

UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

INVESTIGATING ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT
AND STUDENT EVALUATION OF TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS
IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A	Adult student
ATI	Approaches to Teaching Inventory
B.A.ELLS	Bachelor of Arts (English Language and Literature Studies)
BM	Bahasa Malaysia/Bahasa Melayu
C	Chinese
CCSF	Conceptual Change/Student-Focused Approach
CEQ	Course Experience Questionnaire
CIPP	Context-Input-Process-Product
COS	College Outcomes Survey
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
etc.	etcetera
F	Female
GI	Group Interview
I	Indian
IDEA	Instructional Development and Effectiveness Assessment
Int.	Individual Interview
IP	Indigenous people from East Malaysia
ITTF	Information Transfer/Teacher-Focused Approach
JE	Journal Entry
KBSM	Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah (Integrated Curriculum for Secondary Schools)
KBSR	Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah (Integrated Curriculum for Primary Schools)
L1	English as a mother tongue
L2	English as a second language
LBA	Left-brain Activity
M	Male
MANOVA	Multivariate Analysis of Variance
MCA	Malaysian Chinese Association
MCKK	Malay College Kuala Kangsar
MG	Minority Group

ML	Malay
MOE	Ministry of Education
MUET	Malaysian University Entrance Test
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PMR	Penilaian Menengah Rendah (Lower Secondary School Assessment)
RBA	Right-brain Activity
RIGs	Rating Interpretation Guides
SE	Student Evaluations
SEEQ	Students' Evaluation of Educational Quality
SEI	Student Evaluation of Instruction
SETE	Student Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness
SIR	Student Instructional Report
SPM	Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (Malaysian Certificate of Education Examination)
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
SR	Student Rating
SRT	Student Ratings of Teachers
S-R Theory	Stimulus-Response Theory
STPM	Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia (Malaysian Higher School Certificate Examination)
TESL	Teaching English as a Second Language
TEVAL	Student Evaluation of Teaching
TQM	Total Quality Management
UPU	Unit Pusat Universiti (Central Admission Application Processing Office)
USM	Universiti Sains Malaysia
UTAR	Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman
YA	Young Adult student

ABSTRAK

Kajian Mengenai Pencapaian Akademik dan Penilaian Pelajar tentang Keberkesanan

Pengajaran dalam Pengajian Tinggi: Satu Kajian Kes

Pada asasnya, kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneliti penilaian para pelajar dewasa dan matang mengenai keberkesanan pengajaran di peringkat pengajian tinggi di Malaysia. Kajian ini juga meninjau samada faktor demografik seperti umur, jantina dan kaum mempengaruhi penilaian pelajar tentang keberkesanan pengajaran, pencapaian akademik pelajar dan persepsi pelajar mengenai kemahiran akademik mereka. Perhubungan antara penilaian keberkesanan pengajaran para pelajar dan persepsi kemahiran akademik pelajar juga dikaji. Kajian ini seterusnya meneliti samada penilaian pelajar dan pensyarah mengenai keberkesanan pengajaran berbeza dan meneliti beberapa kaedah pengajaran yang digunakan oleh pensyarah. Rangka kerja konsepsi kajian ini berlandaskan kajian-kajian teori dan empiris dalam bidang penilaian pelajar dalam pengajian tinggi, kaedah mengajar dan prinsip-prinsip pembelajaran orang dewasa/matang. Sampel kajian ini merangkumi 135 pelajar dewasa dan matang dan 10 pensyarah dari pengajian Sarjana Muda Bahasa dan Kesusasteraan Inggeris di Pusat Pengajian Ilmu Kemanusiaan, Universiti Sains Malaysia. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah kuantitatif dan kualitatif dalam pengumpulan datanya seperti soal selidik, temu bual dan jurnal pelajar. Satu sampel yang terdiri dari 44 pelajar telah dipilih untuk menyimpan jurnal pelajar untuk merekodkan pengalaman pembelajaran mereka dalam satu semester (15 minggu). Data kualitatif dari temu bual dan jurnal pelajar dianalisis, dikategorikan dan diatursusun menurut lima aspek keberkesanan pengajaran yang diutarakan dalam soal selidik 'Course Experience Questionnaire' (CEQ) yang direkabentuk oleh Ramsden

(1991). Persepsi dan pendapat para responden mengenai konteks pengajaran-pembelajaran mereka dikemukakan dalam hasil kajian dan dapat dilihat dalam petikan-petikan penulisan dari respons pelajar dari temu bual dan penulisan jurnal pelajar. Dapatan kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa penilaian pelajar mengenai keberkesanan pengajaran mempunyai implikasi terhadap penambahbaikan kualiti pengajaran-pembelajaran di sektor pengajian tinggi dalam lima aspek pengajian berkesan yang berikut: pengajaran baik, matlamat dan garis panduan yang jelas, bebankerja berpatutan, penilaian berpatutan dan kemahiran generik. Tiga aspek diidentifikasi sebagai aspek utama yang dibincangkan oleh pelajar: peranan maklumbalas, peranan tingkahlaku guru dan peranan beban kerja berpatutan. Kajian ini mendapati bahawa pencapaian akademik pelajar berhubung secara positif dengan aspek 'pengajaran baik' dan berhubung secara negatif dengan aspek 'penilaian berpatutan'. Kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa pelajar matang memaparkan persepsi yang lebih positif terhadap kemahiran akademik mereka dan memperoleh pencapaian akademik yang lebih baik berbanding pelajar dewasa. Kajian ini juga menunjukkan bahawa pelajar perempuan, secara konsisten, merekodkan pencapaian akademik yang lebih baik daripada pelajar lelaki tetapi pelajar lelaki mempunyai persepsi yang lebih positif mengenai kemahiran akademik mereka. Dari segi etnik, pelajar bukan Bumiputra (pelajar Cina, India dan kaum minoriti yang lain) mempunyai pencapaian akademik yang lebih baik dan pada keseluruhannya, mereka lebih positif tentang kemahiran akademik mereka berbanding dengan pelajar Bumiputra (pelajar Melayu dan pelajar pribumi dari Malaysia Timur). Persepsi pensyarah tentang keberkesanan pengajaran juga, secara konsisten, lebih positif daripada persepsi pelajar. Kajian ini juga mendapati bahawa terdapat perbezaan yang ketara dalam cara pensyarah menggunakan kaedah 'Penyampaian Maklumat/Berfokus Guru'. Dapatan kajian ini

berimplikasi bahawa pengajaran yang efektif memang membawa kesan yang ketara-- dan penilaian pelajar mengenai keberkesanan pengajaran merupakan satu alat yang efektif untuk membantu guru dalam sektor pengajian tinggi untuk menilai dan mengambil langkah-langkah yang bertanggungjawab dalam hal menambahbaikkan konteks pengajaran-pembelajaran.

