

# Shocking Facts On Malaysia's Education Gap

BY WIKI IMPACT TEAM | 12 October 2020

*This article is a 'work in progress'. All statistics and facts mentioned are based on existing studies. When new research comes to light, this article will be updated.*

*Fact checked by:*

Deborah Chan on 20 October 2020

Fariessa Ameer on 2 December 2020

## **Currently at: Level 2**

Level 1: Independent secondary research (desk research) and fact-checked by 1 person.

Level 2: Updated with info from new secondary research and fact-checked by 2 people.

Level 3: Contributions from academic researchers or credible practitioners with reliable data.

Level 4: Article revised based on primary research findings by Wiki Impact and reviewed by 2 people.



Education is one of the most important investments a country can make in its people and its future. It is seen as the great equalizer - once you have it, it opens doors to job opportunities, resources and skills that a family needs to not just survive but flourish.

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**Education is a powerful agent of change**, and improves health and livelihoods, contributes to social stability and drives long-term economic growth. A vital human right, education plays a pivotal role in human, social, and economic development. However, despite great progress in the last few years, thousands of children in Malaysia are still denied the right to basic education. **Lack of education is perhaps one of the most certain ways of passing on poverty to the next generation.**

By some measures, Malaysia has clearly seen some wins over the past few decades. **The adult literacy rate [grew 2.3%](#) from 82.9% in 1991 to 94.9% in 2018.** The adult literacy rate measures the ability of the population aged 15 years old and above in reading, writing and communicating in order to go about daily life.

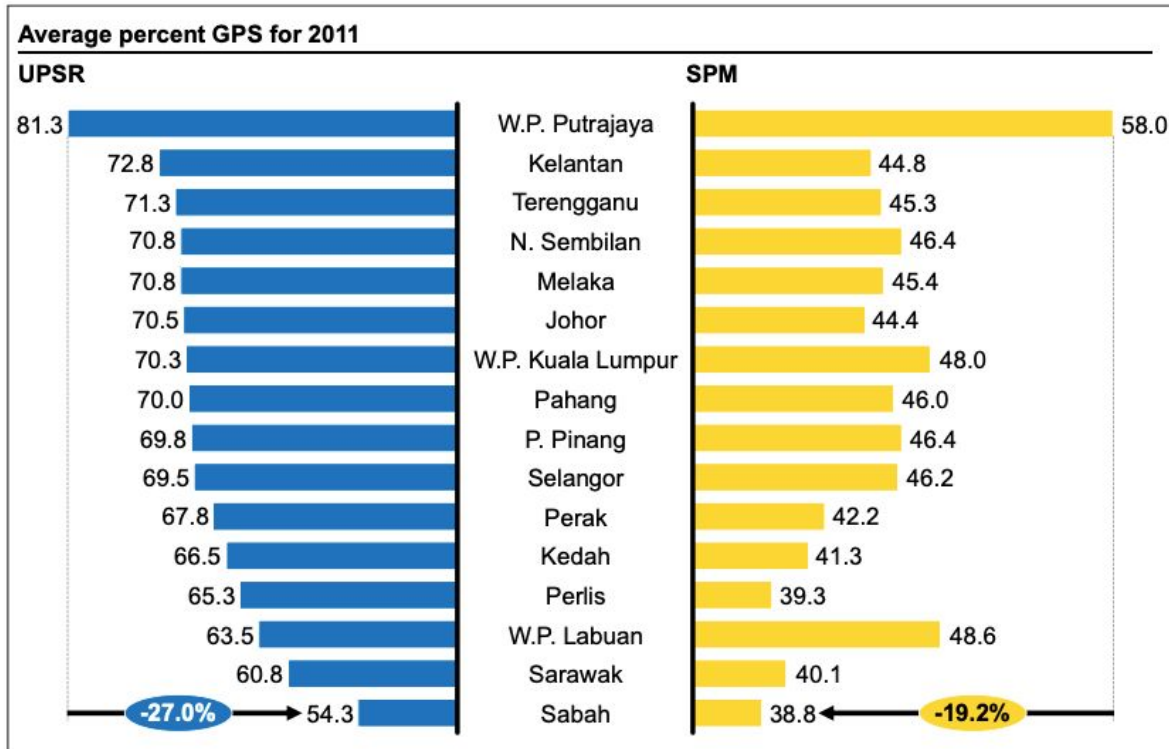
In 2018, the Ministry of Education (MOE) announced the [highest improvement in school enrolment rates](#) for Primary, Lower Secondary and Upper Secondary at 97.8%, 95.3% and 87.2% respectively. This meant that **more children throughout the nation were going to school and progressing into higher education levels.**

While these wins ought to be celebrated, we must not ignore the gnawing education gaps that are still existing in this nation. If we have been given the privilege and access to good education, we must not be unaware of the education inequity in Malaysia and its severity. We will take a look at the difference between urban and rural education, come face-to-face with the harsh realities of school conditions and evaluate if we have the right educators in place to forge forward in developing the next generation.

## The Urban And Rural Education Disparity

Malaysia has done well in standardising the nation's school syllabus for students aged 7 to 17 years old, however the student's performance across the nation bears a stark difference. States with more rural schools such as Sabah and Sarawak, on average [perform poorer](#) than states with less rural schools. Sabah and Sarawak has been consistently at the bottom of the education ladder

for as seen in the graph below. Sabah sees a 27% gap in the primary school, Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR) examination and a 19.2% gap in the high school, Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) examination in comparison with the highest performing state.



Source: [Ministry of Education](#)

We see this repeated again in [2018](#) when 70.3% of urban school students passed the UPSR examination, but only 64.3% of rural school students passed (the ability to score at least grade D in all subjects).

