

# Paper on critically examining the educational policy of malaysia

[Education](#)



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Malaysia is one of the world's fastest growing economic regions, a rapidly growing nation in the heart of South East Asia. Within a period of two decades, it has succeeded in bringing about socioeconomic transformation of the society; from its architecture to its lifestyle, the Malaysian character speaks of a comfortable coexistence of its ethnic, cultural as well as religious diversity that continues to be a part of this country's charm and practical reality.

Malaysia's Vision 2020 steers the nation towards becoming a fully developed and industrialized country, a democratic society that is strong in religious and spiritual values, a society that is liberal and tolerant, scientific and progressive, innovative and forward looking. This goal is reflected in the mission of the Ministry of Education, that is: " To develop a world class quality education system which will realize the full potential of the individual and fulfill the aspiration of the Malaysian nation."

Education has provided a solid platform for country's political as well as economic stability with a view to establishing Malaysia as a regional center for academic excellence and turning education into a top quality export commodity. The Malaysian education system has equipped its young people with a level of competence and skills which has put them on par with the top students in some of the world's best universities, and at 93%, Malaysia's literacy rate is one of the highest in the world.

The paper aims at critically examining the educational policy of the Ministry of Education Malaysia, with description of social, governmental and economic environments in which the policy was developed. Effectiveness of

the policy will be evaluated and problems related to it will be further highlighted, with comparison to the one of the models from class lecture, i. e. the incremental model of public policy.

The foundation for the development of the national education system rests on the National Philosophy of Education, which states that: Education in Malaysia is an on-going effort towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonious, based on a firm belief in and devotion to God.

Malaysia being a multi-religious country, spiritual, religious and moral characteristics of the individuals are highly emphasized and encouraged, which is clear from the national philosophy as well. Such an effort is designed to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable and competent, who possess high moral standards, and who are responsible and capable of achieving high level of personal well-being as well as able to contribute to the harmony and betterment of the family, the society and the nation at large.

One of the most significant reforms initiated in recent years is the formulation of new legislation on education, which will affect the process of educational reforms from pre-school to higher education. The Education Act 1996 replacing the old one of 1961 aims at consolidating the national system of education and widen the scope of education in the country. All categories of schools, with the exception of international ones will be incorporated under the national system of education, which is characterized by the use of

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a common medium of instruction, a nationally excepted curriculum and common public exams. It will also cover such areas as upgrading and enhancing of pre-school education, teacher education, special education, private and technical education. It gives the education greater prominence, ensuring relevance and quality in the system of education.

The Ministry of Education is directly responsible for the organization, management and development of the education in the country and has a centralized system of educational administration headed by the Minister of Education. He is assisted by two Deputy Ministers of Education. The secretary-general of Education is responsible for the administrative matters, and the Director-General of Education is concerned with professional matters, and both are directly responsible to the Minister of Education.

" The Ministry was restructured in 1995" and under this new structure there are six principal Departments, such as Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education Department, Department of Higher Education which coordinates governance and policy formulation of public universities and higher education institutions in the country; Technical Education Department which is responsible for conducting research, planning and implementing technical and vocational programs; Department of Private Education which monitors and regulates the development of private education in the country; Department of Special Education; and Department of Islamic Education which supervises the Islamic and Moral Education at all public primary and secondary schools.

Besides these six Departments, there are several Divisions, agencies and statutory bodies within the Ministry of Education that are responsible for professional and administrative matters that are not handled by the six Departments. They can be classified under two broad categories, namely Professional and Administrative Divisions.

Under Professional Divisions are: Educational Planning and Research Division, which undertakes macro educational planning, and monitors the implementation of educational policies and programs; Educational Technology Division, which upgrades the quality of the teaching-learning process by providing educational media and technological services to support educational programs; Examinations Syndicate responsible for organizing, administrating and conducting all public examinations for schools; and Federal Inspectorate of Schools, providing professional supervision on the teaching-learning process of teachers and supervisory management to school principals.