ABSTRACT

This study is primarily an investigation into adult and young adult students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness (SETE) in a Malaysian higher education setting. The study also examines whether demographic factors such as age, gender and ethnicity relate to SETE, students' academic achievement and their perceptions of their academic skills. The possible relationship between SETE and students' academic achievement is also investigated. The study further examines the extent to which students' and course lecturers' perceptions of teaching effectiveness differ and investigates the various approaches course lecturers use in their teaching. The conceptual framework that underpins the study includes theoretical and empirical studies on student evaluation in higher education, approaches to teaching and principles of adult learning. The sample comprises 135 adult and young adult students and ten course lecturers in the Bachelor of Arts, English Language and Literature Studies degree programme at the School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia. The study employs both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques such as questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and student journals. A selected sample of 44 students kept student journals to record their course experience in one semester (15 weeks). The qualitative data from interviews and student journals were analysed, categorised and sorted into the five domains of teaching effectiveness advocated in the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) developed by Ramsden (1991). Respondents' perceptions and opinions of their teaching-learning context are presented in the findings, which are illustrated through the use of excerpts from interview responses and journal entries. The findings of the study indicate that SETE has crucial implications for improving the quality of teaching and learning in higher education in the following five domains of teaching effectiveness: good teaching,

clear goals and standards, appropriate workload, appropriate assessment and generic skills. Three domains are identified as major areas addressed by the students: role of feedback, role of teacher behaviour and role of appropriate workload. This study shows that students' academic achievement is positively correlated to the domain of 'good teaching' and negatively correlated to the domain of 'appropriate assessment'. This study shows that adult students are more positive of their academic skills and have better academic achievement than young adult students. It also shows that female students consistently record better academic achievement than male students but male students have more positive perceptions of their academic skills. In terms of ethnicity, non-Bumiputra students (Chinese, Indians and minority group students) have better academic achievement and generally have more positive perceptions of their academic skills than Bumiputra students (Malays and Indigenous groups from East Malaysia). Course lecturers' perceptions of effective teaching are consistently more positive than students' perceptions. This study also indicates that a significant difference exists in the way course lecturers use the Information Transfer/Teacher-Focused approach. The findings imply that effective teaching matters greatly and that SETE is an effective tool to help teachers in higher education reflect on and take responsible steps in improving the teaching-learning context.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.0 Introduction

Like many other multilingual and multicultural countries, Malaysia continues to grapple with multifaceted issues, problems and challenges in her realm of higher education. In the history of higher education in Malaysia, there have been significant changes in policies, organisation, staffing, funding and management of universities in the last decade. Globally and internationally too, many of these changes have occurred as a consequence of government policies. Chalmers and Fuller (1996) comment that one major consequence of these changes is that students who now attend universities are no longer drawn from an elite or privileged group but are more heterogeneous and representative of the general population

In line with international developments in higher education, a growing trend in the Malaysian public higher education sector in recent years is a gradual shift away from elitist education to one based on making undergraduate education available to the general population. Today over 25 per cent of the 17 - 23 age cohort enters tertiary education and the national target is to increase the numbers entering public and private education institutions to 60 per cent of that age cohort by the year 2020. The aim is to have 20,000 undergraduates in every public university in 2020 (Ministry of Education, 2001).

In making public higher education more accessible to the general population, the Malaysian government is encouraging improvements for student learning. In the global marketplace, Perry and Smart (1997) observe that higher education will provide an essential infrastructure with which a country can harness its technological

and creative potentials. As part of this expanding 'knowledge industry', institutions of higher learning will be expected to place greater emphasis on teaching, so that new developments can be more quickly communicated to the broader community. Emphasis on the teacher and the performance aspect of teaching perpetuates a long-standing perception about the function of teaching in higher education. Current movements towards quality assurance in higher education in the country have led to attempts to define high quality teaching. The context for these national developments has been the diversification of higher education and "new forms of accountability have been called for which have placed their emphasis upon assessment and improvement rather than regulation and control" (Brennan & Shah, 2000: 332).

Another profound change in Malaysian higher education in recent years has been the growing number of adults over 25 years of age who have enrolled in undergraduate degree programmes (Kaur and Che Lah, 2000). The Ministry of Education has been instrumental in providing opportunities for adult/mature learners by making available numerous scholarships and loan schemes to finance their further studies on a full-time or part-time basis in public universities (Kaur, 2001).

In most educational contexts, it is the teachers who can play an important part in helping both students and learning organisations to promote quality learning outcomes. In higher education, in particular, much of a student's learning takes place in private, through the effort to make sense of new ideas and to develop and practice new skills. Effective teaching contributes greatly to this activity, as do many other components of the overall learning environment (Entwistle, 1998). Therefore, educators all around the globe emphasise that in today's world of accelerating growth and change, "the ultimate goal of education should be lifelong learning if we are to avoid the catastrophe of human obsolescence" (Knowles, 1990:135). Pedersen (2002:

iii) suggests that lifelong learning is now regarded as an essential element in “securing increased economic growth, development of adequate qualifications of the labour force as well as the inclusion of all segments of the population in the rapidly changing labour market and society at large”. Several prominent educationists in Malaysia share these views (Bajunid & Said, 2002; Had Salleh, 2002; Lowe, 2002) and they propose that lifelong learning be seen as a behavioural manifestation of man that communities, societies and nations should inculcate in their populace.

In the Malaysian education system, the purpose of students attending higher education institutions in order to pursue degree programmes in various academic disciplines is clearly to prepare the younger generation for further economic and technological development in Vision 2020 (Sixth Malaysia Plan, 1990), which has been proposed by the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad. Universities in Malaysia have become the central institutions of modern civilisation. Not only are they places in which all ideas that one takes seriously are subjected to systematic scrutiny, but they are increasingly being seen as the institutions responsible for our society’s rite of passage between youth and adulthood (Goodlad, 1995). In this respect, Vision 2020 (a vision that sees Malaysia as an industrialised country) necessitates a quantum leap, a systematic shift that Malaysian economist Colin Abraham (1989:58) sees in terms of:

the information revolution, high technology and the shift in economic base from small scale enterprises as well as from commodity-based production to manufacturing and high technology.

