Chapter 7
Changes in the Malaysian School Curriculum from the Pre-independence Years Until the New Millennium

Norjoharuddeen Mohd Nor, Kwan Eu Leong, and Umi Kalsum Mohd Salleh

Abstract This chapter describes the changes in the school curriculum of Malaysia from the period before its Independence until the present period. After describing the meaning and the definition of curriculum to frame the narrative in this chapter, the chapter then goes on to describe the curriculum changes that took place in the Malaysian education system over the period of three different eras. The first era was from the pre-independence years up to 1979, as Malaysia endeavoured to define its nationhood. The next era was from 1980 to 1999, underscored by a major curricular overhaul with the introduction of the KBSR in 1983 and the KBSM in 1988 that put an emphasis on integration of knowledge, skills and values towards producing holistic students. The third era was from 2000 until the present period which saw changes in the medium of instruction twice and the introduction of the KSSR in 2011 followed by KSSM in 2017. The chapter also discusses the catalysts and contexts that bring into effect these changes and explains the success and failures of the changes.

7.1 Introduction

One of the major foci of reforms in the education system of any country, including Malaysia, is the changes made to the school curriculum. The school curriculum structures students’ learning experiences, and changes to the curriculum from time to time are aimed at improving the learning experiences of students. This chapter describes the changes in the curriculum from the period before independence until today, as well as the catalysts and contexts that brought about these changes.

The term “curriculum” has been used differently by various authors and researchers in education. For some, curriculum is a plan for teaching and learning. For example, Gagne (1967) defines curriculum as a sequence of content units. To the Indiana Department of Education (2010), curriculum means the planned interaction of stu-