



MDG 2

Achieve Universal Primary Education

Expanding access and improving the quality of education at all levels has been a continuing national development objective throughout Malaysia's sequence of five-year development plans. Thus the First Malaysia Plan, 1966-1970, stated that 'unless the educational system is geared to meet the development needs of the country, there will be a misallocation of an important economic resource, which will slow down the rate of economic and social advance.'

Upgrading the national education system and broadening educational opportunities have been a central part of the government's strategy to foster national unity and support economic growth. It has also been a strategy to help reduce poverty and expand opportunities and choices for both girls and boys. Government efforts have been supported at the family level by parents who have perceived education as an opportunity for providing upward mobility and a better life for their children.

The government's commitment to education, as a prime contributor to national development, is evidenced by the continuous and large capital investments in educational infrastructure and supported by substantial recurrent expenditures in the period since 1970. Educational expenditure averaged some 17 per cent of total public expenditure, and 5 per cent of the ever-growing GDP over the period 1970-2000.

The MDG target is to ensure that by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling (Box 2.1). Malaysia had already achieved this target in 1990 when 99 per cent of boys and girls were enrolled, 97 per cent of whom completed primary 5. At the same time as it has made tremendous progress in providing universal primary education, Malaysia has implemented programmes to meet challenges with respect to educational quality, curriculum relevance and the promotion of pre-school education. This chapter first describes the key trends in indicators of educational progress, and then goes on to discuss the enabling environment, the resources-financial and infrastructure, and specific programmes implemented, insights gained, and future challenges.

Box 2.1 INDICATORS OF PRIMARY EDUCATION

Three related population-based indicators are used to assess progress towards the MDG of universal primary education.

The **net enrolment ratio in primary education** is the ratio of the number of children of primary school age to the total population of children of primary school age. Net enrolment ratios below 100 per cent may provide a measure of the proportion of school-age children who are not enrolled at primary level.

The **proportion of pupils completing year five**, is the percentage of a cohort of pupils enrolled in primary 1 at the

primary level of education in a given school year and who go on to complete year five. This indicator measures the education system's internal efficiency and success in retaining students from one grade to the next.

The **literacy rate of 15-24 year olds** is the percentage of population aged 15-24 who can read and write, with understanding, short simple statement on everyday life. This youth literacy rate reflects the outcome of primary education over the previous 10 years. As a measure of the effectiveness of the primary education system, it is often taken as a proxy measure of social progress and economic achievement.

Trends in school enrolment

In Malaysia, primary education of girls and boys between the ages of 6 and 11 refers to formal education that emphasizes the acquisition of strong reading and writing skills as well as a solid foundation in mathematics and basic sciences. Children usually spend six years at primary school, followed by three years at lower secondary from the age of 12. Those who successfully complete lower secondary spend two years at upper secondary beyond which there are a range of tertiary options. Education is provided free to every child of school-going age, for a period of 11 years, with promotion at the primary schooling level being automatic.

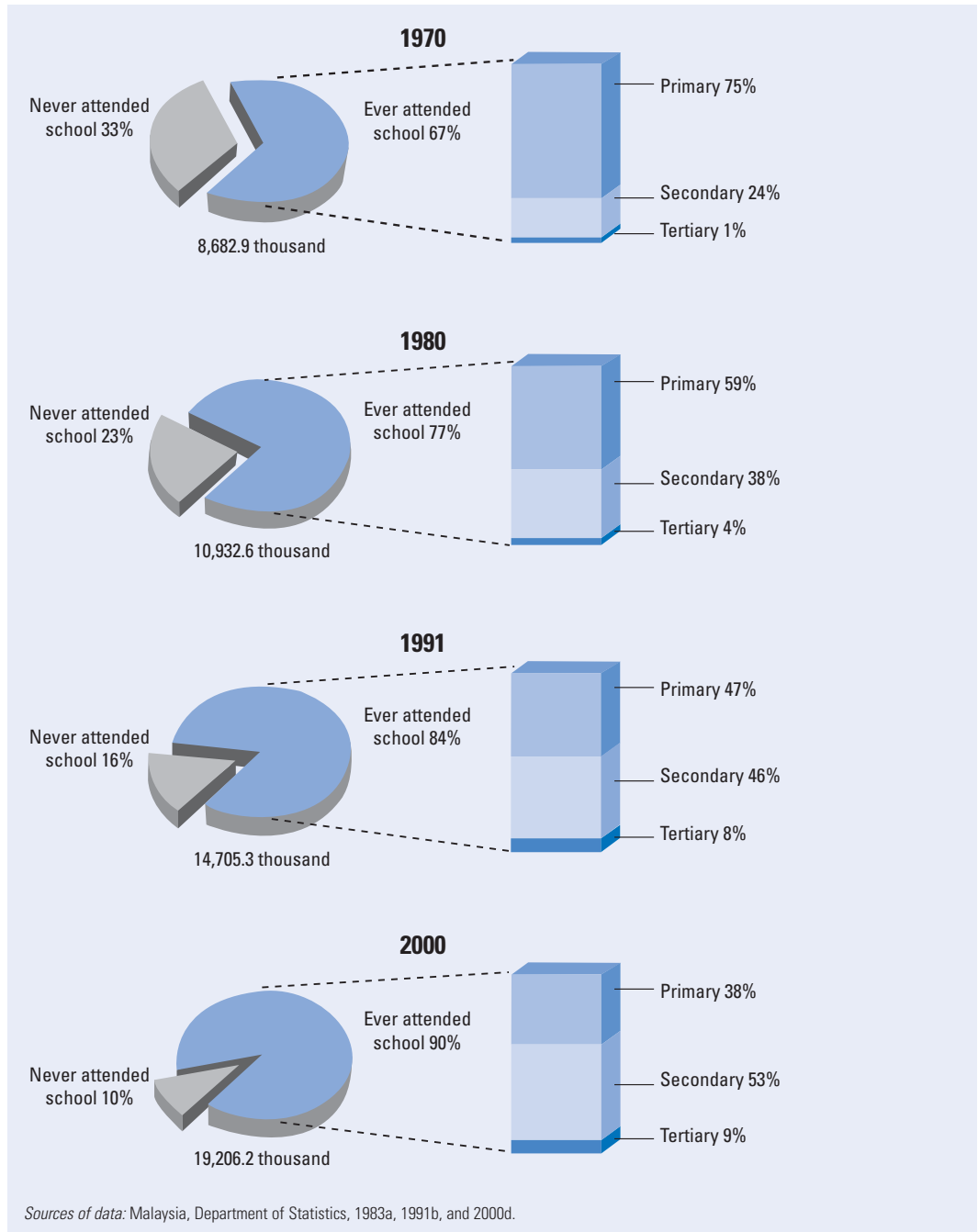
Following the National Education Policy, the medium of instruction at all educational establishments was changed to *Bahasa Malaysia*. The transition from English to *Bahasa Malaysia* began in 1970 and was largely completed by 1980, schools in Sarawak making the transition in medium of instruction somewhat later than elsewhere in Malaysia.

Attainment and literacy

The expansion in educational opportunities in Malaysia over the period 1970–2000 is clearly illustrated in Figure 2.1. In 1970, one-third of the country's population aged 6 and over had never attended school; by 2000, the figure dropped to 10 per cent. Over this 30-year period there were very marked increases in the proportions who had attained secondary and tertiary education.

