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**A study o the policies and practices of teacher education in Malaysia
towards producing quality pre-service teachers**

Hazri Jamil, Nordin Abd Razak, Mohammad Zohir Ahmad & Jinan Hatem Issa

School of Educational Studies
Universiti Sains Malaysia

Abstract: The teaching profession is vital for the achievement of Malaysian educational aims of enhancing education quality and developing the human capital of the nation. The Malaysian government has worked to improve the quality of teachers and recruit highly-qualified people to the teaching profession by improving remuneration and opportunities for promotion. Nonetheless, the provision of highly quality initial teacher education through higher education institutions and teacher training institutions are critical for establishing Malaysia as a centre of educational excellence (Ministry of Education, 2001). There have been many initiatives and innovations for teacher education within the general reform movement in the Malaysian education system (Ministry of Education, 2006). For example, inter-agency collaboration between NGOs, schools, teacher training institutions, and higher education institutions locally and abroad, are used to strengthen teacher training (Ministry of Education, 2008). This paper investigates how teacher education policies and initiatives are enacted in Malaysia produce quality pre-service teachers. We employ the Alignment model (Caldwell & Spinks, 2008) to frame our examination of how financial capital and social capital work to shape teacher preparation and align with institutional practices. In addition, this paper examines the similarities and differences of financial and social capitals between the high performing schools (recently introduced by the Ministry of Education in the Malaysian system) and non-high performing schools in Malaysia. Using the alignment model, this project will describe how policies for attracting and educating pre-service teachers are translated into practice to produce teachers for the Malaysian school system.

Introduction

Undoubtedly, the quality of the teaching profession in any nation constitutes a key element in attaining its national education objectives. Obviously, teachers do an essential task in addressing the challenges and impacts of globalization faced by that nation (Mokshein, Ahmad, & Vongalis-Macrow, 2009). Hence, seeking a systematic approach for education policy, that unifies teachers, has become urgent in a world characterized by an ever-increasing number of teachers. However, the output of the educational process does not meet the demands of the recent living circumstances in a world marked by competing in quality. Hence, reforming teacher education as a task brings to the light important issues for Malaysia.

In brief, the alignment model (Caldwell & Harris, 2008) was employed in this paper to examine the financial and social capitals that work to shape teacher preparation in Malaysian teacher education policy. The utilization of the alignment model (Caldwell & Harris, 2008) to improve the quality of pre-service teacher education in Malaysia via analyzing the financial and social capitals to frame a systematic teacher policy that is aligned with institutional practices.

The Alignment Model

The international consulting group McKinsey & Company (2007) issued a published report on the world's best-performing school systems and the reasons behind their being on the top. According to the recent results of the OECD's (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development) PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), the world's ten best performing school systems are 'Alberta, Australia, Belgium, Finland, Hong Kong, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Ontario, South Korea and Singapore' owing to scoring highest in the TIMSS (the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) (Cheng, 2009a). As a result, detailed studies were carried out on these systems to investigate these phenomena of best performing. The findings revealed that teachers were the focus when employing quality teachers and how those were performing as effective instructors to make sure that the best possible can be delivered for all students (Cheng, 2009b).

Over the last few years, the Asia-Pacific region generally and Malaysia particularly has accomplished some rapid economic growth. In fact, the low cost and fairly skilled human capital assist the Asia-Pacific countries to enter the world's market competition (Tam & Cheng, 2007). Apparently, this is evident when demonstrating results from PISA and TIMSS in which some of the Asia-Pacific countries have achieved very high in some selected subjects even exceeding those of major Western countries (Willms, 2004). Caldwell and Harris (2008) cited Schleicher's words (2008) on praising Mckinsey report as providing policymakers with an instrument to be utilized for school improvement and welcoming change to adapt easily in this indifferent world. According to Mckinsey report (2007), the success in top-performing school systems are prior to three parameters:

1. Getting the right people to become teachers (Quality teachers).
2. Developing effective instructors (Effectiveness of teacher education and professional development).
3. Ensuring every student performs well (Empowerment of teachers to be effective).

Therefore, the provision of those three parameters can direct any school system to accomplish high performance through the significant and measurable effect for the quality of its teachers on student achievement (Cheng, 2009b). Based on the alignment model (Caldwell & Harris, 2008; Caldwell & Spinks, 2008), attaining success for all students becomes possible when the school system utilizes the four capitals: intellectual, spiritual, social and financial. Figure 1 below portrays the alignment of

transformation model (Caldwell & Harris, 2008; Caldwell & Spinks, 2008) for pre-service teacher preparation in order to improve the quality of those student teachers.

