

# Mission of Public Education in Malaysia

## THE CHALLENGE OF TRANSFORMATION

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**Hussein Ahmad**



# Mission of Public Education in Malaysia

To,

Yang Amat Berbahagia  
Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad  
Chairman,  
Human Life Advancement  
Foundation and the Fourth  
Premier of Malaysia.

From,

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Highest regards and  
respect, Sir!

Jamil  
24/7/201



TUN DR. MAHATHIR MOHAMAD

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In memory of my late father,  
Haji Ahmad and my mother, Rahmah

and

to my wife, children and grandchildren...

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO

the unsung heroes of the Malaysian teaching profession  
who have tirelessly rendered their services in pursuit of  
the noble aims of education



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# Introduction

Education is a valuable social commodity that can transform human lives from one stage of development to another. Given a supportive and conducive socio-political, economic and cultural environment, it not only can help to shape and mould the intellectual, social, spiritual and competency skills of individuals, but it can also transform a nation as a whole from a traditional and backward context of existence into a modern and progressive state of development.

It is well acknowledged that, from the perspective of history, an educational transformation process does not happen in a vacuum, nor can it happen within a short period of time. As shown by the experiences of many educational systems in several advanced countries, in order to remain sustainable over time, the transformation process of the public education system has to face wide-ranging challenges from within and without. In addition to that, they may have to overcome, various stages of the change process, reform or adjustment over a long period of time.

Along a similar line of thinking, the process of transforming an education system does not necessarily progress along a random or linear model of development on the pathway toward development without exposing itself to unexpected “hiccups” of issues and challenges which may bring about unanticipated consequences. The policy, mission and legal aspects of an education system which set the agenda and guidelines of the transformation process, have to be continuously reviewed. Such reviews need to be undertaken to ensure that the related aspects of the transformation process are in alignment with the national aspirations of the citizens as a whole, while at same time do not lose sight of the changing demands of the globalisation phenomenon.

This book examines and analyses the historical bases and fundamental challenges of policy, reform, mission, and transformation process of the public education sector in Malaysia through several decades of its development. In analyzing the transformation process, several major issues and questions arising from various stages of the developmental process in the past decades are critically examined

against the backdrop of the socio-cultural, economic and political development of the country. In this regard, several relevant questions on the transformation process of the Malaysian educational development are critically discussed.

Some of the basic questions are: What are the strategies that were adopted in the early years of the transformation process of public education in Malaysia? What impacts have the transformation process achieved thus far? Is there a disjuncture between the transformation process of the early education strategies and that of the present and the future? What is the current status of the transformation process? Is it progressing smoothly along the road of planned continuous change and development or is the momentum of the transformation process in a state of confusion of what is often termed as 'change dilemma' at the threshold? Basically, these are important questions that the book tried to examine and discuss.

In Chapter 1, the focus is on the sociological issue of an educational segregation process and inequality of opportunity along ethnic lines, beginning from the early days of the British colonial era. With a brief history of the country as back drop, the Chapter traces the social origins and migration patterns of particular ethnic groupings, and within and between-ethnic variations of the whole population fabric of the Malaysian society. As often discussed in many books of social history and anthropology on the subject, the ethnic separation policy of the Malayan population then was further exacerbated by an educationally segregated schooling system. The effect of the segregated policy implementation of the colonial system gradually saw the emergence of socially enclosed socio-cultural environments based on clearly defined major ethnic groupings of Malay and the Bumiputera, Chinese and Indian living in three major regions of the country: Peninsular Malaysia, Sarawak and Sabah. The Chapter concludes with a discourse on the historic formulation of a fundamental policy principle toward racial unity and national integration through education, within the context of the establishment of the national and the national-type primary schools, and the unified national secondary school system that became the precursor of the current existing system.

In the post independence period, Chapter 2, the concept of educational opportunity which assumes the main thrust of the transformation process is examined. The Chapter analyses the change process from a divisive policy to an integrated system of education. In this Chapter, the discussion which is focused on the initial stages of policy reform, examines the outcomes of the foundational policy reports of education by the Abdul Razak Education Committee (1956) and the Abdul Rahman Talib Education Review Committee (1960), whi

were enacted as the Education Ordinance (1957) and the Education Act (1961), respectively. Policy issues pertaining to ethnic participation in the primary and secondary school systems, curriculum re-orientation, patterns of enrolment, school dropouts, national level examinations system, upper secondary school system, student access to secondary education, class size and student-teacher ratio are analysed in some depth. The discussions basically relate to the strategies of addressing the issue of educational opportunity and equity that persisted through the 1960's.

