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## THE EDUCATION PILLAR IN MALAYSIA MADANI: FOSTERING STUDENT DEVELOPMENT FOR A DEVELOPED MALAYSIA

Nor Azira Mohd. Radzi <sup>\*1</sup>, Majdah Chulan<sup>2</sup>, Azhar Abdul Rahman<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Academy of Language Studies, UiTM Perlis, Malaysia.  
Email: [norazira202@uitm.edu.my](mailto:norazira202@uitm.edu.my)

<sup>2</sup> Academy of Language Studies, UiTM Perlis, Malaysia.  
Email: [majdah@uitm.edu.my](mailto:majdah@uitm.edu.my)

<sup>3</sup> Academy of Contemporary Studies, UiTM Perlis, Malaysia.  
Email: [azharabdulrahman@uitm.edu.my](mailto:azharabdulrahman@uitm.edu.my)

\* Corresponding Author

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### Abstract:

The study explores strategies to strengthen holistic education by balancing academic and non-academic development, emphasizing life skills, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and employability competencies. Equity in education is addressed through targeted interventions such as scholarships, infrastructure improvements in rural schools, and inclusive learning environments that cater to diverse needs. Innovation and technology are examined as essential tools for preparing students for the digital economy, with recommendations for integrating digital literacy and coding into curricula while bridging the digital divide through infrastructure investments. Additionally, the paper highlights challenges related to teacher quality and professional development. It underscores the need for competitive salaries, career advancement opportunities, and ongoing training to equip educators with effective pedagogical strategies and technological proficiency. Parental and community involvement is also emphasized as a critical factor in student success, advocating for initiatives such as parent-teacher associations and community-based programs. By aligning Malaysia's education system with the principles of Malaysia Madani—sustainability, prosperity, innovation, respect, trust, and compassion—this paper provides actionable recommendations for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders to address systemic inequities. These findings contribute to the discourse on educational reform in Malaysia while offering insights into fostering a more inclusive and innovative learning environment.

**Keywords:**

Developed Malaysia, Malaysia Madani, Student Development.

**Introduction**

Malaysia's vision to achieve developed nation status by 2025, initially outlined in Vision 2020, has evolved into the Malaysia Madani framework, which emphasizes compassion, justice, and sustainability as guiding principles for national development. Central to this framework is the education pillar, which positions education not merely as a tool for individual advancement but as a cornerstone for societal progress and economic growth. The education pillar aims to cultivate well-rounded, innovative, and socially responsible individuals capable of contributing to Malaysia's development goals.

This paper critically examines the role of the education pillar within Malaysia Madani, focusing on its objectives to foster holistic student development, equity in education, and innovation-driven learning. It identifies key challenges that must be addressed to realize these objectives, including the overemphasis on academic achievement at the expense of non-academic growth, persistent disparities between urban and rural schools, and the digital divide that limits access to technology for underserved communities. Additionally, issues related to teacher quality and parental involvement are explored as critical factors influencing student success.

The study further highlights opportunities for reform and provides actionable recommendations for policymakers and educators. These include revising curricula to promote holistic education, implementing targeted interventions to address educational inequities, integrating technology into classrooms to prepare students for the digital economy, and enhancing teacher training programs. By aligning Malaysia's education system with the principles of Malaysia Madani—sustainability, prosperity, innovation, respect, trust, and compassion—this paper aims to contribute to the discourse on educational reform in Malaysia while offering insights into fostering a more inclusive and innovative learning environment.

**The Education Pillar in Malaysia Madani*****Holistic Education for Student Development***

The Malaysia Madani framework, spearheaded by Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, serves as a comprehensive blueprint for national development, underpinned by principles of sustainability, prosperity, innovation, respect, trust, and compassion to realize the potential of Malaysia Madani fully, it is imperative to understand the interconnectedness between its guiding principles and the transformation of the education sector. For instance, the principle of 'Sustainability' directly relates to fostering environmental awareness and responsible citizenship among students, aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The principle of 'Innovation' necessitates a shift towards a more dynamic and technology-driven education system, preparing students for the demands of the future workforce. The educational policies must be deliberately crafted to embody and advance these core principles.

Holistic education is a central tenet of Malaysia Madani, emphasizing the development of students' intellectual, emotional, physical, and social capacities. This approach aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which calls for inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations, 2015). Malaysia's Ministry of Education has launched many programs to encourage holistic education. As per the Ministry of Education Malaysia (2013), the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 places significant emphasis on the development of students' cognitive, emotional, and psychomotor skills. In other words, it is essential to develop well-rounded people who possess life skills, critical thinking ability, emotional intelligence, and academic proficiency (Ismail et al., 2024). To develop socially conscious citizens, the blueprint also emphasises the importance of character education.

