

COUNTRY ANALYSIS PROFILE: MALAYSIA

Introduction

Malaysia has been undertaking bold steps in improving the level of education of its population over the past quarter century or so. Compared to other countries in East Asia, data from the World Development Indicators, 1998 showed that Malaysia' public education expenditure as a percentage of GNP was highest compared with other countries in East Asia in 1980 and even in 1995 despite its decrease by 0.7%.

Yet despite the high priority given to education, and the efforts made by Malaysia to ensure that the poor are relatively well educated, there are still some concerns that differences are growing between urban and rural areas, in terms of access and quality. The Government of Malaysia has also given special priority the improvement of science and math programs in their schools while additional emphasis are continuing to improve the quality of and access to schools in underserved areas.

Using the public release database of TIMMS (IEA's Repeat of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study at the Eight Grade), this study aimed to find out what other variables (particularly school-related and policy-manipulable variables) could help improve achievement in science and math. More specifically, the study aimed to examine such questions as:

- Are schools providing the necessary inputs for students to attain higher achievement in math and science?
- What teaching-learning practices could help improve achievement in math and science?
- What school policies are contributing to higher math and science achievement?

The study also looked at students' profiles and determined what among the individual- and family-related variables could affect students' achievement in math and science. Questions, such as the following will be examined:

- How do family-related variables such as parents' educational level, access to computer at home, number of books at home and language spoken at home, among others, affect students' achievement in science and math?
- How does student's self-concept affect their achievement in science and math?

The Malaysia Educational System

The Malaysia education system provides free education to students between the ages of 7 to 17 for a total of 11 years of universal education. Admission age to the first year of primary schooling is usually seven and the graduating age for a first bachelor degree is about 22 years old. In school year 2000-2001, primary education has a total enrolment of 3,017,902, which registered a gross enrolment ratio of 98%. At the secondary level, school-age population was 3,136,000 of which 70% were enrolled. The country has a literacy rate of 93%, one among the highest in the world.

By age group, the following is the grouping in the educational system: