

SEAMEO MINISTERIAL POLICY E-FORUM (SMPeF)

**EDUCATION REIMAGINED: SOUTHEAST ASIAN EDUCATION IN A
POST COVID-19 WORLD**

THURSDAY, 18TH JUNE 2020

0930 - 1130 hrs (Bangkok)

1030 - 1230 hrs (Kuala Lumpur)

KEYNOTE SPEECH

**BY H.E. DR. RADZI JIDIN
SENIOR MINISTER OF EDUCATION MALAYSIA
AS THE PRESIDENT OF SEAMEO COUNCIL**

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Keynote 1

H.E. Dr Radzi Jidin
Senior Minister of Education Malaysia and
SEAMEO Council President

Excellencies Ministers of Education,
Dr Ethel Agnes P. Valenzuela, Director of SEAMEO Secretariat,
Ladies and gentlemen.

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh and a very good morning.

Opening Remarks

1. It gives me great pleasure to join you at this SEAMEO Ministerial Policy E-Forum (SMPeF) today. Thank you for taking time off your busy schedules to discuss and share your experiences on *“Education in a Post COVID-19 World”*.
2. The Covid-19 pandemic is unprecedented. Most of us have spent the first half of this year trying to manage disruptions to the education systems in our respective countries. According to UNESCO, the disruption to education due to closure of schools has impacted over 60% of the world’s student population or more than 1.53 billion learners. Southeast Asia is home to more than 630 million people and it is estimated that 26.5% are below the age of

14. This means that within this age group alone, over 167 million children were impacted by the pandemic.
3. The world collectively is learning how to cope in this time of upheaval and abrupt changes. As the custodian of this generation of learners, we are thrust into the situation of not just coping but ensuring that our education system and its stakeholders are agile enough to adapt and move forward. Hence, Malaysia believes this platform that we have today will allow us to reflect on our experiences in managing the education sector during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Malaysia's Response to COVID-19 on Education

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

4. Allow me to share some of Malaysia's experiences during the pandemic before I go into my perspective on the regional education landscape. Malaysia saw the surge of COVID-19 cases in mid-March 2020, resulting in the closure of schools and the implementation of movement restrictions nationally. The schooling of about 5 million¹ students was instantly interrupted. This meant that learning has become immediately detached from school, as students have to stay at home.
5. To ensure learning continues, albeit away from schools, the Ministry of Education (MOE) immediately tasked our 440 thousand² teachers

¹ Exact figure - 5,036,965 students

² Exact figure – 440,684 teachers

to turn to **alternative modes of delivery, that is, through home-based learning**. The aim is for students to continue learning at home, using worksheets and online platforms, among others. This change of modes demands teachers to familiarize themselves with digitally aided and online delivery methods; parents had to make adjustments to cope with their responsibilities as well as facilitating their children's learning; whilst students too had to adapt to changes to their learning environment.

6. Malaysia is fortunate because MOE has already developed a Digital Learning Platform in 2019. This platform facilitates the transition from conventional face-to-face approach to remote mode of teaching and learning. The platform offers free educational services across many applications, such as Google Classroom, and is accessible to all schools, teachers, and students. By the end of May 2020, 90% of teachers (approximately 376,000) and 59% of students (approximately 2.824 million) were actively utilizing the learning platform. Besides the Digital Learning Platform, there are other online learning platforms by the MOE that also cater to on-demand content for students from pre-school to secondary level. However, as a nation with a diverse education landscape, we are aware that there are still a large proportion of students who are experiencing difficulties in pursuing home-based learning due to lack of hardware and internet accessibility.
7. Although efforts to minimize academic loss are continuously scaled-up, we know that home-based learning is not a comprehensive replacement for all aspects of school learning. Not all subjects can be remotely taught at the same levels of effectiveness and quality.

To mitigate this issue, students' ownership of current technological equipment and connectivity, a suitable learning space and parents' cooperation are key aspects to the success of home-based learning.