Under Administrative Divisions, there are Organizational Development and Services Division, which oversees the implementation of the terms and conditions of the education service; Scholarship Division; Management Services Division responsible for handling general administrative matters for the Ministry of Education; Financial Division; Information Systems Division and International Relations Division.

The administrative structure is organized at four hierarchical levels, namely, national, state, district and school.

A system of committees is established in the Ministry of Education to facilitate inter-division and intra-division decision-making. The Minister chairs the Education Planning Committee, which is the highest decision-making body at the federal level concerned with educational policy adoption, adjustment and implementation. Policy matters in education with wider ramifications are referred to Cabinet before final decisions are made.

#### b) State Education Department (SED)

Those educational policies and plans made at the federal level are implemented at the state level through the State Education Department. It supervises the implementation of education policies, monitor national education programs, project and activities, as well as providing feedback to the central agencies for general planning.

District Education Offices are set up in almost all states, except Perlis, Malacca and the Federal Territories, in order to support the state level administrative system. It basically provides the linkage between schools and the SED.

At the level of school, the Headmasters/Principals, assisted by two or three Senior Assistants are responsible for providing professional as well as administrative leadership in schools. The Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA) foster better cooperation between the school and the community.

Malaysia provides 11 years of free schooling. Education is the responsibility of the Federal Government, and 20, 4% of the annual National Budget is

allocated for education. The national education system encompasses education beginning from pre-school to higher education.

Primary and secondary education is free but not compulsory. Excellence has been achieved through a carefully designed system that allows flexibility and room for individual approaches. This is really apparent at the pre-school and again at tertiary level. However primary and secondary education is highly structured, with a curriculum which enables the sound acquisition of fundamental knowledge and skills. The admission age to the first year of primary education is six. Most schools in the country are government or government-aided schools. The school year starts in January and ends in November. Students sit for common exams at the end of primary, lower secondary, upper secondary and sixth form levels.

The primary level covers a period of between five to seven years, the lower secondary three years, followed by two years at the upper secondary and another two years at the post secondary level. Tertiary education in both the academic and professional fields is provided by universities colleges and other public and private institutions of higher education as shown in Chart 1.

Pre-school education is part of the national education system under the Education Act, 1996. The aim of pre-school education is to provide a firm foundation for formal education at the later stage. They are run by government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGO's) as well as private institutions. Children generally begin their pre-school level between four and five years of age. Within the broad guidelines set by the Ministry of Education, a high degree of flexibility prevails in terms of teaching

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approaches and medium of instruction. The curriculum guidelines set by the Ministry of Education enables pre-school children to acquire sufficient basic communication, social and other positive skills in preparation for primary schooling.

Primary school begins at six years of age, and may be completed within five to seven years. Education at this level aims to provide the child with a firm foundation in the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, as well as emphasizing thinking skills and values across the curriculum. Even though education at this level is not compulsory, more than 99 percent of this age group are enrolled in primary schools nationwide.

Taking into consideration the multi-ethnic nature of its population, Malaysia has set up two categories of schools: the National and National-type schools. In the national schools the medium of instruction is the Malay language, whereas the medium of instruction in the national type schools is either Chinese or Tamil languages.

In both types of schools the Malay language is compulsory, and English is also taught as second language in addition to Chinese, Tamil and other indigenous languages.

The curriculum used at this level is the Integrated Curriculum for Primary Schools (ICPS) which consists of three main areas, namely, Communication, Man and his Environment, and Self Development. Two assessment examinations at year three and six are used to evaluate student



performance. Outstanding students at year three can opt to go straight into year five.

Secondary school offers a comprehensive education program. It aims to promote the general development of students by helping them to acquire knowledge, insight and skills from wide range of arts and sciences as well as vocational and technical subjects that provide a practical bias and hands-on approach to learning. Basically, the ultimate goal is to develop a strong foundation for life-long education as students are introduced to the beginnings of specialization. The medium of instruction is the Malay language, English, Tamil and Chinese are also widely taught as second language.

