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BOOK OF EXTENDED ABSTRACTS

iVCPPTS 2021

1ST INTERNATIONAL VIRTUAL CONFERENCE ON PUBLIC POLICY AND SOCIAL SCIENCE

iVCPPTS 2021:

**REGIONAL ISSUES IN PUBLIC POLICY
AND SOCIAL SCIENCE
DURING COVID 19 PANDEMIC**

CO-ORGANIZED BY:

**FACULTY OF ADMINISTRATIVE SCIENCE
AND POLICY STUDIES, UTM KEDAH
& FAKULTAS ILMU SOSIAL DAN ILMU POLITIK
UNIVERSITI OF AIRLANGGA (UNAIR)**

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LIST OF PAPER iVCPPTS 2021

No	Name & paper	Page
1	MANAGING SUPERTEAMS: HOW TEAM COMPOSITION AFFECT THE TEAM PERFORMANCE OF PUBLIC HEALTHCARE IN MALAYSIA <i>Dr Azlyn Ahmad Zawawi</i>	1-2
2	REGIONAL AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN MALAYSIA: UNRAVEL THE TALE OF RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT <i>Dr Nazni Noordin</i>	3-4
3	MALAYSIAN FISCAL POLICY INITIATIVE DURING PANDEMIC COVID-19: A SYNOPTIC VIEW <i>Mohamad Ariff bin Mohd Yusof, Muhammad Farouk bin Azmi & Dr. Junaida Ismail</i>	5-7
4	THE CHALLENGES OF DIGITAL POVERTY IN PURSUING ONLINE DISTANCE LEARNING AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA <i>Syuhada Shahren, Nur Aiesya Atika Ardi & Intan Syahriza Azizan</i>	8-11
5	THE IMPACT OF FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENT TO THE EMPLOYEES AT PEJABAT SETIAUSAHA KERAJAAN NEGERI KELANTAN (SUK) <i>Nurul Ayuni Shafei, Nur Jalilah Salleh & Dr Nor Zaini Zainal Abidin</i>	12-13
6	THE ROLE OF SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY ON INTERNAL TEAM PERFORMANCE: A CONCEPTUAL REVIEW OF MALAYSIAN SEARCH AND RESCUE (SAR) TEAM <i>Norsyazwani Ab Halim & Azlyn Ahmad Zawawi</i>	14-16
7	COVID-19 AND ONLINE LEARNING IN HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS: REVIEW ON ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FACED BY STUDENTS <i>Ayu Nazurah Dzulhasdi, Siti Nur Anis Safiah Rosli , & YM Tunku Nashril Tunku Abaidah</i>	17-20
8	JOB PERFORMANCE AMONG ENFORCEMENT STAFF IN NORTHERN MALAYSIA: A CASE OF JPJ SEBERANG JAYA, PENANG, MALAYSIA <i>Anis 'Amirah Razali, Noorzaihaini Ahmad & Nazmi@Nazni Noordin</i>	21-22

- | | | |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| 9 | <p>GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY POST-COVID 19: THE CHALLENGE FOR MALAYSIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITY</p> <p><i>Muhammad Asiff Rafani Bin Mohd Noor Azmi, Nur Ashma Hidayah Binti Ahmad Bakri & Adnan Aminuddin</i></p> | 23-25 |
| 10 | <p>MALAYSIAN GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES IN MANAGING EDUCATION CRISIS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC</p> <p><i>Nur Atika Azman, Nur Aniessa Abd Aziz & Muhammad Syahmizan Azmi</i></p> | 26-32 |
| 11 | <p>FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO ACADEMIC STRESS AMONG STUDENTS IN NORTHERN MALAYSIA HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTION</p> <p><i>Nur Basirah Zahari, Kalsom Lazim, & Azni Syafena Andin Salamat</i></p> | 33-39 |
| 12 | <p>ANTECEDENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS, INTENTION TO PRACTISE E-WASTE RECYCLING</p> <p><i>Nursyafiqah Najeehah Abdullah Rizzal, Nurul Athirah Kassim, & Mohd Nazir Rabun</i></p> | 40-46 |
| 13 | <p>ANALYSIS OF COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE REGIME IN SPATIAL AND ZONE PLANNING POLICY IN GREATER MALANG AREA</p> <p><i>Siti Khodijah Ananda Ayu, Rerica Dhea Shavila & Muhammad Hafizh Irhamna</i></p> | 47-49 |
| 14 | <p>THE DILEMMA BETWEEN ECONOMIC MOTIFS AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: GOALS AMBIGUITY IN GOVERNMENT-OWNED ENTERPRISE</p> <p><i>Rendy Billiyanto & Dr. Antun Mardiyanta</i></p> | 50-51 |
| 15 | <p>DYNAMIC GOVERNANCE THEORY FOR UNDERSTANDING WORK FROM HOME POLICY: A CASE OF PUBLIC SERVICE IN DKI JAKARTA DURING THE PANDEMIC</p> <p><i>Ahbiiba Nur Iftah Ellahuuta & Putri Faticha Sari</i></p> | 52-53 |
| 16 | <p>INTENTION OF USE OF E-HEALTH SITE BY PUSKESMAS PATIENTS (STUDY IN SURABAYA CITY)</p> <p><i>Irvan Kurniawan, Arfiedna Tiara Fatiha, & Dr. Antun Mardiyanta</i></p> | 54-55 |
| 17 | <p>CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC SERVICE EXPENDITURE POLICIES TOWARD GENERAL ALLOCATION FUNDS (GAF) FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN 2020</p> <p><i>Ayuni Nur Siami, & Dr Sulikah Asmorowati</i></p> | 56-58 |

