

Malaysia: Strategic Policy Thrusts of Educational Transformation for
Human Capital Development Towards 2020

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Currently, Malaysia is facing tremendous challenges from within and without due to the unanticipated effects of globalization, liberalization and development of the information technologies and communication systems. One of the critical challenges is how to steer and develop its future economy so as to base it upon the strategy of the knowledge industry, or in short, the K-Economy.

The document of the 9th Malaysia Plan reports (pp. 260) that investment in human capital would be given greater emphasis during the Plan period (2006-2010). This policy thrust was designed to sustain economic resilience and growth, drive knowledge-based economy as well as foster a community with an exemplary value system. This will be achieved through greater synergy and collaboration between the Government, the private sector and the community. In this regard, the human capital policy thrusts are:

- Undertaking comprehensive improvement of the education and training delivery systems.
- Strengthening national schools to become the schools of choice for all Malaysians to enhance national unity.
- Implementing measures to bridge the performance gap between urban and rural schools.
- Creating universities of international standing and ensuring that tertiary institutions meet the need of employers
- Providing more opportunities and access to quality education, training & lifelong learning at all levels.
- Nurturing and innovative society with strong S & T capabilities and the ability to achieve and apply knowledge.
- Straightening national unity and developing and society with a progressive outlook, exemplary value system and high performance culture as well as with an appreciation for tradition and heritage; and
- Enhancing the forum of engagement and consultation between the Government, Private Sector parents and community in human Capital development

In retrospect, for more than the past three decades, the education sector was able to demonstrate its rapid growth and development, principally in the provision of basic infrastructures and facilities and also in addressing the equally pertinent issues of accessibility, equity and quality education.

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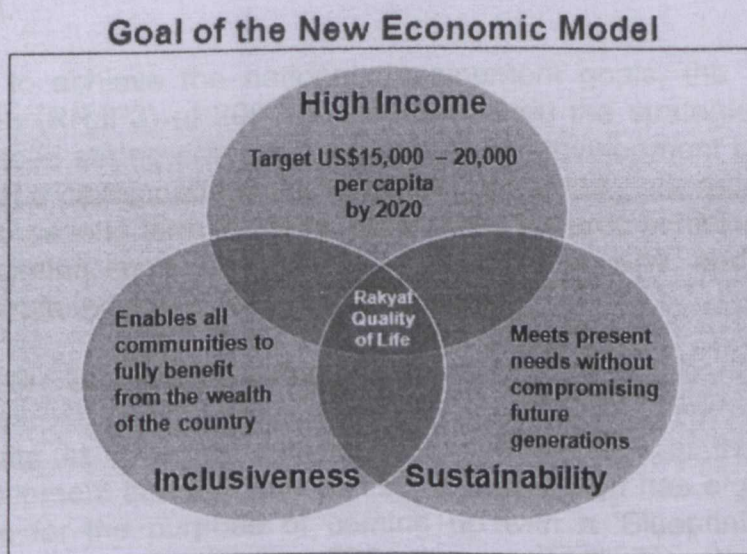
New Economic Model, 10th Malaysia Plan and Education

In the past several decades, Malaysia's national socioeconomic development programmes have been underpinned by the application of principles of the New Economic Policy (NEP) which was targeted to restructure society and eliminate poverty. While the policy has had its impact on the transformation of Malaysia's population for about thirty years, there are other issues that have not been well addressed particularly in terms of per capita income, stagnating productivity level, low labour productivity growth as well as declining annual GDP growth. Coupled with these issues are also factors that have been found to have contributed to the sluggish economic growth of the country.

The National Economic Action Council (NEAC) which was instituted by the government in the mid-2010 in preparation for 10th Malaysia Plan (2011-2015) had analysed and identified the most critical factors. They include, among others; decline of private investment in the economic sector, bureaucratic difficulties in relation to doing business in the country, existence of low value-added industries, persistence of low skill jobs and low wages for workers, insufficient initiatives of innovative and creativity in productive areas and, a general lack of appropriate skilled human capital.

Given such a scenario the government adopted a new socioeconomic development formula for the whole nation. It is labeled as the New Economic Model (NEM) that will address three principal targeted objectives: high income target of per capita by 2020 at US\$15000-20000; inclusiveness wherein all communities regardless of ethnicities, religious background and social status must fully benefit of the wealth of the country; sustainability in terms of meeting present needs without compromising future generation. The overall goal of the New Economic Model has been synthesized as the total improvement of quality of life of all Malaysians. The targets have been conceptualized by the NEAC as in the Figure 1 below.

