

Keynote Address

Challenges of Learner Diversity in Malaysia:
Policies, Practices and the Way Forward

YBhg.Dato' Hj Alimuddin Bin Mohd Dom
Director General of Education, Ministry of Education, Malaysia

Read by:

Yang Berbahagia Encik Bong Muk Shin

Director

Special Education Division

Ministry of Education

Malaysia

at the

Opening Ceremony of International Conference

On the Education

Of Learner Diversity

26 August 2008

Marriott Hotel Putrajaya

Thank you

YBhg. Prof.Dato' Dr. Zalizan Mohd Jelas

Yang Amat Berbahagia

Tan Sri Dato' Paduka Dr Mazlan Ahmad, Chairman, Board of Directors, UKM.

Yang Berbahagia

Prof. Dato' Dr. Sharifah Hapsah binti Syed Hassan Shahabudin

Vice Chancellor of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

Yang Berbahagia

Prof Datin Dr. Siti Rohayah Binti Ariffin

Dean of Faculty of Education.

Yang Berbahagia

Prof. Puan Sri Dr Rohaty Binti Mohd Majzub

Chairperson of International Conference on the Education

of Learner Diversity.

Distinguished Guests, speakers and participants,

Ladies and gentlemen,

A very good morning to all of you. Welcome to the International Conference on the Education of Learner Diversity 2008.

1. It is a pleasure for me to be here at the International Conference on the Education of Learner Diversity - a conference that is dedicated to the sharing of expertise and experiences as well as to the building of new partnerships in looking at learner diversities. It is heartening to see so many eminent persons from Malaysia and abroad, representing various organisations involved in presentations here today. I believe that a gathering of the best minds and experts on learner diversity, such as this one, is important because it enables the sharing of experiences and best practices among educational planners and practitioners as well as to explore options relevant to our own respective organisations, countries, regions and at the global level. This conference would be an ideal platform to learn about processes that are locally relevant and culturally appropriate for reorienting programmes and instituting educational reforms to address the needs of diverse learners. At this juncture, allow me to take this opportunity to congratulate the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia for taking on this enormous task.

2. I am most honored to be given this opportunity to address all distinguished professors, academicians, specialists, and representatives of Non Government Organizations (NGOs) / Non Profit Organizations (NPOs) and Government Link Companies (GLC), government agencies, speakers and participants.

The Malaysian Context

3. It has been well documented that a student's cultural and family background and socioeconomic level affect his or her learning. The context in which he or she grows and develops has an important impact on learning. Learners bring their own individual approach or styles, talents and interests to the learning situation. However, despite acknowledgment of the important differences among learners, uniformity continues to dominate our school practices. Over the last 50 years, too little has changed in our approach to schooling. Most schools still function as if all students were the same. Students use the same textbooks and the same materials for learning. They work at the same pace on the same quantity of learning material. They study the same content and work through the same curriculum on the same schedule. Teachers talk with whole groups of students, delivering the same information at the same time to everyone. And, of course, schools conduct the same examinations for all to measure the success of the learning.

4. The topic of my keynote address **Challenges of Learner Diversity in Malaysia: Policies, Practices and the Way Forward** is indeed appropriate and timely. However, allow me to provide further clarification. While we honor diversity, it does not imply a lack of direction, clear beliefs and strong values.

There are some absolutes in education. Among others are:

- Every learner benefits from an outstanding teacher and an engaging learning experience.
- Every student and teacher deserves to be treated with respect.
- Every student should have an opportunity to reach his or her individual optimum potential.
- Every student should master specific basic knowledge skills.

5. Good long-term planning through a clearly defined objective is paramount to improve quality, efficiency and effectiveness of the education system. It is possible to promote innovation and secure competitive advantage in the development of the education system through systemic planning. The consequences for lack of preparation can be costly and disastrous. It cannot be denied that good planning is indivisible from good design and implementation to ensure functionality and impact. Good design and implementation should take the opportunities available that contribute positively to improving the quality of education. If the programmes and

projects are to be sustainable, the market, economy and other driving forces that shape our communities and nation have to be factored into the planning and design.