MALAYSIAN GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES IN MANAGING EDUCATION CRISIS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Nur Atika Bt Azman¹, Nur Aniessa Binti Abd Aziz² Muhammad Syahmizan Azmi³

¹ Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Kedah, Kampus Sungai Petani, Kedah, Malaysia, nuratika0357@gmail.com

² Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Kedah, Kampus Sungai Petani, Kedah, Malaysia, nuraniessaaziz99@gmail.com

³ Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Kedah, Kampus Sungai Petani, Kedah, Malaysia, syahmizan@uitm.edu.my

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**Corresponding
Author:**

syahmizan@uitm.edu.my

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION

Education has always been recognized as a crucial tool to exhume inner potentials of individuals. The Malaysian government for the past decades has persistently and effectively emphasized on the significant roles of education in human development. The unwavering efforts can be seen manifested in the implementation of national education programs and policies throughout the nation. The Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013-2025) for instance, is one of the initiatives of the Ministry of Education to energize the Malaysian education system. This blueprint supports the Philosophy of National Education to ensure Malaysian education continuously develops overall individual potentials and integrate them to create a set of balanced qualities in terms of intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical capabilities which are directly aligned to achieving United Nation Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) no 4 ; Quality education (National Education Policy, 2017). The COVID-19 outbreak has undeniably created some distraction in education sector and force the entire educational system to embrace a new normal. According to The World Economic Forum (WEF), the acceleration of Covid-19 cases during the pandemic have made nations worldwide act to the closed educational institution to minimize the total daily infection. To curb COVID-19 infection, the government is enforcing Movement Control Order (MCO) (Aziz, 2020), with mandatory strict restrictions on population, including the closure of offices, schools, universities with "Just stay at home" command (Sheena Kaur, 2020). Since mid-March 2020, school closures have suspended formal classroom learning for 4.9 million preschools, elementary and middle school students across the country (Khazanah Research Institute, 2020). Online learning has been implemented as one of undisputable means in exercising teaching and learning process at many levels, be it schools or universities. However, the issues of affordability to use highly effecient electronic devices and internet data among the students have become a debate.

PURPOSE/AIM & BACKGROUND

In 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the globe, most countries announced the temporary closure of schools, impacting more than 91 per cent of students worldwide (United Nations, 2020). Therefore, due to the massive impact from the COVID-19 pandemic faced by Malaysia and the entire world, the education sector is severely affected over this current issue (Kuazhar, 2020). On that ground, social distancing is required at this moment to flatten the curve to control and reduce the rate of COVID-19 infections. Considering schools as places that potentially can increase the spread of Coronavirus, the government had instructed to close all schools in Malaysia (Hazlin, 2020). Therefore, a drastic increase on the usage of online learning can be seen to replace the learning process in the classroom. Hence, according to the current scenario, it can be concluded that most teachers and students are already exposed to online learning but it is not totally fully utilized in the teaching and learning process as both are challenged by the adaptability towards the drastic change (Choong Pui Yee, 2020). According to UNESCO statistics, in May 2020, 1.21 billion students, respectively 69.3% of their total number, leads to the main effects of the closure of schools and institutions includes students' and teachers' adaptability and unpreparedness to do online learning (UNESCO, 2020).