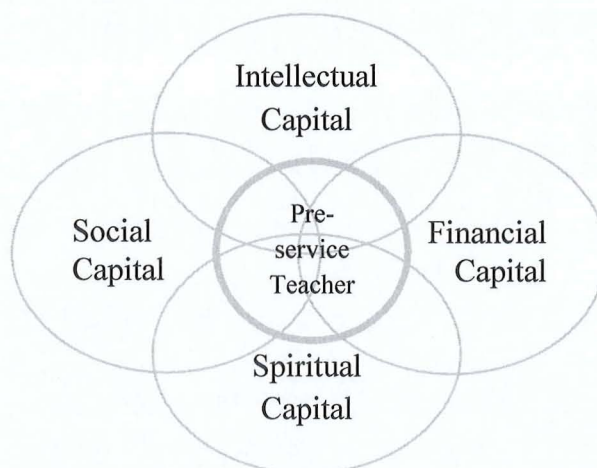


Figure 2: Alignment Model (Caldwell & Harris, 2008; Caldwell & Spinks, 2008)

In fact, the major finding of McKinsey report of the international project on high-performing school systems was summarized by one statement ‘the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers’ (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Dinham, 2007). The Alignment model (Caldwell & Spinks, 2008) recognizes the importance of enhancing four capitals: intellectual, spiritual, social and financial to attain success for all the students. Intellectual capital comprises the knowledge and skills of workers in or for the school. Spiritual capital refers to the strength of shared values, ethics, beliefs and attitudes towards life and learning as well as moral purpose. Social capital describes the formal and informal relationships and networks of mutual support and trust. Finally, the notion of financial capital refers to all the funds, resources and facilities accessible to the school system.

This paper focuses on employing only two forms of capitals: financial and social to frame a systematic policy used for pre-service teacher preparation programs in order to improve the quality of those student teachers and produce quality teachers in schools.

Overview of Pre-Service and In-Service Teacher Education in Malaysia

The philosophy of teacher education formulated in 1982 determined the direction of the teacher education. The philosophy gives emphasis to the desire to educate and produce teacher’s who are noble and caring, knowledgeable and skilful, creative and innovative, resilient and competent, scientific in outlook, committed to uphold the aspirations of the nation, proud of their heritage and dedicated to the development of the individual and preservation of a united, progressive, and disciplined society. This underlying philosophy is translated in principle to the teacher curriculum,

which encourages in the development of a balanced, well-rounded individual, trained and skilled individual and the ministry ensures its aspirations are met.

The Ministry of Education (MOE) was responsible for planning and organizing teacher education and training in Malaysia (UNESCO, 2008). The Ministry of Education (MOE) main concern is to provide pre-service as well as in-service training for its teachers in order to meet the needs of its schools. Both the teacher training colleges and universities undertake the mission of teacher education and training. Therefore, teacher education was viewed by Lee (2002) as ‘a shared responsibility between the teaching training colleges and the public universities.’ Due to the fact that Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) was established on 27 March 2004, the secondary and primary school teacher training were separated and given to MOHE and MOE respectively. The MOHE trains the secondary school teachers via the government-funded universities and the MOE trains primary teachers via the Institute of Teacher Education (ITE), to ensure professional development is encouraged and its goals and aspiration are achieved.

The Malaysian government expects to elevate the quality of teacher education to world standards. In line with this agendum the government has made efforts to establish training centres for its teachers. The teacher education in both under MOE and MOHE initiates the pre-service and in-service training for the primary and secondary school teachers. Primary teachers’ training is the responsibility of MOE trains through the Institute of Teacher Education (ITE) or as it was known before upgrading its status in 2006 as (Teacher Training Colleges), whilst the secondary teachers’ training is the MOHE responsibility by the government-funded universities that are Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris in Perak; Universiti Sains Malaysia in Penang; University Malaya in Kuala Lumpur; Universiti Putra Malaysia in Selangor; and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia which is also in Selangor (Rajendran Nagappan, et al., 2008; UNESCO, 2008). The supervision process of teacher training in Malaysia comes under the Teacher Education Division (TED) responsibility which is a section in the Malaysian Ministry of Education in charge of all administrations concerning teacher education except the training programs. There are several various units under the Teacher Education Division (TED) to assist in the operations which are below:

- *The Planning and Policy Unit:* this unit is responsible for planning and deciding the trend of teacher education in Malaysia.
- *The Curriculum Unit:* this unit is responsible for verifying the curriculum offered in the Institute of Teacher Education (ITE).
- *The Assessment Unit:* this unit is responsible for handling the setting of examination questions and marking of answer scripts in addition to the awarding of the student teachers’ grades.