Figure 1



Source: PEMANDU-Secretariat of the NEAC Economic Planning Unit
Prime Minister's Department 2010

The adoption of the strategy is important in order to ensure that the country would not only be economically competitive in the global arena but also would progress along a sustainable development strategy in all sectors of the economy through the year 2020. This challenge demands that the country develop its human capital potentials to the maximum, specifically to enhance its comparative and competitive edge in the global economy, and towards achieving the goal of a developed nation in 2020.

Education has been acknowledged as the principal vehicle to develop the qualities of resilience and resourcefulness of the human capital potentials. In this regard, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education are expected to focus on developing and expanding their respective systems toward achieving higher level of quality student outputs. The strategy is to develop and provide quality educational programs that will produce knowledgeable, skillful and ICT literate citizens with good moral values and attitudes based on the National Philosophy of Education, while at the same time able to fulfill the aspirations of the individual self, family, society and the nation in general.

Strategic Policy Approaches

The formulation of the educational development policy and strategy of the 9th Malaysia Plan (9th MP) takes into consideration of the generalized policy and planning strategies of Vision 2020 concept, the principal thrusts of the Long-Term Third Perspective Plan (RRJP3), and the planning policies of the Ministry of Education in the development plans between 2001-2010.

The national educational development in the Ninth Malaysia Plan (2006-2010) also takes due consideration of the national Vision strategy. It aims at creating a resilient citizenry, and a society based on a set of characteristics: social equality and justice, sustainable economic growth, perseverance in the face of international competition, knowledge-based economic development, enhancement of the human capital development, and the continuation of policy of sustainable development of the environment.

In order to achieve the national development goals, the Third Long-Term Perspective Plan (RRJP3) of 2001-2010 has defined the strategies, programs and projects that placed strong emphasis on qualitative development towards achieving the aspirations of a developed nation. In this regard, quality educational programmes will be continued as long term strategy, particularly towards achieving the over-riding goals of restructuring society, reduction of absolute poverty, and the provision of quality human capital and workforce for the nation.

Education and the Blueprint Strategy

In order to relate its role and function with the strategy of the national socio-economic development strategy, the Ministry of Education has organized dialogues and discussions for the purpose of coming up with a 'Blueprint' for Educational Development' for the years covering 2001 through 2010. The Blueprint apparently covers the educational policy and strategy in terms of the national as well as its development goals within the context of the National Philosophy of Education.

The 'Blueprint' is aimed at ascertaining that every citizen of the country benefit from the policy of access to quality education. The aim is also to develop their individual potentials as a whole in a well integrated and balanced mould in line with the aspirations of the National Education Philosophy, and to generate in them the elements of creativity and innovations within the context of the culture of knowledge creation, science and technology, and life-long learning.

The final objective of the Blueprint is to provide an efficient system of world class education, and to transform Malaysia into a center of educational excellence through upgrading the quality of the national education system to the international level benchmark. The planning and implementation of the educational development strategy at the current stage was, thus, based on a set of principal development thrusts, which have been continuously used since the early Five-Year Plans through the 9th Malaysia Plan. There are six principal policy thrusts adopted in the Blueprint. There are:

- i) Building of a Malaysian Nation towards enhancement of national unity, the creation of national identity and patriotism, and development of human resource in alignment of national needs.
- ii) Developing human capital that have the knowledge, skills and noble human values.
- iii) Strengthening of the national schools by ensuring that all national primary and secondary schools become the first choice of Malaysian parents.
- iv) Closing of the educational gap between locations, socio-economic status and students' level of ability.
- v) Improving the teaching profession through enhancement of teacher quality, career and welfare.
- vi) Enhancing the educational institutions in the country toward excellence

In essence, the Blueprint strategy that was developed in the 9th Malaysia Plan (2001-2010) was designed to address the following strategic development parameters:

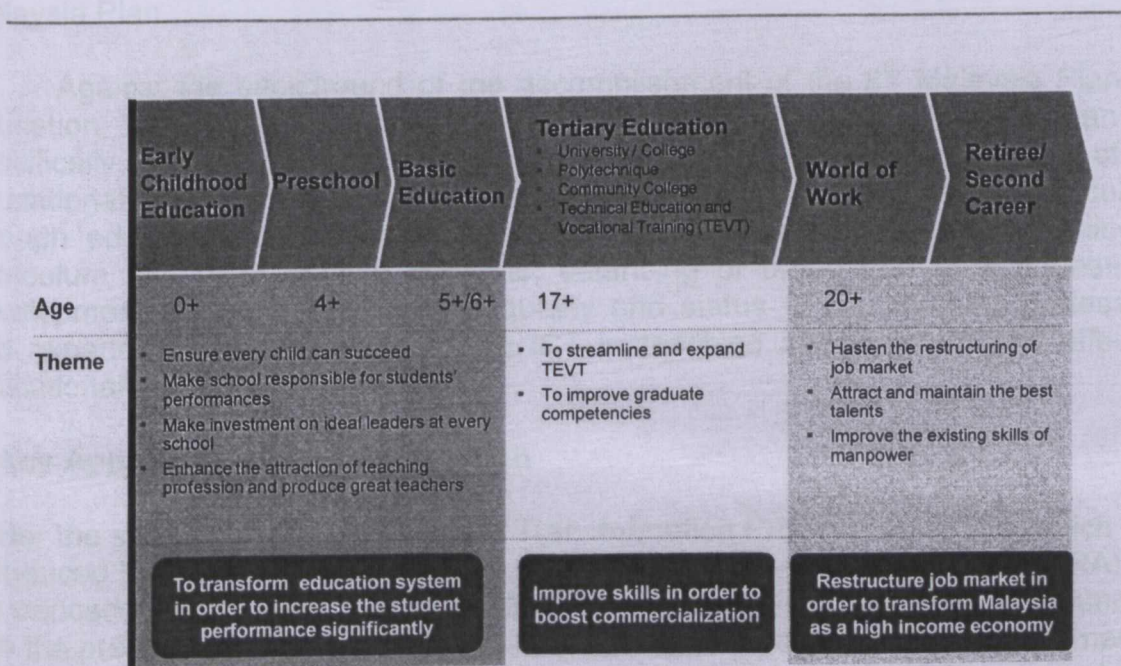
- i) Accessibility of all children to quality education
- ii) Equity issues in education
- iii) Quality of educational programmes
- iv) Efficiency in the management and organization of the education system

Implementation Strategy

To ensure a successful implementation of the Plan, since the year 2010, several new strategies and action plans have been identified for all levels of the structure of the education system, so that all Malaysian citizens of the school-going age have the opportunity to attend schooling up to twelve years on the bases of the principles of access, equity and quality.

The strategy to improve accessibility is focused on the efforts of ensuring an increased percentage of the young citizens to benefit from education from pre-school through secondary level of education. The emphasis on which this strategy is hinged on covers the sub-strategies of increasing and improving the infrastructure and educational facilities, increasing the participation rates and reducing student dropout rates, as well as improving and expanding the varied educational programs to cater the diversity of student populations especially in terms of aptitudes, abilities, inclinations and interests. The structure of integrated framework of human capital development is summarised in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2
An Integrated Framework of Human Capital Development



SOURCE: Economy Planning Unit

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To improve equity in education, a strong focus is given to the sub-strategy of narrowing the 'education gaps' of urban and rural schools, the variations between sexes and ethnic groups. Strong emphasis is also focused on the sub-strategy of ensuring schools and educational institutions to have all of the infrastructure and physical facilities, headmasters, principals and management staff, teaching staff, adequate teaching and learning materials, sufficient educational curricular and co-curricular programs and assistance, so that students are equitably accessible to well organized learning environment.

In addressing the issue of quality education, emphasis is directed to the sub-strategy of ensuring quality for all inputs of the whole system of education through programmes, projects and activities and thereby quality student outputs as the products of the system. The strategy to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in educational management encompasses a wide range of sub-strategies. Effective and efficient delivery systems in all aspects of the management of institutions, data

management and information systems, programmes and project monitoring, evaluations, research and development have been the major emphasis that the Ninth Malaysia Plan would address itself in the sub-action plans.

Fundamental Bases of Planning and Implementation

The planning and implementation principle of programmes and projects for the 9th Malaysia Plan takes into consideration two principal factors. Firstly, programmes and projects of the 8th Malaysia Plan, and its continuation in the 9th Malaysia Plan, including of committed projects that have been deferred and projects that have been implemented through deferred payments; secondly, programmes and projects of the 9th Malaysia Plan and projects under the 8th Malaysia Plan that have not been started, but have been revised in terms of their needs and priorities in the 9th Malaysia Plan.