Following the Lower Secondary Assessment examination (PMR) at year three, students move into more specialized fields of study at the upper secondary level, based on choice and aptitude of the students, and are reevaluated at year five through the Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM) assessment examination. Some secondary schools offer the Malaysian Higher School Certificate (STPM) program which qualifies students for entry into the national universities, colleges and teacher training institutions.

Co-curricular programs are regarded as integral part of the school curriculum, and there are basically three types of co-curricular activities, namely, uniformed bodies, clubs and sports. Some co-curricular programs and activities are partly financed by government agencies and the private sector, and implemented at school, district, state and national levels. Various

co-curricular programs are organized to develop character, discipline and leadership qualities of the students.

Some of these programs are: School Youth Cadet Corp., School Fire Brigade Corp., and other leadership courses. The Youth is highly encouraged to indulge in various Entrepreneurial Programs, writing, speaking and debating competitions as well as cultural activities to create cultural awareness and literary appreciation among the students. Cultural exchange programs are held to promote closer ties and foster better relationship between students of different countries regionally and internationally.

Special education provides educational opportunities for pupils with special needs, such as the spastic, handicapped, visually impaired, hearing impaired as well as those with learning disabilities. Currently there are 2883 schools in the country which are equipped with both teaching staff and facilities to help integrate these children within the general school system. However, those needing more intensive care and attention attend 31 special schools.

The Education Act 1996 provides for special provision of special education in special schools or in regular primary and secondary schools. As a policy, the duration of schooling for children with special needs in a formal system should not be less than that accorded to pupils in regular primary and secondary schools. To ensure effective implementation of special education programs, the Special Teacher's Training College conducts courses for teachers of the visually and hearing impaired students.

By the way of shedding light on the policies adopted by the Ministry of Education of Malaysia, it would be expedient to evaluate their effectiveness, and give some solutions for future improvements. During the Sixth Plan period, i. e. 1991-95, the overall thrust of education was on expanding capacity and increasing access to all levels of education, strengthening the delivery system and improving the quality of education. Consequently, it resulted in increases in enrollment at all levels of education.

Recognizing the importance of pre-school education efforts were taken by the Ministry to increase facilities and improve quality of pre-school education. Efforts by both the public and private sectors including non-governmental organizations, resulted in an increase in pre-school centers from about 6, 960 in 1990 to 10, 350 in 1995. Correspondingly, the number of children in the 5-6 age category enrolled increased from 328, 800 in 1990 to 420, 600 in 1995, representing an increase of 27, 9 per cent. 10

Establishment of pre-school centers in the rural areas was very much emphasized, " of the total pre-school centers established by the Government, 80% were in rural areas, which benefited about 204, 100 rural children. 11

In primary education the main focus was on expanding capacity, improving existing facilities, and the quality of teaching and learning materials. In order to instill interest in science from an early age, the old existing syllabus were revised and some new ones were introduced. In order to accommodate increases in enrollment, reduce overcrowding, a total of 9, 530 additional classrooms were constructed. With hostel facilities provided in rural and

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remote areas, students were able to gain access to a more conducive learning environment.

In order to attract qualified and experienced teachers to serve in the rural and remote areas, an incentives were introduced for those those willing to teach in rural areas. Efforts were also undertaken to provide greater access to education for disabled children and those with learning difficulties. Despite efforts to improve the overall academic performance of primary school students, gaps in student's achievements between rural and urban schools still remained.