- *The Student-selection Unit*: this unit is responsible for carrying out the required tests and the interviews for selecting the candidates for the Institute of Teacher Education (ITE). (All information are adopted from UNESCO report on Teacher Education in Malaysia (2008)).

Pre-service teacher education programs are offered at the universities and ITE. Simultaneously, some in-service teachers, on the other hand, are pursuing their bachelor's degree in the universities. In fact, these in-service teachers spend the first year studying at selected Institutes of Teacher Education before continuing another two years at a government-funded university of their choice and all this is sponsored by MOE. Basically, there are 27 Institute of Teacher Education (ITEs) that are situated in all 14 states of Malaysia supplying both pre-service and in-service programs (UNESCO, 2008).

Obviously, some universities do contribute to the reforms determined by the Malaysian government to improve the quality of education which can be seen in running some short-term courses, seminars and conferences for in-service teachers in order to enhance their teaching abilities; professional; and personal development in addition to increasing their knowledge such as the School of Educational Studies at USM in conducting workshops, seminars and short courses for pre-school teachers.

The enrollment of pre-service teachers at the (27) teacher training institutes is about 800-1000 per institute. There are four units under the authority of those (27) institutes: the Examination Unit; the Co-curriculum Unit; the In-service Unit; and the Practicum Unit (Lee, 2004; UNESCO, 2008). It took pre-Service teachers one year to get a Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching, whereas five and a half years to hold a Bachelor degree in Teaching. On the other hand, in-service teachers attend the two- to three-day short-refresher courses that are carried out by different lecturers from the various departments for the candidate teachers. Hence, in-service teacher programs are essentially refresher courses or updated courses ranging from two- to three-day courses to six weeks, 10 weeks and 14 weeks.

There are some important reforms that been taken into consideration when tackling improving the quality of teacher education in Malaysia. This comprising selection and recruitment; curriculum; ICT; length, content and method of training; and approaches (Lee, 2004). Moreover, teacher education programs in Malaysia also include 'cultural-specific'; 'cultural-general' socialization strategies; and 'culturally sensitive pedagogy' as teachers come from different cultural backgrounds. For example, owing to the four major types of schools in Malaysia and the different used languages as the medium of instruction: the National Schools (Malay and since currently English has been used to teach science and mathematics); the Chinese Schools, (Mandarin); the Tamil schools (Tamil); and the privately managed Islamic religious schools (Malay and Arabic), has resulted the Institutes of Teacher Education ought to supply training in the respective languages. Prior to the diversity of learners, the pre-service teachers ought to be well-prepared to be able to teach the national curriculum (Lee, 2002). In fact, society demands from teachers are inconsistent and unreasonable as suggested by Kennedy (2006), "Society holds many lofty aims for education, in general and for teaching in particular,

but these aims are inconsistent with one another. There is a tension between the societal desire to accommodate individual needs and the societal desire to treat all students equally” (pp. 206). However, recent reforms and policy initiatives seem to raise a number of pertinent issues in the domain of teacher education (Lee, 2000) that requires reviewing the patterns of teacher education in Malaysia and dealing with the current problems and challenges.

The Ministry of Education (MOE) has announced that by the year 2010 (Ministry of Education, 2001), all secondary school teachers must hold at least a bachelor degree qualification to be eligible for teaching. Consequently, several significant improvements, regarding the quality of teachers, have been achieved in terms of their academic and professional qualifications. Therefore, only Bachelor of Education and Post-Graduate diploma in Education holders represent the current secondary school teachers (Mokshein, et al., 2009). Prior to the various initiatives concerning the improvement of teacher quality in the Malaysian education system (Abdullah, 2001), this paper investigates how teacher education policies are enacted to produce quality pre-service teachers.