Over this 30-year period there were very marked increases in the proportions who had attained secondary and tertiary education. In 1970, 24 per cent of persons aged 6 and over had some secondary education and only 1 per cent had attained tertiary education. By 2000, these proportions had increased to 53 and 9 per cent respectively. Thus over time, Malaysia's human capital has risen markedly. Those currently with little or no education are mainly among the older generations.

Figure 2.1 Educational Attainment of Persons Aged 6 and Over, Malaysia, 1970–2000



With the expansion of educational opportunities, literacy, the ability to read and write, has become almost universal among the young. Thus by 2000, less than 3 in every 100 were illiterate as compared to 1970 where about one-quarter of those aged 15–24

were illiterate (Table 2.1). The big gap in literacy levels that existed between young females and males has been progressively narrowed, such that by 2000 there were no sex differentials.

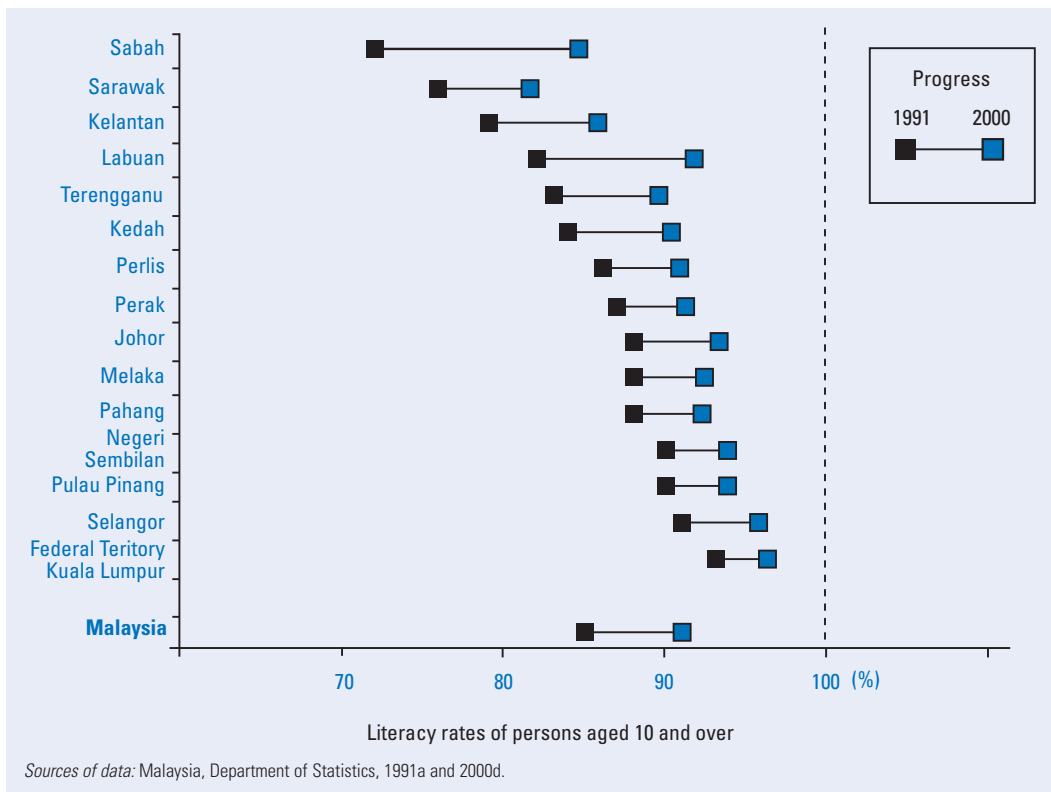
Table 2.1 Literacy Rates of 15–24 Year Olds by Sex, Malaysia, 1970–2000 (%)

Year	Female	Male	Persons
1970	68.0	83.0	75.0
1980	89.9	94.0	91.9
1991	95.3	95.9	95.6
2000	97.3	97.2	97.2

Sources of data: Malaysia, Department of Statistics, 1983a, 1991a, and 2000d.

In Malaysia, literacy levels among persons aged 10 and over reached 92 per cent in 2000, with illiteracy confined mainly to older persons. There are, however, state variations in literacy levels (Figure 2.2). These reflect both historical differences in educational opportunities in the country that tend to mirror disparities in state development patterns. Nevertheless, improvements in literacy levels are occurring in all states and differentials are narrowing.

Figure 2.2 Literacy Rates of Persons Aged 10 and Over, Malaysia, 1991 and 2000



Substantial gains in literacy rates have been shared by each of the ethnic communities in Malaysia. In 1970, 13 per cent of Indians aged 15–19 were illiterate, with the corresponding figures for the Bumiputera and Chinese being 9 per cent and 6 per cent. By 2000, less than 2 per cent of any of the communities were illiterate (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2 Literacy Rates of 15–19 Year Olds by Ethnic Group, Malaysia, 1970–2000 (%)

Year	Bumiputera	Chinese	Indians
1970*	91.0	94.0	87.0
1980*	96.0	97.0	92.0
1991	96.9	98.4	96.9
2000	98.3	99.6	98.7

Sources of data: Malaysia, Department of Statistics, 1983a, 1991a, and 2000d.

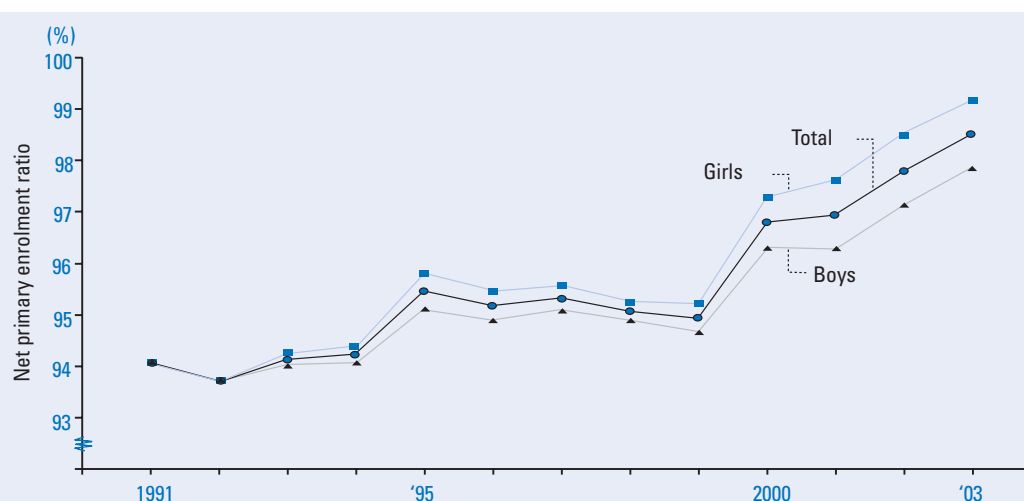
* Relates to Peninsular Malaysia.

Net enrolment in primary education

Even though the number of children enrolled in public primary schools in Malaysia almost doubled between 1970 and 2000, net enrolment ratios more than kept pace. By 1990, universal primary education was almost achieved, when the net enrolment ratio rose to 94 per cent. It fluctuated in the 1990s around this level, as shown in Figure 2.3. Less than 100 per cent enrolment is partly attributable to an increase in the number of children of primary school age attending private schools—the published figures exclude private sector enrolments.