Enrollment at the secondary level in Government and Government aided schools increased by 23. 1 per cent from about 1. 3 million in 1990 to about 1. 6 million in 1995<sup>12</sup> as shown in Table 1. With the gradual implementation of the policy in the Sixth Plan, the transition rate from lower to upper secondary level improved from 68 per cent in 1990 to 83 per cent in 1995, while the participation rate at the upper secondary level increased from 50. Per cent in 1990 to 63. 7 per cent in 1995. <sup>13</sup> Due to increasing enrollment in urban schools and to reduce overcrowding, a total of 5, 20 additional classrooms was planned for construction. However, only 75% or 3, 960 classrooms were completed. Despite improvement measures bring undertaken, there were still concerns regarding student achievement and the proportion of students who chose science subjects at the upper secondary level.

In order to meet the manpower requirements of a rapidly growing economy, tertiary education was directed at increasing enrollment at the degree,

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diploma and certificate levels, particularly in science, medicine, engineering and other technical related courses.. Efforts were undertaken to increase intake into local public institutions of higher learning by expanding physical facilities of existing campuses and establishing new universities.

Opportunities for Bumiputera to pursue studies at the tertiary level were expanded at the Institut Teknologi MARA (ITM) where enrollment increased from 27. 500 in 1990 to 35. 480 in 1995. Enrollment at the degree, diploma and certificate levels increased by 52. 7 per cent from 100. 590 in 1990 to 153. 610 in 1995. In 1995 an estimated 50. 600 Malaysian students or 20 per cent of students in tertiary education were enrolled in various institutions overseas. 14

In order to meet the objective of education and skill training programs, which is to produce an adequate number of skilled and quality workforce to meet the manpower requirements of the country as well as produce citizens who are disciplined and possess high moral values and good work ethics, the following measures were suggested:

- to increase the capacity of existing institutions and establishing new ones, particularly in science, engineering and other technical fields;
- strengthen the delivery system through the provision of qualified and experienced teachers and instructors, as well as greater utilization of up to date technologies and computers so as to improve the overall quality;

- improve the management and implementation of education and training programs through enhancing managerial capability as well as strengthening the monitoring and evaluating system;
- strengthen research and development (R&D) within the existing institutions of higher learning as well as collaborating with local and foreign R&D institutions;
- increase science and technical manpower, particularly in R&D;
- provide appropriate incentives to increase enrollment in the science stream.
- improve educational facilities in rural areas so as to reduce dropouts from the schools, while at the same time helping the children to perform better;
- inculcate positive values and right attitudes as well as innovativeness, communication and analytical skills among students and trainees;
- encourage reemployment of retired teachers to overcome the problems with shortages in critical subjects;
- encourage more private sector investment in education and training to complement public sector efforts. 15

As far as the future development of pre-school education is concerned, the Government targets at participation of at least 65 per cent of children in the age of 5-6. A comprehensive policy will be formulated for the development of pre-school education, covering major aspects such as curriculum, physical

facilities and teacher training, in addition to further improvements of coordination and quality of pre-school education in the public and private sectors. In this respect the latter will be encouraged to provide more pre-school facilities. Furthermore, greater parental involvement in their children's education will be encouraged to increase awareness of parents on the importance of pre-school education in their children's development. New syllabus and teaching methods with emphasis to practical experience will be further developed.

As far as secondary education is concerned, the enrollment at the secondary level in Government and Government-aided schools is expected to increase by 25 per cent from about 1.6 million in 1995 to 2.0 million in the year 2000. The increase will be more significant at the upper secondary level with the extension of basic education from nine to 11 years. A total of 9,770 new classrooms will be built in order to accommodate the increase in enrollment and reduce overcrowding. 16 Teaching methods which are simple, practical and interesting will continue to be used in order to increase student's interest as well as improve their performance.

Appropriate incentives will be provided to science students so as to increase enrollment in the science stream. Taking into account the latest technological development, the use of computers in secondary schools will be extensively promoted to build a strong foundation for a computer literate society. Extensive monitoring and evaluation of student's performance at all levels will be undertaken, in addition to development of new teaching and learning approaches so as to enhance student's academic performance.