Since the announcement of the Movement Control Order (MCO) by the Malaysian Government to help curb the spread of COVID-19 virus, education institutions across the nation have taken great measures to ensure that their students can continue learning through digital means (K. Raman, 2020). Malaysian Government is responsible along with government initiatives, the top management of universities and colleges have taken swift action in implementing crisis strategies to protect their stakeholders, namely students. To ensure that academic sessions can be continued in new life norms in the enforcement of movement control order (MCO), online learning has been implemented to ensure the teaching and learning process runs smoothly (Salleh Sulieman, 2020).

To curb the spread of COVID-19, Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) has come out with the idea of implementing Online Distance Learning or known as ODL as a learning and teaching methods for University levels under e-Learning Policy (Ministry of Higher Education, 2020). This move however, is to practice the social distancing and avoid the crowded situation in campus that could cause infection. Regarding that, students and instructors must operate for online virtual learning session and do away with the traditional face to face learning (The Sun Daily, 2020). Aligning to the Malaysia Education Development Plan 2020-2025 for the higher institution or known as PPPM(PT), ten transformations are to be the guidelines to strengthen the Malaysia Higher Education. It includes the aims towards the Globalised Online Learning (GOL) as adding in the online based learning parallel to the national advancement in technology. The insertion of Policy e-Pembelajaran Negara (DePAN) or also known as National e-Learning Policy 2.0 was launched on 11 April 2011 and is in use to support development of the National Higher Education Strategic Plan (PSPTN) also has become one of the reformations by the implementation of this ODL.

According to Centre for Innovative Delivery and Learning Development (2020), Open and Distance Learning (ODL) refers to the provision of flexible educational opportunities in terms of access and multiple modes of knowledge acquisition. In the other words, ODL can be defined as a way of online learning remotely without face-to-face meeting with the teachers in the classroom. This way of learning is not a new thing for the secondary students in the learning process. The implementation of online learning in schools has already begun when the Ministry of Education introduced Smart Schools (Sekolah Bestari) starting with 88 schools (MalaysiaGov, 1997).

Therefore, this paper aims to highlight on the Malaysian government programmes in sustaining the education during the pandemic of COVID-19. It also aims to roughly identify the issues

arisen on the government responsiveness in sustaining the education by the implementation of online distance learning (ODL) and PDPR for secondary and tertiary school levels.

METHODOLOGY

The nature of this study is qualitative. This study applied content analysis method in which data were gathered and analysed from the secondary sources obtained from previous research, journal articles, newspaper reports, government records and other available information.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FACED BY MALAYSIAN GOVERNMENT DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic has left the government with no choice but to close all schools to reduce the risk of infection. Therefore, a drastic increase in the usage of online learning can be seen to replace the learning process in the classroom. Hence, according to the current scenario, it can be concluded that most teachers and students are already exposed to online learning but it is not totally fully utilized in the teaching and learning process as both are challenged by the adaptability towards the drastic change (Choong Pui Yee, 2020). According to UNESCO statistics, in May 2020, 1.21 billion students, respectively 69.3% of their total number, leads to the main effects of the closure of schools and institutions includes students' and teachers' adaptability and unpreparedness to online learning (UNESCO, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has seriously impacted the Malaysian unemployment rate. The impacts of COVID-19 on Malaysia's education can also be seen via high unemployment rate. In 2019, the unemployment rate of Malaysia is 3.3% which means there are 508,200 individuals unemployed (Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM), 2020). ISEAS Article Journal illustrates the statistics of Unemployed Graduates sources from the Department of Statistic (2020) states that, there are 3.3% and 3.9% unemployment rate for secondary and tertiary education attained. The COVID-19 pandemic has seriously impacted the Malaysian fresh graduates' employment. The obvious comparison of each years can be seen and shows the negative fluctuation on the years of 2020 where the pandemic of COVID-19 starts to emerge. In January 2020, the unemployment rate is 3.2% but there is a continuous increase in the unemployment rate until 10 May 2020 and it reaches 5.3%. This is shown in Figure 1 below. This is not a good phenomenon because there is a negative trend in the labour demand (Shankar, 2020).