The dawn of the third millennium has brought significant changes in every professional environment including the field of education. Today this contemporary information revolution (assisted by rapid advancements in educational technology) has opened an entire network of information retrieval possibilities to instructors and

students. Some of these advances include the use of multimedia, the Internet, computer conferences, list serves, relational databases and many other innovations. Under such circumstances, knowledge gained yesterday is no longer sufficient to equip a person for a lifetime. Hence, students in higher education need to “learn at least as quickly as the prevailing rate of change, otherwise they will forever be playing catch-up” (O’Sullivan, 1997: 217).

The multifaceted issues that exist in the field of higher education has prompted the researcher to look at teaching from the students’ perspective and ask what aspects of teaching contribute to effective and high quality learning. The purpose of the study is to investigate student evaluation of teaching effectiveness (SETE hereafter) in their undergraduate degree programme and to see whether SETE, students’ perceptions of their academic skills and academic achievement varies according to the demographic factors of age, gender and ethnicity. In addition, this study also aims to investigate course lecturers’ perceptions of university teaching and their approaches to teaching and to compare lecturers’ and students’ evaluation of effective teaching.

As a background to SETE, it is first necessary to discuss the education system and the development of public higher education in Malaysia. Therefore, this chapter focuses on formal education in the country and the development of public higher education in Malaysia. It is hoped that a brief look into Malaysia’s education system and the development of public higher education in Malaysia can assist one in understanding the teaching-learning process in public higher education in Malaysia. As the undergraduate degree programme in this study is the English Language and Literature Studies programme, a discussion on English language issues in Malaysia is also presented in this chapter to help contextualise relevant issues pertaining to English language education in the country.

1.1 Malaysia in Brief: A Sociolinguistic Profile

Malaysia gained her independence from British rule on 31 August 1957 and comprises West Malaysia (also known as Peninsular Malaysia) and East Malaysia, which includes Sabah and Sarawak. The South China Sea separates Peninsular Malaysia from East Malaysia (see Figure 1).

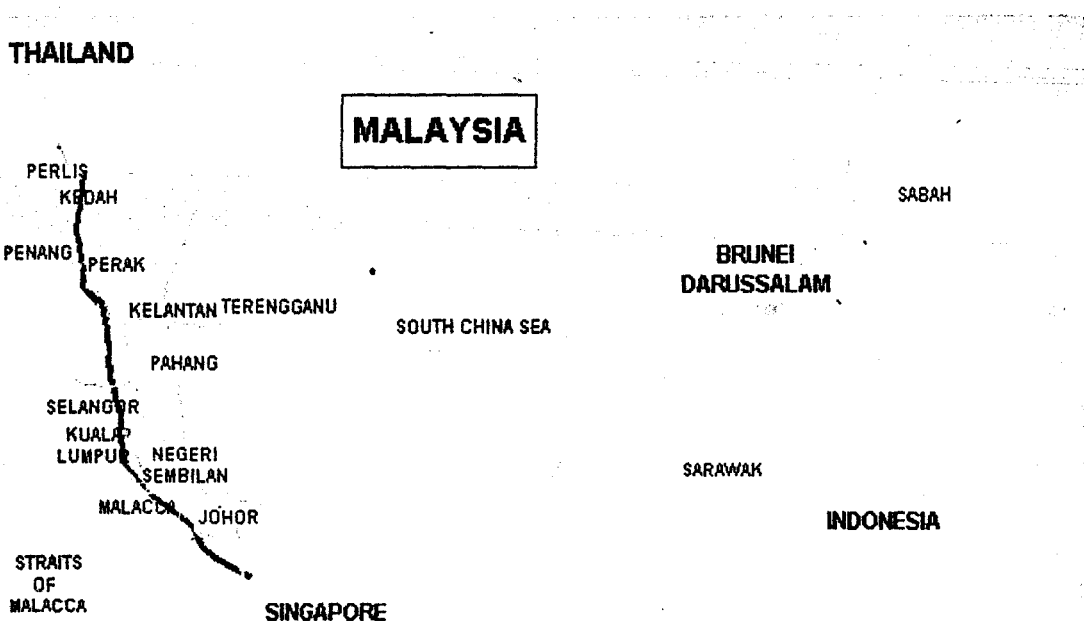


Figure 1: Map of Malaysia

Malaysia has thirteen states and three federal territories (Kuala Lumpur, Labuan and Putrajaya). Each state has an assembly and government headed by a chief minister. Nine of the states have hereditary rulers, generally titled 'sultans' while the remaining four have appointed governors in counterpart positions. Malaysia has a democratic system of government under a constitutional monarchy and is regarded as a multilingual, multiethnic, multicultural and multireligious country. Islam is the official religion. With a population of 22.7 million (1999 estimates), Malaysia continues to grow at a rate of 2.4 per cent per annum and has a workforce of 9.6

million (Background notes on countries of the world, 2000). Malaysia's population comprises three principal ethnic groups: Malays and 'bumiputra' groups (59%), Chinese (24%), and Indians (7%). By constitutional definition, all Malays are Muslim. In the Malaysian context, the term 'bumiputra' has a special meaning. Literally it means 'son of the soil' – a term that was exclusively reserved for the Malays. However, when the two states of Sabah and Sarawak joined Malaysia, the term 'bumiputra' had to take on a new and wider meaning, to incorporate all the indigenous people of the two states (Che Lah, 1996).

The existence of multiethnic and multicultural groups in Malaysia has resulted in a large number of languages being spoken in the country. Besides Bahasa Malaysia (BM hereafter), which is the national and official language of Malaysia, there are about one hundred languages in use (Asmah Haji Omar, 1987). The other languages are English, Chinese languages (such as Cantonese, Hokkien, Mandarin), Indian languages (such as Tamil, Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu, Telugu), tribal languages (such as Iban, Kadazan, Senoi) and foreign languages, which are not spoken as a mother tongue such as Thai, Arabic and Japanese (Che Lah, 1996).

1.1.1 Education in the Colonial Period

Before the British came to Malaya, education in the Malay community meant Islamic religious studies. Formal teaching of Malay was not thought to be necessary; instead Arabic, being the language of the *Quran*, was more important as a subject to be studied. Later, British colonial policies included introducing English-medium schools. These schools then existed alongside the 'community schools' for the different ethnic groups with their own languages as the medium of instruction.

According to renowned Malaysian linguist Asmah Haji Omar (1992:82), “the presence of English education in Malaysia has been made possible by two processes: imperialism and voluntary acceptance”. By her classification, imperialism means that there was an imposition of the language by the British when they occupied Malaya. As far as English is concerned, its introduction in Malaya was by ‘gentle coercion’ (Asmah Haji Omar, 1992). This gentle coercion of learning the language culminated in the establishment of an elite English school for the sons of the Malay sultans, nobles and chiefs in the 1920s. This was the famous Malay College Kuala Kangsar (MCKK) in Ipoh. Following this, an equivalent establishment was set up for the daughters of the Malay upper class in 1948 in Kuala Lumpur and it was called the Malay Girls’ College of Kuala Lumpur. These two schools had nurtured a group of Malays who later became very influential in the sociocultural and socioeconomic life of Peninsular Malaysia. To this group, English was a second language but it was observed that English played a more significant role in their public, private and working lives (Asmah Haji Omar, 1992).

The British also built other English-medium schools in the peninsular. The government built some of these schools while various Christian missionary bodies built some. However, the Chinese and the Indians due to their urban locations more heavily populated these schools. During the colonial period, English was neither a first language nor a second language but it was some where between the two (Asmah Haji Omar, 1992). However, the intensity of its use in the day-to-day communication of the speakers indicated that it was a primary language of the speakers concerned.

English-medium schools proved to be popular, particularly among the Malays, because of the political and economic advantages that could be reaped from an English education (Tengku Mahadi, 1995). English undermined the role of Malay as

the lingua franca. In fact, English could be said to be the lingua franca of educated members of the society. By the middle of the 19th century, English became the preferred language of economics, domestic and international trade and communications (Pandian, 2001).

After the Japanese invasion of Malaya (1941-1945), Malay nationalism and communal politics were at its height. The establishment of the Malayan Union in 1946 stirred nationalistic feelings among the Malays as they demanded educational, political and economic reformation (Pandian, 2001). The Director of Education then, Mr. H.R. Cheeseman advocated a post war reconstruction of the educational system. In his working paper, Cheeseman recommended English language teaching to be extended to all primary schools and also recommended the establishment of two types of secondary schools: one that used English as a medium of instruction and a mother tongue as a school subject; another that used a mother tongue as the medium of instruction and English as a school subject. However his recommendations were never carried out as they were perceived to be detrimental to national integration. Following this, other educational reforms and reports were commissioned but none yielded any substantial impact on the educational system in Malaya.

A review of the educational policy was conducted in 1956 with the formation of a select committee of fifteen members representing the various ethnic communities and headed by the then Education Minister, Dato' Abdul Razak bin Hussein. The Razak report of 1956 was hailed as the first pre-independence report to form the basis for educational policy in Malaysia (Pandian, 2001). It laid the foundation of the present national education policy because special attention was given to language. The Razak report advocated the use and teaching of the following four languages: Bahasa Malaysia, English, Mandarin and Tamil. Bahasa Malaysia and English would

be used as official languages for a period of ten years, after which Bahasa Malaysia was to replace English and become the sole official language. Bahasa Malaysia was also to become the main medium of instruction in education to teach a common syllabus with common goals to promote a national outlook.

1.1.2 Education in the New Education Policy

The New Education Policy 1971 reaffirmed the status of English as a 'second most important language'. This status was first accorded to English in the Razak report 1956. What is meant by 'second most important language' as given in the policy is the language, which is second in importance in the education system, and it is second in importance only to Bahasa Malaysia, the national language. This meant that the teaching of the English language was compulsory in all government schools and institutions of higher learning, although a pass in the English language was not necessarily obligatory for the award of a certificate or a diploma.

With the implementation of the New Education Policy 1971, the former English schools in Malaysia were gradually transformed into national schools, which used Bahasa Malaysia as the main medium of instruction. The process of replacing English with Bahasa Malaysia was done subject by subject starting with Mathematics and Science, followed by Geography, History and so on. The whole process of changing over the medium of instruction from English to Bahasa Malaysia was completed in 1980.

The Chinese and Tamil schools came to be known as national type Chinese and national type Tamil schools. The label 'national type' was considered more acceptable than the former label of 'vernacular', and this new label was given because they could still use Chinese and Tamil as their main languages of instruction while