Educational opportunity and ethnic participation are important indicators of development strategy of the educational transformation process in a developing economy. However, in the 1970's, an equally important dimension that needed examination is the debate on the controversy of ethnically-related issue of under-performance of students and the differential levels of achievement of the diverse student populations who attended the primary and secondary schools in the national system. In Chapter 3, the achievement issue is empirically examined through a systematic sociological analysis using a reliable set of quantitative data from a cross-national survey.

The data that was collected in 1972-1974 as part of a larger education research project of the government concerning 'A Study of Opinions about Education and Society' became an invaluable source of information on the state of affairs in terms under-performance of students. The analysis of the issues was contextualised against a set of determinant variables, in particular, in terms of effects of "significant others", the influence of factors of ethnicity, school-type, socio-economic status, classroom streaming, location of schools in Peninsular Malaysia. The major findings of this analysis apparently provide a useful platform for a greater understanding of the dynamic impacts of the multiple set of independent variables. Given the varying impacts of the factors, the classroom streaming variable by ability, stood out as a critical determinant of student achievement. That the classroom streaming variable remains as a pervasive phenomenon in the school system through the early decades till the present has far reaching implications in terms of the practice of educational management and instructional supervision.

In Chapter 4, the focus of the discussion is shifted to another dimension which has a meaningful significance in the context of development of the national mission of education and in relation to the educational transformation process in the 1980's. This is the dimension of the institutionalization of the policy research culture in education as recommended by the Cabinet Committee Report (1979). Research activities became pervasive throughout the 1980's as a basis

of ensuring a greater sense of rational decision-making process and strategic planning development. During this decade, not only that the role of policy research practice and activities became an important component in the development of the Malaysian education system, but also the training of prospective educational researchers assumed a strategic agenda in the transformation process. The establishment of research units and sections in many of the professional divisions, and the initiatives taken to conduct macro-level policy studies, especially at the Educational Policy Planning and Research Division (EPRD), took the centre stage. All of the research and evaluation activities conducted then have a strong bearing toward a continuous effort of improving the educational delivery system.

The focus of Chapter 5 of the book is on educational data and information. The data-base Management Information System is a fundamental element of any system-wide transformation process. Information is a vitally critical variable that no planning, evaluation, research and monitoring exercise can achieve their goals without it. Against this background, this chapter traces critically the 'shortcomings' of the early policy planning and implementation strategies of several national education plans in relation to the overall framework of socio-economic development in the National 5-Year Plans. The need for various types of critical base-line data and information became the central concern of analysis in this chapter. The discussion is gradually focused on the development of the Educational Management Information Centre and the creation of its operational Data Unit at the EPRD which was designed to serve the macro policy planning and research activities of the education system.

The end of the decade of the 1990's and the beginning of the 21st Century saw the reform process of education at its heights after more than fifty years of the nation's independence. The nation's education, training and capacity building programmes for manpower development assumes a greater degree of importance in terms of its impact, relevance and direction. Varied policy planning issues covering strategic approaches that would fulfill social demand and globalization trends, policy shifts, re-setting of the educational mission, and re-orientation of thrusts of the national curriculum toward revitalization are discussed in some depth in Chapter 6.

Among the most challenging developmental process of the national education system that could be observed was the transformation of teacher education in terms of demand, supply, quality and standards. In Chapter 7, issues in respect of trends and planning projections of various categories of teachers, training needs, selection and compensation systems, appraisal and recognition awards are critically examined.

Future challenges in terms of balancing teacher demand and supply models are also suggested and discussed. Various new strategies and initiatives to address mismatch of teacher needs, standards, international benchmarking and model for improvement of the educational transformation process are articulated in this chapter.