Another element of holistic education is to balance between academic and non-academic development, which includes co-curricular activities, community service, and character-building programs alongside traditional classroom learning. According to Teo and Ho (2015), to promote a more holistic development, students are encouraged to engage in sports, arts and other extracurricular activities. Besides that, as Shah et al. (2020) claim, students need to develop their skills beyond their academic qualification, like communication skills, critical thinking, problem-solving, and digital literacy, which are seen to be significant for employability in the contemporary economy. This indicates that Malaysian holistic education places a strong emphasis on students' character development and non-academic skills to cater for the demands of the job market and prepare them to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

Nonetheless, there are still issues with putting holistic education into practice. The existing system frequently places more emphasis on academic achievement than other areas of growth, which narrows the focus on test scores. To solve this, Malaysia needs to take a more well-rounded stance that prioritises academic success along with creativity, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence.

### ***Equity in Education***

Equity in education is another key principle of Malaysia Madani. Ensuring that all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background, have access to quality education is crucial for national development. The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 identifies equity as one of its key aspirations, aiming to reduce disparities in educational outcomes between urban and rural areas, as well as among different ethnic groups (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013).

In the primary school context, equity for all students means to ensure all children at the primary school level complete their primary schooling. Over the years, the government has provided additional support and programs, ranging from financial support programs, programs for Special Education Needs and special programs for the Orang Asli communities as well (Othman et al, 2022). In addition, The Ministry of Education (MOE) has also introduced the use of ICT in schools to improve teaching and learning.

Addressing equity in education requires a multi-faceted approach that goes beyond providing financial assistance. Addressing equity involves creating inclusive learning environments that cater to the diverse learning styles and needs of all students, including those with disabilities and those from marginalized communities (Ainscow, 2023; 2024; OECD,2023). Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles can serve as a valuable framework for designing

curricula and instruction that are accessible and engaging for all learners (Fazliyah, 2020; Idawati et al., 2024).

Despite these efforts, disparities persist. Rural schools often lack the resources and infrastructure needed to provide quality education, while students from low-income families face barriers to accessing higher education. To address these issues, Malaysia must invest in targeted interventions, such as scholarships, teacher training, and infrastructure development, to ensure that all students have equal opportunities to succeed.

### ***Innovation and Technology in Education***

Innovation and technology are essential for preparing students for the challenges of the 21st century. The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 recognizes the importance of integrating technology into the classroom to enhance teaching and learning (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the need for digital transformation in education, as schools were forced to adopt online learning platforms.

According to Moorhouse (2020), teachers in most educational institutions were required to conduct online teaching during the pandemic of COVID-19 to fulfil the students' learning needs. The face-to-face teaching method was replaced by an online setting that mostly depended on technology. Teachers must be highly proficient in using technological tools to conduct online teaching to get through a new norm in teaching during this pandemic (Rashid et al., 2021). That is, they should believe they can use ICT resources to create an effective and engaging online learning environment.

To effectively integrate technology into the classroom, teachers require ongoing professional development that focuses not only on the technical aspects but also on pedagogical strategies for leveraging digital tools to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes (Afsheen Rezai et al., 2024). Such professional development efforts must be contextualized to the Malaysian educational landscape, considering the diverse needs and challenges of different schools and communities.

However, the digital divide remains a significant challenge. Many students, particularly those in rural areas, lack access to reliable internet and digital devices. To bridge this gap, Malaysia must invest in digital infrastructure and provide training for teachers to effectively use technology in the classroom. Additionally, the curriculum should be updated to include digital literacy and coding, equipping students with the skills needed for the digital economy.

## **Challenges and Opportunities**

### ***Teacher Quality and Professional Development***

The quality of teachers is a critical factor in student development. Research has shown that teacher quality is one of the most significant predictors of student achievement (Hattie, 2003). In Malaysia, efforts have been made to improve teacher training and professional development through programs such as the National Professional Qualification for Educational Leaders (NPQEL) and the Malaysia Teacher Standard (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013).

A qualitative case study by Ming and Mansor (2023), which involved three primary teachers in the Larut Matang and Selama districts in Perak, explored the strategies for improving the

implementation of Teacher Professionalism Development. Based on their findings, three strategies have been identified, which were: (a) needs-based planning for effective TPD, (b) preferences for flexible and personalized learning, and (c) digital TPD delivery method, and they were found to have the implementation of teacher professional development. They concluded that the TPD Learning Model is proposed to enhance the implementation of teacher professional development, particularly in the Larut Matang and Selama districts.

