

# SUMMARY: BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE: THE NEED TO TRANSFORM MALAYSIA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM

OCT 31<sup>ST</sup> 2023



Malaysian Institute of Economic Research

## Summary of the Education Dialogue at MIER

The summary is based on feedback gathered from our session with government agencies, private & public schools, academicians, social enterprises and civil societies.

SCOPE	ISSUES	ELABORATION
<b>Students are reluctant to pursue higher education</b>	The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted students' interest in pursuing higher education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Financial constraints and economic uncertainties resulting from the pandemic have led to job losses, pay cuts, and financial instability for many families. As a result, students may perceive higher education as an additional financial burden, deterring them from pursuing further studies.</li><li>The pandemic has also affected numerous industries, resulting in fewer job opportunities. Students may choose to enter the workforce soon after finishing their current education level rather than investing time and money in furthering their education.</li><li>Students who want to make quick money will engage in the gig economy or pursue a career as a social media influencer.</li><li>Some students may face difficulties adapting to the new normal of virtual education. Technical issues, lack of access to necessary technology, and the digital divide may hinder their ability to fully engage in and benefit from online learning experiences. Hence, it is necessary to motivate students with new skills in digitisation.</li></ul>
<b>Low enrolment in STEM education</b>	The uptake of STEM education among students is low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>More students opt for non-engineering programs like hospitality and business instead of electronics and engineering courses. It is a missed opportunity if students are not in the STEM field because the new industries are experiencing growth and demand and these industries require talent that is STEM-based.</li></ul>



<b>Employment</b>	<b>Inadequate supply of critical skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rapid technological advancements require an education system that adapts to changing industry landscapes. Thus, integrating technology-related skills and knowledge ensures that students are prepared for evolving job requirements.</li> </ul>
	<b>Lack of emphasis on soft skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing soft skills and fostering critical thinking are essential components of a well-rounded student education. Soft skills, such as communication, teamwork, adaptability, and problem-solving, go beyond academic knowledge.</li> <li>• Critical thinking skills are needed because they enable students to analyse information, evaluate perspectives, and make informed decisions.</li> </ul>
	<b>Collaboration between universities and industries</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The collaboration between universities and industries is essential to enhance the learning experience of students and better prepare them for the professional world.</li> <li>• This collaboration can take various forms, including internships, industry-sponsored projects, and guest lectures by industry experts.</li> </ul>
<b>Quality of teachers</b>	<b>Capacity building among educators is needed to improve the learning rate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A recent study with 25,000 respondents found that one in three students feels that they are not learning anything in school while two in three feel unsupported by teachers. The survey also stated that 70% of students are struggling to catch up.</li> <li>• In contrast, 80% of teachers stated that ‘everything is fine’, similarly 80% are satisfied with the measures to address learning loss.</li> <li>• Therefore, there is a disconnect between the teachers’ and students’ perspectives about the learning rate.</li> <li>• This highlights the gap in the education system such as unengaging classrooms and an inadequate teaching environment.</li> <li>• It was recommended to encourage capacity building among educators so they will be more innovative and creative to make learning attractive and engaging.</li> </ul>
	<b>Insufficient measures to track the uptake of courses taken by teachers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having an attendance list is not sufficient to track the uptake rate of courses among teachers.</li> <li>• Need to have different measures to track teachers' uptake of school courses as it allows educational institutions to assess the effectiveness of professional development initiatives.</li> </ul>

<b>Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)</b>	<b>Teaching career needs to be attractive</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data collected will aid in refining and tailoring future training programs to meet educators' specific needs and preferences.</li> <li>Making teaching an attractive career is essential for attracting and retaining high-quality educators who play a pivotal role in shaping the future.</li> <li>Foster a positive and supportive work environment. Provide resources, materials, and assistance to help teachers manage their workloads effectively. Provide ongoing professional development opportunities to help teachers continually improve their skills and stay updated on educational trends.</li> </ul>
	<b>Bureaucracy in the public education system</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The administrative structure hampers creativity and hinders talents from coming back into academia. For example, a PhD holder has to go through complicated administrative work and take external exams to qualify himself as a public university lecturer. The bureaucracy of the "box-ticking" system for promotion, and placing the role of administrators over employees has forced the best talent to move to the private sector (e.g., GLCs) and not into public universities.</li> </ul>
	<b>Lack of real-life learning opportunities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Real-life learning opportunities enhance students' learning by connecting theoretical knowledge with practical experiences. This also means that teachers need to be motivated and passionate to produce platforms for students to learn.</li> <li>Real-life learning opportunities include project-based learning, simulations and role-playing.</li> </ul>
	<b>Need to promote STEM education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promoting STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education is a way to inspire students to enrol in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programmes.</li> <li>STEM subjects spark curiosity and creativity and lay the gateway to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), where practical skills meet real-world applications.</li> </ul>

<b>Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)</b>	PISA is not comprehensive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The current approach to PISA testing, particularly in the context of Malaysia's education system suggests that the age at which Malaysian students take the PISA test (15 years old) is not directly comparable to students in most developed countries (who finish at around age 15).</li> <li>• Although PISA is an international exam for reading, mathematics, and science literacy among 15 years old, policymakers should not solely rely on the test results. It is also important to critically evaluate the educational landscape over time.</li> </ul>
<b>International Schools</b>	Investing in international schools is important for investors to stay/migrate to Malaysia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investing in international schools holds special significance for investors with families. It provides stability and continuity in education, allowing children to seamlessly transition between countries without facing major disruptions.</li> </ul>
<b>Digital Literacy</b>	Inadequate digital literacy among students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The digital divide among students in Malaysia refers to disparities in access to and utilization of digital technologies for educational purposes.</li> <li>• This divide can affect students' ability to participate fully in online learning, access information, and develop essential digital skills.</li> <li>• More intervention is needed to improve digital literacy among students such as access to devices, digital literacy skills, and internet connectivity.</li> </ul>
<b>Language</b>	Debate on medium of instruction: Bahasa Malaysia vs. English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The choice between Bahasa Malaysia and English as the medium of instruction in education is a complex decision that depends on various factors, including cultural, social, and educational considerations.</li> <li>• Prioritizing Bahasa Malaysia in education helps preserve and promote local languages and dialects, contributing to linguistic diversity.</li> <li>• Nevertheless, proficiency in English enhances students' employability and opens up opportunities for higher education as many universities and workplaces use English as a primary language.</li> <li>• English provides students with access to a vast array of international educational resources, research, and literature, enriching their learning experiences, especially in the STEM field.</li> <li>• In the context of industry, the use of English in industry facilitates communication, collaboration, and opportunities.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Therefore, English is an important medium of communication that institutions should encourage to increase students' chances of employability.</li> <li>• The goal is to equip students with proficiency in both languages, allowing them to navigate the complexities of a globalized world while maintaining a strong connection to their cultural roots. Additionally, to ensure the sustainability of knowledge and the learning process for students, the medium of instruction has to be standardised.</li> </ul>
<b>Terminal Exams</b>	<p><b>Rationale for cancellation of the national terminal exams</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The idea to cancel terminal exams like SPM, PMR, and UPSR may be driven by the notion of evolving educational philosophies and assessment methodologies in the education system.</li> <li>• Firstly, educators found difficulties when students moved to SPM, requiring them to cover and teach the form4's and form 5's syllabus.</li> <li>• Secondly, exams may inadvertently contribute to educational inequality, as students with varying resources and support systems may experience different levels of preparation thus producing different results. Cancelling terminal exams can be a step toward creating a more equitable education system.</li> <li>• Thirdly, traditional terminal exams often focus on testing memorization and recall skills. Cancelling such exams may be in line with a shift towards holistic assessment, emphasizing a broader set of skills, including critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and practical application of knowledge.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>The issue with the cancellation of the national terminal exams</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Class ranking provides teachers with a benchmark to assess a student's performance compared to their peers. Without it, educators may find it more challenging to gauge the overall academic standing of each student in the class.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Emphasis on sustainability education</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching students about sustainability is crucial for preparing them to become future leaders who understand and address the challenges of climate change.</li> <li>• Informed by sustainability education, students will be potential future leaders who can advocate for and contribute to the development of policies that prioritize environmental conservation, climate action, and social justice.</li> </ul>

## Visually impaired individuals

Low number of school registrations among visually impaired students

- In Malaysia, a national survey indicates that there are 5,000 visually impaired individuals between the ages of 6 to 18. However, only 2,600 of them are currently enrolled in schools.

Shortage of teachers for visually impaired students

- This discrepancy is exacerbated by the shortage of teachers trained for visually impaired students. Even though the number of teachers for special students (*guru pendidikan khas*) has increased, most of these teachers are redirected to address the rising demand for autism and learning disabilities. This will cause a shortage of teachers for visually impaired students.
- Despite efforts to encourage science education, the shortage of teachers hampers students from pursuing STEM subjects.
- Even though the government announced the 'zero-reject policy' to reduce education inequalities the lack of teachers may pose a challenge in the implementation.

Lack of inclusive and adaptive teaching environment

- The lack of up-to-date and adaptive equipment in schools poses a challenge. Even though the education blueprint states that the latest technological equipment will be provided for schools with visually impaired students, however, technology may arrive too late or it may be outdated.

## About MIER

*The Malaysian Institute of Economic Research undertakes independent and high-quality problem-oriented research on economic, financial and business issues facing the country and provides advice on macroeconomic management, development and future economic perspectives.*

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