students were advised to bring their own face masks besides hand sanitizers even though the latter were provided at every checkpoint. Other facilities such as the library and the canteen operated normally, abiding by the specific measures provided by the Ministry of Health, such as maintaining physical distancing as well as self-hygiene. Through these procedures, it was hoped that the spreading of the COVID-19 viruses would be prevented with the great cooperation between the University staff and the students.

Important Factors Contributing to the Effective Teaching and Learning at KUPU SB During COVID-19

Even though, the global widespread of COVID-19 has forced schools and universities to close their doors, it has indirectly encouraged the lecturers and students to implement online learning in their courses. This has directly developed their knowledge and skills in using ICT. Although, the universities had enhanced blended learning before the outbreak of COVID-19, not all lecturers had implemented this learning (i.e. blended learning). The outbreak of COVID-19 has shown the urgency for all lecturers and students to implement on-line learning as well as blended learning. In the writer’s view, the most critical factor contributing towards the effective learning and teaching is the knowledge of the teachers and students in the use of online learning software. Secondly, adequate learning facilities and conducive learning environment have contributed to the development of online learning. Learning facilities also refer to the strength of wireless connectivity apart from the computers itself. Learning environment has also an impact on the interactions between the lecturers and the students. If the lecturers and students are surrounded by noisy background, interactions between the lecturers and students would

not be effective. Students’ financial background has also impacted their online learning program as some of the students are found not to have wireless connections at their homes. Students with this situation are usually exempted to join the online class and were replaced by other methods of learning such as interacting through email as well as “WhatsApp” mobile application.

Conclusion

Gratefully, at the time of writing this article, Brunei Darussalam has recorded nearly three months without new COVID-19 cases (Kon, 2020). This is due to the strong efforts and collaborations between the government of Brunei Darussalam, especially the Ministry of Health and the people of Brunei Darussalam. The “BruHealth” mobile application which was initiated by the government and several agencies has helped the public, including the students, to mobilize securely within the country including all the educational institutions such as the universities and schools (Ministry of Health Brunei Darussalam, 2020). The “BruHealth” mobile application helps people to update their self-assessment tool, a tool that assesses the risk factor of COVID-19 to users as a reference. Apart from that, it enables the users to comprehend and be aware of COVID-19 by sharing the press releases issued by the government agencies such as the Ministry of Health generally as well as Ministry of Education. This has provided valuable information on the procedures of conducting lessons throughout all educational institutions and schools. It also enables the users to scan the QR Code at every entry to building premises as well as educational institutions including KUPU SB. The artificial intelligence application such as the “BruHealth” mobile app has allowed students to enter the university campus during the de-escalation phases with confidence. Even though, the current pandemic COVID-19 has disrupted the daily activities, such as teaching and learning, it has indirectly enforced every lecturer and student to utilize the online learning platform such as Zoom and the Microsoft office, despite facing some limitations in implementing the online learning. It has indeed enabled “distant learning” to take place, one which is not limited by space and time.

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Appendix 1

Pesanan Ra'es



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ وَبَرَكَاتُهُ

عَنْ أَبِي بَرْزَةَ الْأَسَدِيِّ، قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: لَا تَزُولُ قَدَمَا عَبْدٍ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ حَتَّى يُسْأَلَ عَنْ عَمَلِهِ فِيمَا أَنْفَاهُ، وَعَنْ عَمَلِهِ فِيمَا فَعَلَ، وَعَنْ مَالِهِ مِنْ أَيْنَ اكْتَسَبَهُ وَفِيمَ أَنْفَقَهُ، وَعَنْ جَسَدِهِ فِيمَا أَبْلَاهُ. هَذَا حَدِيثٌ حَسَنٌ صَحِيحٌ [أَخْرَجَهُ التِّرْمِذِيُّ فِي سُنَنِهِ]

Anak- anak kami para Pelajar KUPU SB yang dirahmati Allah ﷻ,

Sukacita menasihatkan semua untuk meningkatkan ketaqwaan kepada Allah ﷻ:

1. Memantapkan keimanan dan amalmu kepada Allah ﷻ sebagai hamba dan khalifahNya. Amalkan segala suruhan dan jauhi laranganNya serta hiasi diri dengan akhlak mengikut Rasulullah ﷺ.
2. Luaskan pengalaman Pengajian Islam dan tunaikan amanah sebagai penuntut ilmu dengan penuh keikhlasan. Banyakkan membaca dan bertanya untuk mendalami ilmu Pengajian Islam untuk amalan diri dan mendidik keluarga, pelajar dan masyarakat.
3. Kukuhkan pengalaman pedagogi dengan pendekatan, kaedah dan teknik mendidik serta mendakwah orang lain dengan efektif, kreatif, inovatif dan hikmah.
4. Sentiasalah ke hadapan bersama pihak Kerajaan Kebawah Duli Yang Maha Mulia Paduka Seri Baginda Sultan dan Yang Di-Pertuan Negara Brunei Darussalam dalam melaksanakan peraturan dan tindakan mengawal COVID 19.
5. Berusahalah menjadi intelek yang pakar dan rasional dalam menyelesaikan cabaran pendidikan, masalah masyarakat dan umat melalui penyelidikan dan penulisan, khususnya aspek kesihatan dan kebersihan dalam melawan COVID 19.

