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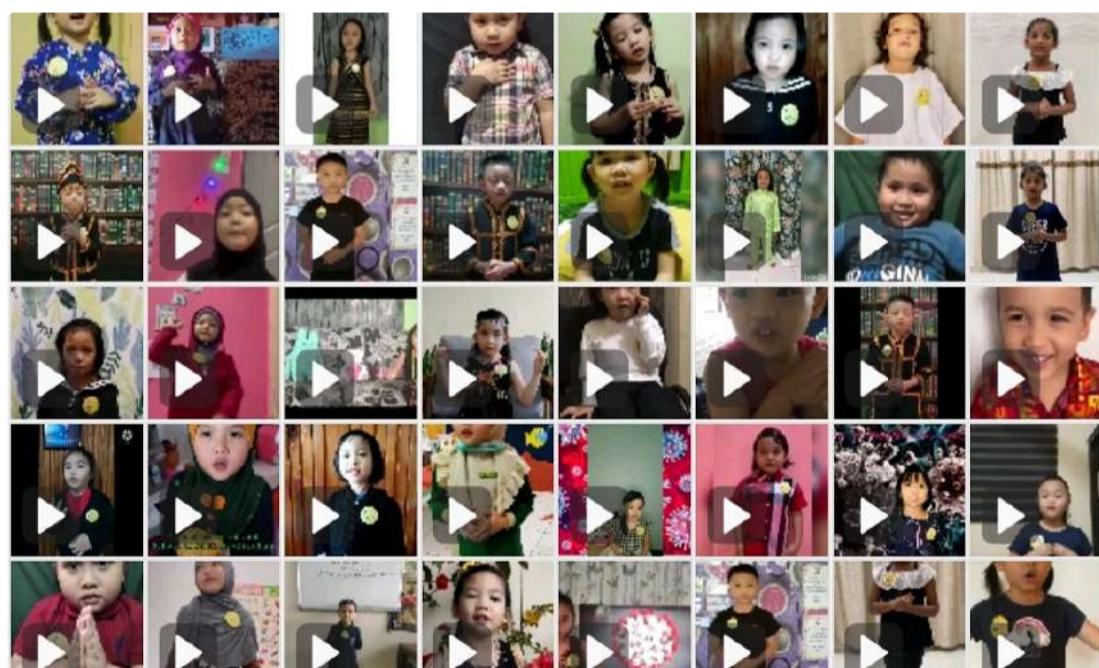
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Sabah-based society runs virtual Covid-19-themed contest for children to nurture English proficiency

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BY MILAD HASSANDARVISH



Over 20 children from the rural areas in Sabah take part in a virtual public speaking contest to improve their English language proficiency. — Picture courtesy of Sabah English Aspiration Society

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KUALA LUMPUR, March 4 — Many have adopted creative ways to help improve English language literacy among young pupils in the country.

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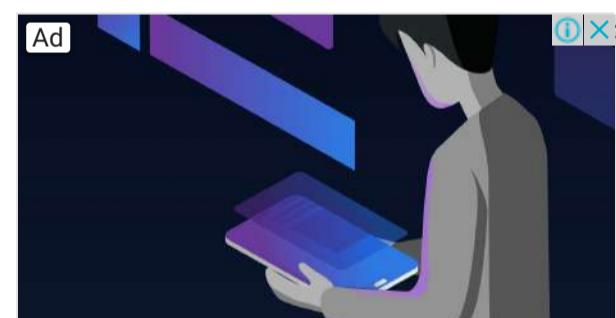
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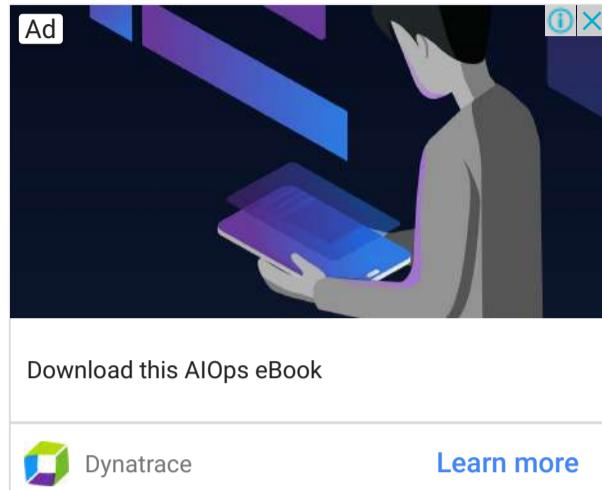
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One such event was a virtual public speaking contest among children aged between four and six from the rural areas in Sabah.

The contest, dubbed 4SY online contest, called on young children to submit a short video presentation about the topic: "Hi Vaccine, Bye Covid".



4SY stands for four minutes of Short Sessions of Speak Up and Stand Out for Youth.

The initiative organised by London-based neonatologist Dr Zainab Kassim and her husband, orthopaedic surgeon Dr Burhanuddin Busu, received 26 entries with 10 making it to the finals.

The final stage of the public speaking contest was assessed by a group of judges from Malaysia, UK, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, Canada, Ireland and the US.

Among the judges were consultant paediatrician and neonatologist Datuk Dr Musa Mohd Nordin and a group of young English language enthusiasts aged between seven and 18.

Five students, Oliver Ostern Fredoline, Claire Ravensca Clarence, Keerthika Suthahar, Mohamad Affan Darwish Mohamad Ayub and Dayang Nur Arissa Zara Batrisya Awang Marzuqi were named the finalists of the contest.

In their short video presentation, the finalists highlighted the challenges brought by the Covid-19 pandemic, its danger to the community and hopes with the vaccine roll-out.

The children also brilliantly touched on the issue of vaccine hesitancy and talked about the importance of vaccination in breaking the chain of infections.

The contest was supported by Maybank Asset Management and received donations from generous individuals.

The top 5 winners will also receive a trophy each sponsored by Dr Musa Nordin.

Speaking about the initiative, Dr Zainab said she was overwhelmed with the response from the children and their family as well as the sponsorship the project received.

She said they are planning to organise the public speaking contest every month until June.

"There are already children asking to register for the next one."

"This competition is already oversubscribed, and Seas is planning to expand it to a bigger scale."

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Neonatologist Dr Zainab Kassim and her husband, orthopaedic surgeon Dr Burhanuddin Busu have been advocating English language literacy among students living in rural areas in Sabah since 2017. — Picture courtesy of Sabah English Aspiration Society

Since then, the society has been actively organising English language camps, games and motivation talks for children in Sabah every year.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and travel restrictions, Dr Zainab said they were unable to proceed with the usual activities since last year.

"We had a brainstorming session and the idea of a virtual public speaking contest came up.

"We then thought of having multiple objectives such as improving the kids' English language proficiency, confidence building, and nurturing the public speaking skills among the students via this virtual contest."

Dr Zainab said they also decided to choose pandemic and health-related topics to educate the children about the current public health issues.

The event which wrapped up yesterday received positive feedback from both the participants and their parents.

One of the parents Devaki Narayanan thanked the society and said the contest has helped build her child's self-confidence.

"She's got more to learn, and she enjoys doing it which I believe will be more meaningful for her."



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