The enrolment ratio of girls in primary schools is almost the same as that of boys for much of the period since 1970. In Malaysia, the education policy does not discriminate against girls. Enrolment of boys and girls increased rapidly as parents began to realize that education provides a gateway for a better standard of living for their children, and that there are opportunities for gainful employment of females.

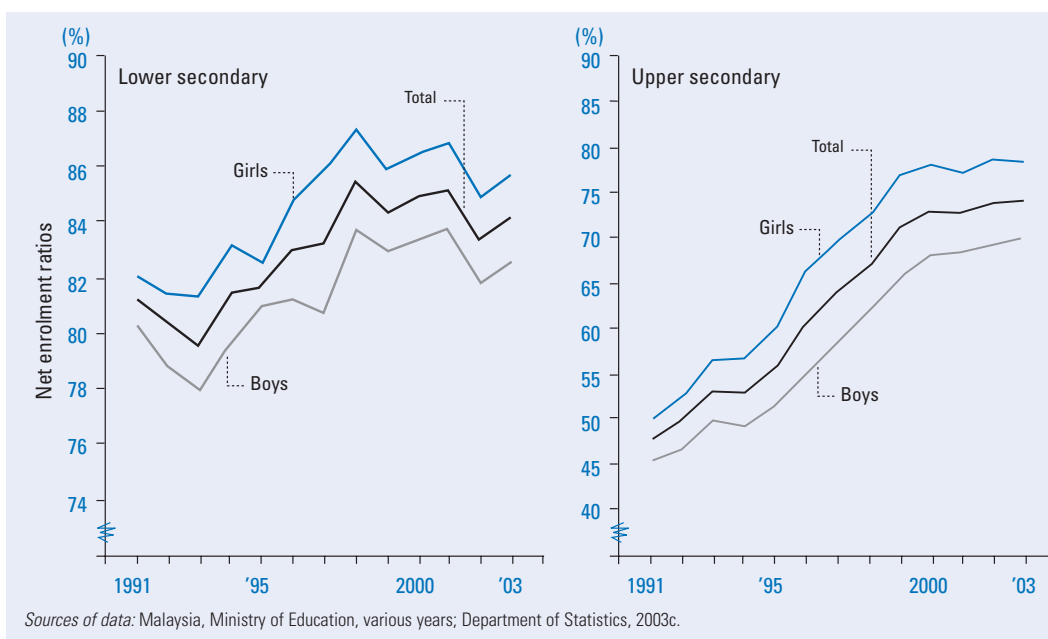
Figure 2.3 Net Enrolment Ratios in Primary Schools, Malaysia, 1991–2003



Sources of data: Malaysia, Ministry of Education, various years; Department of Statistics, 2003c.

One of the effects of an increasing net primary enrolment is increasing net enrolment at the next level of education. Figure 2.4 charts the upward trends, albeit with some annual fluctuations, in net enrolment ratios in lower and upper secondary levels from 1991 to 2003. These figures record enrolment ratios in public schools and it is estimated that approximately 10 per cent of school-going children leave public schools to enter private schools after year 6. For both lower and upper secondary levels, enrolment ratios are significantly higher for girls than boys.

Figure 2.4 Net Enrolment Ratios at Lower and Upper Secondary Levels by Sex, Malaysia, 1991–2003

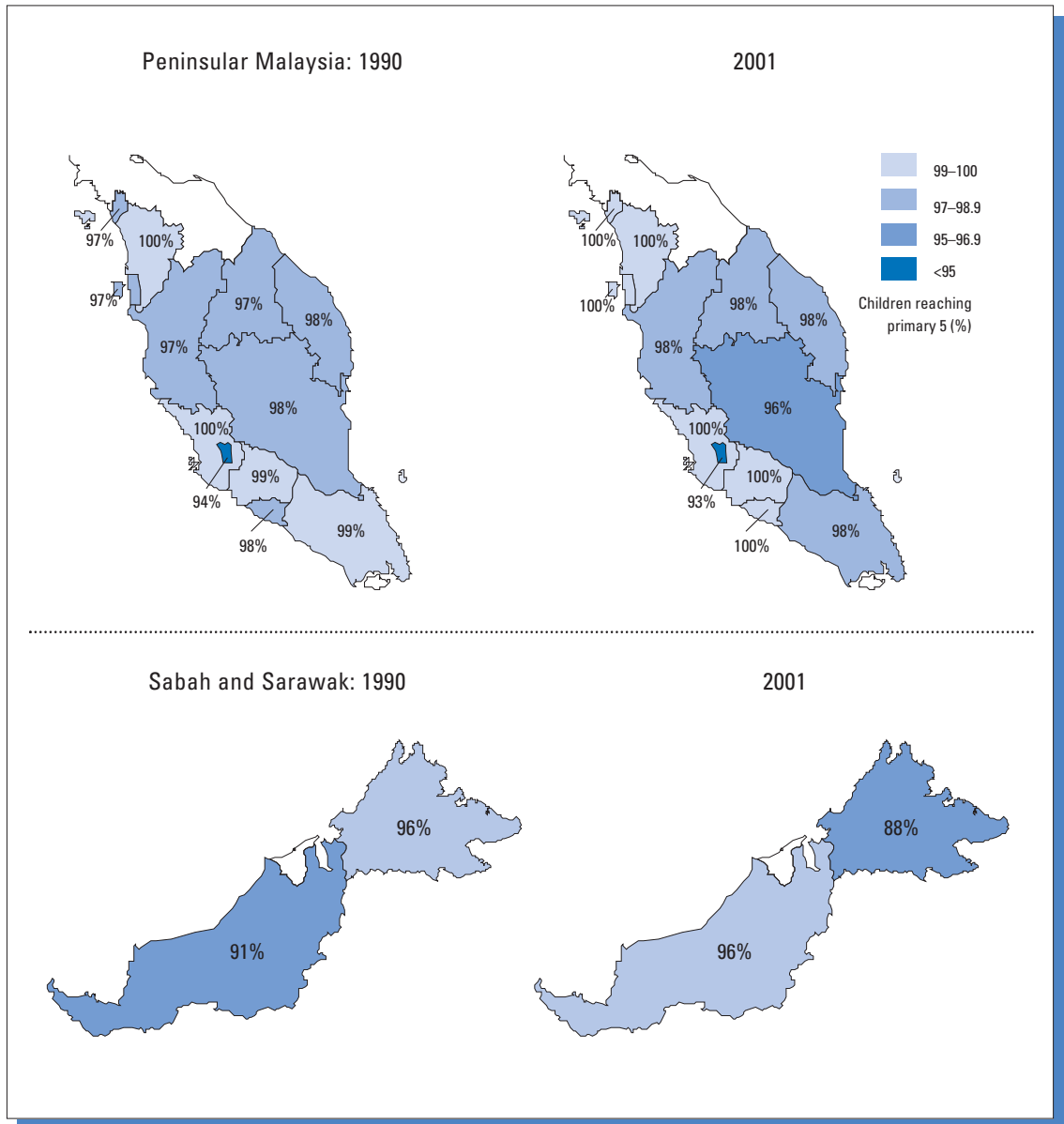


State disparities in progress from primary 1 to 5

The proportion of pupils starting primary 1 who reach primary 5 was consistently above 97 per cent over the 10 years between 1990 and 2001. The high level of transition through to primary 5 is evident in all states, except in Sabah, where levels have declined (Map 2.1). In fact, overall in Malaysia, the transition rate from primary level to secondary level was above 19 per cent throughout the 1990s.

