

QUALITY OF EDUCATION FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: MALAYSIAN EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), Quality Education is one of the 17 SDGs by United Nation, to ensure ensure inclusive and quality education for all community. It is a priority objective of 2030 Agenda Sustainable development can be applied in various educational contexts, formal and non-formal, and can also produce multiple benefits for the public. Through education, the community members will have a sense of equality when it comes to development. The Malaysian Ministry of Education have come out with the Malaysian Education Blueprint for both the primary schools and higher education and have incorporated SDG 4 in its strategic plan. This paper will discuss some of the initiatives taken by the Ministry of Education and also selected Foundations in achieving SDG 4. It has been shown that these initiatives do offer a positive impact to achieve Quality Education. This paper concluded that when children are offered the tools to develop to their fullest potential, they become productive adults and are ready to give back to their communities and break the cycle of poverty.

Keywords: Quality Education, SDG 4, Community Programs, Ministry of Education, Foundations

1. BACKGROUND

Education is able to create a fair and just society for all. Recently, the provision of quality education has been recognised as a standalone Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4). This suggested that intergovernmental organisations should consider education, training and lifelong learning as high priority areas in their regulatory policies. Furthermore, with better education, there may be implications for job creation, competitiveness and prosperity (OECD, 2012). In academia, attempts to shed light on the association between education and economic growth, poverty, gender equality and health occurs often (Vladimirova & Le Blanc, 2016; Gupta & Vegelin, 2016; Gradstein & Justman, 2002; Green, Preston, & Sabates, 2003; Thorbecke & Charumilind, 2002).

On the 1st of January 2016, an ambitious new plan was launched by United Nations to increase the number of goals from eight to seventeen in order to strengthen the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development (Palmer 2015). In these seventeen goals, SDG 4 will refer to the knowledge and skills needed to fulfil them with the motivation and attitudes required for the actions needed to achieve these goals in society. Quality education will also provide access to disability, teenagers who dropout at an early age. Many companies will also support scholarship in education at the same time as a good strategy to recruit them for the preparation of regeneration in human capital to match with the company's vision. **Figure 1** shows the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which contains the 17 goals.

Through education, a path towards good health, empowerment, employment and improve the standard of living can be achieved. Besides that, education can also aid in building happier societies. There are numerous contributions in the field of quality of life which highlights the link between education, employment and welfare (Greenhaus, Collins and Shaw, 2003; Morett, 2004; Ferrante, 2009).



Figure 1. Susatainale Development Goals (SDG)

Source: United Nation's Official Website (<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>)

In addition, education is also one of the most important means to improve personal endowments, build capabilities and overcome constraints in the process to enlarge available sets of opportunities and choices for sustained improvement in the well-being of society. The process of education and attainment has an impact on all aspects of life. The goal of social development in the context of modern welfare is to produce social well-being and educational quality which has become the central pivot for many education systems in developing countries. By enhancing the focus on quality education, it is argued that efforts in this regard should be accompanied by policies to enhance principles of quality education through 1) availability of educational institutions and programmes, 2) accessibility by all with full inclusion of the most marginalised populations, 3) acceptability of form and substance by ensuring that the content of education and process of teaching are relevant and of good quality, and 4) adaptability with regards to changing the needs of learners and society (GCE, 2013).

This paper will highlight the definition of quality education, will discuss issues to achieve quality education and some of the initiatives taken by the Ministry of Education and other organisations in assisting Malaysia to achieve quality education.

Definition of Quality Education

Quality Education refers to all aspects of school and its surrounding education community, the rights of the whole child, and all children, for survival, protection, development and participation at the learning centre. This means that the focus is on learning which strengthens the capacities of children to act progressively on their own behalf through the acquisition of relevant knowledge, useful skills and appropriate attitudes. This will help the children create for themselves and others, places of safety, security and healthy interaction. (Bernard, 1999).

Figure 2 shows the definition of Quality Education by UNICEF (2000). Quality education includes: Learners who are healthy, well-nourished and ready to participate and learn, and supported in learning by their families and communities in environments that are healthy, safe, protective and gender-sensitive which provides adequate resources and facilities; content that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy and skills for life, and knowledge in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention and peace. The processes through which trained teachers use child-centred teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools with skillful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities and outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills and attitudes. These factors are linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society.

Quality education aid students to develop their attributes and skills in order to achieve their potential

in life and in society. Thus, quality education helps the educational institution to make good changes in each student. By setting high standards and motivate the students to work hard in order to achieve these standards, the outcomes of quality education will be developing knowledge, skills and attitudes that are linked as positive participation in society.