6. Today, achieving economic and social progress depends largely on the nation's capabilities to acquire, share, create and use knowledge effectively. Globalisation not only mobilises capital, goods and people, but also changes concepts, cultures, values and identity. Given the challenges, the nation building process in Malaysia involves the creation of a progressive and united Malaysian nation based on a resilient economy that is characterised by an equitable and just distribution of wealth regardless of race and creed. Besides achieving a dynamic economic growth and imbalances in economic opportunities must not adversely affect national development. At the same time, the peoples' mindsets, cultures and values need to be strengthened in line with the nation's aspirations to progress in its own mould as envisioned in Vision 2020 and strategize in the National Mission. In ensuring the success of the National Mission, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has prepared a comprehensive Education Development Master Plan (EDMP), 2006-2010 that outlines the plan and policies to make the national education relevant to current and future needs. Any gap or deficiency in education will be addressed and given due attention.

Education Development Master Plan (EDMP)

7. The EDMP was developed in line with the national development plans and policies by taking into account the Third Outline Perspective Plan, Five Year Malaysia Plans, the framework laid out in the National Mission, the National Integrity Plan, Islam Hadhari as well as national education development plans and policies. The education development plan per se is innovative in that it is the first time the MOE has produced its own master plan in line with the Five Year Malaysia Plan. It is formulated based on findings from research and development and through the collaboration and inputs from various ministries, agencies, NGOs and other stakeholders. The strategies underlying the EDMP are characterized by the following guiding principles: promotion and protection of fundamental rights, solidarity within and between generations, an open and democratic society, involvement of citizens, involvement of stakeholders, policy coherence and governance, policy integration, and the use of best available knowledge and talents.

8. The ultimate goal of EDMP (2006 – 2010) is to provide access, equity and quality education for all which includes diverse learners, which are the prerequisites for education for sustainable development. The plan promotes two main approaches namely to provide equal opportunities for all and to accelerate excellence in educational institutions. In the first

approach, the MOE is committed to ensure that all citizens receive fair and equal educational opportunities regardless of location, race, ability or ethnic background and even extended to juveniles in Henry Gurney Schools and young prisoners in prisons. The MOE will ensure that all students will master the reading, writing and arithmetic skills (3Rs) and that no student will drop out from school due to poverty or locality. In cooperation with the National Implementation Directorate and National Implementation Task Force, for the first time the MOE has prioritised Quantum Leap in Rural Education as crucial in narrowing the education gap. Programmes to bridge the gap include pre-school education, basic facilities, school infrastructure, ICT initiatives, education programmes, teacher development and support programmes.

9. In the second approach, recognizing the needs to address diversity in learning by striving to develop excellent as such of education institutions, MOE will identify schools in the respective clusters of national schools, national-type schools, fully residential schools, premier schools, technical schools, national religious secondary schools, centennial schools, special schools, indigenous people schools, smart schools, sport schools and schools in Putrajaya and Cyberjaya. As an innovative approach, the schools will identify their niche areas and build upon strengths and competitiveness of the school community.

10. Education for ***diverse learners*** in Malaysia is also developed actively with various programmes to strengthen national integration. In a multi-racial society such as Malaysia, the establishment of national schools (NS) is one of the efforts made to inculcate a sense of national aspiration amongst students. The national schools is hoped to become a place where the younger generation could live and work together, producing a nation of loyal citizens who can contribute towards the well being of the country. In line with this move, the Ministry of Education introduced this policy to boost the excellence of national schools to enable it to become the school of choice and accord equal attention to the government - aided religious schools, National - Type Chinese and National - Type Tamil schools.

11. To attract more students from all ethnic background to enrol in National Schools, several initiatives have been taken towards achieving the concept of '**Unity in Diversity**'. These include:
 - i. The provision of the opportunity to learn other languages for communication such as Arabic, Chinese and Tamil.
 - ii. The expansion of the pre-school programme by increasing the number of pre-school classes in all National Schools especially in the interior and remote areas, applying the National Pre-school

Curriculum, including ensuring that children with special needs receive pre-school education.