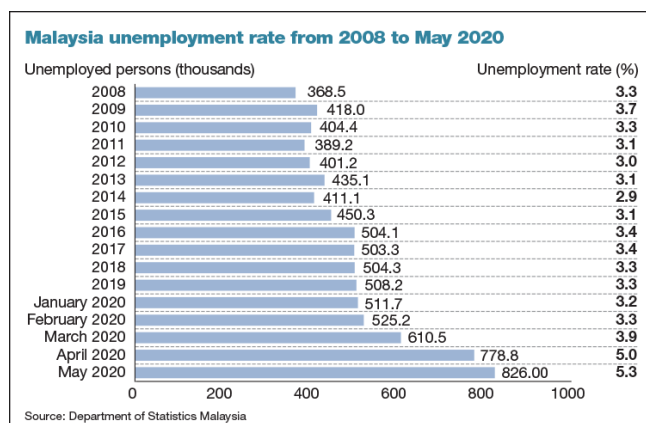


Figure 1: Malaysia unemployment rate from 2008 to May 2020

The academic institution closure begins during the Movement Control Order (MCO) from 18 March 2020 as the education sector is the one that was impacted the most during this covid19 pandemic as the covid19 cases rose daily. The education institution closures involved 4.9 million schools and 1.2 million higher education institutions (The Star,2020). Malaysia's government address this issue and policymakers used online learning or e-learning as a method to replace face-to-face learning method. Besides that, Teknologi Mara University (UiTM) is the first higher

education institution that implement online distance learning (ODL) as a university-level learning process. Besides that, by following the recommendations of the former Minister of Education, home-based teaching, and learning (PdPR) are enforced for elementary and middle school students to adapt to the new norms (The Star, 2020). Unfortunately, this method does not apply to SPM and STPM candidates as their examination in 2020 had been postponed to 2021. Standard 6 students who were to sit for UPSR and form 3 students, the PT3 exam was instantly canceled (The Star, 2020). However, the implementation of e-learning as a teaching and learning method has created a problem that concerns students to adapt to new standards.

Obtaining an internet connection is becoming one of the required aspects of conducting and participating in online classes. Good access to the internet is a crucial part of ensuring that every student can take part in the class sessions, which is also crucial for lecturers to recognize and detect the best and most suitable methods to conduct classes. However, some constraints are emerging mainly for the lecturers and students who live in rural areas and have poor internet coverage (The star, 2020). It is because gaining access to the internet in rural areas is difficult as the location and the coverage are limited compared to the urban areas. This is due to the less usage by the locals. It may accordingly affect the students' academic performance for those who are incompetent to join or students who have a hard time understanding the learning process. Students living in rural communities will go to certain places, such as cyber cafes to obtain internet access.

To conduct and participate in online courses, a large quota of Internet is required as educators and students usually utilize Google Meet, Zoom, Discord to conduct live lectures. Another method of online classes is by video recording through Loom, and Screencast-O-Matic apps. This affected poor students specially to apply home Wi-Fi or using the best data plan that offers a good internet connection. Due to that, the students had incurred more cost on the bills and top-up every month. In order to be able to access the Internet without any problems and will conduct smoothly.

Students also requires the proper electronic devices and technology such as smartphones, laptops, and tablets as the medium to help and support the students so that they can participate in the online classes effectively (Vincent Tan, 2021). However, it may be difficult for the students who come from low-income families to provide the devices and technology due to the high price and unable to purchase them in a short time. Students may face constraints to join the online classes as they are difficult to access the Internet as they do not have any devices or technology to assist. As a result, the effectiveness of online classes will be significantly reduced and impact students performance.

The second challenge of reformations in education system is the lack of mental and physical preparation. The changes are made drastically to control the spread of COVID-19 that eventually had affected the physical and mental health of students and teachers. The COVID-19 pandemic and Movement Control Order (MCO) indeed have caused emotional distress to many including students and teachers. This can be proven according to research conducted in Malaysia where 70 per cent of the respondents agreed that their anxiety level increased during the early phase of the Covid-19 outbreak in Malaysia (Ramlee, 2020). This challenge can be in two main context which are students and teachers as both plays a role in learning and teaching process.

COVID-19 that spreading across the world truly has affect the whole system of educational as many changes are made to ensure that the students, teachers and the whole school organizations are safe from this deadly virus (Mohamad Izzat Mohamad Khalizan, 2020). SPM examination that is originally planned to be held in November 2020 has been postponed a few times due to Covid-19 (Dr Mohd Radzi Md Jidin, 2020). New norms including the social distancing make it harder to do the examination as it includes the matter of live of the individuals. Right after a month MCO has been announced in the country, Education Minister Radzi Jidin said that all major secondary school examinations would be postponed to the next

year but the dates were not confirmed. Later on 28th Jun, Radzi Jidin stated that Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) examination would be rescheduled to Jan 6 to Feb 9 the following year (The Star, 2020). Dr Habibah, the Director General of Education said that intakes into higher education institutions and application via the UPU Online portal would still proceed (Rajaendram, 2020).