MOE policy is to elevate the teaching profession by improving the quality of teachers, teacher’s career and their welfare. Accordingly, the government has utilizing four strategies to elevate the teaching profession via improving both the selection of teacher trainees, and the teaching environment, then re-establishing respect for teachers in society and finally promoting pride in them. To this end, the focuses of teacher education policy are to:

- improve the system of teacher selection
- Strengthening the teacher training
- Improving the environment and the welfare of the teachers
- Strengthening human resources planning and management

In 2005, approximately 327,000 teachers in Malaysian school, 58.2% of teachers in primary schools and 41.8% in secondary schools. Number of teachers increased to 405,716 teachers in 2010, i.e. 56.8% in primary schools and 44.2% of teachers in secondary schools (Ministry of Education, 2010). The government has the commitment of achieving its 50% target of teachers in primary school and 100% of its secondary school teachers with the degree qualification (Malaysia Education Development Plan 2001-2010). Since the beginning of 2004, MOE embarked in a programme to upgrade the quality of its primary education, intending to develop its teachers professionally. Teachers were encouraged to upgrade their teaching qualifications through distant education and in-service training in local or foreign universities, which was under the MOE continuous professional development programme. Despite having achieved an increase to 13.7% for primary school and 87.1% for secondary school by 2008 (see Table 1), the government faces the challenge to ensure that all its graduate teachers are quality teachers and are able to face their curriculum delivery

challenges efficiently. Further it faces the challenge to administer frequent monitoring through supervision by the government agencies and ensure that they are strictly adhered to.

Table 1
The Achievement of Educational Aims for School

Policy Commitment	Output
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieving target of 25% of teachers in primary schools and 100% in secondary school with degree qualification by 2010 • Making national schools ‘smart’ through making all schools Smart Schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduate teachers increased from 6.1% in 2005 to 13.7% in 2007 for primary school and 82.4% to 87.1% for the secondary schools • Established internet access centres in 40% of all primary schools

Source: Mid-term review of the Ninth Malaysian Plan 2006-2010, (2008).

Enhancing Financial and Social Capital for Improving Teacher Profession

As suggested by Cheng (2009a) for teacher management policy, there are four aspects: attracting; developing; empowering; and retaining. Hence, developing the pre-service teacher education and in-service professional development comes in the second stage after attracting them. Apparently, attracting and retaining high quality teachers represent the foundation for accomplishing the educational reforms sought through Malaysia Vision 2020 (Mokshein, et al., 2009). The focus of this stage of teacher management policy is to develop the professional competence and standards as key concepts in changing the school to be best performing (Cheng, 2009b). Hence, education expenditure is an important factor in the attractiveness of the teaching profession. In fact, the acquired compensation from teaching as a profession is relatively high compared to other professions. As a result, outstanding candidates are attracted to the education sector (Mokshein, et al., 2009). The salary levels for Malaysian teachers depend on the academic qualification as the Malaysian Remuneration Scheme set two grades of teachers in the school system: teachers without a degree (i.e. teachers with a diploma) and degree holders. Owing to teaching performance, added study, experience, and the level of teaching, teachers are promoted (Lee, 2004; Mokshein, et al., 2009; Tam & Cheng, 2007).

The Malaysian government continues its effort to improve the teaching profession by improving the teacher’s service scheme in terms of the remuneration and promotional opportunities (see Figure 1).

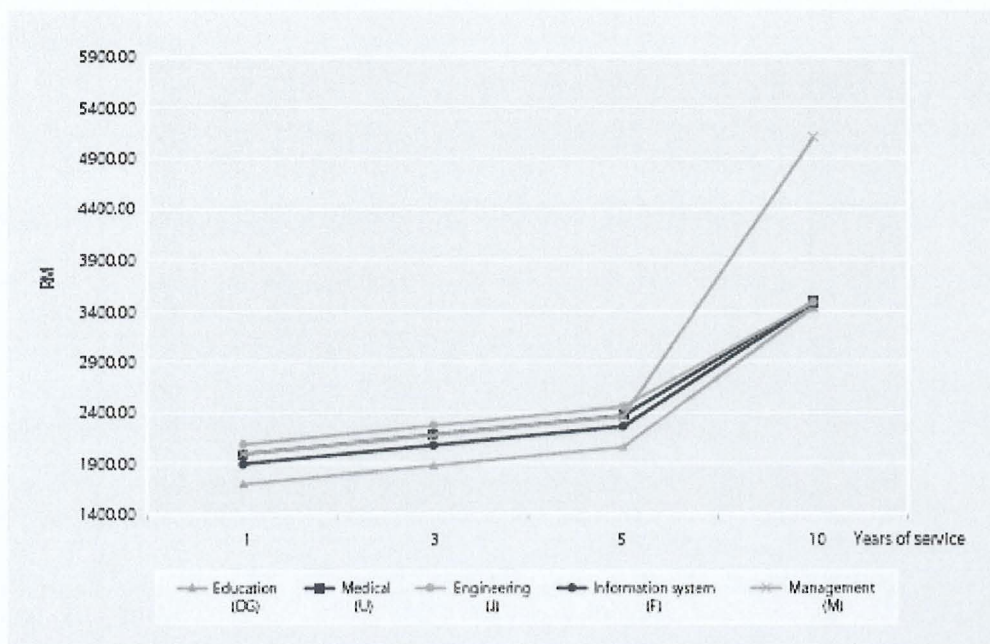


Figure 1: Salary Progression for teachers and Several Other Public Services

Source: Data from the Public Services Department of Malaysia (cited from Siti Aishah Mokshein, Hussein Haji Ahmad & Athena Vongalis-Macrow, 2009)

In areas of skills shortage; however, any teacher who holds a bachelor degree in architecture, engineering, agriculture or accountancy with a diploma in education gains a relatively higher salary. Salaries of teachers are still lower than other sectors (i.e. the medical, engineering, and general management) in spite of improving the level of salary for the people doing the teaching profession recently. Hence, the salary levels of teachers certainly need reviewing when achieving a quality teaching workforce. For this reason, the per cent of male in the teaching profession is very low when compared to the per cent of female. Therefore, males are not likely to join Teacher Education Institutes as they can earn better and promote faster in other professions (Mokshein, et al., 2009). However, the teaching profession remains an attractive career to the public as it is evident firstly in the enrolment percents in the teacher education programs each year and secondly in the tiny number of teachers who resign or retire earlier than the fixed retirement age ((MOE), 2006). Moreover, there are several benefits for the teachers in Malaysia to enjoy so as to make up for the lower salary that assist the feeling of job security. Actually, everyone works in the public service such as teachers enjoy numerous allowances for instance housing allowances and loan facilities for housing, car, and computer as well as cost of living allowance. Furthermore, there are some more specific allowances to teachers such as special allowance for teaching critical subjects, identified by the Central Curriculum Committee (CCC) in the MOE, comprise ‘mathematics, science, English, technical subjects, and special education.’ UNESCO report revealed that about 25 percent of all teachers in

Malaysia received this benefit for teaching English, or mathematics or science in English (BISP for ETeMS). Not only the allowance of teaching critical subjects that the teachers in Malaysia enjoy but also the hardship allowance which is granted to teachers serving in rural or remote areas, particularly in Sabah, Sarawak, and some regions in Pahang, Perak, Johor, Kelantan, and Terengganu (Mokshein, et al., 2009).

Besides, another issue in the form of compensation that is given to civil servants in the teaching profession is promotions. In order to appraise teachers' performance, the Malaysian Government executed the New Remuneration System in 1993 for the purpose of the continuous objective assessment of teachers' actual performance which is annually done by the school principals. In addition to that, teachers ought to sit for the Competency Level Assessment (PTK) which is a tool employed to evaluate teachers' competency in performing their job to assess their professional knowledge, skills, personal values, and attitudes.

In spite of the benefits gained from the appraisal process since the positive results are a pre-requisite for promoting to higher scales, there were some criticism to this process. Prior to the fact that teachers are being seized through performing many other activities 'not part of the appraisal goals' as well as the 'agreed-upon tasks' which constitute extra burdens for the teachers and as a result influence their performance. In this respect, Chuan (2005) reported how teachers in rural areas and remote districts are mostly affected by such workloads more than those of teachers in urban regions.

To sum up, teachers, like employees in other sectors, are being promoted to higher grades after a few years of successful performance in school and in the Competency Level Assessment (PTK) as well as the number of years teaching. Although, a high salary is not the only motivator to become a teacher, salaries of teachers should be in-line with employees in other sectors. Therefore, raising salaries ought to be in-line with other professions and not above the market average which does not drive to improving the quality of teachers (McKinsey & Company, 2007). The financial side regarding teachers in Malaysia as it is crucial in creating an encouraging environment that paves the way to achieve one the most requirements towards quality teachers.

Training and Professional Development

Generally, the Malaysian government has been putting efforts to strengthen the quality of both in-service and pre-service teachers which can be seen, on one hand, in the adopted strategies of expanding degree programs and reduction of the diploma programs. In addition to that, recruiting of new highly-qualified teachers and following more careful procedures in the selection process. On the other hand, budget allocations have been increasing for in-service training programs and their continuous professional development (UNESCO, 2008). Hence, the aim of Teacher Education programs is to enhance the quality of education through developing the competencies of teachers and the capacity of teacher education institutions. That is why the Malaysian government in their seeking to reform the teacher education systems, an introduction to innovative approaches to teacher

education concerning teacher training policies, curricula, methodologies and resources was put into practice (UNESCO, 2008).