- iii. Ensuring there are sufficient and well-trained pre-school teachers and teacher assistants;
- iv. Strengthening the leadership of the principal and quality of teachers by providing adequate training in leadership and improving the criteria for the selection for principals and headmasters. Early Intervention classes for reading and writing (KIA2M) were introduced in 2006 to ensure that all Year 1 students can read and write after six months of schooling. Pupils with learning disabilities will attend remedial classes, therefore sufficient number of remedial teachers would be provided to the schools;
- v. Expand the j-QAF program to strengthen Islamic education. Through this programme the Muslim students will be proficient in reading and writing Jawi, able to complete the reading of the Quran, students have the basics in communicating and understanding of Arabic and will be able to practice the Fardhu Ain upon completion of their primary education; and
- vi. Provide and manage a comprehensive infrastructure for teaching, learning and the management of all type of schools. This includes provision of hardware, software and training.

12. To enhance the quality of education for diverse learners, teachers are identified as the main agent to play an important and huge role in accommodating to needs of the diverse learners. There are about 350,000 teachers in Malaysia who are potential change agents to 5.2 million primary and secondary school students. This includes 830 teachers in special schools for secondary and primary school students and 3865 teachers in special education integrated programmes in primary schools. There are 1727 teachers in special education integrated programmes in secondary schools while there are 90 teachers attached to the prison department of Malaysia.

13. Teachers are influential in developing the minds of students. In the classrooms of today and tomorrow, the role of teachers for children with special needs in particular and diverse learners as a whole is no longer confined to a dispenser of knowledge but has extended to that of a facilitator and a source of inspiration to students. Teachers have to be creative and innovative in order to make the teaching and learning process more effective and fun. Teacher education, indeed, has become a strategic thrust in the support for sustainable development. The challenge to the MOE is to ensure that we have a pool of qualified, skilled and motivated teachers who are able to engage children with diverse learners within and outside the classroom.

14. To ensure the welfare of teachers for students with special needs in particular and at the same time, to overcome the problems of deploying and maintaining teachers in rural areas, the MOE has introduced two incentives in 2007, namely the Special Allowance by Location and Level of Hardship (amounting to RM500, RM1,000 or RM1,500 per month) and the Allowance to Return to Hometown. In 2007, the MOE also increased the allowance for special education teachers (from RM100 to RM250), created the position of remedial teachers in all schools and implemented a better teacher norm of 1.7 per class (from 1.5 per class) in order to overcome teacher workload in primary and secondary schools.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

15. One of the main groups under diverse learner is children with special needs. Let me explain a bit about this group. As we know, three different ministries provide services for children with special needs in Malaysia. They are Ministry Of Education, Ministry Of Health And Ministry Of Women, Family and Community Development. The Ministry of Health has the task of early identification and screening of children at risk. The ministry's medical and Para – medical personnel are responsible for the curative and preventive aspects for early intervention of children with impairments. Unlike many other countries, two ministries provide educational services for children with special educational needs. The

Ministry of Education, meanwhile, is given the task of providing educational services for children with the following educational needs;

- i. hearing impairments;
- ii. visual impairments and
- iii. learning disabilities

Categories of students with learning disabilities whose educational services are being provided by the Ministry of Education include:

- i. Down's Syndrome
- ii. Mild Autistic Tendency (Autism)
- iii. Attention Deficit and Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD)
- iv. Minimal Mental Retardation, and
- v. Specific Learning Difficulties

16. In 1981, the Ministry of Education adopted the 'least restrictive environment' policy in providing educational facilities for its students with special educational needs. This resulted in the development of integrated special education programs with the establishment of special education classes in mainstream schools. Unlike special education schools, these special education classes are part of mainstream schools system. The purpose of developing special education classes in mainstream schools is to enhance social integration between children with special needs and their mainstream peers in as many schools activities as possible.