Against the background of the accomplishment of the 8th Malaysia Plan, for education, the priority programmes and projects under the 9th Malaysia Plan are specifically focused toward addressing the critical six policy-related issues of the educational development blue print. These are: building up strong citizenship culture through education; enhancement of quality of national schools; strengthening of curriculum and co-curriculum contents; balancing of urban and rural educational development disparities; raising the quality and status of the teaching profession; and expanding the application of the ICT in teaching and learning; and effective educational management systems.

Policy Approach: NKRA in Education

Under the strategy of the Government Transformation Programme (GTP), which was introduced by the government in 2010, four "National Key Results Areas (NKRA)" for the education sector have been identified. The strategy was designed in conjunction with the preparation of the 10th Malaysia Plan in order to expedite the achievement of the qualitative goals of Vision 2020. However, it should be noted that not only the issue of equal opportunity of access to every level of education should be efficiently provided to all Malaysian citizens, but it must also be in tandem with the philosophy of quality at every level of schooling---preschool, primary, secondary, and tertiary.

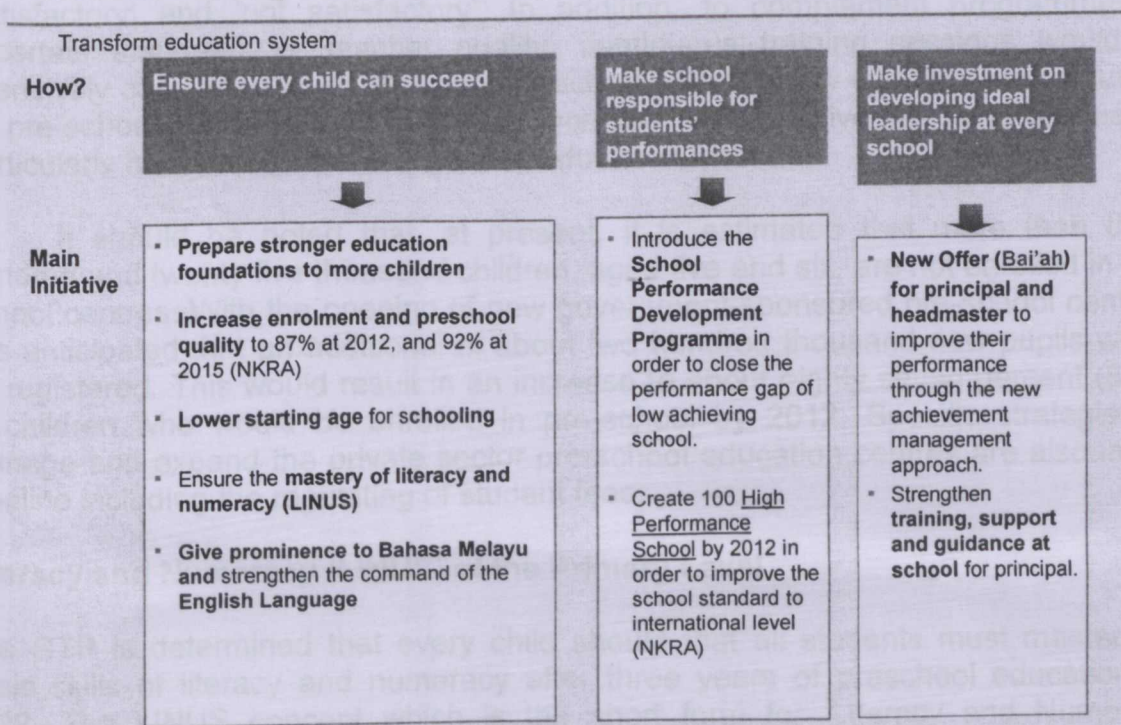
In short, the quantitative expansion and development of the education system has to be underpinned by the qualitative factor since these two factors are inseparable in any process of educational transformation. The strategy of applying the NKRA also suggests that rates of student enrollment or participation (an indicator of input) and achievement (an indicator of output) need to be maximized while the rates of failure and dropouts minimized. All aspects of the measurable indicators, principally educational rates of participation, literacy, achievement, and dropout rate have to be consistently monitored and continuously improved. All of these issues have to be evaluated against the backdrop of management and leadership behavior of school principals and headmasters.