Intiatives taken by Malaysia Government on Quality Education

Education in Malaysia is under the responsibility of the federal government and all educational matters are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education (MOE). It is a centralized system with common curricula and examination systems throughout the country. At the federal level, MOE translates the National Educational Philosophy (NPE) into educational policies, plans, programs, and projects in accordance with the national aspirations and objectives that co-ordinates the implementation (Mokshein., S. E., 2018).

Similarly, Malaysia is very concerned about the education of its community by launching two Education Blueprint, namely Malaysia Education Blueprint, 2013-2025, for preschool to post- secondary in 2013 and Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 for higher education in 2015. Malaysia Education Blueprint, 2013-2025 for preschool to post- secondary, offers a vision of the education system and student aspirations that Malaysia both needs and deserves. It suggests 11 strategic and operational shifts that would be required to achieve these visions.

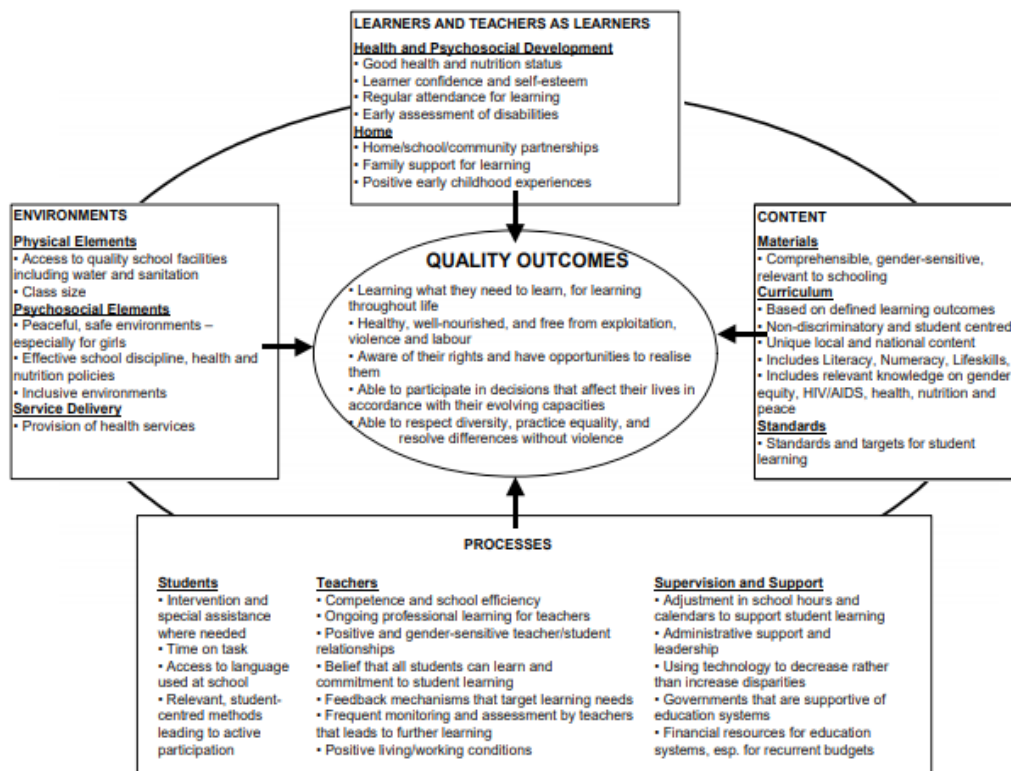


Figure 2. Definition of Quality in Education

Source: Defining Quality in Education(UNICEF, 2000).

As for the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 for higher education, its aims are to keep abreast with, if not ahead of, global trends. For example, disruptive technologies such as advanced robotics, the internet, and the automation of knowledge work are expected to dramatically reshape the business and social landscape from what it is today. Preparing Malaysian youth to thrive in this complex and ever-changing future will require an equally fundamental transformation of how the higher education system and higher learning institutions (HLIs) currently operate.

Malaysia has also hosted two important regional follow-up meetings after the adoption of Education 2030, which are the Asia-Pacific Regional Conference on Education and Training: Making Skills Development Work for the Future on the 3rd to 5th of August 2015 in Kuala Lumpur and also the 2nd Asia-Pacific Regional Policy Forum on Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) on the 19th to 21st of July 2016 in Putrajaya. These conference and forums are Malaysia's efforts in implementing its National Education Blueprint 2013-2025. The SDG 4/ Education 2030 can serve as a reference document for the national review of the Blueprint implementation. Malaysia has become a donor country by establishing a Funds-in-Trust Agreement with UNESCO through benefiting developing and least developed countries and contributing to the South-South cooperation in delivering the SDG 4/ Education 2030 agenda.