Inclusive Education

17. Inclusive Education (IE) is defined as a process of addressing the diverse needs of all learners by reducing barriers to, and within the learning environment. Inclusive education is “about enabling schools to serve all children” (UNESCO 1994). In other words, inclusive means creating schools which welcome all learners, regardless of their characteristic, disadvantages or difficulties.

18. Inclusion in Malaysia is the process of placing students with Special Education Needs under the Ministry of Education responsibilities into mainstream classes to be educated alongside their mainstream peers of the same age group or otherwise, with or without additional support, and within the present school system. This concept of Inclusive Education (IE) might not be in line with the ideal concept of inclusion pace on *“acceptance, belonging and about providing school settings in which all these advantaged children can be valued equally and be provided with equal educational opportunities”*(Thomas;1997), but in the Malaysian context, (with its limitation and constraints). It is practicable. Inclusion in Malaysia is more of functional integration rather than “total inclusion” (acceptance of students with special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream classes without conditions). Two types of inclusion is being

practiced, (i) full inclusion, i.e. students with SEN are being placed fully in mainstream classes, and (ii)partial inclusion, i.e., students with SEN are being placed in mainstream classes for certain subjects only. Prior to inclusion especially in the early part of their formal education, students with SEN are being equipped with the necessary basic skills and knowledge, so as to enable them to cope with mainstream learning. Only those who are perceived able to cope with mainstream learning would be included fully or partially. Thus, students with SEN are being prepared for inclusion as opposed to inclusion without conditions.

The Way Forward

Ladies and Gentlemen,

19. Allow me to share our experience and efforts to equip Malaysians as the workforce of tomorrow. Other than the special education schools and integrated special education programs provided for children with special educational needs, the Ministry of Education also takes into consideration education for future employability. Children with special educational needs could pursue vocational training at upper secondary education (Secondary 4 – 5) in technical / vocational secondary schools after completing their lower secondary education (secondary 1- 3). The technical education department introduced special educational classes for students with special education needs in technical/vocational secondary schools in

1999. Currently, these educational services are only available for students with hearing impairments and learning difficulties.

20. Besides establishing special educational classes in technical and vocational secondary schools, the Technical Education Division has also initiated the opening of the special education classes for students with hearing impairments at 3 polytechnics for those who are interested to pursue their studies at tertiary levels. Courses currently being offered to these students are;
 - i. mechanical engineering;
 - ii. civil engineering;
 - iii. fashion and design;
 - iv. graphic designing; and
 - v. hotel and catering

21. Our effort in supporting the aspirations of a caring society does not stop here. To further assist these diverse learners and their parents, the Ministry of Education has set up 14 special education service centres (3PK) since 1999. These centres provide expert guidance on matters relating to education of children with special needs. It also acts as a complimentary body to other agencies related to special needs education, which provides the following services;
 - i. audiology service

- ii. speech therapy activities
- iii. parents counseling
- iv. toys library and resource materials

Learner Diversity – Equality and Quality

Ladies and Gentlemen,

22. Besides children with special needs, Ministry of Education also plans to embark a pilot program for gifted children in 2009. The program of gifted education will be implemented at primary school level in 18 cluster schools. In line with our educational Development Master Plan (EDMP) of which the thrust of all efforts is towards building quality human capital, it is essential for special education division to review strategies of teaching and learning for gifted students. It is important that the collaboration between developing countries be expanded to include gifted program. Malaysia is therefore looking into best practices from Singapore, Thailand, South Korea and New Zealand to share their successful practices in implementing the curriculum.
23. The MOE has also introduced innovative measures in providing education to the Orang Asli and Penan children. At present, there are about 28,600 Orang Asli and 2,060 Penan pupils in 93 Orang Asli schools, 6 Penan schools and other primary schools. The enrolment of Orang Asli has

increased 3.5 times since the Ministry took over the responsibility of their education in 1995 (from the Department of Orang Asli Affairs). Most Orang Asli and Penan children attend primary school in their settlements and are thereby excluded from the mainstream until they enter secondary level.