Educational support programmes, such as scholarships, textbooks-on-loan, and hostel facilities, contribute towards the increasing number of students who complete primary schooling. In 2000, 83 per cent of primary school students benefited from the textbook-on-loan scheme. Accompanying universal primary enrolment ratios are declining pupil-teacher ratios, from an average 30 pupils per teacher in 1985 to 19 pupils per teacher in 2000. This is indicative of national efforts to increase the quality and effectiveness of primary schooling.

Map 2.1 Children Who Achieve Primary 5, Malaysia, 1990 and 2001



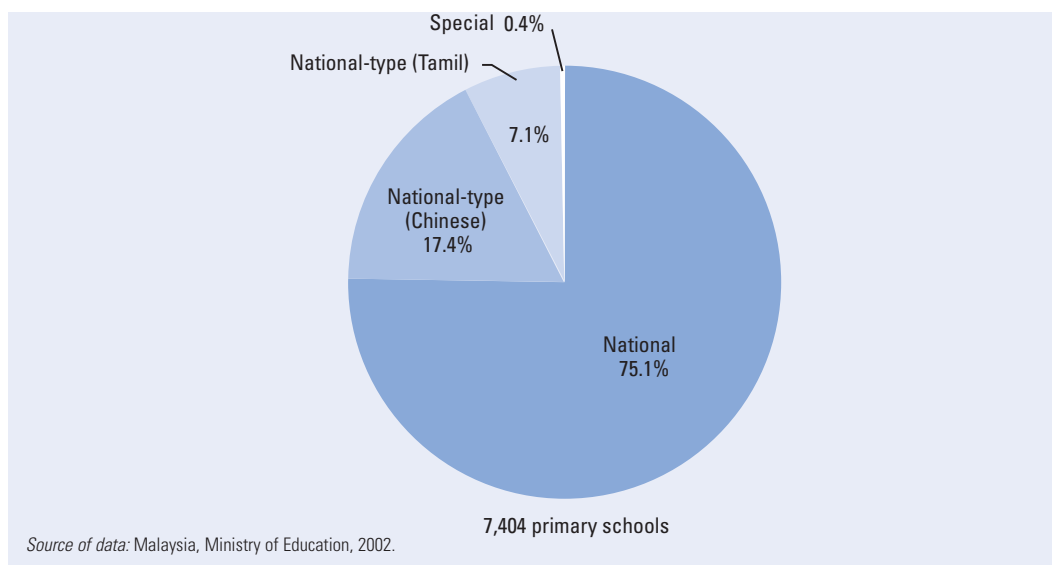
Sources of data: Malaysia, Department of Statistics, 1985b, 1990b, 1998c, and 2001c.

Types of primary schools

There are two types of primary schools in Malaysia, the national and national-type (Tamil and Chinese) schools (Figure 2.5). The medium of instruction in national schools is *Bahasa Malaysia*, while in national-type schools the medium of instruction is Tamil or Chinese, although *Bahasa Malaysia* is a compulsory subject. The existence of these two types of schools is built into Malaysia's Constitution and meets the needs of the country's multi-ethnic population, with a common school curriculum and a national language ensuring

integration. There are also special schools catering for the hearing-impaired and visually handicapped. Overall, the commitment to prepare appropriate and sufficient primary schools can be seen in the increase of 937 schools over a 30-year period from 1970 to 2000.

Figure 2.5 Primary Schools by Type, Malaysia, 2002



In addition, there are currently some 500 national schools equipped with teaching and staff facilities to help integrate children with special needs within the general school system. Almost 10,000 children were enrolled in special schools and classes by 2002, compared with 5,858 in 1996 with a pupil-teacher ratio of 4:9 (Table 2.3).

Table 2.3 Special Education Programme for Primary Education, Malaysia, 1996–2002

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Number of pupils	5,858	7,280	7,559	8,567	8,749	9,747	9,956
Number of teachers	1,190	1,634	1,784	1,937	2,010	2,248	2,248
Pupil/Teacher ratio	4.9	4.5	4.2	4.4	4.4	4.3	4.4

Sources of data: Malaysia, Ministry of Education, various years.

Pre-school

Government attention to pre-schools has increased since the early 1990s. Not only will this have a favourable impact on future educational outcomes, but children who attend pre-schools are less likely to drop out of school in later years. Pre-school educational programmes have been supported by health and nutrition programmes targeted at young children in poor households (see Chapters 1 and 4). Some 400,000 children enrolled in pre-school centres in 2000, representing 64 per cent of children in the 5-6 age cohort.

Enabling environment

The enabling environment for the development of the education sector in Malaysia is influenced by its history, the socio-economic and political situation, and the crucial role of the government in forming the regulatory and institutional framework to implement policies (Table 2.4). In the early years, the government was committed to using education as a nation-building tool. Over time, as political stability was achieved, the role of the education and training sector was taken to a higher level in the 1990s, when it was also a contributor to economic growth.

The present education system in Malaysia has its origins in the pre-Independence era. The British introduced secular education and established the first English school in Pulau Pinang in 1816. Other schools, classified according to the language of instruction, were the Malay, Chinese, and Tamil schools. By 1938, there were 788 Malay schools, 654 Chinese schools, 607 Tamil schools, and 221 English schools. These schools had diverse management and financial resources. They included government-maintained schools, missionary schools, and non-profit schools, all of which received financial aid from the government, as well as privately funded schools.

After the Second World War (1941–6), there was a significant change of attitude towards education among all races which led to an increase in demand for education. This was attributed to the increasingly settled position of immigrants (in part due to post-war developments in China, India, and other neighbouring countries) and the emergence of Malay nationalism. A number of studies led to the National Education Policy of 1957, with subsequent reviews and refinements (Box 2.2).

Box 2.2 EDUCATION POLICY IN MALAYSIA

A number of studies and reviews were carried out to decide on the policies and principles to be followed with regard to education: a Central Advisory Committee on Education set up in 1949; a committee on Malay education which produced the Barnes Report in 1951; and a study on Chinese education which produced the Fenn-Wu Report in 1951. A consideration of these reviews led to the Education Ordinance in 1952.

A review of the education policy in 1956 (the Razak Report) introduced the use of the Malay language as the national language and as a compulsory subject in primary schools (in addition to the English Language), and the use of a common syllabus for all schools. Proposals made in the Razak Report were enacted in the Education Ordinance 1957 and the National Education Policy was formulated. The Razak Report allowed for the transition from a fragmented

colonial education system to one which was more integrated along national lines.

In 1960, a committee was set up to review the implementation of the education policy. The Rahman Talib Report made several recommendations which were subsequently incorporated into the Education Act 1961.

These included the abolishment of school fees at primary level (implemented in 1962), the use of *Bahasa Malaysia* as the main medium of instruction, and automatic promotion to Form 3, thus increasing basic education to 9 years. Universal education was raised to 11 years in 1979 based on the recommendations of the Cabinet Committee Report on Education. The report also gave emphasis to school curriculum to ensure the acquiring of the 3Rs (reading, writing, and arithmetic) at the primary level. In 2003, primary schooling was made compulsory under the Education Act 1996.