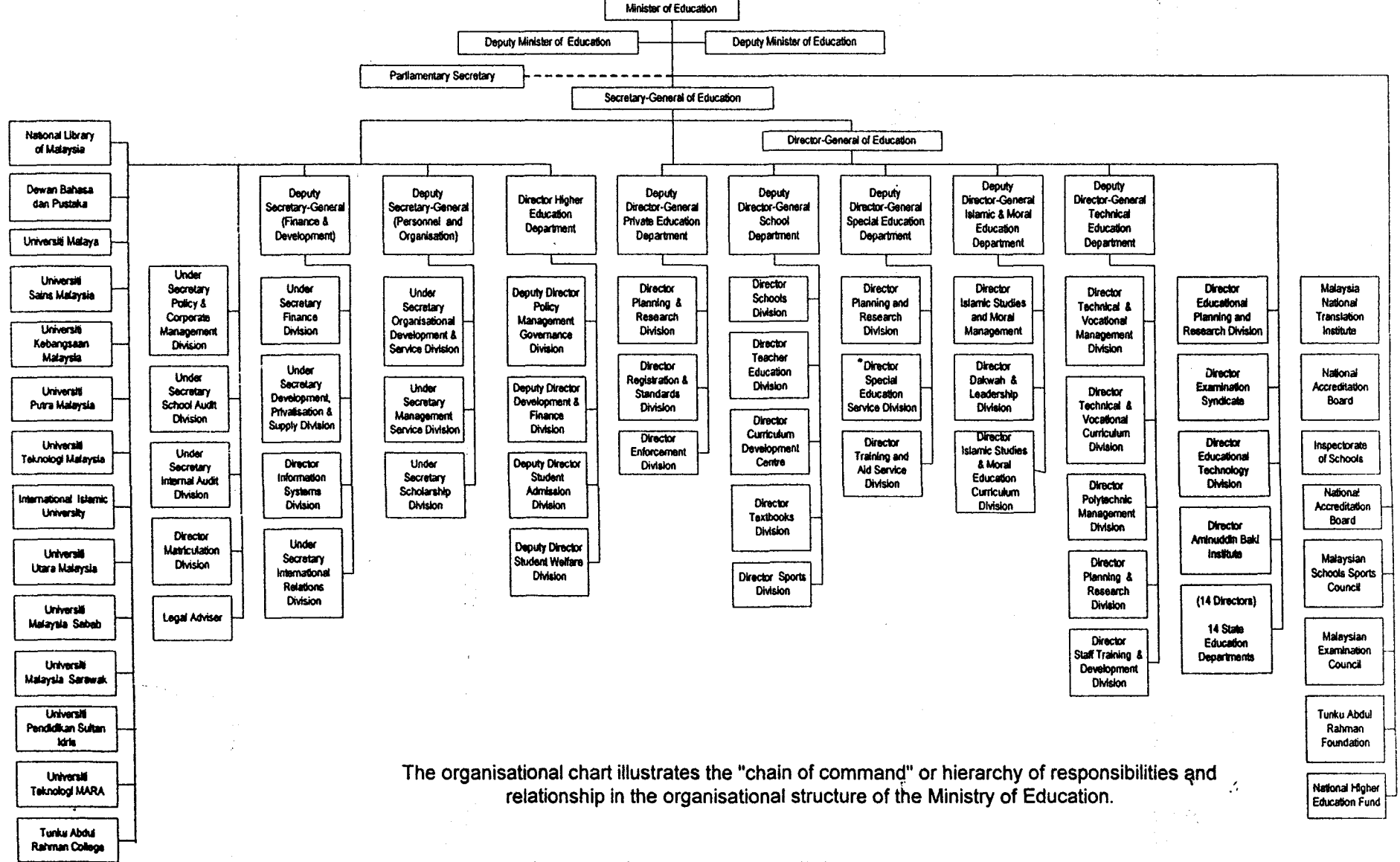
making the teaching of Bahasa Malaysia and English compulsory. The rise of the national schools from the former English schools had not only changed the nature of the end product of the school-going students, but had also given every schoolchild the opportunity to get a secondary level of education with Bahasa Malaysia as the main medium of instruction and English as the 'second most important language'. Hence, the New Education Policy had made it compulsory that every school, national or national type, taught English as 'the second most important language'; no matter where it was located.

1.1.3 The Current Education System in Malaysia

Education in Malaysia is under the jurisdiction of a national administrative body known as the Ministry of Education (MOE hereafter). The formal school system in Malaysia has a 6-3-2-2 pattern. This structure represents the primary (six years), lower secondary (three years), upper secondary (two years) and post-secondary levels (two years). There is automatic promotion for all students from Primary One to Secondary Three. Students at the age of 15, after three years of secondary schooling, sit for a public examination, the Lower Secondary School Assessment Examination (known as the PMR – *Penilaian Menengah Rendah*). A pass in the PMR examination enables students to be promoted to Form Four. In Form Five, at the age of 17, students sit for another public examination called the Malaysia Certificate of Examination (known as the SPM - *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia*). The SPM examination is an approximate equivalent of the GCE O-levels examination. After this, students venture into post-secondary education such as Form Six or matriculation and thereafter to university education. Various public and private institutions of higher learning throughout the country provide tertiary education.

Recently, the MOE announced a major restructuring of the education system (The Star, 10 October 2001). Under the ten-year Education Development Blueprint (2001-2010), approved by the Cabinet, the PMR examination in Form Three will be abolished in 2006 and replaced with a school-based assessment in Form Two to decide if students enter the Arts or Science stream. According to the Education Minister, Tan Sri Dato' Seri Musa Muhammad, the modification of the country's education system will start in 2002 and aims to increase access to education and reduce schooling years from 13 years to 12 years.

Figure 2 shows the organisational structure of the Ministry of Education. The Minister of Education heads the Education Ministry, a post appointed by the Prime Minister. Two Deputy Ministers assist him. The Ministry of Education was restructured in 1995. In this new structure there are six principal departments, each with several divisions. Departments are directly under the Director-General of Education and one is under the Secretary-General of Education. A Deputy Director-General of Education heads each division. Besides these departments, there are several divisions, agencies and statutory bodies in the Ministry of Education.



The organisational chart illustrates the "chain of command" or hierarchy of responsibilities and relationship in the organisational structure of the Ministry of Education.

Figure 2: Organisational Structure of the Ministry of Education

1.1.4 Status and Role of English in the Education System

Graddol (1997) and Crystal (1997) acknowledge the fact that there will be major language shifts in Kachru's (1985) three concentric circles of English language speakers. Presently the figures of English language speakers stand at 375 million L1 (English as a mother tongue) speakers, 375 million L2 (English as a second language) speakers and 750 million EFL (English as a Foreign Language) speakers (Graddol, 1997). As a fast-developing country, Malaysia recognises the potential use of English for internal communication, transmission of science and technology and international communication. English had played the role of official language in Malaysia until ten years after the Independence of Malaya (1957) when the Language Act of 1967 deprived it of this role. In Sabah, English continued to be an official language together with Bahasa Malaysia until 1973, and in Sarawak until 1985 (Platt and Weber, 1980; Chitravellu, 1993). Bahasa Malaysia (now Bahasa Melayu) is now the premier language of the nation and the chosen language for nation building, being the official channel for administration and legal communication.

In discussing the status of the English language in Malaysia's system of education, Asmah Haji Omar (1993) states that Bahasa Malaysia is the first primary language in all government schools. In university undergraduate and postgraduate education and in private schools, both Bahasa Malaysia and English are used as mediums of instruction and Bahasa Malaysia is used as a teaching subject.

In 1985, Chitravellu's report '*The status and role of English in Malaysia: A research report prepared for the United States Information Agency*' proved that English in Malaysia will survive in independent Malaysia because its roles are contrasted and complementary to the roles of Malay and because its economic and academic values provide sufficient incentive to the people who need it to make the

additional effort to acquire it. She projected that English will be needed most at the highest levels in the organisational structure, both in the government and in the private sector. In this regard, she said that university education would require undergraduates to continue to upgrade their English language proficiency as most reading resources are still predominantly in English.