Some initiatives taken by the government towards quality of education to the community are providing completely free education for students to continue their studies at institutions of higher learning. The aid of free education will target on low-income households (B40) and on those in disabled (OKU), minorities and the less fortunate. Meanwhile, the school fees at the primary and secondary education levels of government school and government aided schools are also given free of charge (Sinar Harian, 2021).

The government will support the needs of B40 families in online learning namely by improving internet access for the B40. To address these issues, the government rolled out multiple initiatives which are The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) via the National Digital Network outlined plans for full 4G coverage in populated areas; the Higher Education Ministry also provided free devices and worked with Internet data providers on offering special packages to university students; state governments partnered with the tech industry to donate computers and data plans; MCMC introduced 837 "Community Computer Centres" to improve Internet use; MCMC, in partnership with telecommunication companies, provided free Wi-Fi hotspots to 130 selected People's Housing Projects; and, cash subsidies to buy devices. However, insufficient attention has been paid to the B40's psychological stress and other family hurdles, which needs immediate attention as they distract B40 students in online learning.

Thus, having to deal with family chaos, B40 students need constant encouragement. Schools, parent-teacher association, teachers and non-B40 classmates could play a role in this initiative (New Strait Time, 2021).

According to "Education for All, End Decade Review Report 2000-2015" (MOE, 2015), Malaysia has recorded a quantum leap in the Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) for preschool education in Malaysia which has nearly doubled from 46 percent in 2000 to 83 percent in 2013 for both public and private preschools. The transition rate from primary to lower secondary education has also risen from 90 percent to 97 percent between 2000 and 2013. With the introduction of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), the GER has seen an increase of 11 percent amongst upper secondary level pupils. In terms of adult literacy rates, there is a progress from 91 percent in the Year 2000 to 94.2 percent in 2013. There is no gender disparity between the boys and girls in school at the primary level, however the Gender Parity Index (GPI) for GER in upper secondary and tertiary education is more in favour of girls.

One of the struggles in education is to assist the Orang Asli community to be aware of the importance of education in improving the lives of their family. Most of the parents of Orang Asli children have not received a formal education, and only a small amount of people does further their studies until primary school but do not finish it. A lot of them drop out of school earlier and gets married to their beloved and go to work for their family at a very young age. With this kind of situation that has happened upon them, these parents are acknowledged as ill-educated people who cannot give good examples to their children about the importance of education (Mazzlida M.D & Ruhaiza M.Y., 2016). However, things have improved with more Orang Asli holding important positions in the Government. There is also a special body set up to look at issues pertaining Orang Asli-JAKOA (Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli or Department of Development of Orang Asli).

Some Initiatives on Quality Education by Foundations in Malaysia

According to the Ministry of Education Malaysia, the benefits of smart partnership initiative can improve and enhance the knowledge, skills and expertise especially in sharing data and resources. Information received from each party are beneficial for future development and for the students. Besides that, it can save cost and financial burden that is needed to be covered by the ministry. Thus, since every year a large number of allocations is given for education sector, some of the initiatives taken by the Ministry of Education is to work hand in hand with the private sector such as banks and foundations. Furthermore, the private sectors involved can give back to the society through corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives thus, have their tax exemption (Senin, M.A., Halim, H., Ali, R.A.A., 2019).

On the other hand, Yayasan Bank Rakyat believed that education is the epitome to improve social and economic development of Malaysians for poverty eradication and to equip mankind with critical thinking skills and tools to help themselves and their loved ones. Amongst its objectives is to create a productive and highly skilled human capital: well-rounded, capable individuals with a sense of integrity and accountability. These individuals are able to participate and benefit from the nation's economic growth and development and contribute towards global harmony and prosperity. Some of the programmes aligned with this aim includes a convertible loan (PPBU-Pembiayaan Pendidikan Boleh Ubah) that can be converted to scholarship depending on the performance of the recipient. Other initiatives include Tuition Rakyat which was launched in 2015. The 4 to 6 months long program caters to less privileged students sitting for their national examinations. Students registered for the free Tuition Rakyat from experienced teachers and speakers. 64% of the schools that participated recorded an improvement in the school's Grade Point Average for Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM).