It cannot be denied that NKRA for education is an important catalyst for the transformation process of the education system. If well implemented, it should benefit generally all students. In this regard, the NKRA have identified four sub-

indicators that need to be given serious attention, viz. 1) pre-school, 2) educational literacy and numeracy (3R's and linguistic communication), 3) high performance schools (curriculum and co-curriculum activities), 4) new deal for principals and headmasters. Elements of the transformational initiatives are conceptualized in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3

The transformation of the educational system at school level in order to improve students' performance significantly (1/2)



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Source: Economic Planning Unit

One of the Sub-Indicators of the NKRA in Education is in the area of the pre-school. Within the pre-school Transformation Concept, several indicators of standard have been identified. They are:

National Preschool Curriculum Standard

- Introduction to literacy, and numeracy
- Introduction to basic thinking and problem-solving skills
- Inculcation of confidence and positive attitudes
- Practice of safe living and healthy life
- Practice of self-reliance, cooperation and give-and-take attitude
- Promotion of creative ideas and appreciation towards arts and music
- Exhibit characteristics of inquisitiveness and responsibility
- Readiness to progress to the primary school

Under the NKRA strategy, the move towards standardizing the assistance to all government pre-school centres to ensure quality education has assumed a policy priority. Hence, it is envisaged that all government pre-school centres will continue to receive per capita fund assistance and equipment support. The amount of financial allocation, though, will vary between centres, according to regional needs, higher for Sabah and Sarawak pre-school than that of the Peninsular.

The NKRA strategy also involves new initiative to ensure quality education. The initiative will formalize the approach of Key Performance Indicators (KPI). This is to ensure quality delivery process of pre-school education and the criteria of standards achieved would include concepts of 'excellent performance', 'good', 'satisfactory' and 'not satisfactory'. In addition, to complement programmes to ascertain standards of teacher quality, continuous training sessions would be intensively conducted to all pre-school teachers. As a policy direction for the future, all pre-school teachers that would be recruited will be university level graduates, particularly from the Malaysian Teacher Education Institutes.

It should be noted that, at present, it is estimated that more than three hundred and twenty five thousand children, aged five and six, are not enrolled in pre-school centres. With the opening of new government-sponsored pre-school centres, it is anticipated that an additional of about two hundred thousand new pupils would be registered. This would result in an increase to about eighty seven percent (87%) of children who would be enrolled in pre-school by 2012. Specific strategies to manage and expand the private sector pre-school education centres are also in the pipeline including the regulating of student fees.

Literacy and Numeracy (LINUS) at the Primary Level

The GTP is determined that every child should that all students must master the basic skills of literacy and numeracy after three years of preschool education by 2012. The LINUS concept which is the short form for 'Literacy and Numeracy Domain' area is a remediation programme which is designed to ensure that students master the basic skills of literacy and numeracy in Malay Language (Bahasa Malaysia) at grade three of their primary schooling. While the programme is targeted at students with learning problems and difficulties in respect of the Three R's, there are six sub-strategies of the LINUS programme which would target at ninety percent of the relevant cohorts and they are as follows:

- 1) Student Domain (Year 1, Year 2, Year 3)
- 2) Development of educational learning materials
- 3) Teacher pedagogical skills enhancement
- 4) School and community awareness programme
- 5) Evaluation, supervision and monitoring
- 6) Development of FaciLINUS (LINUS Facilitator)

The LINUS programme would focus on early interventions (Year 1 through Year 3) for skills of literacy and numeracy. It is noted that previously the intervention Programme has primarily focused on literacy skills or is conducted at Year 4; remediation teacher-student ratio would be improved to 1:15 from one remediation

