Chapter 5.26
Distance Learning and Educational Technology in Malaysia

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INTRODUCTION

Malaysia, in comparison to some of the other countries in South East Asia, is relatively small, with a size of 329,750 km2 and a population of 25.45 million (first quarter of 2004). Yet, the country, which comprises the peninsular Malaysia, Sabah, and Sarawak, is undoubtedly one of the most rapidly developing countries in the region. Figure 1 shows Malaysia's capital Kuala Lumpur and important cities.

This chapter discusses mainly the institutions in Malaysia offering distance education (DE) using educational technology, and it identifies the front line for the educational technology concern. In order to get a clear picture about Malaysian distance education, the reader must understand the Malaysian education system generally.

MALAYSIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

Education is a priority concern of the Malaysian government, and annually, the biggest amount of the national budget is allocated for educational purposes. The objectives of the Ministry are reflected in the National Philosophy of Education, which states that education in Malaysia is an ongoing effort toward further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and physically balanced and harmonious, based on the firm belief in and devotion to God. Such an effort is designed to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable and competent, who possess high moral standards, and who are responsible and capable of achieving a high level of personal well-being, as well as being able to contribute to the harmony

Figure 1. Malaysia (Source: http://www.gajahmas.com/skti/mapmalaysia.html)

and betterment of the family, the society, and the nation (Zakaria, 2000).

In Malaysia, primary and secondary school education is free for students between the ages of seven to 17 (a total of 11 years of universal education). The admission age to the first year of primary school is usually seven, and the graduating age for a first bachelor's degree is about 22 years old. Over 97% of 7-year-old children are enrolled in the public school system. Malaysia has a literacy rate of 93%, which is one of the highest in the world. The government is soon to make primary education compulsory for all Malaysian children.

The Malaysian education system conducts education from preschool to higher education, as grouped below.

- Preschool education from age five (for two to three years)
- Primary education from age seven (for five to six years)
- Lower secondary education from age 13 (for three years)
- Upper secondary education from age 16 (for two years)
- Postsecondary education or sixth form from age 18 (for one to one-and-a-half years)
- Higher education
- Undergraduate studies from age 20 (for three to five years)
- Postgraduate studies (for one to five years)

Both publicly and privately funded educational institutions exist in the national education system. There is free primary and secondary school education in the public sector, but not in the private sector. Most primary and secondary school education for Malaysian children is provided by the government and public schools. The private sector plays a significant role in tertiary education but contributes minimum at primary and secondary levels.

The national curricula at primary and secondary levels prepare students for the common public examinations at the end of the primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary levels. Bahasa Malaysia (Malay language) is our national

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