CHAPTER 2
VISION AND ASPIRATIONS
2. Vision and Aspirations

Every education system must be anchored to a set of aspirations that are closely tied to its particular national context. Although there are many different perspectives on what would make Malaysia’s education system great, almost all stakeholders agree that Malaysia’s education system must do much better if it is to live up to the ambitions of all Malaysians. This chapter addresses two aspects regarding the future of the education system: it imagines what Malaysia’s school system would look like once it is successfully transformed, and what the hopes and aspirations are for each individual Malaysian child.

The state of the education system today is the best predictor of Malaysia’s competitiveness tomorrow. As outlined in the New Economic Model and the 10th Malaysia Plan, Malaysia’s push from middle-income to high-income status will need to be fuelled more by talent—particularly that of leaders and knowledge workers—than by any other input (such as unskilled labour or capital). Furthermore, globalisation demands that Malaysia’s talent needs to compete with the best internationally. It is therefore imperative for Malaysia to have a globally-competitive education system that produces globally-competitive talent.

Malaysia is therefore at a critical juncture. In a world being transformed by the applications of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, Malaysia’s economic transformation will rely on knowledge and innovation-driven industries. The country requires a transformation of its basic education system in order to realise its aspirations and meet the human capital needs of the future. This transformation will be grounded by ambitious and clear objectives that reflect the country’s requirements for talent, while considering Malaysia’s unique context and strengths. Importantly, these aspirations need to be shared by all stakeholders—not just by the Government, the Cabinet, and the Ministry, but also by parents, the community, employers, and the students themselves. For the Malaysian Education Blueprint, the Ministry took innovative steps towards engaging every corner of Malaysian society via a National Dialogue, showing a renewed commitment towards ensuring that perspectives of the rakyat would be heard. In fact, education-related aspirations was one of the most popular topics discussed during the National Dialogue, covering 15% of all comments.

The aspirations for the transformation of the education system comprise two aspects: firstly, those for the education system as a whole, and secondly, those for individual students.

SYSTEM ASPIRATIONS

There are five outcomes that the Blueprint aspires to for the Malaysian education system: access, quality, equity, unity, and efficiency (Exhibit 2-1). These aspirations have emerged from the body of historical Education Reports, remaining as relevant today as when they were first conceived in the Malaysian context.

In 1956, the Razak Report envisioned a national education system that guaranteed access to a place in school for all children regardless of ethnicity or socio-economic background, and that provided all children with a learning environment that celebrated unity through an appreciation of the nation’s diversity. In 1979, the Cabinet Committee Report reiterated Malaysia’s goals for its education system, with a focus on educating students holistically, and preparing a nation for the future to come. Most recently, the Education Development Master Plan 2006-2010 aimed to improve access, equity, quality, efficiency and effectiveness. These five thrusts are also in line with the aspirations articulated by participants during the National Dialogue. Action across all five areas is important and no initiative in one area should detract from or undermine progress in another.
The purpose of education in Malaysia is to enable Malaysian society to have a command of the knowledge, skills, and values necessary in a world that is highly competitive and globalised, arising from the impact of rapid development in science, technology, and information.”

Preamble to the Education Act (1996)

Access to Success

Every Malaysian child, regardless of wealth, ethnicity or background, deserves equal access to a quality education that will enable the student to achieve his or her potential. Building upon the principle of Education for All, part of the Millennium Development Goals, the Malaysian education system aspires to ensure universal access and full enrolment of all children from preschool through to the upper secondary (Form Five) level, whether through the academic pathway or equivalent vocational and technical pathways. This commitment includes ensuring all students have a place in school and proactively reaching out to those children currently not attending school, as well as ensuring that these students complete schooling to minimum acceptable standards, namely passing the six core subjects of Bahasa Malaysia, English language, Mathematics, Science, History and Islamic Education or Moral Education at the end of Form 5.

Achieving universal enrolment would put Malaysia at par with other developed nations. It will also help increase the percentage of students entering some form of post-secondary education in academic institutions such as universities, colleges, polytechnics, vocational institutions, or in structured skills training programmes.

Quality of a High International Standard

All students will have the opportunity to attain an excellent education that is uniquely Malaysian and comparable to high-performing education systems. This will require that Malaysia’s education system embark upon a path of improvement that will move it rapidly towards great performance, as benchmarked against other countries by international standards. This includes standards for disciplines such as Mathematics, Science, and English language, and for higher-order thinking skills such as reasoning, applying, and problem-solving.

The aspiration is for Malaysia to be in the top third of countries in terms of performance in international assessments as measured by outcomes in Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) within 15 years. Additional assessments that address other dimensions of quality that are relevant to the Malaysian context may be included as they are developed and become accepted international standards.

Achieving this goal will require enormous commitment from the entire nation. In the past decade, very few school systems have managed to make such a step-change in performance. However, several of the world’s top-performing school systems, such as Singapore and South Korea, have demonstrated that it is possible for a system to go from poor to great performance within a few decades.

The National Education Philosophy

The National Education Philosophy for Malaysia, written in 1988 and revised in 1996, enshrines the Ministry’s and Government’s vision of education as a means for the holistic development of all children: intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and physically.

“Education in Malaysia is an ongoing effort towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and physically balanced and harmonious, based on a firm belief in and devotion to God. Such an effort is designed to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable and competent, who possess high moral standards and who are responsible and capable of achieving high levels of personal well-being as well as being able to contribute to the harmony and betterment of the family, the society, and the nation at large.”
Likewise, the most improved school systems across the world, such as those of Boston (USA), Ontario (Canada), and Armenia, have consistently demonstrated that it is possible to make substantial improvements in student outcomes in as little as six years. It is the Ministry’s intention for Malaysia to join this select list of high performers, particularly in the areas of Science and Mathematics. Indeed, if Malaysia is able to move from the bottom third to top third of countries on international assessments in 15 years, Malaysia will be one of the fastest-improving systems in the world.

**Equity for All Students**

The best school systems deliver the best possible education for every student, regardless of ethnicity, geographical location, or socio-economic background. The education system envisioned for Malaysians is one where all students—regardless of who their parents are, or where they study—will be equipped with the tools they need to unlock their own future.

The Malaysian school system aspires to halve the socio-economic, urban-rural and gender achievement gaps in student outcomes by 2020. The reduction of the socio-economic and urban-rural gap is expected to also impact corresponding achievement gaps between states and school types. Achieving this reduction would make Malaysia one of the more equitable systems in the world.

The education system will actively support social mobility by providing additional support to those who are at a disadvantage, thereby ensuring that a student’s socio-economic background will no longer be the biggest driver of whether or not he or she succeeds in life. The system also aspires to provide access to alternative, attractive pathways to education such as vocational education, to provide opportunities for students of diverse interests and abilities to develop their talents. This push for greater choice and flexibility in the education system is in line with feedback from the National Dialogue.

Similarly, it is acknowledged that there are student segments within the school-going population in Malaysia with specific needs who require even more support. To this end, the Ministry will provide greater support and programmes for students with special needs, indigenous and other minority groups, as well as “gifted” students, to allow them to achieve their fullest potential.

**Fostering Unity among Students**

Since independence, one of Malaysia’s core aspirations as a uniquely diverse nation has been to foster unity. Highly diverse nations that embrace this diversity and prioritise social and systemic inclusiveness exhibit greater unity. International research from the OECD indicates that such greater unity is associated with healthier populations, safer communities, and higher rates of employment.

As students spend over a quarter of their time in school from the ages of 7 to 17 (Exhibit 2-2), schools are in a key position to foster unity. Through interacting with individuals from a range of socio-economic, religious and ethnic backgrounds—and learning to understand, accept and embrace differences—a shared set of experiences and aspirations for Malaysia’s future can be built. It is through these shared experiences and aspirations that a common national identity and unity is forged.

Internationally, there are no definitive measures of unity. However, to enable better tracking of progress, the Ministry will launch an annual student survey based on the Societal Relations Index currently conducted by the Department of National Unity and National Integration or Jabatan Perpaduan Negara dan Integrasi Nasional (JPNIN). It will assess indicators of unity, including degree of general trust among different ethnic groups, extent of racial and religious tolerance, and social interaction between students of different ethnic groups.
Five system aspirations for the Malaysian education system

**Access**
- 100% enrolment across all levels from preschool to upper secondary by 2020

**Quality**
- Top third of countries in international assessments such as PISA and TIMSS in 15 years

**Equity**
- 50% reduction in achievement gaps (urban-rural, socio-economic, gender) by 2020

**Unity**
- An education system that gives children shared values and experiences by embracing diversity

**Efficiency**
- A system which maximises student outcomes within current budget
Delivering with Greater Efficiency

Malaysia’s consistently high level of expenditure on education relative to its federal budget is indicative of the Government’s commitment to education. These expenditure levels have resulted in almost universal access to primary and lower secondary education and relatively high upper secondary enrolments, but there remains room for improvement on the other dimensions of quality, equity, and unity. Consequently, returns (in the form of student outcomes) must be maximised for every ringgit spent. As the Ministry strives towards delivering the education system aspirations, execution will be done responsibly and will pay heed to efficient and effective deployment of public resources so as to maximise student outcomes within the given budget. The Government is also committed to maintaining the current level of investment in the system of approximately 16% of the annual federal budget.

STUDENT ASPIRATIONS

The Malaysian education system aspires to ensure that every student in every school in every state achieves their full potential. Each and every school leader, teacher, parent, and the community has an important role to play in ensuring that the young people in their charge are moving towards these aspirations.

The Blueprint will continue to use the National Education Philosophy’s vision of a balanced education as its foundation for individual student aspirations. This is in line with the feedback from the National Dialogue. It has also drawn on learnings from high-performing systems to develop a refined articulation of the specific attributes and competencies that students will need to succeed and thrive in an increasingly globalised world.

Accordingly, the National Education Philosophy’s vision of a balanced education is reflected in six elements (Exhibit 2-3). The emphasis is not just on the importance of knowledge, but also on developing critical, creative, and innovative thinking skills; leadership skills; proficiency in Bahasa Malaysia and the English language; character and values; and a strong sense of national identity. These elements also highlight the focus on enabling all students to contribute meaningfully to their families, to society, and to the nation.

Knowledge

At the most basic level, every student needs to be fully literate and numerate. This equips them with basic life skills, and enables them to function effectively in society so that they can create value for themselves, their community, and the nation. In addition, it is important that students master core subjects like Bahasa Malaysia, English language, Mathematics, Science, and History. To be well-rounded, students will be encouraged to be informed and knowledgeable in other areas such as the arts, music and sports. Beyond just acquiring this knowledge, it is important that every student has the ability to apply this knowledge in day-to-day situations.

Thinking skills

Every student needs to develop skills of inquiry and learn how to continue acquiring knowledge throughout their lives, to be able to connect different pieces of knowledge, and to create new knowledge. These higher-order thinking skills and the ability to innovate are especially critical in a rapidly evolving technological world. Every student needs to master a range of important cognitive skills:

- Creative Thinking and Innovation: the ability to innovate, to generate new possibilities, and to create new ideas or knowledge;
- Critical Thinking and Reasoning: the ability to analyse information, anticipate problems and approach issues critically, logically, inductively, and deductively in order to find solutions, and ultimately make decisions; and
- Learning Capacity: the ability to independently drive one’s own learning, coupled with the appreciation of the value of lifelong learning.

