Literacy among the Secondary schools Students in Malaysia

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Abstract—This study is aimed at exploring the literacy rate in Malay language, English and mathematics among the secondary school students in Malaysia and the factors that influence it. The conceptual framework of this study is based on the concept of literacy adopted by the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS). A total of 5,635 respondents from the Remove Class to Form Five were drawn from secondary schools throughout the country. The findings showed that the basic literacy rate overall was at 95.2%, while critical literacy rate was 71.2%. Malay language literacy rate at the basic and critical level was higher than the rate for English and mathematics. Therefore, the Malaysia Ministry of Education (MOE) should emphasize literacy in mathematics particularly of the secondary school students. One-way ANOVA analysis showed significant differences in the rate of basic literacy and critical levels of students according to their level of education and ethnicity. Thus the cooperation of all parties is essential to ensure that the secondary school students achieve a satisfactory literacy rate.

Index Terms—International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), literacy, Malaysia, secondary schools

I. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally literacy has been defined as the ability to read and write. UNESCO's definition of literacy refers to the ability to identify, understand, interpret, design, communicate, and learn to use printed and written materials relating to a variety of contexts. Literacy rate also is a key indicator for measuring human capital and the ability of nations to develop their human capital [1][2]. Policy makers view literacy may increase the individual's employment opportunities and access to education at a higher level. Basic concepts of literacy, which communicate via text and printing, are embodied in the goals and focus of each educational system in the world. In the education context in Malaysia, literacy proficiency is the foundation and most important goal of the national system of education.

II. LITERACY AMONG THE SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

A. Statement of the Problem

Although the national education system, put on the shoulders of the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE), has successfully built the human capital of the country, some gaps in educational attainment still exist, particularly in issues related to literacy proficiency of students in secondary schools.

The Education Development Master Plan (PIPP) [3] had touched on several issues directly related to literacy of students in the education system. First, 7.7 percent of primary schools pupils or a total of 115,000 in Phase I in 2004 have not mastered reading, writing and arithmetic (3Rs, or known in Malaysia as "3M"). Second, there were dropouts or students who leave the school system of MOE at 1.9 per cent in urban and 1.2 per cent in rural areas for cohort 1999 to 2004 at the primary level and 9.3 per cent in urban and 16.7 per cent in rural areas for cohort 2000 to 2004 at secondary level.

It is clear that the issue of literacy is a fundamental issue that contributes to high dropout rates at primary and secondary schools and about the 3M at the primary level. The issue of literacy also is a major challenge in achieving the aims of the MOE and provision of human capital as outlined in the PIPP 2006-2010 and the 9th Malaysia Plan.

Based on the requirements of the MOE to address literacy issues in a thoughtful and focused manner, an exploratory study was made to ascertain the literacy rate of secondary school students and other variables that affect the rate of literacy of secondary students in the national education system.

B. Need for literacy Citizen

Many policy analysts contend that the literacy is an important indicator to measure a country's human capital [4][5]. The importance of literacy to human capital development of a country like Malaysia is urgent as a result of the continuous impact of globalization to the future and well-being of the country. Human capital in literate development is very important to a country to meet the growing demand for producing men power who are knowledgeable, skilled, and qualified and meet the challenges of globalization [6].

The need to produce people who are literate through the education system also has to do with the quality of life of a country development. According to Dighe, Anita and Reddi [7], the aim of education is to enable people to make their own choices in defining the desired quality of life. This can be

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