Emphasis on quality education requires the teaching force be competent in curriculum delivery. Transference of learning requires knowledge, skills and attitudes from the technical know-how to the creative art of teaching. In order to enhance the training the TED has employed these strategies:

- *Extending the career pathway for teachers* - in a way of encouraging CPD; one-year Special Diploma in Teaching Programme is given for non-graduate teachers in order to upgrade their academic qualification in their respective area of specialization, upon completion there is a raise in salary (as cited in World Data of Education, 2006/07).
- *Improving the qualification of the teacher educators* – the aim of TED is that the teacher educators themselves undergo further training to improve. Short in-serve courses, master degree courses and doctorate courses are offered through the Ministry’s Staff Development Scheme. Many on-going programmes and projects also help develop cohort of key trainers, they in turn conduct staff-development programmes in their respective colleges and zones (ibid).
- *Upgrading the teacher educators’ entry qualification*: the existing staffs that have the basic degrees and qualify the age category are encouraged to apply for scholarships for master’s degree or PhD either locally or abroad. The TED also works collaboratively with local and foreign universities towards upgrading the teacher trainers (ibid).
- *Research and development*: as part of the college culture educational research has been instituted. Conversely, there had been a mixed response because of the heavy workloads of the educators’ and lack of research knowledge. The TED encourages the teacher educators and colleges to take active part in the field of pedagogy, management and evaluation (ibid).
- *Curriculum support programmes*: this program is essential for effective implementation of the curriculum. Mastery of varied strategies in curriculum delivery and access to teaching-learning resources for teacher educators is made available. A few programmes implemented include those for critical subjects like Science, Maths, English and ICT, both teaching-learning strategies and curriculum delivery are mainly based on reflective and process-based approach. With the introduction to teach science and mathematics in English in 2003, a curriculum support project was set up to produce teaching-learning materials for the teacher-training syllabi. A group of key teacher educators wrote material focussed on constructivism to improve the teaching and learning of science and mathematics (ibid).
- *Management courses for administrators and school heads*: this endeavour is taken up by the Ministry of Education, to conduct management courses to upgrade administrators and school

heads in order to enhance their management and leadership skills. The excellent schools and heads are provided with incentives to stimulate their excellence and creativity (ibid).

- *Inspection of educational institutions:* this is the responsibility of the Federal Inspectorate of Schools, which covers all the government schools, colleges and university. The role of the inspectorate is to ensure quality curriculum is planned and implemented (ibid).
- *Publicizing the achievement of teachers:* the national newspapers in the country have a separate weekly column which focuses on schools or educational institutions achievements or initiatives. This in turn promotes their excellence in education and helps as a catalyst to upgrade their professional esteem and self-worth (ibid).
- *The Smart Teacher Training Course:* initially this training was started in 1988 for about 83 pilot project schools and later expanded to 2400 schools which were equipped with computer labs and is expected to increase to 10,000 schools by 2010 (9MP). The governments' expectation is to train 200,000 teachers through this programme by the end of 2010. The focus is on enriching teachers in pedagogical instruction particularly as technology as an enabler to teaching. The courses have been revamped to keep in pace with the frequent changes and development in ICT. Reports have shown teachers readiness in using ICT, integrating it in teaching and learning and pedagogical improvements have been made (Asariah, 2009).
- *14 Weeks of Professional Development:* this programme covers a wide range of knowledge and skills on computer hardware, software, networking, multimedia, internet and integration of ICT in teaching and learning. It also ensures that the teachers can handle computer labs and ICT-equipped classrooms. In 2007, 78 teachers and in 2008, 108 teachers were successfully trained under this programme. Considerable improvement was observed in the teachers' knowledge and skills in ICT during the two weeks practical training-phase. Though the numbers were small this programme equipped the teachers to implement ICT in schools or become coordinators at the division, state or national level (ibid).
- *A one-year Specialist training Certificate:* this programme is full-time in-service programme that emphasizes academic content in ICT, offered to primary teachers with a minimum of three years teaching experience. Teachers with the 14 weeks of professional development experience are given preference (ibid).