This is an area where the system requires more improvement, as reflected in the TIMSS and PISA 2009+ scores which indicate that Malaysian students are less able to apply knowledge and think critically outside of familiar academic contexts. Consequently, it is more important than ever for the education system to help every student to acquire these thinking skills.

Leadership skills

Being able to work effectively with and lead others is critical, especially in our increasingly inter-connected world. In the National Dialogue, the importance of instilling leadership and the ability to work effectively in teams for every student was consistently raised. The education system seeks to help every student reach their full potential by taking on leadership roles, and by working in groups. In the context of the education system, leadership comprises four elements:

- Entrepreneurship: taking the initiative to create and develop one’s own solutions, the willingness to invest one’s own resources in doing so, and the drive to see these through to their realisation;
Aspirations for every student

Every student will have ...

- **L**eadership skills
- **B**ilingual proficiency
- **T**hinking skills
- **E**thics and spirituality
- **K**nowledge
- **N**ational identity

... aligned with the National Education Philosophy
- **Resilience**: developing a mindset that is both constructive and able to withstand setbacks;

- **Emotional intelligence**: possessing the ability to understand and work effectively with others and to influence them positively; and

- **Strong communication skills**: possessing the ability to clearly express one’s opinions and intentions in oral and written form.

Schools will need to make use of the opportunities provided inside the classroom through project-based and group work, and outside of the classroom through sports, the arts, and co-curricular activities to build the character of their students.

**Bilingual Proficiency**

Every student will be proficient in Bahasa Malaysia as the national language and in English language as a second language and the international language of communication. Every student will also eventually have the opportunity to learn an additional language.

Malaysia’s unique diversity and multicultural heritage provides a competitive advantage to all. Students will continue to have the opportunity to learn Chinese and Tamil language at National-type schools. Currently, some National schools also offer the opportunity to learn a third language such as Chinese language, Tamil, Arabic, Iban and Kadazan Dusun. At secondary level, this is expanded to include other international languages. Over time, all students will be encouraged to learn at least three languages, allowing them to collaborate and communicate effectively with fellow Malaysians and Malaysia’s neighbours in today’s rapidly globalising world.

**Ethics and Spirituality**

The education system will prepare every student to rise to the challenges they will inevitably face in adult life, to resolve conflicts peacefully, to employ sound judgment during critical moments, and to have the courage to do what is right. The emphasis will be on every student establishing a set of principles that includes strong shared values held in common by all Malaysians:

- **Spirituality**: to have strong religious beliefs and practices as the foundation for life and to espouse high moral standards;

- **Integrity**: to possess the courage, the discipline, and the will to do the right thing; and

- **Civic responsibility**: to act for the good of the entire nation, to care for others and the environment around them, and to possess a deep capacity for social contribution.

**National Identity**

An unshakeable sense of national identity, tied to the principles of the Rukun Negara, is necessary for Malaysia’s future and to foster unity. Every student will identify themselves proudly as Malaysians, irrespective of ethnicity, beliefs, socio-economic status or geographical location. Achieving this patriotism requires a strong sense of inclusiveness, acquired through learning to understand and tolerate difference, to accept and respect others, as well as to live together and embrace the diversity within the Malaysian community. A common national identity also requires all students to understand Malaysia’s history, develop shared experiences in and out of school, and build shared aspirations for Malaysia’s future.
There are five outcomes that the Blueprint aspires for the Malaysian education system as a whole, access, quality, equity, unity, and efficiency. These outcomes are in line with the aspirations articulated by participants during the National Dialogue, and are comparable to outcomes achieved by high-performing education systems. Beyond these system-wide outcomes, the Blueprint will also continue to use the National Education Philosophy’s vision of a balanced education as its aspiration for individual students. A solid combination of knowledge, thinking skills, leadership skills, bilingual proficiency, ethics and spirituality, and national identity are critical in preparing students to succeed and thrive in an increasingly globalised world.