Chapter 8 focuses on two fundamental aspects of any educational transformation process, namely governance and information. In terms of governance, the focus of the discussion is on policy, structure, system, and reform of the education law of 1961. The discussion in this chapter is approached from an analysis of governance and the organization of the education system, particularly with respect to the new Education Act 1996, University and University Colleges (Amendments) Act, 1996, National Council of Higher Education Act, 1996, Private Higher Educational Institutions Act, 1996 and the National Accreditation Board Bill, 1996.

In respect of information, the challenge of the transformation process is on two issues, namely, the management system of policy-level information especially in terms of strategies, principles and computerization of data and information, and; secondly, the policy of financing computer technology applications on a national scale for teaching and learning in school. This issue is discussed in relation to the globalization implications, advances in the development of information technology, the lack of access and opportunity for global citizenry to information and communication technology, and the possible negative fallouts of youths from the future cyber world.

Any reflective examination on the conceptual relationships of education in the enhancement process of human capital formation will invariably lead to the question of the need to develop quality workforce for the expanded labour market. Chapter 9 focuses on the debate of skills formation policy and strategies of the 1980's and 1990's, especially as it affects the re-orientation of the national educational curriculum and the policy of revitalizing the approaches of teaching and learning in the overall school system. The discussion in the chapter is based on an examination of the rate of economic growth and the strategic development of human capital through various supportive mediums, be it public or private.

The measurement and application of indicators to assess the state of educational development in the last four decades is a special area of concern that is addressed in Chapter 10. The significance of this chapter is that it examines critically the methodology in the assessment of the performance of education at multiple levels of the education system, and it also offers some insights on the process of identifying indicators of educational efficiency within an environment of the competitive market.

An analysis of the critical indicators of the educational production model is suggested for assessing the quality of education at multiple levels of the Malaysian system. The discussion of these measures includes lists of quantifiable effectiveness indicators, 'output' indicators, and 'outcome' indicators that may be considered in future assessment of the effectiveness of the Malaysian education system. It is a challenge that Malaysia's future policy planners and evaluators of education have to grapple with.

Chapter 11 addresses the fundamental role of education within the framework of national socio-economic development. While the chapter outlines the major issues in the evolution of the policy reform strategy within the early transformation period, it also traces the development of the initial reform strategies in the 1970's through the 1980's and 1990's. This involves a discussion of the strategic policy and planning initiatives of the past four decades within the overall framework of ten National Development Plans of Malaysia and the goals of Vision 2020. The social restructuring initiatives guided by the current strategy called the Government Transformation Programmes (GTP), particularly within the context of National Key Results Areas (NKRA) in education are examined. Issues pertaining to economic transformation and physical growth and development of the country made demands not only on increased governmental expenditure but also on the quality of the development programmes that have been formulated and implemented. An analysis of the strategic policy-making machineries in the government involving the central agencies, other than that of the Ministry of Education, throws some light on how the monetary and budgetary needs for the targeted educational reform activities are allocated.

Social transformation is a strategically planned process of societal change that targets, principally, a total qualitative improvement in the overall development programme outcomes, be it living standards, quality of life, quality of social services and particularly, education, health, and security. In education, the transformation process involves not only critical reforms, change and reviews of certain aspects of the existing system, but also holistic in approach with well-planned strategic initiatives in critical policy domains, structure, system, programmes and activities. Since formal learning and teaching takes place at the school system, the educational transformation process need to involve the strategic initiative of educational decentralization through school-based management. Hence, capacity building initiatives in educational leadership and management is considered vital to bring about greater opportunities in student learning and general school improvement. In Chapter 12, issues of the transformation strategies along with the themal

sub-topics are discussed in some depth in view of the continuing need for change toward a decentralisation policy of the centralised system of education. In this context, the development of 'superleadership' model of management styles among school principals and headmasters is described in some depth.

The mission of public education in Malaysia does not only develop at the lower levels of the system, from pre-school, primary, lower and upper secondary, but also encompasses changes at the tertiary level. In particular, they include colleges, polytechnics, matriculation centres, community colleges and universities. In the domain of public tertiary education, it is observed that the transformation process has been seen to be dynamic and highly encouraging. With the establishment of more than twenty public universities, twenty seven polytechnics, twenty-seven degree-awarding institutes of education, and thirty seven community colleges, the critical challenge, particularly in terms of quality that lies ahead of the Malaysian tertiary system, has yet to be addressed more profoundly. In Chapter 13, this theme is critically examined in relation to fundamental policy perspectives of the mission and the contestations of the principles of meritocracy against equity. The critical change issues of creativity, innovation and paradigm shifts in terms of effective teaching and learning technology, research and academic publications are also discussed.