6. Bergembiralah dengan personaliti dirimu dan mantapkan dengan pola berfikir, menyelesaikan malah dan bertindak secara hikmah MIB. Amalkan cara hidup yang sihat, diet dan riadah ikut sunnah Rasulullah ﷺ dalam menghadapi COVID 19.
7. Berusahalah memberikan sumbangan bagi meningkatkan ketaqwaan dan kebajikan masyarakat. Fikirkanlah keperluan mereka dan berikanlah khidmat pada kadar yang termampu dalam mengatasi COVID 19.
8. Kembangkanlah fitrah dan potensi yang telah dikurniakan Allah ﷻ untukmu. Manfaatkan ia untuk kebahagiaanmu, ahli keluarga, masyarakat, negara dan umat manusia.

**Kamu adalah Khalifah Allah ﷻ. Tunaikan amanahmu kepada masyarakat
untuk mendapatkan keredhaan Allah ﷻ**

جزاكم الله خير الجزاء

Salam kasih sayang



Dr Haji Adanan bin Haji Basar
Ra'es
Kolej Universiti Perguruan Ugama Seri Begawan

Tarikh: 12 Sya'aban 1441
6 April 2020

Appendix 2

KENYATAAN AKHBAR
26 Rejab 1441
21 Mac 2020



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

SESI PENGAJARAN DAN PEMBELAJARAN SECARA ATAS TALIAN KOLEJ UNIVERSITI PERGURUAN UGAMA SERI BEGAWAN

Berikut perkembangan terkini mengenai jangkitan wabak COVID-19 sepertimana yang dikemaskini oleh Kementerian Kesihatan, Negara Brunei Darussalam, Kolej Universiti Perguruan Ugama Seri Begawan (KUPU SB) dengan ini mengumumkan perkara-perkara berikut:

- i. Pelajar adalah **tidak diperlukan** hadir ke Kolej Universiti mulai **hari Selasa, 24 Mac 2020** hingga ke satu tarikh yang akan dimaklumkan kemudian.
- ii. Sesi pengajaran dan pembelajaran akan dijalankan secara **atas talian** menggunakan aplikasi pembelajaran *online* yang bersesuaian. Pelajar dikehendaki menghubungi pensyarah masing-masing mengenai perkara ini melalui telefon /SMS/Whatsapp/emel.
- iii. Sesi pengajaran dan pembelajaran setiap kursus adalah mengikut jadual kelas yang telah ditetapkan sebelumnya.
- iv. Kemudahan Kolej Kediaman KUPU SB bagi **pelajar tempatan** adalah ditangguhkan / ditutup hingga ke satu tarikh yang akan dimaklumkan kemudian.

Selain itu, dalam usaha bersama bagi membendung penularan jangkitan wabak khususnya bagi pegawai dan kakitangan KUPU SB yang bertugas, pemeriksaan suhu badan telah mula dilaksanakan bertempat di pintu pagar utama KUPU SB dan *hand sanitizer* disediakan di beberapa tempat dalam kawasan Kolej Universiti.

Muka Surat 1 / 2

Pihak KUPU SB akan secara berterusan memantau perkembangan jangkitan wabak COVID-19 dari semasa ke semasa serta menyelaraskan sebarang tindakan dengan merujuk kepada Surat Keliling yang dikeluarkan oleh Jabatan Perdana Menteri dan siaran akhbar dari Kementerian Kesihatan, Negara Brunei Darussalam.

Bagi maklumat lanjut mengenai perkara berkaitan Hal Ehwal Pelajar dan Akademik KUPU SB, bolehlah menghubungi talian pemedulian KUPU SB iaitu: **+673 897 0305**. Maklumat terkini KUPU SB akan diumumkan melalui Instagram rasmi KUPU SB (@kpusb_official) dan telegram (t.me/rasmikupusb).

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَعُوذُ بِكَ جَهْدَ الْبَلَاءِ، وَدَرْكَ الشَّقَاءِ، وَسُوءِ الْقَضَاءِ، وَشَمَاتَةِ الْأَعْدَاءِ
وَعْضَالَ الدَّاءِ، وَخِيْبَةَ الرَّجَاءِ

“Ya Allah, aku berlindung dengan-Mu dari musibah yang dahsyat, ditimpa malang, nasib yang buruk, kejahatan musuh, penyakit tidak dapat diubati dan harapan yang kecewa”

-TAMAT-

Muka Surat 2 / 2

Disediakan oleh:

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