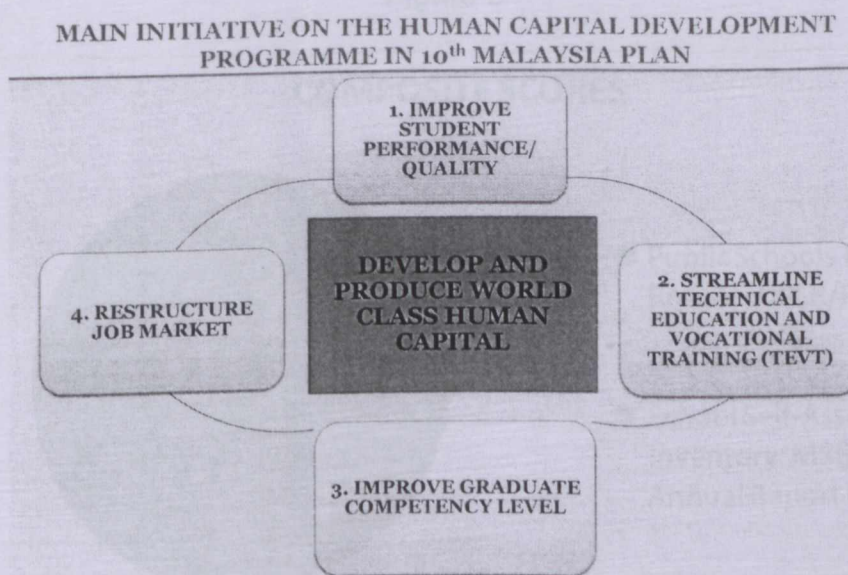
teacher for each school. The Quality Assurance monitoring and management role would be undertaken by the Education District Office and the School Inspectorate. Previously such function was sole centrally conducted. Under the new policy approach, best and excellent teachers would be assigned to such classes; where as previously, such teachers were assigned to teach at the examination class at Year 6.

Several other strategies have also been considered and new initiatives to enhance the successful implementation of the LINUS programme have been identified. These include the creation of FaciLINUS team at the District Education Office; the deployment of best and experienced teachers under the direct purview of the 154 Offices, to be supported by a Team of 2-10 LINUS teachers per District, with a ratio of 1 FaciLINUS for 30 Schools within a given District. The role of the professionally trained LINUS teachers is to assist the State Education Office in delegating and streamlining the LINUS programme with respective Headmasters as well as in providing training, mentoring and capacity building activities for remediation teachers with the concurrence of the school management. They are also expected to assist the related primary schools with the task of designing plans for corrective actions.

High Performance Schools Approach

Under the concept, the plan is to enhance and promote schools which have attained excellent performance record. The approach would be undertaken under the strategic quality enhancement programme, especially through the provision of greater autonomy and accountability and by allowing the schools to generate innovations in managing the centralized curriculum and education service personnel. The principal aim in the long run is to produce excellent student output of international standards in respective fields of competence. The main initiative on the human capital development as reflected in 10th Malaysia Plan has been conceptualized by the Economic Planning Unit of the Prime Minister Department is reflected in the following Figure 4.

