

MALAYSIA: LANGUAGE, EDUCATION, AND SOCIAL COHESION

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unite for
children

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Sustainable Development through Multilingual Education

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unicef 



Universal Declaration on Linguistic Rights, Barcelona, 1996

“All languages are the expression of a collective identity and a distinct way of perceiving and describing reality. Education must always be at the service of linguistic and cultural diversity and of harmonious relations between language communities throughout the world”.



The Big Picture

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

2016 - 2030



Sustainable Development Goal 4



Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for ALL

1. Free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education
2. Quality early childhood development, care and preprimary education
3. Quality technical, vocational, and tertiary education
4. Youth and adults with relevant skills (for employment, job etc.)
5. Eliminate gender disparities in education (disabilities, indigenous etc.)
6. Adult literacy and numeracy
7. Knowledge and skills for sustainable development (peace, citizenship etc.)

SDG 4 – MLE & MTBBE

- **SDG 4 Indicators – Thematic
INDICATOR # 18**

“Percentage of students in primary education whose first or home language is the language of instruction”



Malaysian Context



LAWS OF MALAYSIA

REPRINT

Act 550

EDUCATION ACT 1996

Incorporating all amendments up to 1 January 2006



Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025

(Preschool to Post-Secondary Education)



Policy Context

Malaysia: Vision 2020

The Last Lap....

“Malaysia should not be developed only in the economic sense. It must be a nation that is fully developed along all the dimensions: economically, politically, socially, spiritually, psychologically, and culturally. We must be fully developed in terms of NATIONAL UNITY and SOCIAL COHESION, in terms of our economy, in terms of social justice, political stability, system of government, quality of life, social and spiritual values, national pride, and confidence”.

Malaysia – Demographics...contd.

Ethnic Diversity

- Major ethnic and indigenous groups: Orang Asli (Peninsular Malaysia) and indigenous peoples in Sabah and Sarawak
- Sabah: 27% of population are “foreigners”, immigrants, refugees, undocumented and stateless. Kadazan-dusun (17.8%), Chinese (9.1%), Bajau (14%), Brunei Malay (5.7%), Murut (3.2%)
- Sarawak: Iban (29%), Chinese (24%), Malay (23%), Bidayuh (8%), Melanau (6%), Orang Ulu (5%)

Malaysia - Demographics

Language Pluralism

- Main languages: Bahasa Malaysia, Chinese, Tamil and indigenous languages
- Education: Bahasa Malaysia, Chinese, Tamil – English as a second language
- 138 languages in total
- Immigrant languages include: Burmese, Rohingya, Punjabi, Telugu, Malayalam, Cham, Syiheti, Sinhala, etc.

Sabah - Demographics

- Filipino refugees, undocumented migrants, plantation workers & Bajau Laut
- Filipino refugees: Mostly Muslims, fled to Sabah from 1972-1984 to escape conflict in Mindanao; given IMM13 cards to live, work
- Undocumented: When refugees fail to renew IMM13 cards
- Plantation workers: Mostly Indonesians, Filipino refugees & undocumented
- Bajau Laut: Sea gypsies of SE Asia, roam through the 'Coral Triangle' of Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines



Who are the ‘invisible’ children in Malaysia?

Non-citizens

Refugees,
Asylum-seekers

Legal residents,
temporary or permanent

Foreign workers, legal

IMM13 cardholders

Foreigners, staying
illegally

Undocumented

Stateless children

Dependents of foreign workers

Foreign children, staying illegally

Children born from mixed marriages

Children born from unregistered
marriages

Children born soon after marriages

Children born by single mothers

Children from indigenous groups

Malaysia – Education system

Diversity in Education

Main types of schools:

- (a) National schools (primary and secondary) – Malay Mol schools
- (b) National-type (vernacular) Chinese Mol schools (primary and secondary)
- (c) National-type (vernacular) Tamil Mol schools (primary)
- (d) Religious schools (government-supported)
- (e) International and Local private schools

3 key Dilemmas for Governments

- What choices need to be made in the language field in relation to the socio-economic context and situation of the country?
- What languages are to be promoted and how?
- What languages are to be introduced and used in education?

Language Policy in Malaysia – Is it a story of “Big Fish – Small Fish”?



Malay, Chinese,
Tamil

Indigenous
Languages



Malaysian Education Policy Context VISION vs REALITY

Malaysia – education policy contradictions

Education Ordinance 1957:

- Razak Report 1956: “...making Malay the national language of the country while preserving and sustaining the growth of the language and culture of other communities living in the country.”

Rahman Talib Report 1960:

- deleted the above underlined provision (no reasons given) — instead empowered “the Minister of Education” to....”**at any suitable time convert all primary schools providing mainly mother tongue education (i.e., national type primary schools) to national primary schools using Bahasa Malaysia as the main medium of instruction**”.
- in addition, teaching of the mother-tongue would only be available on two conditions: (a) if the parents of 15 children in the school requested it, and (b) if it was reasonable and practical to provide facilities for such education

Education policy contradictionscontd.

3. Education Act 1996

- All schools to use Bahasa Malaysia as the main Mol – only two exceptions: (a) schools which are given exemption by the Minister of Education, and (b) the “national-type schools” to be established in the future.
- If there are five or more Islamic pupils in a school, they must be given religious teaching of at least two hours a week during the school hours, without any request from their parents.