In government administration, both Bahasa Melayu and English are used during meetings, recording of minutes and writing of reports. In the legal profession, both languages are used in the courts. However, on 1 June 1990, 33 years after independence, Bahasa Melayu was proclaimed the language of the courts (Tengku Mahadi, 1995). This was a formal attempt to show full support for the struggle to uphold Bahasa Melayu as the national language and the official language, and to replace English completely in the public sector.

Currently the medium of education in schools and institutions of higher learning in Malaysia is Bahasa Melayu and most textbooks have been translated into this language. However, students in public universities and those who have graduated into employment markets need access to more advanced information in science and technology, and the means to cope with more abstract concepts in the field. Since most of the material required for these purposes is available only in English in this part of the world, students in institutions of higher learning need to master the English language if they wish to excel academically.

1.1.5 Declining Standards of English in Malaysia

Throughout the world, from Asia to Europe, to the Americas to Africa, movements have arisen to defend local languages against encroachment of global English (Warschauer, 2000). In the context of Malaysia, Zawiah Yahya (2000, cited

in Singh, 2001) argues that some Malaysians have every right to fear globalisation as a direct consequence of the expansion of Western culture across the planet via colonisation and cultural mimesis. She feels that Malaysians fear that the role of their national language as a tool of nation building and “language for unity to replace a colonial language” (Bajunid, 2002:5) will be undermined. During the 1950s, this marginalisation of the national language had also raised fears among some Malay nationalists in the country who looked upon English as a colonial language which had little or no place in their lives. Some of these Malay nationalists saw the rapid rise of English as a threat to Malay values and national identity. They were suspicious of English because it was the language of Christianity and the Malays are Muslim people who were re-evaluating their lives and wanted to reject Western ideas and practices including English, which was viewed as a non-Islamic language. According to Che Lah (1996:70) “this is an example of a classic dilemma faced by the rural Malay folks during the British colonisation where some of them shunned English-medium education because they felt that English could lead to a conversion to Christianity and they preferred that Arabic be used instead”.

Although English is still widely used in many domains in Malaysia and is viewed favourably by language and curriculum planners, there has been extensive coverage in the mass media on the decline of English proficiency in Malaysia. More than a decade ago, Benson (1990) commented that in multilingual and multiethnic Malaysia, fears for the future of English are expressed in widespread concern over falling standards of English as he observed that some decline in levels of competence is inevitable when a language ceases to be employed as a medium of instruction. However, he believed that English was deeply rooted in Malaysian soil to disappear

overnight and felt that "English may find a stable position within the language repertoire of an increasingly polyglot population" (Benson, 1990:19).

Over the past few years, concern about falling standards of English has once again come to the fore. In 1999, only 63.9 per cent of the students who sat for the *Penilaian Menengah Rendah* (PMR) examination managed to obtain a 'D' – a minimum level of pass. In the year 2000, the figure dropped further to 59.8 per cent (Pandian, 2001). It is believed that the decline is more pronounced among the Malays than other ethnic groups. Statistics show that the percentage of Malay students who are literate in English is low compared to those of Indian and Chinese origin. The figures also clearly indicate declining standards among rural students.

The Star newspaper (14 November 2000) reports that the two Bahasa Malaysia dailies (*Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian*) focussed on the challenge to master the English language and the need to look beyond sentimentality over the national language. The *Utusan Malaysia* pointed out that English was the communication tool for globalisation and the k-economy, setting the 'real' perspective for Malaysia. Globalisation, which demands skills to be learned efficiently, has become more challenging as the new generation has to be proficient in both written and spoken English. Even the former Finance Minister, Tun Daim Zainuddin, in presenting his 2001 Budget speech, admits that English had become the main language in the world of information and communication technology. The Star (14 November 2000) reports that all Malaysians should aim to be computer-literate to enable them to be more creative and dynamic in the global world. The English daily also states that many graduates of local universities faced difficulties when asked to speak in English during job interviews. The daily feels that the Education Ministry should consider putting aside more hours for English to be taught in schools as they

firmly believe that the globalisation era did not sympathise with anyone; and those who could not catch up (because of their weak proficiency in English) would be left behind.

Another newspaper article proclaimed that the standard of English in public universities is worsening due to its limited use in campuses (The New Straits Times, 14 April 2001). The Johor State Manpower Department Director, Mr. Zaharah Atan, reports that job seekers in this southern state of Malaysia have 'such a poor command of English that many give up when asked to fill in application forms in English' (The Star, 18 October 2001). According to him, the department only managed to fill 19 per cent of the 4,870 vacancies available because of the poor command of English of the candidates applying for jobs with the department's job matching service. Some of the shortcomings of the job applicants were: inability to fill in application forms in English, disappearing from the interview venues after finding out the sessions were conducted in English, fear to converse in English and the shame of exposing their language weakness, poor computer skills and lacking mental preparation when it comes to interview sessions.

No matter what the reasons for the decline in English proficiency, various measures have been taken by the Ministry of Education to improve the standard of English in Malaysia such as designing new syllabi, increasing teacher training facilities, hiring native English teachers, student-teacher training abroad and having 'twinning' programmes with overseas institutions. In the 1980s, the Integrated Curriculum for Primary Schools (known as the KSBR – *Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah*) and the Integrated Curriculum for Secondary Schools (referred to as KBSM – *Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah*) were implemented with the aim of making teaching and learning more effective. Under the new curriculum, the aim of

the English syllabus was to teach English as an effective second language. After a series of evaluations, more changes were incorporated in these new innovations to include aspects such as thinking skills, study skills, learning strategies, environmental awareness, good school culture and science and technology (G. Kaur, 2000).

In a further effort to improve English language proficiency, the Malaysian government introduced the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) in 1999 at the post-secondary level. In the year 2000, the study of English literature in the language classroom was included in the secondary English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom. These changes have been made, as the Malaysian government is aware that the English language is the key to international communication, a major source of up-to-date information and knowledge and access to English language and literacy skills are key criteria for participation in the global economy (Singh, 2001). In advocating these measures to help improve English language proficiency in Malaysia, the government is aware that English is not only the language of the 'new' knowledge economy, it is also the language of the new technologies of human interaction, reflection and knowledge production (Singh, 2001). In realising this knowledge-production potential of English, the Malaysian government has now directed that in the year 2003, all schools will teach Science and Mathematics in English for students in Year one, Form one and Form Six.