8. In my interactions with other Ministers of Education during the Virtual Extraordinary Conference of Education Ministers of ICESCO Member States on COVID-19 last month, it is apparent to me that most countries are facing common concerns. These include **the reality of social and economic gaps, digital divide and the delivery system**. Despite the difficulties and challenges, many creative and innovative solutions were found to address the challenges.
9. We need to apply the strategies as well as incorporate the lessons learnt during the pandemic to help alleviate the disruptions and address the issues. We must ensure these challenges do not detract children and youth, particularly the under-privileged, from returning to school. As it is, we already have a staggering 15 million children and adolescents who are out of school across the region³. The challenge for us now is to bring them back to school safely.
10. Equally as important is how the pandemic has also caused a rethink in the approach used to conduct school assessment, including large-scale, high-stakes public examinations. The COVID-19 crisis clearly shows that reliance on public examination as the sole assessment method is a risky approach. Experiences during the pandemic suggest that the introduction of a more holistic assessment method is crucial. While all types of assessment of

³ UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre, 2019

student learning are important, formative assessments, through the empowerment of teachers, would be a good place to start. The use of formative assessment is also a sensible approach in the context of home-based learning, given that teachers and parents-turned-teachers need to understand whether students are absorbing the content delivered to them in formats that differ from business-as-usual.

11. COVID-19 is a public health issue that requires **multi-sectoral approaches to provide response, recovery and resiliency efforts**. In Malaysia's preparation to reopen schools, MOE worked closely with various ministries and agencies to formulate an effective Standard Operation Procedure. On 24th June 2020, Malaysia will begin the reopening of schools in stages, with strict safety guidelines in place to ensure the safety, wellbeing and resiliency of the children and the school community.
12. As we reopen our schools, holistic assessment of students coming in from the long hiatus will be crucial. This would assist in determining the progress of students after months of learning remotely at home and teachers can then develop lesson plans accordingly. In addition, the initial assessment will allow teachers to ascertain the socio-emotional development of students, which may be affected as a result of school closures.

Leading the Way Forward for SEAMEO

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

13. This pandemic has challenged everyone to think outside the box. SEAMEO has been observing the SEAMEO Southeast Asian Education Agenda 7 Priority Areas⁴ since 2015, and our work plans thus far has consistently adhered to these priority areas. We have to ask ourselves, “How can we do things better?” as the education landscape and ecosystem have definitely changed since this pandemic started.
14. One of the issues we need to face is our readiness in responding to crisis. It is necessary to re-evaluate our current mechanisms and strategies for disaster recovery and resilience, over and beyond our conventional practices focusing on natural disasters.
15. As SEAMEO goes into the development phase of the SEAMEO Strategic Plan 2021 – 2025, **it is also important that we incorporate the experiences and lessons learnt in this pandemic to plan an improved strategic direction for SEAMEO.** Thus, in charting the perspectives of SEAMEO post COVID-19, I would like to call upon the SEAMEO Secretariat to facilitate this effort, and I request the support of my fellow Ministers of Education of SEAMEO Member Countries, and the whole body of SEAMEO Units, Associate Member Countries, Affiliate Members and partners. This is an opportunity for us to foster greater regional collaborations.

⁴ SEAMEO Southeast Asian Education Agenda 7 Priority Areas:

1. Achieving universal early childhood care and education;
2. Addressing barriers to inclusion;
3. Resiliency in the face of emergencies;
4. Promoting technical and vocational education and training;
5. Revitalising teacher education;
6. Harmonising higher education and research; and
7. Adopting a 21st Century curriculum.

16. I am sure, my esteemed Colleagues, with our collective experience and expertise, we can work together to chart our way forward for education in this new normal. I wish everyone to stay safe and healthy.

On that note, I thank you.

1,600 words approximately

10:00 minutes delivery time

***Prepared by:
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