Malaysia's public education system has weaved itself through the process of time over the last several decades. It has faced and overcome varied forms of challenges from within and without the system in order to sustain its momentum toward contributing to the socioeconomic transformation of Malaysian society. It has now reached the critical crossroads wherein the challenges are more intense and demanding than ever before. The processes involved in the era of "globalisation", "internationalisation", "regionalisation" and "glocalisation" for meaningful 'revitalisation' and transformation through education, deem it necessary for Malaysia to advance itself with greater vitality, rigour and vigour not only at the tertiary level, but also at the preschool, primary and secondary levels of education.



# List of Abbreviations

|           |  |
|-----------|--|
| ANCOVA    | Analysis of covariance   |
| ANOVA     | Analysis of variance   |
| CAD/CAM   | Computer-aided Design/Computer-aided Manufacturing   |
| CBT       | Competency-based Training  |
| CCC       | Central Curriculum Committee   |
| CDC       | Curriculum Development Centre  |
| CDP       | Continuous Development Programme   |
| CIE       | Computer in Education  |
| COLA      | Cost of Living Allowance   |
| ComIL     | Computer Integrated Learning System  |
| CPHD      | Committee of the Professional Heads of Division  |
| DELSILIFE | Development or Coordinated Educational Intervention System for Improving the Quality of Life of the Rural Poor through Self-Reliance |
| DEO       | District Education Office  |
| DTC       | Day Training Centre  |
| EFA       | Education for All  |
| EFAA      | Education for All 2000 Assessment  |
| EMIS      | Educational Management Information System  |
| EN        | Education Network  |
| EPC       | Educational Planning Committee   |
| EPRD      | Educational Policy Planning and Research Division  |
| EPU       | Economic Planning Unit   |
| ETD       | Educational Technology Division  |
| ETeMS     | English as the medium of instruction in the teaching of mathematics and science  |
| FELDA     | Federal Land Development Authority   |
| FIAC      | Flander's Interaction Analysis Construct   |
| GCE       | General Certificate of Education Examination   |
| GDP       | Gross Domestic Product   |
| GLC       | Government-Linked Company  |
| GNP       | Gross Net Profit   |
| GTP       | Government Transformation Programme  |
| HIID      | Harvard Institute for International Development  |
| HPS       | High Performance School  |

|          |  |
|----------|--|
| HRD      | Human Resource Department                                |
| HSC      | Higher School Certificate                                |
| IAPG     | Inter-Agency Planning Group                              |
| IAU      | International Association of Universities                |
| IBE      | International Bureau of Education                        |
| ICT      | Information and Communication Technology                 |
| ICU      | Implementation Coordination Unit                         |
| IDRC     | International Development Research Centre                |
| IER      | Institute for Educational Research                       |
| IIEP     | International Institute of Educational Planning          |
| In-Set   | In-service training                                      |
| ISCED    | International Standard Classification of Education       |
| ISD      | Information Systems Division                             |
| IUFM     | Institut Universitaire de Formation des Maîtres          |
| JARING   | Joint Advance Research Integrated Networking             |
| KPI      | Key Performance Indicators                               |
| KRC      | Knowledge Resource Centre                                |
| LCE      | Lower Certificate of Education Examination               |
| LINUS    | Literacy and Numeracy                                    |
| LSE      | Lower Secondary Evaluation                               |
| MAMPU    | Malaysian Administrative and Modernization Planning Unit |
| MCCE     | Malaysian Council for Computers-in-Education             |
| MCE      | Malaysian Certificate of Education                       |
| MCP      | Malayan Communist Party                                  |
| MCVE     | Malaysia Certificate of Vocational Education             |
| MEASAT   | Malaysia East Asia Satellite                             |
| MEREC    | Malaysian Educational Research Council                   |
| MIMOS    | Malaysian Institute of Microelectronic Systems           |
| MITI     | Ministry of International Trade and Industry             |
| MOE      | Ministry of Education                                    |
| MOHL     | Ministry of Higher Learning                              |
| MOST     | Management of Social Transformation                      |
| MQA      | Malaysian Qualifications Assurance                       |
| MQF      | Malaysian Qualifications Framework                       |
| MTC      | Malayan Teachers' College                                |
| M-TeST   | Malaysian Teachers Selection Test                        |
| MTR      | Mid-Term Review  |
| MWTC     | Malay Women Teachers' College                            |
| N.U.P.W. | National Union of Plantation Workers                     |
| NAB      | National Accreditation Board                             |
| NCHE     | National Council of Higher Education                     |
| NDPC     | National Development Planning Committee                  |