1.2 The Development of Public Higher Education in Malaysia

Malaysian colleges and universities are at the pinnacle of the Malaysian education system. Higher education is becoming of paramount importance as it is via this educational vehicle that a wide base of knowledge workers, competent and adept to function in a k-economy, can be produced. The Higher Education Department in

the Ministry of Education first began as a division but in 1995 it was upgraded to a 'department' to enable it to effectively manage the growing number of universities and the increased demand for higher education in the country. Currently there are four divisions under the department, namely, the Policy Management and Governance Division, the Development and Finance Division, the Students' Admission Division and the Students' Welfare Division.

The Higher Education Department is the central governing body responsible for formulating policies and long term planning strategies related to public higher education. It develops strategies aimed at enhancing the governance and management of public higher education institutions. Another major function of this department is the planning and coordination of student intake into public universities. This department, through the various Malaysian Students' Departments abroad, also handles the welfare of overseas Malaysian students.

Until the 1990s, the government financed university education in Malaysia. The first public university in the country, University Malaya, was established in 1949 in Singapore. Following the declaration of independence of the former Federation of Malaya, it was decided to develop a 'Division of the University' in Kuala Lumpur, in 1959. In 1962, this division became a separate autonomous university, the present University Malaya, which continued to be the only university in the country until 1969.

The development of university education has come a long way since the birth of the first university. In September 1962, the government of the Federation of Malaya decided that a Higher Education Planning Committee be established to make recommendations for the development and improvement of higher education in the light of manpower needs of the country. The report published in 1967 provided the

basis for establishing new universities in Malaysia. By the year 1998, there were 10 public universities, seven private universities, six polytechnics, 33 teacher-training colleges and 415 private colleges (Lee, 1999).

During the period of the New Economic Policy (1970-1990), access to higher education was used as a means of restructuring Malaysian society and eliminating the identification of race with economic functions. Concerted efforts were made to provide more opportunities to the economically disadvantaged and students from the rural areas. Higher education was seen as a means to serve the dual need of national unity and the production of the required manpower.

The 1990s saw a shift in educational policy, which would spearhead Malaysia's aspirations towards achieving a developed nation status by 2020. The realisation that national prosperity and the country's ability to face the challenges of sustainability in an increasingly globalised world (which depended on the availability of an innovative, multi-skilled and adept workforce) resulted in the liberalisation of education. As an immediate and short-term measure to cope with the acute demand for an educated workforce, the duration of degree courses (except for the medical degree) in public universities were shortened from four to three years in 1999. More public universities were set up to accommodate the increased demand.

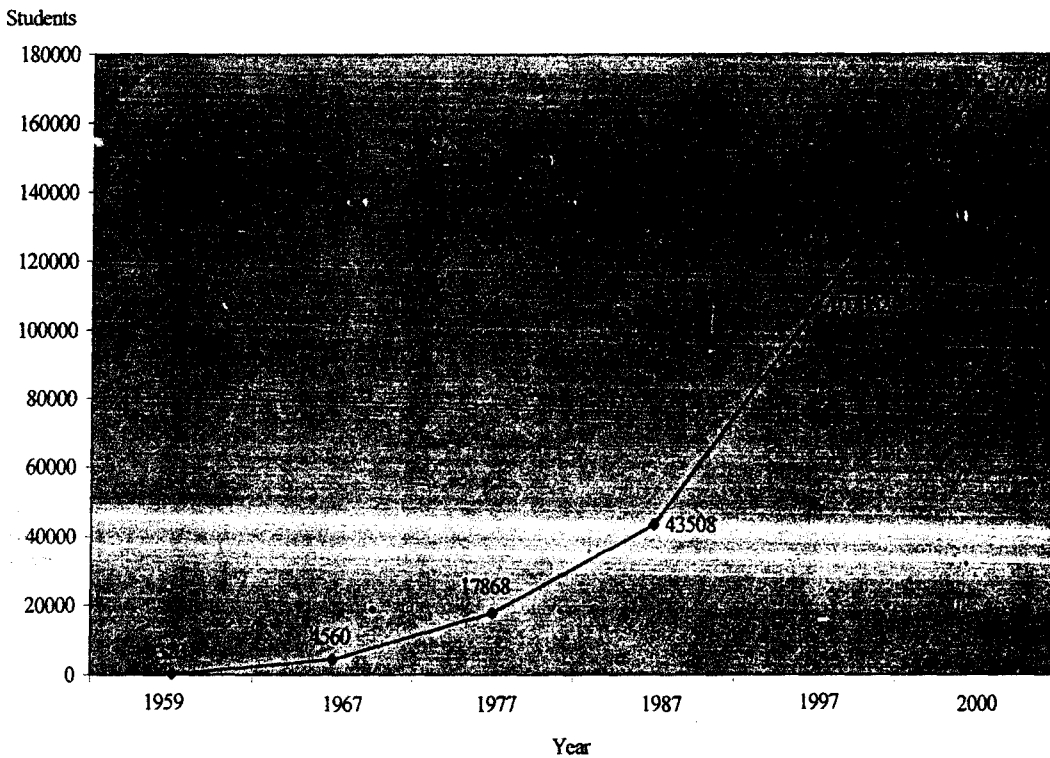
1.2.1 Trends in Enrolment and Course of Study

In the forty-five years since independence, the development of higher education has been phenomenal in terms of the number of universities, enrolment capacity and the range of courses offered. In July 2001, the Malaysian government approved long-stalled plans by the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) to establish its own private university. The new institution, to be known as the University Tunku

Abdul Rahman (UTAR) will operate under the governance of the MCA, Malaysia's dominant political and cultural grouping of Chinese Malaysians.

In response to market driven forces, the emphasis on courses offered by institutions of higher learning is on science and technology. Courses being offered are in the new and emerging technology areas such as advanced manufacturing, automated manufacturing, electronics, biotechnology and information technology. Most of the universities have a digital optic fibre backbone and several have already incorporated distance-learning programmes for professional and technical degrees.