24. The successful inclusion of these children depends on their ability to accommodate and assimilate. While it takes both sides to ensure smooth transition, the government must understand the importance of education in their lives. For instance, the MOE has to accept that attendance is dependent on the seasonal nature of household chores. Children will be away during the fruit season and “drop in” school whenever they are “free” from chores. Measures have been made to ensure that the Orang Asli and Penan children fully utilise the opportunities provided to them to acquire education at all levels. These are to:
 - i. Increase awareness on the importance of education among Orang Asli parents and provide adult education to create more literate parents;
 - ii. Review and adapt the national curriculum and pilot it in selected schools;
 - iii. Reduce dropout by developing special remedial and education programmes. For example, introducing K9 Comprehensive Special Model schools that provide preschool education up to Grade 9 in/close to their settlements;

- iv. Provide support services to ensure the welfare of children are taken care off; and
 - v. Continuously improve and upgrade teachers' knowledge and skills in Orang Asli and Penan schools, with the aid of the Department of Orang Asli Affairs.
25. Malaysia is a member of SEAMEO (South East Asian Ministers of Education Organization) since its establishment in 1965. The Asian Education Third Meeting and the 43rd SEAMEO Council Conference, which took place in Kuala Lumpur, had aroused the interest to Malaysia as the regional centre for special education for children with special needs. SEAMEO council has agreed with the proposal by Malaysia to establish such a centre in Malaysia. The proposed regional center for special education is in line with the Education Development Master Plan (EDMP) to enhance and elevate the status and quality special education in the region to be of world class standard. The center will establish links to worldwide networking such as in Japan, National Institute of Special Education (NISE) and Korea Institute for Special Education Korea (KISE).
26. The MOE has made efforts to obtain world recognition, especially among developing countries through best practices in education. The MOE has established an MOU with Thailand to strengthen Islamic education in Southern Thailand by training teachers in Islamic studies and English

language and by providing Muslim students places to study in two Federal Islamic Secondary Schools (SMAP Labu and SMAP Kajang). Our textbooks and Islamic education syllabi has also been studied and reviewed for use in Afghanistan by UNESCO. In relation to training, the MOE has trained 105 teachers from Aceh beginning 2006. Institut Aminuddin Baki has conducted a series of training programmes on educational leadership and management as well as curriculum management to principals and head teachers from Cambodia, Maldives and several ASEAN and G-15 countries. All these new efforts in internationalisation are innovative approaches made to strengthen initiatives in placing education in Malaysia at the international platform.

27. The Ministry of Education under the Education Development Master Plan (2006 – 2010) has several strategies in addressing the issues of learner diversity such as pre – school programme in special schools and integrated special education programme, expansion education program for Juvenile and young prisoner (Henry Gurney School and Integrity School) and education programme for students with multiple disabilities.

28. The success of special education programme depends very much on the support and contribution given by all parties related to the aspiration of providing quality education for children with special needs. Therefore, The Ministry of Education (MOE) is looking forward for collaboration of all social

resources in the community, such as NGOs, parents, prominent individuals, corporate sectors and international bodies to help support our efforts in providing equal educational opportunity for all children regardless of their backgrounds.

Issues and Challenges of diverse learners

Distinguished Guests and ladies and gentlemen,

29. So far, we understand that diverse learners comprise of all spectrum of children at going school ages, right from left hand up to right hand or from special needs students to gifted and talented students. For looking forward, it is good for MOE to address some issues and challenges in order to provide high standard education for diverse learners.

i. Expanding the Supply of Highly Skilled and Knowledge Workers

Since human resource is the key factor in the development of a knowledge-based economy, concerted efforts will have to be made to increase the supply of highly skilled and K-workers through the expansion of education and training. K-workers refer to those who can acquire, apply, synthesize and create knowledge. In view of the increasing need for K-manpower, the overall capacity of education and training institutions will be increased through the expansion and

upgrading of existing institutions as well as the establishment of new institutions by the public and private sectors. The education system will be reoriented to enable students with special needs to acquire a higher level of explicit knowledge as well as thinking and entrepreneurial skills through, among others, improvements in the curriculum and teaching approach. The ability of the education system to increase the supply of K-workers will depend, to a large extent, on a pool of highly trained and motivated teachers. The private sector is expected to intensify their involvement in the provision of education and training, especially in multidisciplinary knowledge and new disciplines such as biotechnology and bioinformatics.