Table 2.4 Overview of Primary Education Development, Malaysia, 1960–2000

1960–70	1971–90	1991–2000	2001–10
Pre-NEP	New Economic Policy (NEP) OPP1	National Development Policy (NDP) OPP2	National Vision Policy (NVP) OPP3
First Malaysia Plan (1966–70)	Second Malaysia Plan (1971–5) Third Malaysia Plan (1976–80) Fourth Malaysia Plan (1981–5) Fifth Malaysia Plan (1986–90)	Sixth Malaysia Plan (1991–5) Seventh Malaysia Plan (1996–2000)	Eighth Malaysia Plan (2001–5)
Strategies Related to Education			
Utilized as a social tool to integrate the three major races in the country.		Education continued its role as a social tool. Role for education is further emphasized—human resource development to play a part in leading Malaysia towards Vision 2020. Liberalization of the education sector.	Utilizing lifelong learning to raise the quality of life. Enhancing access to tertiary education. Using knowledge-based education as a tool for employment restructuring.
Major Primary Education Sector Programmes			
Mobilizing resources to increase participation in school. Implementing two school sessions in a day. Abolishing primary school fees (1962). School health programme launched (1967).	Textbook-on-loan scheme introduced (1975). Supplementary food programme introduced (1976). Cabinet Committee set up to review education policies recommended that universal education be raised to 11 years (1979). School milk programme introduced (1983). Identification of the need for hostels to be built to increase participation from rural children (1972). Curriculum review emphasizing the 3Rs in the Fourth Malaysia Plan.	Special Education Department set up to look into the needs of special children (1995). Integrated health school programme launched (1997). Special degree programme for teachers to upgrade non-graduate teachers (1999). Smart schools pilot project launched (1999).	Primary schooling made compulsory (2003). Plans to extend the smart school project (2004).

National policies and plans

Changes and reforms in Malaysia’s education system reflect the government’s efforts to adapt education to national development needs, in particular economic growth, poverty reduction, human resource development, and national unity. The government’s commitment towards education is also seen in the consistency of expansion plans in all Malaysia’s five-year national development plans since Independence. Pre-primary and primary school expansions have followed the expansion of the number of school-going children in Malaysia. Pre-primary and primary strategies in all Malaysia’s five-year national development plans have been aimed at improving accessibility of education to children and enhancing quality at school. The government’s consistent commitment towards education and the improvement of access to pre-primary and primary schooling levels have no doubt assisted in the achievement of universal primary school attainment in Malaysia.

The aim of providing access to education was evident in the First Malaya Plan (1955–60). Although the government faced multifaceted challenges in integrating a multi-ethnic society, it was successful in ensuring that every child of 6 years of age was offered

school admittance. Resources were mobilized to ensure this, with schools undertaking double shifts in order to have two school sessions in a day. The consistency in national policies and plans is evident in the Second Malaya Plan and subsequent five-year national development plans.

In 1970, education policy was aligned to the NEP with its two-pronged strategy of eradicating poverty and restructuring society. National unity was still fragile in the young nation and the *Rukunegara*, or National Ideology (1970) seeks to create a national identity of a united, just, and progressive nation with a plural society of diverse cultures and religions (Box 2.3).

Box 2.3 PRINCIPLES AND PHILOSOPHY OF *RUKUNEGARA*

The five principles of the *Rukunegara*:

1. Belief in God
2. Loyalty to King and Country
3. Upholding the Constitution
4. Rule of Law
5. Good Behaviour and Morality

Underlying the *Rukunegara* are the aims to achieve:

1. A united nation with a plural society
2. A democratic society through a constitutionally

elected Parliament

3. A just society with equal opportunities for all
4. A liberal society of diverse cultural traditions
5. A progressive society oriented towards science and modern technology.

The concepts of national identity and unity enshrined in the *Rukunegara* guide the goals, aims, and objectives of education and all its programmes.

Source of data: Malaysia, Ministry of Education, 1984.

In each of the five-year development plans covering the NEP period, education and training facilities were expanded to allow for higher intakes of students into the various levels of schooling (Figure 2.1). For example, by the end of the Third Malaysia Plan (1976–80), schemes for the poor or low-income pupils were implemented. These schemes provided needy pupils with textbooks, health services, and nutritional programmes. After 1970, education and training were geared towards fostering national unity and aimed at increasing participation of all Malaysians in national development. The education programmes detailed in the Fourth Malaysia Plan (1981–5) were formulated based on the recommendations by the Cabinet Committee after reviewing the National Education Policy. The measures were aimed at improving the teaching and learning process, such as class size, pupil-teacher ratio, and curriculum. Priority was also given to schools in the rural areas.

Curriculum-wise, the Fourth Malaysia Plan detailed a new curriculum for the primary school level, which carried an objective of establishing a firm educational foundation, especially in reading, writing, and arithmetic (the 3Rs). The outcome of this change is seen from the high literacy rate achieved by Malaysians. The government was visionary in its planning and implemented appropriate actions to accommodate its national policies and plans. In the Fourth Malaysia Plan, the idea of extending the 9 years of universal schooling to 11 years was initiated. To ensure that this would be possible, the government made plans to expand upper secondary school facilities.

The expansion of the primary schooling level initiated expansion spillover effects onto the other schooling levels. For instance, the curriculum reform which began in the Fourth Malaysia Plan was extended to the secondary level in 1989. Under the broader umbrella of the NDP (1991–2000), human resource development was rendered as an important contributor to growth, therefore placing further emphasis on the education sector. The importance of the education sector continues to be laid out as Malaysia enters into the Eighth Malaysia Plan (2001–5).

Institutional framework

The MOE is the principal institution that implements the National Education Policy. However, other ministries, such as the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (currently known as Ministry of Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry and Ministry of Rural and Regional Development), also implement education programmes in rural areas, particularly the provision of schools for pre-schoolers. In the rural areas, accessibility to education is provided with the support of other ministries which include the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Energy (currently known as Ministry of Energy, Water and Communications), the Ministry of Information, and the Ministry of Health. Private agencies, NGOs, associations, and religious bodies are also involved.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Malaysia also received some external assistance for education and training in the form of technical assistance and investment programmes. The WB and the ADB were the major sources of external assistance. Many one-off budgets are also received from international bodies, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), to further assist in achieving universal primary education.

While universal primary education was achieved in 1990, educational priorities continued to be focused on improving access of the poor to quality education. To attain the objective of becoming a developed nation by 2020 as envisaged in Vision 2020, the education sector’s strategic thrust now centres on reducing the gap in student performance between the urban and rural areas and among the states, improving the delivery system in line with technological change, and creating a knowledge-based economy.

Budget allocations

Expenditure on primary schooling is mainly funded through the federal government budget. There has been a marked uptrend over time in the proportion of development expenditure on education. The proportion more than doubled between 1980 and 1990 and then nearly doubled again by 2003, when the amount increased to 25.9 per cent (Table 2.5).