Figure 3 below shows the enrolment in first-degree programmes in public universities from 1959-2001. It can be seen that the first university in the country started with an initial enrolment of 323 students. In the next thirty years, student enrolments in public universities increased gradually until it reached the figure of 43,508 students in 1987. Between the periods 1987-2000, there was a sharp increase of student enrolments in all the public universities in Malaysia.

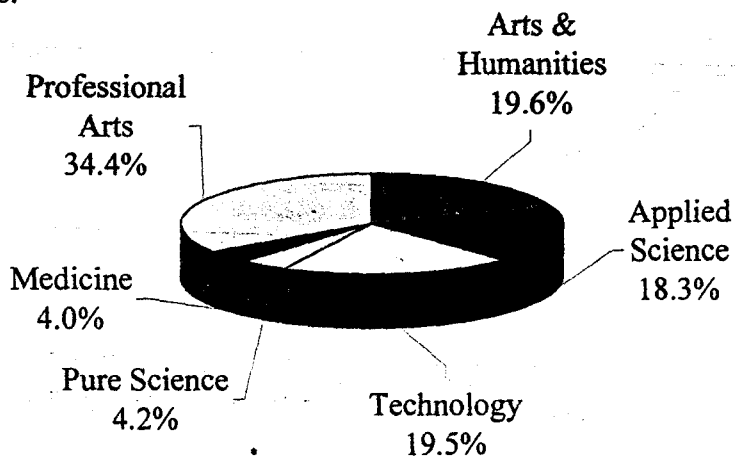


(Source: Higher Education Department, Malaysia)

Figure 3: Enrolment in First-Degree Programmes in Public Universities (1959-2000)

Varied developments in the wide range of courses offered by public universities over the years have been remarkable not only at the undergraduate level but also at the postgraduate level. The number of postgraduate programmes offered has increased tremendously. In 1999 alone, forty new postgraduate programmes in areas such as cardiology, physiology, pharmacy, bioinformatics and polymer technology were introduced (Ministry of Education, 2001). In 1977, the number of students enrolled in postgraduate programmes was only 1,587; but in the year 2000, it rose to 30,477.

In the academic year 1998/1999, a total number of 129,417 students enrolled in first-degree programmes in public universities throughout the country. Figure 4 below shows the breakdown of the student enrolment according to academic disciplines:



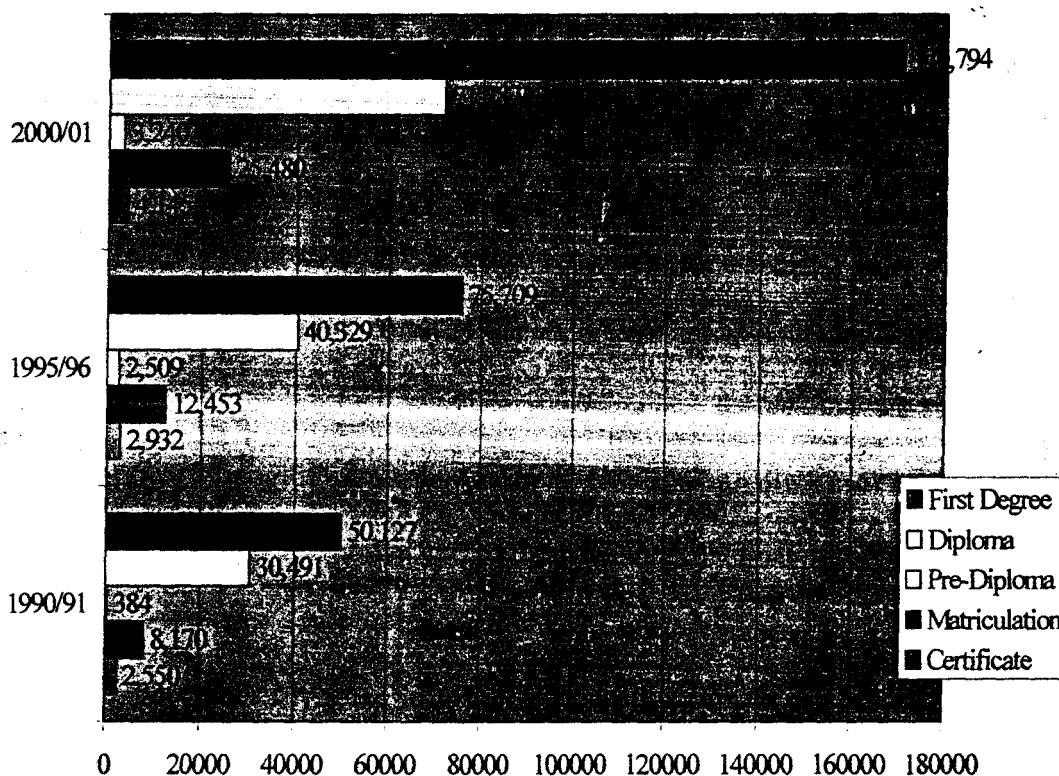
Total Number of Students 129,417

(Source: Higher Education Department, Malaysia)

Figure 4: Enrolment in First-Degree Programmes in the Year 1998/1999

Figure 5 below shows student enrolments in public universities from the academic sessions 1990/91 – 2000/01. Student enrolments for all academic awards (first-degree, diploma, pre-diploma, matriculation and certificate) show an increase during the duration of these academic sessions. Enrolments for first-degree programmes now stand at 170,794; an increase of 120,667 students over a period of ten years. The rapid expansion of higher education has been fuelled by strong social demand for higher education, seen as the main avenue for social mobility and facilitated by the universalisation of secondary education. Over the last decade, the Malaysian government has invested heavily in higher education as a response to both

social and economic demands. Two years ago, the government spent 2,250 million ringgit in financing higher education (Ministry of Education, 2001).



(Source: Higher Education Department, Malaysia)

Figure 5: Student Enrolment in Public Universities 1990/91 – 2000/01

1.2.2 University Entrance Requirements

The Ministry of Education, through Unit Pusat Universiti (UPU or the Central Admission Application Processing Office), coordinates the intake of students into all local universities, except for Universiti Islam Antarabangsa and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, which have a separate set of admission criteria. Generally, admission requirements and selection criteria are the prerogative of the individual universities. Unit Pusat Universiti (UPU) processes all applications for first-degree and diploma