ii. Increasing Accessibility to Education and Training

Efforts will continue to be undertaken to increase accessibility to education at all levels in order to enhance income generation capabilities and the quality of life. To improve the attendance and performance of students, particularly in the rural areas and students with special needs, priority will, therefore, be given to increase the enrolment rate of school-going age cohort. The construction of centralized schools in remote areas, special schools and special education integrated programmes will also increase accessibility, thus leading to an improvement in attendance. In addition, measures will

also be implemented to improve the performance of students in rural schools, special schools and special education programmes including the provision of adequate teaching and learning materials, infrastructure and trained teachers, thus reducing the performance gap between rural and urban students, mainstream students and students with special needs. To attract quality teachers to serve in these schools, incentives and benefits such as housing and hardship allowances have been increased.

iii. Improving the Quality of Education and Training Delivery System

Efforts will be focused on increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the education and training delivery system to ensure an adequate supply of high quality manpower. To nurture creativity and innovativeness as well as thinking skills among students with special needs, the current curriculum and performance assessment of students with special needs will be reviewed. The student-centred learning approach will be strengthened. More subjects will be taught using computer-based resources and multimedia technology. New subjects, courses and programmes will be designed to develop a workforce that can learn and adapt rapidly to changes in technology as well as meet the market demand for new skills.

iv. Promoting Lifelong Learning

Efforts will be made to develop a knowledge-seeking culture among Malaysians in view of the rapid changes in technology and the increasing knowledge intensity of the economy. Lifelong learning will be promoted to enhance productivity and employability through the use of ICT in distance learning and web-based learning to meet individual needs.

v. Reinforcing Positive Values

Efforts will be undertaken to inculcate and reinforce positive values through the education and training system. These values including good work ethics, diligence, integrity, tolerance, gratitude, and respect for authority, punctuality and pursuit of excellence are characteristics of a high quality workforce. Other values that will be emphasized include kindness, caring and neighborliness, which are necessary to promote social harmony and cohesion. These efforts will be complemented by the involvement of parents, individuals and the corporate sector.

Smart partnership

Ladies and Gentlemen,

30. To further accommodate learner diversity in education, the Ministry of Education has collaborated with non – government organization (NGOs) in different fields as listed below:

- i. There are at least four influential NGOs that contribute services in the education for the hearing impaired, they are The Malaysian Federation of the Deaf, The National Society of the Deaf, the State - level Society of the Deaf, and Y Self Reliance Centre for the Deaf.
- ii. Main resources, collaboration and NGOs contribution on the education for the visual impaired comes from the National Council for the Blind Malaysia (NCBM) and The Malaysia Association for the Blind (MAB).
- iii. Advocacy, resources and collaboration for children with learning disabilities are provided by the Down Syndrome Association of Malaysia, The National Council for the Association of Spastic Children Malaysia, National Autistic Society of Malaysia (NASOM) and the Dyslexia Association of Malaysia, and

iv. Corporate bodies are also involved in providing resources, collaboration and contribution to the special children under the Ministry of Education. They are The Royal Rotary Club Kuala Lumpur that donates hearing aids and learning aids to all categories of children with special needs. The Media Prima Berhad which is the main broadcasting agency in Malaysia provides publicity and news coverage, other corporate organization such as The Sunway Medical (private hospital), Speech Training Unit under the National University of Malaysia and the Science University of Malaysia that provides support and teacher training programs. Other huge corporate contributors are The Tenaga National Foundation (Government Lead Conglomerate) and The Procter and Gamble Company.

The role of government

Ladies and Gentlemen,

31. Malaysia as a board member of the International Bureau of Education (IBE) will join the 48th Session of the International Conference on Education to be held from 25 to 28 November 2008 at the International Conference Centre in Geneva (Switzerland). The theme of the conference is “Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future.” I believe, education in Malaysia, in general and special education in particular will benefit greatly from the discussion held.