FINDINGS/RESULTS

Actions taken by the government, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education to overcome academic crisis during COVID-19:

BUDGET 2021

On 6th November 2020, BUDGET 2021 that was presented at the House of Representatives has included several concerns on the improvisation for the Ministry of Higher Education. Aligning to the challenges faced by the Ministry of Higher Education during this pandemic of Covid-19, Ministry of Finance has presented the allocation in the various aspect that covers the improvisation of educational system sustainability for students. This includes 50 million ringgit provided for projects to repair obsolete infrastructure and equipment in public universities and to ensure internet connectivity in institutions of higher learning. The government also has allocated 50 million ringgit to upgrade access lines by Malaysian Research & Education Network or MYREN from 500Mbps up to 10Gbps. Further, to ensure IPT students who get credited PTPTN loans are able to follow learning online, Government cooperates with BSN and will provide 100 million Ringgit for BSN Scheme financing MyRinggit-i COMSIS which is a laptop loan scheme. Besides, to encourage parents to make savings for their children's financial cost on higher education, tax relief up to 8,000 ringgits for net savings. The National Education Savings Scheme is extended until the year of assessment 2022. Aiming towards the encouragement of more industry involvement in implementing the program based on TVET, the Government introduced the National Dual Training System Plus with a monthly allowance increased from 625 to 1,000 ringgit. This initiative involves a total allocation of 60 million ringgit and benefiting 10 thousand participants. A total of 29 million ringgit is also allocated to implement TVET programs under the MOHE including Islamic education initiatives and lifelong learning to 15 thousand students in tahfiz institutions and short schools. This reformation on BELANJAWAN 2021, has a lot to do in reforming the higher education as the allocation for the Ministry of Higher Education can fund and improvise to covers the challenges faced by MOHE during this pandemic.

PENJANA KPT-CAP and MyStep

The government is aware that cash assistance alone is never sufficient. As such, under the strategy of Generating and Retaining Jobs, steps have been taken through close cooperation between the Government and the industry. These include the creation of the MyFutureJobs portal, which is a one-stop center and the main reference point for employment-related initiatives. There are more than 200,000 job opportunities available for job seekers with candidate and industry matching processes. Additionally, this portal serves as a one-stop center for information and access to employment-related initiatives that include re-skilling and upskilling programs, advisory services as well as current employment-related programs (myfuturejobs, 2021). The Ministry of Human Resources National Penjana Kerjaya Carnival 2021 is scheduled to take place from 23 to 26 February 2021. A carnival is an online event that will bring together employers from all over the country for interview sessions to hire new employees (Perkeso Career Fair, 2020).

EDUCATION CHANNEL

On 17th February 2021, Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin launch the channel specifically for educational purposes through the Ministry of Education on channel 107 for MyTv, Channel 147 for Astro, as well as UnifiTV in NTV7 (New Straits Times, 2021). This method is indeed not only safer than other methods but also provides flexible learning time for students because the data show that about 95% of Malaysian households have TV sets and can achieve the PdPR initiative (Minister of Education Dr. Datuk Mohd Radzi, 2021). The government launches the broadcast channel through the Didik TV KPM to provide students with the learning material and assist them during this current climate. The goal of DidikTv KPM is to cover the quality of education on the Internet at a slow rate, mainly in rural areas (News Straits Times, 2021). The content will cover both curriculum and non-curriculum content, as this will help improve students' skills, knowledge, and abilities (The Star, 2021). Throughout this channel, students will be able to learn through home-based teaching and learning (PdPR) classes (News Straits Times, 2021). The education channel shows begin from 7 am until 12 am daily. This educational Tv channel broadcast launches by Prime minister Malaysia, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin on 17 Feb 2020 (malaymail, 2021). Apart from that, this method also benefits those students who do not have consistent access to the internet since it can also provide full coverage on the syllabus (Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, 2021). The education ministry believes the establishment of the educational channel as a medium in conducting the teaching and learning process suitable for students as well as teachers (The Star, 2021).