Comparing education policy with Federal Constitution

Federal Constitution – Article 152

“1. The national language shall be the Malay language...provided that (a) no person shall be prohibited from using...or from teaching or learning any other language; and (b) nothing in this Clause shall prejudice the right of the Federal Government or any State Government to preserve and sustain the use and study of the language of any other community in the Federation”.

So....as per the Federal Constitution

- While the Malay language has been recognized as the national language, no person is prohibited from teaching and learning his/her own mother tongue;
- every person has the right to use his own mother tongue for non-official purposes, and
- the government has the right to preserve and sustain the use and study of the mother tongue of any ethnic minority community in Malaysia

So....why the contradictions in the Education Policy???

The “20-point Agreement” – Sabah & “18-point Agreement –Sarawak”

Point 2: Language

- a. Malay should be the national language of the Federation
- b. English should continue to be used for a period of 10 years after Malaysia Day
- c. English should be an official language of Borneo (Sabah and Sarawak) for all purposes, State or Federal, without limitation of time.

Point 15: Education

The existing educational system of Borneo (Sabah and Sarawak) should be maintained and for this reason it should be under state control

So....we can CONCLUDE

**The Malaysian Government's current Education
Policy on language and education contradictions
both**

THE FEDERAL CONSTITUTION

&

**THE 18 & 20 POINT AGREEMENTS WITH SABAH
AND SARAWAK**



LESC - Malaysia

LESC Malaysia – Main Findings

- Conventional analyses of conflict have underestimated the role of language and ethnicity differences in generating tensions and conflicts and in sustaining conflicts once they have commenced
- While language policy, whether in education, law or public administration, is often associated with conflict and can erode social relations between different groups of people; consultative language planning informed by research evidence and opportunities for stakeholders to reflect and engage with issues, invariably plays a productive role in increasing ethnic harmony and social cohesion.
- Governments can especially, but not only through education, influence and mitigate language issues and contribute to social cohesion.

LESC – 10 Key Recommendations for Malaysia

1. Major gap between perceptions/expectations – between government officials and minority groups on language, education, etc.
2. Language is a “sensitive issue” in Malaysia – often a cause of disagreement, tension and conflict
3. The issue of “multiple languages” is badly misunderstood – based on misconceptions, biases, and political considerations
4. Malaysian stakeholders welcomed collaborative decision-making informed by researched data and evidence
5. Wide agreement that language in Malaysia is a complex and multifaceted resource and social capital that can be positively harnessed for development and harmony across ethnic groups and indigenous populations

LESC – 10 Key Recommendations...contd

6. Urgent need for “language policy writing” – based on locally-focused success stories/good practices on curriculum innovation, teaching, pedagogy that is practiced by non-government entities – especially in Sabah and Sarawak
7. Urgent need for public education on multilingualism in education and society – especially among the dominant ethnic groups
8. Urgent need to combine “top-down” and “bottom-up” policies and implementation
9. Language policy is not only needed as an “education imperative” – but more important, to address socio-economic, ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity and tensions in Malaysia
10. Language rights are NOT IMPOSSIBLE to achieve – it is basically a question of “political will” – especially of Government.

“MOTHER-TONGUE FIRST”

MALAYSIA BOLEH

Call upon the Malaysian Government and all key stakeholders to:

- **Align the National Education Policy with the Federal Constitution– to recognize and promote the richness of Malaysia’s ethnic and indigenous languages and cultures in order to positively contribute to achieving national harmony and social development for all citizens**
- **preserve and enhance harmonious unity in cultural diversity that is characteristic of and the richness of Malaysia through mother-tongue and multilingual education**
- **contribute to the revitalization and preservation of the nation’s intangible cultural and linguistic heritage found among the indigenous peoples’ traditions, cultures and languages**
- **promote mother-tongue education as a foundational medium of instruction and pedagogy – especially in preschool/ECD and, where appropriate, from age 0 to 12 years old – for ALL ethnic groups and indigenous communities, not only a “selected few”...**



LESC – Contribution to the National Development Process

- 11th Malaysia Development Plan 2016-2020: Chapter 9, Thrust 5: *“Enhancing Inclusivity”*
- National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) – appointed by Prime Minister – November 2013 – to prepare a “Blueprint for National Unity and Social Cohesion”
- To promote mutual understanding and dialogue among communities, institutions, and policy makers on social cohesion – with special focus on language and education

LESC – Malaysia: Key Outcomes

Presentation to the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC):

- Summary report of LESC study was presented to the NUCC which was charged by the Prime Minister to develop a National Blueprint on Unity for Malaysia
- Key findings and recommendations from the study on language policy and stakeholders dialogue were included in the NUCC submission to the Prime Minister

UNICEF's Advocacy

- Helped UNICEF's ongoing advocacy for mother-tongue based bilingual education for indigenous communities and for refugees, migrant and stateless children
- Planned 2nd Malaysia Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education, Kuching, Sarawak, September 2016

BAHASA JIWA BANGSA
“LANGUAGE IS THE SOUL OF AN ETHNIC COMMUNITY”



LET US GIVE ALL CHILDREN IN MALAYSIA
“ROOTS” AND “WINGS”



THERE ARE TWO
GIFTS WE SHOULD
GIVE OUR CHILDREN;
ONE IS ROOTS, AND
THE OTHER IS WINGS.

THANK YOU

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