The Recent Policies Development of Improving the School Performance

The creation and upbringing of excellent and high performing schools has become an important agenda and issue of significant concern for nations around the world. Findings from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) draws considerable attention from educational policy makers, educators let alone parents who in recent years give deep concern for the children's

education. Malaysia has since followed suit in this challenging drive to produce excellent schools of its own. This is evident in the governments' numerous efforts in the planning and implementation of various policies and programs pertaining to school improvement and school effectiveness with the noble intention of attaining excellent school status such as Cluster Schools and High Performing Schools. Terms such as Cluster Schools and the more recent High Performing Schools in Malaysia are being the goal to be achieved by many schools vying to be on top of the performance list. The motive is to be able to compete in a world of high competency and rapid change to further promote equitable educational opportunities within and across different communities in the country. In line with this phenomenon, the Malaysian Government has taken deep responsibility on transformation tasks in various sectors. Malaysia realizes the need for an education revolution and transformation if it wants to compete globally and thus education was to be made top priority in the government.

The education sector is given paramount importance where above transformation effort is concerned. This can be reflected in the recent tabling of Budget 2011 in Parliament whereby the Malaysian Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak expressed the need to build on quality human capital to achieve the goal of being a high-income nation. (The Star, October 26, 2010). He added that education and training will be restructured and strengthened to achieve this goal. Unsurprisingly, the education sector received 22.8% of the overall RM212bil Budget. Of the figure RM29.3bil and RM10.2bil had been allocated to the Education and Higher Education Ministries respectively. The Education Ministry will also receive an allocation of RM6.4bil for development expenditure, namely to build and upgrade schools, hostels, facilities, equipment and uphold the status of the teaching profession. A total of RM213mil was allocated to reward high-performance schools as well as for the remuneration of principals, head teachers and excellent teachers. There are currently 20 high performing schools nationwide and it is understood that the ministry plans to have a total of 100 such schools within the next two years. (The Star, October 26, 2010). This clearly mirrors the governments' effort to fuel and enhance the education system as calls for reforms and betterment intensifies in the realm of globalization. As such, areas of school effectiveness or effective school practices must be studied to better understand and further enhance the evolving and the sustaining of best schools in Malaysia.

The National Education Blueprint (PIPP) (2006-2010)

Malaysia has framed a five year action plan called the National Education Blueprint (2006 – 2010) or better known as PIPP (Pelan Induk Pembangunan Pendidikan). This is in line with the UNESCO's goal in its' program, Education for Sustainable Development (2005 – 2014, UNDESD), that is to integrate the principles, values, and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning. The main aim of the program is to focus on educational issues of national interest. Nevertheless, it also places great importance on UNESCO's goal that is to encourage transformation in education that will create a more sustainable future in terms of environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society for present and future generations. The National Education Blueprint (2006-

2010) has six strategic thrust areas which will contribute directly towards the achievement of the National Mission through educational sustainability. The six thrust areas are:

1. Nation Building;
2. Developing Human Capital;
3. Strengthening National Schools;
4. Bridging the Rural-Urban Educational Gap;
5. Improving the Teaching Profession; and
6. Accelerating Excellence at Educational Institutions.

The Ministry of Education, Malaysia (MOE) has also taken a few measures to ensure that all above areas are attended to and given due importance. This includes introducing innovative staff development programs besides enhancing existing ones. The MOE strives to achieve a number of goals including making national schools the school of choice, improving quality of teaching by 100% and ensuring that 25% of teachers in secondary and primary school possess first degree qualification by 2010. The MOE had taken a more integrated approach when enhancing and introducing programs so that they complement with one another in an effort to bring excellent culture into the education system.

High Performing Schools (HPS)

High Performing Schools (HPS) is defined as schools with ethos, character and a unique identity which enable the schools to excel in all aspects of education. These schools have strong and excellent work cultures and dynamic national human capital for holistic and continuous development in addition to being able to compete in the international arena, hence becoming the school of choice. High Performing Schools should possess adequate strength and obtaining HPS status will only be achievable to schools meeting the stringent requirements. This includes:

- Upward trend academic achievement (take-off value: min. 80% in the public examinations) ;
- Malaysian Standard Quality of Education (min. 90% achievement in all dimensions);
- Recipient of national and international awards;
- Develop leaders with towering personalities;
- Benchmark and reference point for both local and international schools;
- Smart Partnership with the community
- Network with both local and international schools
- Linkages with local and international institutions of higher learning.