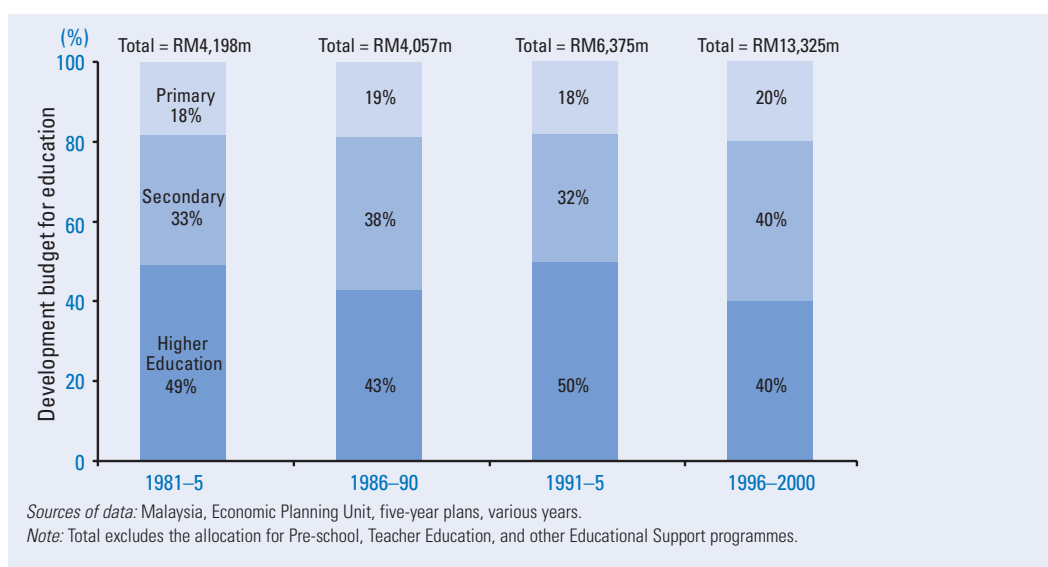
Table 2.5 Federal Government Expenditure on Education as a Percentage of Total Development Expenditure, Malaysia, 1970–2003

	1970	1980	1990	2000	2003
Expenditure on education	6.1	7.5	15.3	25.4	25.9

Sources of data: Malaysia, Ministry of Finance, various years.

Under successive five-year development plans, expenditure for education rose sharply, mainly reflecting continuously higher investments in secondary and tertiary education (Figure 2.6) alongside expanding resources at the primary education level. The rising expenditure on higher education reflects the government's drive to develop human resources to meet the country's vision of reaching developed nation status by 2020. In addition, private sector participation in the provision of higher education is increasing and the government is playing a key role in providing guidelines and monitoring the quality of private institutions.

Figure 2.6 Development Allocation for Education in the Malaysia Five-Year Plans, 1981–2000



Infrastructure allocation

Resource allocation strategies to ensure the availability of proper infrastructure for children at school have consistently been reviewed in all Malaysia's five-year national development plans. Evidence of resource-allocation strategies can be seen from the early days after Independence.

Besides ensuring that accessibility to school is constantly improved, the government is also dedicated to providing an environment that is conducive to learning. New classrooms are constructed to overcome overcrowding problems in urban schools and to replace dilapidated classrooms. For example, under the Eighth Malaysia Plan, a total of 144 new schools were built to provide 3,456 new classrooms, while another 7,360 classrooms were constructed, 20 per cent of which were meant to replace dilapidated classrooms. School facilities in Malaysia also cater to single and double shifts of schooling that enable two primary schools to be run using the same premises. In addition to providing and upgrading classrooms, other school facilities have also been provided, such as canteens, science laboratories, libraries, fields, road access to schools, electrical and water systems, and sanitation.

Resource-allocation strategies are also useful in addressing the performance gap between rural and urban schools. As part of this strategy, the centralized school programme was implemented to improve accessibility and provide a better learning environment for students in remote areas. Under this programme, schools with enrolments of less than 150 students are grouped into a single school complex. Under the Eighth Malaysia Plan, two pilot projects were launched, one each in Sabah and Sarawak. These new school complexes are equipped with hostels, living quarters for teachers, and adequate teaching and learning facilities.

Programmes

Malaysia's success in achieving universal primary education is, in large part, attributed to the creation of an environment conducive to primary education. This includes providing proper infrastructure to ensure access to schools and supporting the needs of the rural poor.

Textbook-on-loan scheme

The textbook-on-loan scheme was introduced in 1975 to reduce the financial burden of parents with low incomes and also to ensure access to education for every child. The criteria for eligibility for the loan are based on the parents' or guardians' income and the number of school-going children. Out of more than three million primary school children enrolled for the year 2002, 84 per cent of them qualified for the textbook-on-loan scheme.

Supplementary food scheme

The supplementary food scheme in schools was introduced after a survey conducted in 1972 revealed that the majority of school children, especially those in rural areas, came to school without breakfast. In addition, many children were undernourished. This scheme was introduced in 1976 as part of the National Applied Food and Nutrition Programme, organized by the Prime Minister's Department, and was primarily for schools in rural areas, as part of its community development service. The implementation of this programme was taken over by the MOE in 1980. Currently, 0.5 million of the 3 million primary school children benefit from this scheme. This programme is aimed at children whose parents earn RM400 or less per month. About RM123 million is spent annually on the supplementary food programme. Apart from improved health, the rate of attendance has improved for children from poor families.

School health programme

A School Health Plan was introduced in 1967 with the objective of producing school pupils who are healthy and productive. After more than three decades since its implementation, this concept has been expanded. In 1995, WHO introduced the Health Promoting School

Project (HPSP). With the cooperation of the MOH, the MOE provides health and dental services for primary school children from Primary 1 to Primary 6. In terms of health services, the height and weight of primary school children are taken and recorded. In addition, referral services are provided. Immunization is given to children aged 6–7 years. Female pupils in Primary 1 are given rubella immunization. In line with this concept, Malaysia carried out its pioneer project in six states and the Integrated Health School Programme was launched in 1997.

School milk programme

In the 1970s, the Ministry of Agriculture ran a programme to supply milk to schools, especially rural schools. From 1983, the MOE, with the assistance of a number of local milk manufacturers, started a new programme. The School Milk Programme which complements the Supplementary Food Programme is specifically for the poor and under-privileged pupils. Under this programme, these children receive two to three packets of milk per week. Funds spent on this programme totalled more than RM16 million per annum.

Hostels

The move to build hostels for primary schools was based on the recommendation of the Dropout Study of 1972. To ensure accessibility of education to every child, school boarding facilities in the form of day school hostels, central hostels, and fully residential school hostels have been set up throughout the country. Factors which determine entry into this facility include the distance of pupils' homes from the school, socio-economic status of the parents or guardians, and the scholastic achievement. The bulk of the hostels are located in Sabah and Sarawak. Primary school hostels are also constructed for the *Orang Asli* schools. These

Box 2.4 SPECIAL EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA

Through its Special Education Department, the MOE provides educational facilities to three types of children with special educational needs, namely, children with visual impairment; children with hearing impairment; and those with learning difficulties.

These include children with Down Syndrome, light autism, attention deficit hyperactive disorder, minimal mental retardation, and specific learning problems, such as dyslexia. Three types of special education programmes are provided, namely:

1. Special education schools for children with visual and hearing impairment;
2. Integrated classes in mainstream primary and secondary schools for the three types of special education needs mentioned earlier; and
3. Inclusive programmes in mainstream primary, secondary, and technical and vocational secondary schools.

To cater to the needs of these special children, teachers are trained either overseas or locally. For its long-term planning, the Department of Special Education has prepared the *Teacher's Handbook for the Implementation of Special Remedial Programme* for primary school teachers to enable them to assist these primary school children. Training of resource teachers was also carried out by the Department of Special Education.