One of the key challenges in improving teacher quality is the uneven distribution of experienced and qualified teachers across schools, with rural schools often facing a shortage of experienced educators. Data from the Ministry of Education (2013) indicates that the teacher attrition rate in rural schools is 15% higher than in urban schools, the same thing was reported by *The Star*, in 2023. To address this issue, targeted incentives and support programs are needed to attract and retain high-quality teachers in underserved areas.

However, challenges remain in attracting and retaining high-quality teachers, particularly in rural areas. To address this, Malaysia must offer competitive salaries and career advancement opportunities for teachers. Additionally, ongoing professional development programs should be provided to ensure that teachers are equipped with the latest pedagogical strategies and technological tools.

### ***Parental and Community Involvement***

Parental and community involvement is essential for student success. Research has shown that students whose parents are actively involved in their education tend to perform better academically and have higher self-esteem (Epstein, 2011). On the other hand, students whose parents are not actively involved may find it difficult to succeed academically due to a lack of academic assistance and supervision (Shimi et al. 2024). Due to this reason, in Malaysia, several efforts have been made to promote parental involvement through initiatives such as the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) and community-based programs.

Parental involvement is a crucial factor in student success, and schools should actively seek to engage parents in the education process. According to Kantova (2024), this can be achieved through various initiatives, such as parent-teacher associations, workshops, and home-school communication channels. Effective parental involvement strategies are culturally sensitive and address the specific needs and challenges of different families.

However, more needs to be done to engage parents and communities in the education process. Schools should provide opportunities for parents to participate in decision-making and collaborate with teachers to support student learning. Additionally, community-based programs, such as after-school tutoring and mentorship, can help bridge the gap between school and home.

### ***Global Competitiveness***

In an increasingly globalized world, Malaysia must ensure that its education system prepares students to compete on the international stage. This requires a focus on developing global competencies, such as cross-cultural understanding, communication skills, and adaptability. The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 emphasizes the importance of international benchmarking and collaboration to enhance the quality of education (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). To achieve this, one of the ways is by introducing the Programme for



International Student Assessment (PISA), which can help Malaysia benchmark its education system against global standards and identify areas for improvement.

While the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of online learning, the digital divide remains a significant barrier to equitable access to education. A recent survey by Surianshah (2021) mentioned, nearly 30% of students in remote regions lack reliable access to the internet at home. This digital divide exacerbates existing inequalities and requires urgent attention to ensure that all students could participate in online learning.

## **Recommendations**

### ***Strengthening Holistic Education***

To promote holistic education, the Ministry of Education should revise the national curriculum to allocate at least 20% of instructional time to non-academic activities, such as arts, sports, and community service. Schools should also be encouraged to implement project-based learning approaches that integrate multiple disciplines and foster critical thinking skills. The success of these initiatives can be measured through student surveys, teachers' feedback and assessments of students' non-cognitive skills.

### ***Enhancing Equity in Education***

To address disparities in educational outcomes, Malaysia should invest in targeted interventions for disadvantaged students. This includes providing scholarships, improving infrastructure in rural schools, and offering additional support for students from low-income families. Additionally, the government should work with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector to implement community-based programs that address the specific needs of marginalized communities.

### ***Promoting Innovation and Technology***

To prepare students for the digital economy, Malaysia should invest in digital infrastructure and provide training for teachers to effectively use technology in the classroom. The curriculum should be updated to include digital literacy and coding, and schools should be equipped with the necessary tools and resources to support online learning. Additionally, partnerships with technology companies can help provide students with access to the latest digital tools and platforms.

The government should establish a national fund to provide grants to schools for the purchase of digital devices, internet access, and educational software. The Ministry of Education should also partner with technology companies to provide training and support for teachers in the effective use of technology in the classroom. The success of these initiatives can be measured through increases in student access to technology, improvements in teacher digital literacy, and enhanced student engagement in online learning activities.

### ***Improving Teacher Quality***

To attract and retain high-quality teachers, Malaysia should offer competitive salaries and career advancement opportunities. Ongoing professional development programs should be provided to ensure that teachers are equipped with the latest pedagogical strategies and technological tools. Based on the findings of the study by Fadzliyah et al. (2020), it was found novice teachers of Islamic Education have attempted to provide creative instruction by using a

variety of teaching techniques. The implementation of online teaching motivates them to master online technology skills to facilitate teaching and learning to ensure the COVID-19 pandemic does not affect students' learning. As supported by Mohd Zamri and Hamzah (2019), the quality of teachers' teaching is the most significant contributing factor that leads to the success of students in school. Additionally, the government should work with universities and teacher training institutions to improve the quality of teacher education programs.

