


Chapter 11

Education Reform to Attain SDG4: A Broad Overview

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores a small country's efforts to achieve the fourth United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG4). Many nations, including Brunei, strive to offer high-quality education. In doing so, policies and strategies have been introduced and put into effect in order to accomplish SDG4 targets. By thematically analysing educational policies and mapping them to all SDG4 targets, the current study sheds light on Brunei's progress toward SDG4. Overall, the findings indicate that Brunei is making steady strides toward providing high-quality education. It is also interesting to note that Brunei advanced despite the COVID-19 outbreak by implementing policies that ensure equitable access. In conclusion, through initiatives and ongoing partnerships, the Ministry of Education will work methodically and thoroughly to meet SDG4 targets by 2030, which calls for high-quality education as the basis of sustainable development and better living conditions. The discussion of findings in this chapter may assist policymakers identify policies that can close gaps in meeting SDG4 targets.

INTRODUCTION

The provision of quality education for all has become a priority for many countries. Quality education offers positive yields for the nation, and is a basic human right. Yet, this basic human right remains unattainable by many around the world due to various reasons caused by crises such as poverty. Such issues, worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic, have led to the widening economic and educational gap

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between the rich and the poor (Deaton, 2021; United Nations Development Programs, n.d.). This issue has prompted intra-national bodies such as the United Nations and individual countries to act on addressing these gaps through formulating education policies and enacting formal education reforms.

Brunei is no exception. Despite contemporary Brunei's relatively young age, having only attained its 39th year of independence from British Protectorate Status, a number of education policies and education reforms have taken place (Mail et al, 2022). The latest education policy introduced is the New Education System for the 21st Century, or *Sistem Pendidikan Negara Abad ke-21* (hereby SPN21) in 2008, and education for the gifted/talented students in 2009.

In Brunei, the right to quality education is not merely a basic human right. It is highly regarded as a necessity to achieve two of Al-Ghazali's Maqasid of the Sharia, which are the preservation and promotion of intellect and wealth. Brunei provides a unique context to study. It is a small nation that practices a national ideology called *Melayu Islam Beraja*, or Malay Islamic Monarchy (Sharbawi & Mabud, 2021), with Al-Ghazali's Maqasid of the Sharia - preservation and promotion of faith, life, intellect, progeny, and wealth (Abdul Aziz, 2019) as reference.

Quality education is explicitly stated in the vision and mission of Brunei's Ministry of Education. The Ministry envisions to provide equitable quality education to Brunei's future generation, guided by the values of Malay Islamic Monarchy, equipping them with knowledge and 21st century skills to be future ready citizens. This is consistent with the main aim of SDG4, that is, "to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." (UNESCO, n.d.). In addition, Brunei is a supporter of the Paris Declaration (Global call to invest in the futures of education, n.d.).

This study investigates how far Brunei's educational reforms and policies have progressed in attaining SDG4 goals. The main objective is to examine Brunei's efforts to meet the SDG4 targets. "How significantly do educational policies and initiatives in Brunei contribute to the achievement of SDG4 goals?" is the primary research question that guides the paper's overall direction. To establish the context for the current paper, a brief review of Brunei's most recent educational policy, the SDG4 targets, and the Global Education Agenda will now be discussed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Provision of Quality Education in Brunei Darussalam

Quality education has always been Brunei's priority and this is shown through the execution of three major educational policies (Mundia, 2010) over the past twenty-five years (1997-2022). The implementation of SPN21 brought substantial changes to educational practices throughout Brunei, aimed at achieving the Brunei Vision 2035 (*Wawasan Brunei 2035*). Three (3) strategic objectives were listed by Brunei's Ministry of Education 'to deliver holistic education to achieve fullest potential for all' (Ministry of Education, Brunei Darussalam, 2018, p. 9):

- A. Transform our organisation human resource towards a performance-driven culture
- B. Provide equal and equitable access to quality education
- C. Enhance shared accountability with stakeholders in the development of teaching and learning

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