The national primary school curricula are used in special education schools and in inclusive education programmes. However, the curricula have been modified to address the needs of these children. Both core and compulsory subjects of the national curricula are offered. Children with special needs sit for the same public examinations with certain modifications. For example, visually impaired candidates have their examination papers in Braille and are provided with the necessary equipment.

hostels, targeted at rural children from low socio-economic backgrounds, are built in low-enrolment schools with about 10–30 children per school. As of 2002, there are 132 such hostels, with a total enrolment of 37,158 children.

Special education

Malaysia has implemented a number of programmes to reduce disparities in education, one of which is in the area of special education. To reduce educational disparities between normal and special children, the MOE set up the Special Education Department in 1995. This is in line with the International Declaration on Education for All (1990) and the United Nations' Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993) (Box 2.4).

Teacher education

The Teacher Education Division (TED) formulates policies and guidelines for the training of pre-service and serving teachers which include formulation, implementation, and evaluation of teacher education curricula; selection of teacher trainees and course participants; and the planning and coordination of staff training programmes. Three pre-service teacher-training programmes are run by the TED, including the Diploma in Teaching for candidates with high school certificates; the Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching for degree holders, and the Teaching of English as a Second Language (TESL) programme for undergraduates. Special Diploma or Professional Development courses are conducted for teachers to upgrade their professional knowledge and skills.

The proportion of untrained teachers at primary level has been gradually reduced and was about 5 per cent in 1998. The majority of untrained teachers are found in rural schools. However, special measures are nevertheless taken to send better trained teachers to serve in the rural schools for a period of time; and quarters for teachers are provided. It is envisaged that during the Third Outline Perspective Plan (OPP3) period (2001–10), an increasing number of primary school teachers are expected to be degree holders, some with postgraduate degrees as well as qualifications in child psychology. At the end of the Seventh Malaysia Plan (1996–2000), 3,000 teachers with a Master's qualification, together with a total of 36,500 non-graduate teachers for primary schools, were trained. The government's emphasis on raising teaching standards through improving the quality of its teachers is further evidence of its commitment to educating the Malaysian population.

The current goal is for 50 per cent of primary school teachers to have university degrees. To achieve this goal, a special degree programme was designed in 1999 to upgrade non-graduate teachers. This is a one-plus-two programme (one year at a selected teachers' college and two years at a university that offers teacher education training). The TED also provides computer training for primary school teachers in the Smart Schools which promote teaching and learning through the use of multimedia. In addition, by the end of the Seventh Malaysia Plan, the teacher training curriculum was revised to incorporate the use of computers and multimedia, especially in subjects such as Mathematics, Science, *Bahasa Malaysia*, and of English Language. To forge better usage

of computers and learning methods that emphasized practical learning, teachers were trained to use various teaching aids, such as computers, improved textbooks, and new teaching guidelines, especially for students in Primary 4, 5 and 6. Short courses were also implemented during the Seventh Malaysia Plan to upgrade teachers' skills. Improved public examination results are evidence of the successful implementation of these efforts in improving teachers' skills. The passing rate for Mathematics improved from 68 per cent in 1995 to 76 per cent in 2000, while that for Science, increased from 75 per cent in 1995 to 78 per cent in 2000.

Curriculum

In addition to improving and enhancing teacher development, the Malaysian government also works towards improving the curriculum at school to meet the changing needs of the economy. During the Fourth Malaysia Plan, the primary school curriculum was revised with the aim of providing and establishing a firm education in reading, writing, and arithmetic. This led to the development of a new curriculum emphasizing the 3Rs. Studies looking at the returns to education in Malaysia have found positive results in those who have had some form of formal education, thereby providing support to the government guidelines on the primary curriculum which emphasizes the acquisition of basic skills.

Adapting the curriculum to meet the changing needs of the economy has also been an agenda on the educational front of the various developmental plans implemented by the government. In line with making science and technology an integral component of socio-economic planning and development, the government introduced the element of science in the Primary 1 curriculum during the 1994/5 school session to encourage higher enrolment and achievement in the science stream at the secondary school level. With the rise of ICT, a Smart School concept was introduced in 1999 where some 90 schools were selected and provided with computers on a pilot basis. At the end of the Seventh Malaysia Plan, a computer literacy programme and computer-aided learning methods were implemented in primary schools, starting initially with 20 primary schools expanding later to 240 schools. The implementation of this programme was carried out with the cooperation of the private sector which complements the role of the public sector.

Remedial education

In Malaysia, the importance of remedial education gained attention in the 1960s. Results of a pilot project in nine schools between 1967 and 1970 showed a need for remedial education, especially for pupils in rural areas. This paved the way for remedial education programmes in primary schools. The pioneers in the field attended a two-year intensive course on remedial education in the United Kingdom. Subsequently, a national series of seminars and workshops on remedial teaching were organized. With the exception of small schools or under-enrolled schools, every school is allocated one remedial education teacher. At the school level, a Remedial Education Committee is formed, comprising the headmaster, remedial education teacher, class teacher, subject teacher, resource centre coordinator, and other teachers as members.

The introduction of a new curriculum for primary schools in 1983 implied a return to

the basics in education. The ultimate goal was to ensure that no pupil is illiterate by the year 2000. The implementation of the remedial education programme for children in Primary 1–3 is to ensure that they master the 3Rs. Children who have been recommended for remedial education are required to attend remedial classes. As of 1999, 54,000 primary school children have undergone the intervention programme.

Insights gained

Malaysia's success in achieving universal primary education is attributable to many factors. These include the government's early investment in education to ensure all children have access to it, the political will to have the institutional and policy framework in place, and the commitment by all stakeholders. The investments in education have had benefits for households and families, as well as for the economy. It is evident that as accessibility to education has greatly improved, the incidence of poverty declined (Figure 2.7). Similarly, as literacy rates of women have increased, family size has declined (Figure 2.8).

Benefiting from the spread of education

Education plays a central role in the country's pursuit of economic growth and development, as well as being an important factor in the reduction of poverty. Education provides many beneficial externalities and has long-term effects on individuals. Government policy has been to encourage education at all levels, backed up by budgetary commitments. Free basic education for boys and girls has been supported with programmes targeting the poor, especially in rural areas, to encourage them to attend and to stay in school. The development policies set by the country in its national plans contributed to the achievement of universal primary education by 1990.

Keeping children at school

Reducing costs. To ensure universal primary enrolment, Malaysia made basic education free and provided assistance for indirect costs, such as school uniforms and shoes. Lowering out-of-pocket costs prevents parents from discriminating between boys and girls when deciding whether to send children to school and, in times of declining household income, discourages them from allowing their children to drop out of school. School Food Programmes, as well as the textbook-on-loan scheme, are also effective in getting children into school and ensuring completion of primary education as is the provision of hostels for children from rural and remote areas.

Automatic progression. Malaysia instituted automatic promotions to address the inefficiency of repeat class years and reduced the high dropout rates. However, standards are maintained with the provision of additional inputs, especially classroom materials, teacher training, and remedial classes.

Figure 2.7 Relationship Between Poverty and Literacy Rates, Malaysia, 1991 and 2000

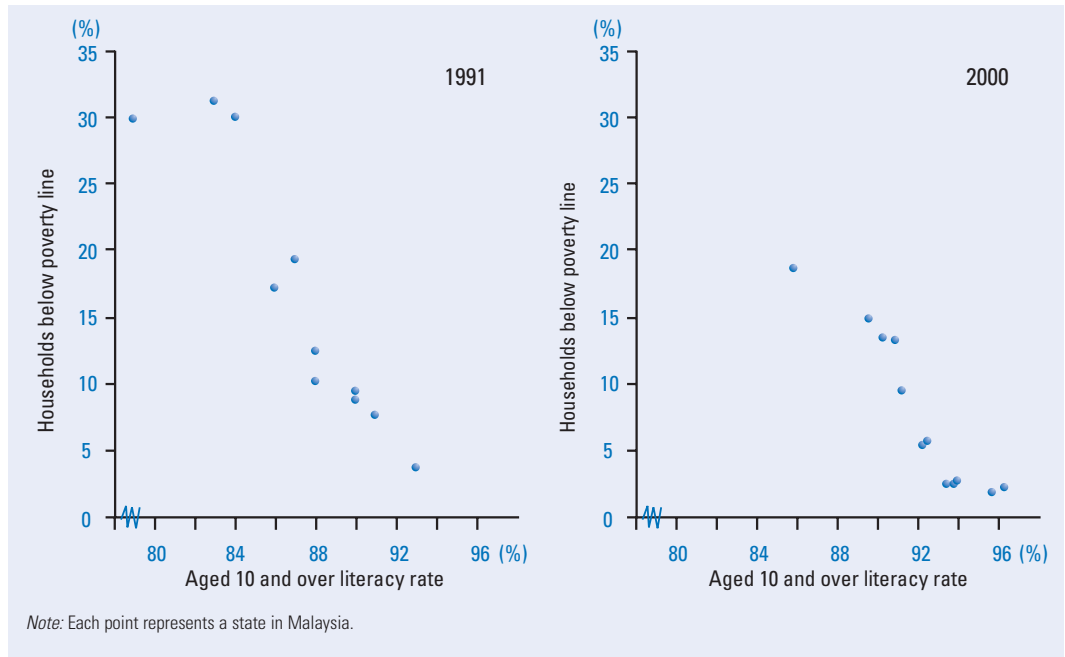
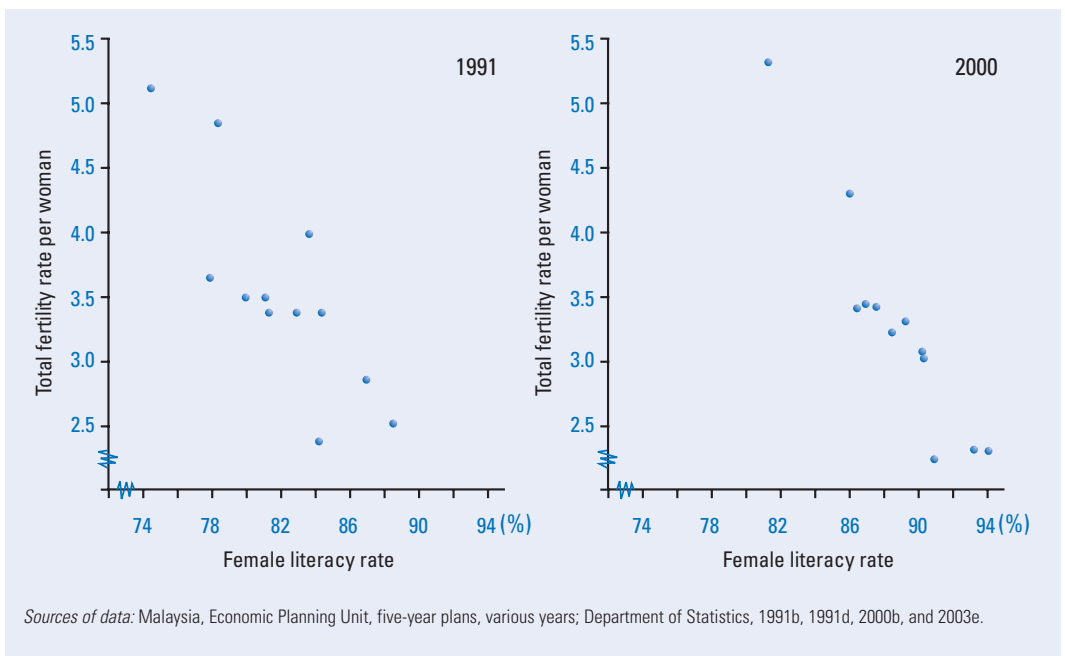


Figure 2.8 Relationship Between Female Literacy Rate and Family Size, Malaysia, 1991 and 2000



Future challenges

Despite the success in achieving universal primary education, challenges remain in improving the quality of primary education and ensuring the relevance of curricula. Attendance at pre-primary schools, which varies widely, can be improved to help upgrade performance at the primary level.

Access to basic education

Enrolment rates in remote and sparsely populated areas, especially in Sabah and Sarawak, continue to lag behind. These are often in areas with concentrations of the low-income group, and where parents may not be able to afford the opportunity costs of sending their children to school, and may need their children to work to help supplement the family income. Remote areas where indigenous people live present further challenges for the government in terms of building schools and hostels, and sending teachers to teach. A special focus on expanding educational access for the hard-to-reach groups is a particular challenge both in relation to the strategies required and the costs involved.

The academic performance of children from rural areas lags behind that of children in urban areas. One reason for this is the lack of experienced and trained teachers in rural areas, particularly the remote areas. Another is the digital divide between rural and urban areas due to the poor ICT infrastructure.

Curriculum relevance

The current primary education system is examination-oriented. This increases the pressure on parents, teachers, and students to measure performance based entirely on examination results. While such measurements are necessary, they tend to encourage rote teaching and learning. Some children who perform well in examinations may not necessarily understand fundamental concepts and are therefore unable to apply, for instance, mathematical or science concepts outside the school or textbook context. This concern is aggravated by the pressure to ensure that the curriculum keeps pace with the changing needs of the economy.

Teachers' development

Besides ensuring that the current curriculum is relevant to the changing needs of the economy, the government has to monitor the development and welfare of teachers amidst the rapid changes affecting the educational system. It is imperative to detect any negative impact on the welfare of teachers. The impact of the new teacher development curriculum, such as the implementation of computer-aided learning and the revamped curriculum, needs to be reviewed to ensure that teachers are not overly burdened.

Role of the private sector

There has been increasing participation by the private sector in education at all levels with an increase in private school enrolment at both the pre-school and primary levels. Government regulations and rigorous monitoring are required to ensure the quality of private schools. The amendment of the Education Act 1996 (Amended 2001) to accommodate the formulation and implementation of the National Pre-School Curriculum has enabled the coordination between the public and private education providers.

New directions

The education and training sector in Malaysia is a vibrant and dynamic sector. Education continues to be a social unity tool that is used to unite and integrate the three ethnic communities in Malaysia as well as to produce a knowledgeable, trained, and skilled society.

The way forward is to ensure that access to universal education continues to be available, especially to the poor and those in remote and sparsely populated areas. Future public policies on education will need to be sensitive to the possibility of an increasing urban-rural digital divide. Other aspects of education that require monitoring as Malaysia advances into the twenty-first century concern the need to ensure curriculum relevance, the quality of education amidst changing needs in the economy, and the important role of the private sector in education.