Other Prioritized advantages of HPS include:

- The announcement of High-Performing Schools (HPS) at the end of December every year.
- Performance based incentives for HPS head teachers and teachers.
- Fast-tracking to gifted students.

- Acceptance of 10% of the students from HPS into the most competitive universities.
- Autonomy or School-based management (Finance, curriculum and teacher selection).
- External examinations for 50% of HPS eg. (New South Wales Examination Certificates) and the results will be published.
- Evaluation of 100% of the HPS by an independent body and the results will be published (academic).
- Audit of 100% of the HPS by independent body and the results will be published. (Qualified Auditors).
- 50% of HPS teaching staff will comprise excellent teachers.

The implementation of high performing schools would set a trajectory in making education in the country world class. We can proudly say that we have made successful transformation when we produce students who are not only apt academically but also have greater mindset and vision to be able to perform and be leaders of the country.

Malaysian Education Quality Standard (MEQS)

The MEQS is a standard instrument formulated by the government in 2000 to evaluate schools based on four main dimensions which include:

1. Vision and mission
2. Organizational administration
3. Administration of educational programs
4. Students' outcome

The MEQS policy introduced a multi-tier system of standards that is able to fortify school evaluation in view of the transformation processes that the schools now face. Schools are expected to engage in self assessments and internal quality auditing. For the purpose of self assessment, schools are required to use the School Self Appraisal instrument which has the capability to identify and assess issues, problems and challenges that may hinder the schools' performance. The result derived from this assessment can be used by the school to rank its current performance, enables the school to determine its take off value and further formulate improvements and development plans. These new processes and instruments in place for self-evaluation are an important start in developing a more holistic approach to school evaluation in Malaysia. It gives school personnel a greater stake in engaging in a key activity for quality improvement. (Naidoo, 2004)

Cluster Schools

Cluster schools refer to schools that have been identified as excellent in their cluster in the aspects of student achievement and the general management of the school. These schools focus their excellence on niche areas or areas which they have an added strength in compared to other schools.

The implementation of Cluster Schools was based on the National Education Blueprint (Pelan Induk Pembangunan Pendidikan). Among the aims and objectives of the implementation of Cluster Schools are to expand the schools full potential and to accelerate the excellence of the schools. Its bigger aims were to improve the Malaysian education system, be role models to other schools, to achieve world class standard and to be centre of education excellence.

An important characteristic of the Cluster School is the idea of giving these schools more autonomy and local 'stakeholders' to have a greater say in the management of the schools. Schools will be given autonomy in five key areas - human resources, school funds, student intake, teaching and learning, and examinations and evaluation. It provides more freedom for farsighted and innovative principals in cooperation with local businesses, parents and students to expand their educational ventures.

Trust Schools

Trust schools are an adopted school scheme in which private companies take on the initiative and responsibility in helping public schools. The initiative obtained approval from the government since it was viewed as the private sectors' corporate social responsibility initiative. As a start, ten Trust Schools, five low performers, three average and two top performers, will be adopted by private companies which will be selected by the end of 2010. The Ministry Of Education (MOE) would still remain in charge of the schools and it is still working out details on the level of authority to be given to these public-private partners in order not to contravene the Education Act.

Discussion and Conclusion

Prior to the new challenges that encountered the teacher education in Malaysia recently, several changes have occurred so that teacher education programs can meet those challenges. The foundation of Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) in 2004 causes the teaching education to be a shared responsibility between the teaching training colleges and the public universities. As a result, an extension to the periods of training programs in the teaching sector and upgrading the status of Teacher Training Colleges into Institutes of Teacher Education (ITEs) in 2006. Furthermore, the short-term courses, seminars and conferences that are run by some public universities for in-service teachers in order to enhance their teaching abilities; professional; and personal development.

The Malaysian Government has also improved the remuneration scheme for the people working in the education sector which is evident in the level of salaries, appraisal allowances and the promotion opportunities offered to teachers and school leaders as well. Hence, improving the financial side in the teaching field has attracted many young people to join teaching schools which caused an increase to the enrolment level in teaching institutes and schools.

Employing Alignment of transformation model (Caldwell & Harris, 2008; Caldwell & Spinks, 2008) for the world's best schools gives Malaysia an opportunity to take part in the international collaboration project among some Asia Pacific countries by directing its efforts towards enhancing and improving the quality of its pre-service teachers. To conclude, in order to improve the quality of pre-service teacher education, there ought to be incessant research on the governance, curriculum, methodologies of teacher education, and the continuous assessment to the existing in-service and pre-service teaching programs as well.

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