Figure 4



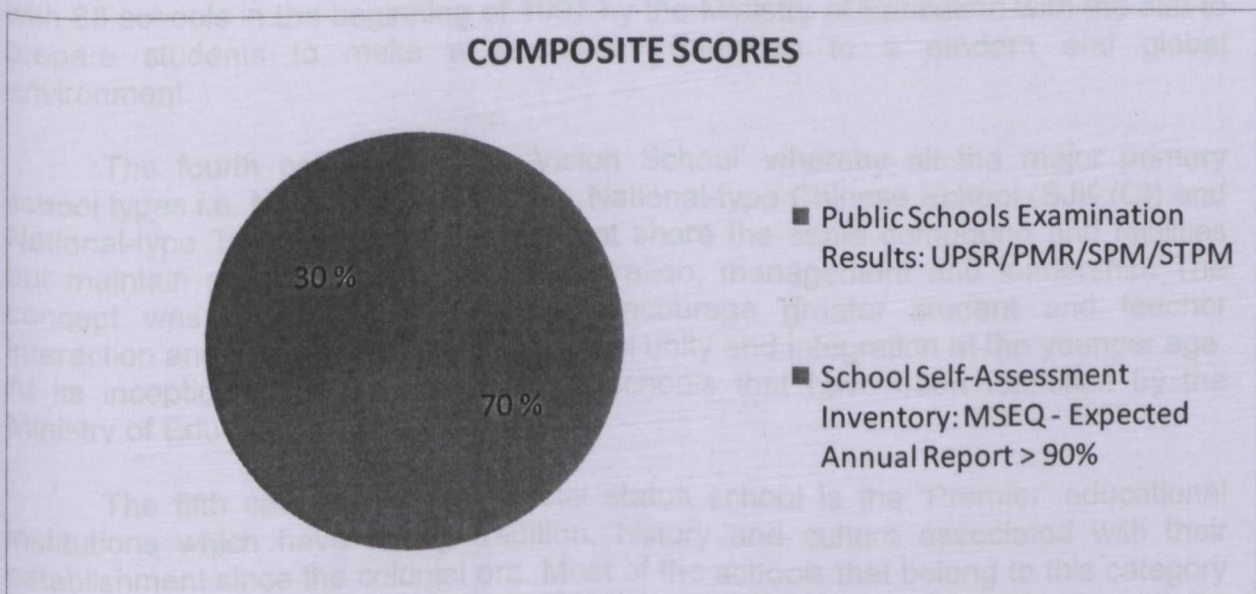
Source: Economic Planning Unit

While the overall goal is to narrow the gaps between schools in terms of standards of performance, the underlying strategic assumption is to provide inspirations to those schools which have thus far not been able to address the issue of under-performance nationally and internationally. The criteria of selecting this school-type is comprised of two principal indicators; firstly academic excellence and secondly Verification Score through the Malaysian System of Education Quality (MSEQ). Related to these two indicators is a set of sub-criteria, which include, namely Ideal Personality Achievement of Individuals and Influential leaders; achievement and recipient of national awards and accolades; linkages and partnerships for credit transfers and student exchange with world class institutions of similar levels internationally; institutions are used as benchmarks for national achievement standards.

In relation to the indicators above, the assignment of school leaders would be based on absolute achievement scores as well as improvement scores. Incentives to principals and headmasters who could surpass the targeted achievement level would be in the form of cash or equivalent to be shared to the staff or attachment programmes with world class institutions for schools which have consistently demonstrated the high performance record, or quicker promotions to higher scales and the award of appreciation certificates.

Labeled as the 'New Deal' in terms of reward and incentives to excellent principals and teachers, this approach has generated a lot interest as well as controversies among educators in the country. For example, the main issue that has been very often debated by the general public is on financial rewards to individual principals and teachers who have successfully achieved the goals that have been determined by the composite scores of the Malaysian System of Education Quality (MSEQ). In order to achieve the rewards, the composite scores are based on the following 2 dimensional indicator; public schools examination results and schools self-assessment inventory:

Figure 5



Source: Ministry of Education

A specific strategy to enhance the quality of education in schools in order not only to achieve the targeted national key performance indicators but also to address clear performance differences between schools has been adopted. This strategy relates to the creation of special schools that have been accorded special status in terms of clear-cut definition as well as specific goals and objectives. While small in number within each classified status, they would become the impetus to be modeled by other schools of their category. The special status is a motivational factor for other schools of their characteristics to emulate.

The classification of these schools include: the 'High Performance School' (HPS). These are schools which have ethos, character and a unique identity quality which enable it to excel in all aspects of education. Its specific goals and objective are to promote innovation and creativity in the management of schools and to improve students' productivity. Wholly owned by the Ministry of Education, in 2010 the number of schools in this category is 20 at the inception stage.

The second category is the 'Cluster School' which is aimed to be the centre of educational excellence (within each school grouping) focusing on niche areas such as music, sports, ICT, science, language and other disciplines of studies. Its principal objective is to accelerate the creation of excellent primary and secondary educational institutions in the country and to develop them as exemplary schools within or outside the cluster. Also wholly owned by the Ministry of Education, the number that had been identified was 120 beginning in 2007. This number is expected to increase as years go by.

The third category of the special status school is the 'SMART School'. The definition of "Smart School" is one that uses a technology platform as a medium on which distance learning and specific teaching expertise are made. The Malaysian Smart School is one of the nine flagships which were premised on the strong belief that information and communication technology is a key enabler to imparting knowledge. As a learning institution, the approach of pedagogy has systematically been reinvented especially in the area of the teaching and learning methods as well as improvement of leadership and the school management process. It was designed with 88 schools in the beginning of 1997 by the Ministry of Education with the aim to prepare students to make a successful transition to a modern and global environment.

The fourth category is the 'Vision School' whereby all the major primary school types i.e. National Schools (SK), National-type Chinese School (SJK (C)) and National-type Tamil School (SJK (T)) that share the same compound and facilities but maintain a separate school administration, management and leadership. The concept was introduced in order to encourage greater student and teacher interaction and to foster the spirit of national unity and integration at the younger age. At its inception in 2004, there were 8 schools that have been identified by the Ministry of Education.