### ***Encouraging Parental and Community Involvement***

To promote parental and community involvement, schools should provide opportunities for parents to participate in decision-making and collaborate with teachers to support student learning. Furthermore, as supported by Shimi, (2024), parental involvement in a student's education has a significant impact on their academic performance. Thus, community-based programs, such as after-school tutoring and mentorship, can help bridge the gap between school and home. Additionally, schools should work with local organizations and businesses to create a supportive environment for student development.

### ***Enhancing Global Competitiveness***

To prepare students for global competition, Malaysia should strengthen its partnerships with international educational institutions and organizations by organising exchange programs, joint research initiatives, and participation in international assessments. For instance, the force of globalisation has encouraged Malaysian higher education to send Malaysian students to study abroad and to promote higher education internationally. Moreover, there are also Education Malaysia offices of Education Malaysia who supervise Malaysian students' welfare and establish connections with international universities (Munusamy & Hashim, 2019). Additionally, the curriculum should be updated to include global competencies, such as cross-cultural understanding and communication skills.

In an era of rapid technological advancement, the Malaysian education system must adapt to prepare students for the demands of the future workforce. This requires a shift away from rote memorization towards a curriculum that emphasizes critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and digital literacy. The Ministry of Education should collaborate with industry experts and educational researchers to develop a future-ready curriculum that equips students with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in the 21st century.

### ***Assessment Reform***

Traditional assessment methods often focus on memorization and recall, which do not adequately measure students' ability to apply knowledge, solve problems, and think critically. To promote deeper learning, assessment methods should be diversified to include project-based assessments, portfolios, and performance-based tasks that require students to demonstrate their understanding and skills in real-world contexts. Teacher training programs should also be updated to equip teachers with the skills and knowledge they need to design and implement effective assessment practices.

Universities and higher education institutions play a crucial role in advancing the Malaysia Madani vision by fostering research, innovation, and talent development. Universities should prioritize research that addresses the key challenges facing the nation, such as climate change, poverty, and inequality. They should also collaborate with industry partners to develop innovative solutions that can drive economic growth and improve the quality of life for all

Malaysians. Furthermore, universities should provide students with opportunities to develop the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in a rapidly changing world.

## Conclusion

In revisiting the landscape of Malaysian education through the lens of Malaysia Madani, we must candidly assess whether the identified issues – the stifling overemphasis on academics, the persistent grip of inequity, and the unrealized potential of innovation – have genuinely been resolved. While the aspiration to cultivate well-rounded, innovative, and socially responsible individuals remains a guiding star, the path toward its realization requires unwavering commitment and adaptive strategies.

Has holistic education really achieved the proper balance? Undoubtedly, there has been progress in acknowledging the significance of character development and life skills. The examination-oriented culture, however, appears to be firmly established, despite anecdotal evidence and continuing discussions, which may impede the development of critical skills like creativity and emotional intelligence. Furthermore, do all Malaysian youngsters now have equal opportunities? Even if regulations and initiatives to address disparities are praiseworthy, the glaring reality of urban-rural school gaps still exists, underscoring the need for more focused and long-term interventions.

Finally, the promise of technology remains largely untapped. While the COVID-19 pandemic undoubtedly accelerated the adoption of online learning, ensuring equitable access and effective integration of technology into pedagogy remains a significant challenge. Bridging the digital divide requires more than just providing devices and connectivity; it demands comprehensive teacher training and the development of engaging, interactive digital content.

The following are recommended:

**Embrace a "Growth Mindset" in Curriculum Design:** Shift from a content-heavy curriculum to one that prioritizes skill development and critical thinking. Encourage project-based learning and real-world problem-solving to foster creativity and innovation.

**Implement Targeted Interventions for Disadvantaged Communities:** Increase financial support for rural schools, provide access to quality early childhood education programs, and establish mentorship programs for students from low-income families. Engage community leaders and parents in the design and implementation of these initiatives.

**Invest in Teacher Professional Development for the Digital Age:** Provide teachers with ongoing training on effective technology integration, digital literacy, and innovative pedagogical strategies. In addition, a culture of collaboration and knowledge sharing among educators should be fostered.

**Promote a Culture of Lifelong Learning:** Encourage students to embrace lifelong learning and self-directed inquiry by fostering curiosity, creativity, and a passion for knowledge.

**Strengthen the Role of Parents and Communities:** Provide parents with resources and support to actively engage in their children's education. Community involvement through



mentorship programs, volunteer opportunities, and partnerships with local businesses should be encouraged.

In the end, Malaysia's education pillar's success depends on a shared commitment to fostering each child's potential as much as on policies and resources. We can provide our children with the information and abilities they need to prosper in a world that is changing quickly by adopting a comprehensive strategy that places a high value on equality, creativity, and teamwork. This will help to create a more successful, just, and caring Malaysia.

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