FREE LAPTOP ASSISTANCE

In implementing home-based teaching and learning (PdPR), the laptop is user-friendly and the demand for the laptop during covid19 makes it unavailable in the market due to high demand (Bernama, 2021). The shortage of electronic devices includes smartphones, laptops, notebooks with the price of RM2000 and below (Bernama, 2021). Through the NUTP survey, over 5 million students in 500 schools will be covered (The Sun Daily, 2020). The survey shows 36% of students without electronic devices influence students learning process and performance in class (Secretary-General, Harry Tan Huat Hock, 2021). Therefore, in the 2021 budget on 6 November 2020, government-linked companies will be involved by contributing 150 million ringgits to Tabung Cerdik to help students from low-income families named B40 by providing free laptops to strengthen education in Malaysia (TheSunDaily, 2021). This project is the collaboration of the Ministry of Education and 'Yayasan Hasanah', they opted to provide a free laptop for the students that could not afford to buy one since every session of education will be held through an online platform (PortalMalaysia, 2021). This initiative aims to help students severely affected by Covid-19 adapt to the new norms. Yayasan Hasanah's target is to fulfill the need of the students that may require the laptop to carry out their daily classes since their parents could not cope with the current situation where the economy is highly affected and the price of the gadgets rise from time to time. Hence, about one hundred and fifty thousand units of laptops will be distributed to the students in primary and secondary schools (PortalMalaysia, 2021).

SCHOOL AID 2021

Through this program, the Malaysian government will provide RM 100 for free to students from low-income families (BHOnline, 2021). This incentive will assist the parents to ease their burden a little bit in preparing necessary things needed for their children to start their school days. For parents with more than one child, each child will receive 100 ringgits to ensure that their parents can supply the children's needs (BH Online, 2020). Apart from that, not only will the RM 100 be provided by the government, but they also give another special school aid for that household with an income lower than RM 2500 (MYPT3, 2021). Some of the initiatives included are KPM aid 2021, Ekasih for poor families, and other school aid provided by the state government (MYPT3, 2021). Benefiting from this, it will help parents purchase items that are suitable for children in the learning process, such as electronic products. As we know, during this current climate, lots of money need to be spent for providing laptops, internet access as well as the smartphone to ease their children in learning through online. For example, through Ekasih Aid, the government

provides RM 100 a year for Primary school students and a further RM 50 for students in secondary schools (BHonline). Each child in the family who attends elementary or secondary school will get the allocation (BHonline).

DATA PLAN PACKAGE

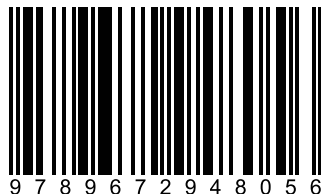
The government has adopted an RM50 data plan for university students to improve Malaysia's education plan (TheStar, 2021). The data plan package offered are Celcom EL30 (RM30), Celcom Xpax 35 (RM35), Maxis Hotlink (RM30/RM40/RM50), Digi (RM28/RM35), Unifi mobile prepaid (Rm 35)(Bernama, 2021). This incentive is applicable to students in higher education with a total allocation of Rm38 million and estimated to benefit more than 76,100 students (TheStar, 2021). Covid-19 has greatly affected the uncertain decision of whether students need to return to university to continue their studies. The government adopts this method to relieve students of higher education level and make it easy to access the Internet (Pendidikan4all, 2020). Because of some constraints that occur such as no money to get back to their college, or student's resident to get a better internet connection, lots of them have suffered the problem of buffering while having a live meeting with their lecturers and classmate (Pendidikan4all, 2020). Therefore, the government needs to provide convenience for students to ensure that they have better access to online learning platforms. Some of the aid include Cash aid of RM 50 for students to purchase their data as well as data plan support for the B40 family and a special Interactive data package for all students in the University (TheStar, 2021). Since the data plan launched on 30 October 2020, shows 195, 028 data plans and 3,773 devices sufficiently deliver B40 from higher education institutions (Bernama, 2021). Without a doubt, students will be less affected by the uncertain decision that the government had to make since all of them can get internet access through this initiative to continue their class sessions.

CONCLUSION

As a concluding remark it is quite fair to say Malaysian government does not fall short in its efforts in terms of improving the educational system during this current climate as compared to the other improvement made by the government in managing the welfare of Malaysian citizens. Furthermore, there are several initiatives the government can do from time to time to further enhance the educational system in Malaysia during this uncertain situation. The government needs to focus on long term initiative in ensuring affordable internet package for students since the internet is the crucial need for students to get access to the online platform and attending the class. Secondly, the government must continuously address the digital gap between rural and urban students. As final note, the government should also design suitable training programs for the teachers. This is because as soon as the government announced the initiative for the education channels, there are lots of voluntary teachers that wanted to teach through this medium.

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