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| NEAC   | National Economic Action Council                                 |
| NEM    | New Economic Model   |
| NEP    | New Economic Policy  |
| NKRA   | National Key Results Area  |
| NPC    | National Planning Council  |
| NPQEL  | National Professional Qualification of Educational Leadership    |
| NPQH   | National Professional Qualifications for Headship                |
| NPSC   | New Primary School Curriculum                                    |
| OECD   | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development           |
| OPP    | Outline Perspective Plan   |
| PC     | Personal Computer  |
| PCG    | per Capita Grants  |
| PHEI   | Private Higher Educational Institution                           |
| PIER   | Programme for Innovation, Excellence and Research                |
| RECSAM | Regional Centre for Education in Science and Mathematics         |
| RTC    | Regional Training Centre   |
| S & T  | Science and Technology   |
| SBM    | School-Based Management  |
| SEAMEO | Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization              |
| SED    | State Education Department                                       |
| SES    | Socio-Economic Status  |
| SGP    | the Anglican Society for the Propagation of the Gospel           |
| SITC   | Sultan Idris Teachers' Training College                          |
| SMI    | Small and Medium Industry  |
| SMP    | Sixth Malaysia Plan  |
| SQEM   | Standards for Quality Education                                  |
| TDI    | Teacher Education Institute                                      |
| TED    | Teacher Education Division                                       |
| TIMSS  | Third International Mathematics and Science Study                |
| TTC    | Teacher Training College   |
| TTI    | Teacher Training Institute                                       |
| TVE    | Technical and Vocational Education                               |
| UNCTAD | United Nations Conference on Trade and Development               |
| UNDP   | United Nations Development Programme                             |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund                                   |
| USSR   | Union of Soviet Socialist Republics                              |
| WAN    | Wide Area Network  |
| WWW    | World Wide Web   |

# Mission of Public Education in Malaysia

## THE CHALLENGE OF TRANSFORMATION

The book analyses the fundamental issues of the historical context, policy reforms and challenges in the process of transforming the Malaysian education system toward educational excellence. In analysing the issues, it also examines many critical challenges in the relationship between education, human capital development and the national transformation strategy.

“...The book is a comprehensive, thorough and reflective examination of public education in Malaysia since its inception. The analyses cover many critical issues both in terms of breadth and depth with respect to challenges and strategic approaches in the transformation agenda of the Malaysian Education System...There is no doubt that it is an invaluable source of reference, particularly for education policy makers, researchers, school administrators, lecturers, teachers, postgraduate students and the public at large, local and international. Indeed, it is a very useful guide for the understanding of issues in policy making, management and implementation of education policy in Malaysia...”

– **Tan Sri Dato’ Seri Arshad Ayub**

Pro-Chancellor, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) and Chairman,  
Board of Directors, University of Malaya.

“...A very exhaustive analysis of a system starting with deprivation and isolation to one of realization, commitment and perseverance, overcoming trials and tribulations of insurmountable constraints in facing everchanging scenarios and challenges, even beyond the horizon. A very commendable effort...”

– **Tan Sri Datuk Seri Panglima Dr. Abdul Rahman Arshad**

Chancellor, UCSI University, Malaysia  
and former Director-General of Education, Malaysia.

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**Professor Dato’ Dr Hussein Ahmad** has varied and illustrious career development from 1964 till the present, both at the national and international level. 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. Later, he was Professor at the Faculty of Education, University of Malaya. Currently, he holds the post of Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Educational Leadership, University of Malaya, Malaysia.



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