

Education in Malaysia

Written by Administrator
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Malaysia has enjoyed progress as a stable, developed country with a relaxed lifestyle. The southeast Asian country of 32 million is a multiethnic society and has made major strides in developing its education system to attract local and international students. After opening a number of international schools in Malaysia, the government-sponsored educational sector, private domestic institutes experienced competition to grow and enhance the quality of education.

After 3 months of lockdown, Malaysia has gradually eased movement control order (MCO) as coronavirus cases continue to dwindle. The country has recorded 6 new cases, with four being local transmissions and two being import cases.

The total number of infections has reached 8,596 cases, and 8,231 people have recovered since the beginning of the outbreak, according to Ministry of Health director-general Datuk Dr. Noor Hisham Abdullah. The recovery rate has reached 95.8% out of the total number of cases of Covid-19. Currently there are 244 active cases remaining for treatment throughout Malaysia.

Malaysia's Ministry of Education or *Kementerian Pendidikan*, oversees education but the country's individual states and territories implement the needs of the school system in each of

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their respective areas. The ministry's 2020 education budget stands at USD 15.4 billion. Since 2012, education in Malaysia is free in National schools from Kindergarten to upper secondary school. Textbooks are provided free of charge but extracurricular activities and sports cover separate costs. The school system consists of preschool, primary education, secondary education and post-secondary education. Classes are taught in English and Malay at such schools.



The school system is similar to the United States, the United Kingdom and most of Europe. Children begin school at 4 with pre-school but is not seriously considered and not a requirement of children in Malaysia. Usually children begin Kindergarten at age 5-6, primary school from 7-12, middle school at 13-15 (Form 1-3) and high school at 16-17 (form 4-5). Post-secondary education is at age 17-18 for students who want to continue to university and university at over 18.

The school year in Malaysia begins in January and ends in November with a break of one month in between. There are also 2 mid-term breaks and one mid-year break, with each break lasting one week. Friday and Saturday are considered weekends, with school session on Sunday. But this is a regional practice and does not apply throughout Malaysia. School hours are held from 7:30 am to 1:00 pm but some public schools have shorter hours to allow having 2 shifts to manage overcrowding.

Public primary schools are further divided into 2 categories based on the language of instruction. The first comprises National schools (public schools, *Sekolah Kebangsaan*, SK) are taught in Malay. The second category includes non-Malay National Schools (

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Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan

, SJK) covering National-type Chinese school (

Sekolah Jenis Kebansaaan

(Cina), SJK (C)) with Mandarin language; Tamil National-type School (

Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan

(Tamil), SJK (T)) WITH Tamil language. All of these schools admit students regardless of racial and language background and use the same syllabus for non-language subjects regardless of the language of instruction. A National School must provide the teaching of Chinese or Tamil language along with indigenous languages if the parents of at least 15 students ask for either of those languages to be taught.

After the first phase the students attends the Primary School Achievement Test (*Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah*

– UPSR), where they are tested in a minimum of 5 subjects (or 7 in Chinese and Tamil schools). They may continue to secondary schools but national-type school students need to attend an additional transition year to reach a satisfying level of Malay. In addition to compulsory subjects, students at secondary school can choose elective subjects in the humanities, vocational/technical subjects, science and Islamic studies.

Students in lower secondary school can continue to upper secondary school after taking lower secondary examinations (*Penilaian Menengah Rendah*, PMR). The test results determine whether they can enter into academic, technical or vocational schools. Academic/technical school students at upper secondary school take the Malaysian Certificate of Education Examination (MCE) and vocational school students attend the Malaysian Certificate of Education (Vocational) Examination.

Students in post-secondary school (pre-university) are prepared to take either Malaysian Higher School Certificate (*Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia*) Examination or the matriculation examinations during the two-year period. However matriculation courses prepare the student for certain universities. Students with the Higher School Certificate can attend any university.

Private schooling is an added balance against the public education system within the student population of 5.4 million including 163,745 children in preschool. Private schools are available in Malaysia from nursery school to tertiary education. Malaysian private schools follow the same curriculum as public education. But they have greater influence in higher education with 31 private university colleges, 9 foreign university branch campuses and 414 private colleges in Malaysia, in addition to 43 universities.



International schools offer a different opportunity for students who want to pursue overseas education at universities in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia and Canada. Curricula based on the Cambridge system of the United Kingdom, American system, Australian system and Canadian system are available. Mont' Kiara International (MKIS) in Kuala Lumpur offers American curriculum with English medium of instruction and offer access to American universities, at a cost of USD 302,000 for a student attending the school from Kindergarten to high school. Regent International School teaches English Cambridge curriculum and parents can expect to pay USD 36,500 over a similar length of time to Mont' Kiara.

Some issues have come up in Malaysia's education system, such as the decrease of English level among young people. One solution was the change of instruction language of Science and Math into English in 2003. But the policy was reversed due to complaints this might lead to erosion of Malay language. The standardized tests after primary school and twice in secondary school have lead to many school dropouts. Certain measures can be taken to address these issues. A renewed focus on English is the first step in the right direction as this would help students more easily when working in a multinational company or study abroad in the future.

Teachers are at the heart of schools and it is important to improve the quality of teachers through intensive training and knowledge-based workshops.. They play a crucial role to teach their students in an effective and efficient manner with the best available resources. Schools should promote extracurricular activities and co-curricular events to develop a more open culture and students' physical and mental well-being. Rote learning could be replaced with developing critical thinking skills which are important in a global knowledge-based economy.

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Malaysian schools need to have more interaction between teachers and student to enhance school performance. Teachers must design coursework to allow students to improve problem-solving skills, communication skills, decision-making abilities and critical thinking skills instead of focusing on student's performance from test scores.

Schools need to focus more on promoting practical subjects such as math, science, English, French, German, Mandarin and so on to prepare students for the real world. Above all, having a consistent syllabus and curriculum would help students cope better with their studies. The Ministry of Education has conducted field trials of having 16 to 17 students from the previous number of 35 students in one classroom once lockdown restrictions are lifted. Larger classes at schools could have up to 20 students. The total number of students in previous classes will have to be divided into 2 groups and the ministry would need to see the effectiveness of teaching the new classes.

"The ministry is considering several options after the pandemic subsides and also seeking advice from the Health Ministry before the students can return to school without compromising their health," Senior Minister (Education) Dr. Mohamadd Radzi Jidin said during a special interview on TV3 during its *Soal Rakyat* program in May. He said that school canteens would be subject to stricter SOP to prevent congestion during recess and the spread of coronavirus infection risk to students.

As Malaysia eases its lockdown restrictions against the declining cases of coronavirus, schools reopen on June 24 for upper secondary students who are scheduled for national examinations such as the Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM), Vocational Certificate of Malaysia (SVM), Higher School Certificate of Malaysia (STPM) and Higher Religious Certificate of Malaysia (STAM). Schools in Terengganu, Kelantan, Kedah and Johor will open on Wednesday and Thursday. The other states will open next Wednesday until Friday. The new procedures include teachers checking temperature scans and students eating their meals in the classrooms. Parents must also help through compliance with rules introduced when they send and pick up their children from schools. The remaining schools are closed indefinitely for other students.

The standard operating procedure (SOP) for schools to handle Covid 19 include social distancing of 1 meter at all times for tables, wearing face masks, the use of hand sanitizers and a space for washing hands with soap. Schools must scan body temperature of teachers, students, staff, contract workers, visitors and clients at the entrance or assembly ground of school property.

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All activities are allowed except for sports, face-to-face co-curriculum activities and any gathering or activity including many students, teachers and other people, according to the SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) from the Ministry of Health. Single-session schools will be held from 7:00 am to 4:00 pm, while two-session schools will be held from 7:00 am to 6.45 pm. Those with business in schools will be allowed in from 8:00 am to 5.30 pm.

International students studying in Malaysia's public and private higher learning institutions are allowed to resume their studies, according to Senior Minister for Security Ismail Sabri Yaakob. He said that they need to register with the Education Ministry or Higher Education Ministry instead of Immigration Department. International students number 130,000 from 136 countries, usually from Asia, the Middle East and Africa. The government will allow expatriates working in Malaysia to enter the country, with having to consult for authorization from the Immigration Department, according to Mr. Ismail.

Mr Ismail said students from “green zone countries” do not have to be quarantined. But students from red zone countries must undergo 14-day quarantine process. The green zone countries comprise Singapore, Brunei, New Zealand and Australia.

Article by Wirasti Wiryono
Erlang Institute
Pejaten Office Park Blok D
Jl. Warung Buncit Raya no. 79
Jakarta 12510
Indonesia
Ph: (021) 7918 0467

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