Another program is Community Heroes whose main objective is to motivate the young generations about the impact they can make in the world through acts of kindness and community service. Community HEROES encourages students' involvement in the society through "Community Engagement" as well as the spirit of volunteerism that is very significant in the context of cultivating the spirit of conscientious in students. Volunteers can choose from 6 of our volunteering branches including Environment Conservation, Humanitarian Leadership, Event Organizing, Corporate Communications and Photography. ICON – Live Up the Dreams is another program which has been established in order to help secondary school students and youth develop the confidence, self-esteem and skills they need to be successful in school and in life and to nurture interest in career development by providing encouragement, support and guidance to students. These are some of the programs that Yayasan Bank Rakyat have with the community to ensure the community has a chance to improve not only their education but also living skills.

In addition, Pahang State Foundation offers educational aids to students, especially for the Pahang community. The vision of Pahang State Foundation is a world-class knowledge society and the some of its missions are (i) to expand the number of graduates, especially graduates from Pahang children in all fields of study, (ii) Prioritize the provision of educational assistance to the rural population and poor families, and (iii) Strengthen the economic position of Yayasan Pahang to generate stable and continuous income. Yayasan Pahang also provides educational assistance in programs such as "Student Development Program" and "Soft Skills Development for the Community Program" in order to benefit the community in addition to offering education aids to the Pahang community.

Yayasan Pahang has also initiated an "orphan program" for the purpose of assisting, guiding and giving opportunity to the orphans to pursue higher education. As of 2019, 18,500 orphans have participated in the program and 71.6% were able to pursue higher education. Another program initiated by Yayasan Pahang is to teach primary schools students to read and write. Students had to go through a test to rate their ability to read and write before they are eligible to join the program. Yayasan Pahang has prepared a module and distributed the module to district teachers in Kuantan to overcome the problem of students not mastering the basic skills of language reading Malay. Students are exposed to symbol recognition and vowel and consonant letter sounds. This method was found to be effective in helping students to read and write.

Yayasan Waqaf Malaysia is a national wakaf entity. It was officially established on 23 July 2008. It is an important government agency and plays a crucial role to manage endowed assets and investments for Malaysia as well as to assist the government in reducing the poverty gap amongst Malaysians (of all races and religions). Some of the initiatives of Yayasan Waqaf Malaysia is supporting less privileged individuals to pursue education in its endowed Colleges. Another example is providing tablets to schools to assist the students to study online.

Challenges in Achieving Quality Education

The Covid-19 pandemic has made the medical field strive to understand the nature of the disease such as the symptoms involved, means of transmission, and contagious conditions upon infection. However, no vaccines or specific treatments are not yet to be discovered, clinical trials are in progress in order to find life-saving treatments for the world population. According to the World Health Organization [WHO] (2020b), early symptoms of Covid-19 are dry cough, fever, and tiredness. Thus, someone suffering from shortness of breath, inability to move or speak, and chest pain should cause for an alarm and brought to the nearest hospital for treatment (S. Aisyah Sufian, N. Adilah Nordin, S. Shafia Nazar Tauji & M. Khalid M. Nasir, 2020).

In addition, for the changes in teaching and learning from a school-oriented process to a virtual platform through online learning from home, Tahir & Noorzali (2020) found that most of the teachers has already been taught about the concept of online learning through the implementation of Sekolah Bestari (Smart Schools). However, certain issues were called upon such as limited applications, lack of technological infrastructures and internet access. Based on a study by Kamarudin et al. (2020) they found that open communication is an under-utilized aspect by teachers due to information technology (IT) was not fully applied because of these technical difficulties

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, Goal 4 aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. This goal supports the reduction of disparities and inequities in education, both in terms of access and quality. It recognizes the need to provide quality education for all, especially the vulnerable populations, including poor children, children living in rural areas, persons with disabilities, indigenous people and refugee children. This goal is important because of its transformative effects on the other SDGs. Besides that, sustainable development hinges on every child receiving a quality education. Thus, when children are offered the tools to develop to their fullest potential, they become productive adults ready to give back to their communities and break the cycle of poverty. Education enables upward socioeconomic mobility and also reduce any inequalities in society by fostering cognitive, interpersonal and emotional skills as well as promoting healthy lifestyles, participatory practices and norms (Jackson, 2009). It is important to realise that certain instruments that reduce opportunity costs of continued education can possibly improve attainment levels (OECD, 2012). Therefore, this paper has discussed some of the issues in achieving SDG4 and has highlighted some initiatives taken by the Government and some foundations to achieve this goal.

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