32. Malaysia gives its full support for special education in terms of expenditure, facilities and allocation of resources. For 2008, the Ministry of Education has allocated RM 65 million for Special Education Division and the 32 special schools under its development areas. The allocation is used among others for

- The upgrading of remedial classes
- The expansion of Pre-School for special education
- The upgrading of integration classes for special education

Under the RMK – 9, there will be 2 more secondary special schools (vocational) will be build at Merbok, Kedah and Kuantan, Pahang. The schools will cater vocational and skill training to students with hearing impaired and learning disabilities.

33. In 2008, student in Malaysia does not have to pay any kind of tuition fees. It is our government new policy on free education, which in line with Dakar Goals and declaration. MOE allocated nearly RM 1.0 billion every year to provide Support Programmes to needy students, among its programmes are:

- i. Food Nutrition Programme – This scheme allowed nearly 707 thousand children to enjoy a daily breakfast before school in 2006, a School Milk Programme that provided milk at school to nearly 570 thousands students in 2006.

- ii. School Health Programme
- iii. Guidance and Counselling
- iv. Boarding facilities
- v. Trust Fund for Poor Students – provided assistance of about 29.4 Million USD to 857,319 primary and secondary students in 2005. In the year 2006, 200 million Ringgit Malaysia has been allocated.
- vi. Textbook Loan Scheme – beginning the 2008 school session, the Text Book Loan Scheme will be provided to all students, irrespective of their families’ income and with no restrictions on the number of eligible children. With this, 5.7 million students will benefit from this scheme compared with 4.5 million students currently. With these measures, schooling in Malaysia is now completely free.
- vii. Scholarship and Loan – supported 230,000 students at secondary level.

Conclusion

Ladies and Gentlemen,

34. Malaysia signified to the United Nation Convention on The Right of The Children (1989), Education for All (1990), The Salamanca Statement (1994), BIWAKO Millennium Framework for action 2003 agenda that learner diversity is recognized and addressed accordingly in line with the demands of EDMP. Diverse learners have the right to quality education and quality of life. Remember, they are also considered as an asset and as human capital of the country. I hope that through our joint efforts and collaboration, Learner Diversity can be addressed effectively and viewed as a boon to the education system. It promotes flexibility, creativity and growth in education process in Malaysia.

All the programs for students with special needs that have been planned and implemented are in line with the national education philosophy and EDMP which aim to produce holistic individuals who are able to fulfill local and international needs. Children with special needs is hoped to be individuals who are marketable and employable together with the development of the nation. This will close the gap between the education of children with special needs and the mainstream children.

35. In conclusion, I'm proud to say that the success of learning of diverse learners in Malaysian education system is attributed to the following factors. **First**, the cooperation and commitment of the stakeholders through constant involvement of various parties in the planning and implementation of education programmes and projects to ensure all information, communication, financial resources, manpower and expertise are efficiently and effectively managed. **Second**, cooperation and commitment of the education community to make certain that all personnel understand the education policies, objectives and targets to be achieved including strategies and action plans that are implemented. **Third**, an efficient and effective educational delivery system that is able to create the desired impact on the target group. **Fourth**, an efficient monitoring and evaluation mechanism at all levels that contributes to the success of the implementation of programmes and projects. **Fifth**, a high degree of efficiency, transparency and accountability in educational management is evident through the report card system whereby it is used as a means of further promoting accountability and performance measurement in service delivery. (The Ministry of Education has presented the second of its twice yearly report cards to the public recently in March 2008). And **finally**, the commitment to enhance the wellbeing of its personnel and the continuous importance placed on a conducive working environment. These are the contributing factors to the success of learning of diverse learners in Malaysian education system.

36. I strongly believe this conference is an invaluable opportunity for policy maker, planners, educationists, researchers, scholars, stakeholders and the corporate sectors to share success stories on learner diversity and to contribute for its advancement in the future.

I wish all participants a fruitful experience and deliberations.

Thank you.