The fifth category of the special status school is the 'Premier' educational institutions which have strong tradition, history and culture associated with their establishment since the colonial era. Most of the schools that belong to this category are over 100 years old and they have been selected as premier schools due to

records of achievements in the academic and co-curricular fields. The objective of classifying this school as Premier institutions is to recognize not only their academic and co-curricular excellence but also to ensure they continuously produced future national leaders, scholars, scientists, corporate figures, professionals and sportsmen. Highly recognized by the Ministry of Education and the Malaysian community at large, the number of these special schools in 2006 is only 4.

The sixth category is the type of school labeled as 'PINTAR'. It is an acronym to indicate the status of the school that has the potential to become excellent and high-performing. It is organized along the principle of collaborative social responsibility initiative by Government-Linked Companies (GLCs) and Malaysian private corporations. The strategy is designed in order to foster higher academic excellence, especially among the underprivileged, disadvantaged and underserved schools nationwide. Its principal objective is to enhance education levels in the schools through greater participation of concerned companies. The number of schools that belongs to this category at its inception in 2006 is 212, out of which 33 are under the purview of corporate organization called PINTAR.

The seventh category in the special status school is 'Trust School' which was established in 2011. The principal thrust of this category of schools is that it is jointly managed by the private and public sectors in order to especially improve performance and student outcomes. Spanning across socio-economic and demographic dimension, the objective of this status school is to create step-change improvement in all aspects of the education through interventions of public and private sector expertise. Organized under AMIR Foundation in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, the number of schools beginning 2011 is 10.

Conclusion

National educational transformation is undoubtedly linked to national development policies, strategies and priorities. The challenges of Vision 2020 demand that Malaysians be able to rise to meet the global challenges of the 21st Century. The development of quality workforce and resource of highly qualified, innovative and creative human capital is based on the model of the 'glocalized' human capital development programmes. Not only that the strategy has become a top priority, but the task of creating such a workforce has to depend on several critical factors and challenges. The overall strategy is to ensure that there is a greater commitment and a more effective involvement of the private sector in order to complement as well as augment the government's initiatives in the transformation process.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR/WRITER



Hussein Ahmad (birth date: 1942) has a varied and illustrious career development from 1964 till the present. His initial tertiary education began at the Malayan Teachers College, Brinsford Lodge, Wolverhampton, England (1961-63) and subsequently he obtained his B. A. (Hons) from the University of Malaya (1969). He has an M.A (Education, 1975), M.A. (Sociology, 1977) and a Ph. D (Education, 1979), all of them are from Stanford University, California, USA. His professional areas of specialisation cover the broad field of education, specifically in policy studies and evaluation, research in the sociology of educational development, educational planning, management and leadership. He also has vast teaching experience from primary, secondary, university to post graduate level. He taught for several years as Associate Professor, and was Deputy Dean at the Centre of Educational Studies, Science University of Malaysia, Penang (1985). He has also held various leadership positions, including Principal of secondary school, Director, Aminuddin Baki Institute of Educational Leadership and Management; Director in the Department of National Unity (1986-88), Deputy Director-General in the National Civic Bureau (1992-1994) in the Prime Minister's Department before being appointed prior to his retirement as Director of Education Policy, Planning and Research Division, Ministry of Education (1994-97).

He has received several excellence service awards from the Education Ministry and the University of Malaya, including Kuala Lumpur Teacher Award (2003), National Teacher Award (2006), the Pahang State Award which carries the title Dato' (2006), and the Diploma of Honour, UNESCO (1997). He is currently a Member, Council of Consultant Fellows, International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), UNESCO, Paris. In 1977, Hussein has represented Malaysia as Permanent Representative/Ambassador to UNESCO, Paris (1997-2000). In 2001-2009, he was appointed Professor at the Institute for Principals Studies, Faculty of Education, University of Malaya. Currently, he holds the position of Senior Research Fellow (Visiting) at the Institute of Educational Leadership, and also as Associate of the International Institute of Public Policy and Management (INPUMA). As a training expert and education consultant with vast national and international experience, he has provided valuable consultancy services for the government of Malaysia, international organizations and several developing countries. Hussein has published several books, book chapters, monographs, research-based papers and journal articles, both in the Malay Language and English, in the related fields for local and international journals. He has taught post graduate courses for several years including: Educational Planning, Policy Studies in Education, Human Resource Management in Education, Curriculum Leadership, Gender and Public Policy, and Doctoral Research Seminar for local and international students and participants from developing countries.