The fact is that not all schools are equal. Depending on where you live, the schools within your vicinity may or may not be easily accessible, the resources are different, quality of education may vary and physical school conditions differ. All these factors influence a student's learning experience and ultimately, their performance.

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# Harsh Reality Of School For Some Students

If you grew up in a suburban or urban area, most students would remember either taking a school bus, public bus or hopping into a family vehicle to get to school. Malaysia's unique geographical conditions consisting of Peninsular Malaysia and the island of Borneo makes it a tricky location to plan and plot schools. Most of West Malaysia is easily accessible by road, however, in Sabah and Sarawak, the existence of roads in rural areas are merely a dream. Waterways dominate most of Sarawak's landscape while Sabah has many villages tucked away in the interiors taking hours of off road driving and hiking to get to. To date, students in East Malaysia still have to [walk long distances](#) to go to school every day.

As a result of poor accessibility to schools, the government also finds it hard to keep up with school building's maintenance, structures and physical conditions. Funds are not readily and easily available for repairs or upgrades.

## Some schools are just not safe for students

Schools are not just concrete buildings with classrooms and furniture. Good schools are safe havens for students to learn, build their social circle and increase in knowledge. **No parent should have to second guess if their child will be safe in the school.** However, not all schools have the same facilities such as libraries, fields, canteens, labs or a school hall. In fact there are schools that do not have access to clean running water and electricity. A school's infrastructure plays an important part in giving the school a wholesome and safe learning experience.

The MOE has provided a ranking system to assess the school's infrastructure. For schools ranking 1 to

*Exhibit 5-4: Infrastructure Physical Condition Scale*

### Red (Safety) SCALE 7

The physical component/facility/building that is inadequate, does not function or is **not safe** to be used and can cause threat/danger resulting in injuries/accidents or the loss of life which has been announced as **unsafe and life threatening** by JKR.

### Red (Safety) SCALE 6

The physical component/facility/building that is inadequate, does not function or is not safe to be used and can cause threat/danger resulting in injuries/accidents or the loss of life which **has been announced by the technical team** in JPN/PPD.

### Red (Safety) SCALE 5

The physical component/facility/building that is inadequate, does not function or is not safe to be used and can cause threat/danger resulting in injuries/accidents or the loss of life **based on the perception of the current user**.

### Orange (Security) SCALE 4

The physical component/facility/building that is inadequate, is still safe, does not function and can cause a disturbance/threat/danger to a person's security, other beings, belonging and nature, based on the perspective of the current user.

### Yellow (Functional) SCALE 3

The physical component/facility/building that is less adequate, still safe but does not function as it is supposed to, based on the perspective of the current user.

### Blue (Uncomfortable) SCALE 2

The physical component/facility/building that does not function adequately, still safe but is not comfortable, based on the perspective of the current user.

### Green (Comfortable) SCALE 1

The physical component/facility/building functions perfectly, safe and comfortable to be used, based on the perspective of the current user.

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4, they are safe and considered a conducive, functioning building for students to study and thrive. The higher you climb on the ranking system, the greater the danger or risk presented to students and teachers attending the school, with 7 as the highest ranking deeming the school unsafe to be used and can cause threat/danger resulting in injuries or the loss of life. In other words, students and teachers enter at their own risk.

It is presumed that schools that are ranked 7 should be shut down for refurbishment and renovation to take place. However, the sad reality is that students cannot afford to miss school and many students, especially in East Malaysia continue going to these schools despite the evident risk.



Ceiling of the school falling down presenting a hazard to students and teachers.

Source: [TV Sarawak](#)

Sabah's State Education and Innovation Minister Datuk Dr Yusof Yacob [stated](#) that out of 1,296 schools in the state, **589 were in the category of dilapidated schools, of which 91 were classified as dilapidated Scale 7 schools that were unsafe to occupy, 414 were category 6. This is nearly half (45%) of all the schools in the state!**





Source: [The Star](#)

The state of Sarawak is not doing much better. Education, Science and Technological Research Minister Datuk Seri Michael Manyin said there were **1,020 dilapidated schools** in the state, of which :

- **415 were considered critically dilapidated.**
- **371 schools did not have electricity supply and were fully dependent on generator sets,**
- **428 schools lacked treated water supply.**
- **721 schools did not have proper road access, including 200 which were only accessible by river or sea.**

Source: [The Star](#) (Ling, 2018)



Source: [Channel News Asia](#)

Both East Malaysian states have a high number of primary schools, but a low number of secondary schools. What this means is that children as young as 7 years old have to put themselves at risk just to obtain a basic education.

## Skilled Educators Need To Forge Forward

As leaders in the classroom, teachers set a strong example for their students, and often become role models for young people. Teachers are like windows, opening possibilities and a glimpse of what the future could look like for their students. There should be no disparity in the quality of teachers in urban or rural school if education was a basic right and everyone should be afforded equal opportunity.

### **Are rural and urban school teachers on par?**

A [study in 2017](#) consisting of 129 (52.9%) urban school and 115 (47.1%) rural school teachers from the states of Penang, Kedah, Perak, and Selangor were evaluated. These teachers who taught the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) subjects and were analysed on their

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competencies such as academic, knowledge, as well as skills in integrating STEM education into their teaching and learning.

The findings were pleasantly surprising as they found **no significant differences between teachers' competencies for both urban and their rural counterparts**. What may have been lacking were some competencies in ICT skills likely due to the lack of resources and accessibility to digital devices. In contrast, the **rural teachers were found to be more competent and creative in organizing co-curricular activities related to STEM integration compared to the urban teachers**.

With new educational requirements being put into place for aspiring teachers across the nation, and “Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) otherwise known as KBAT becoming part of their standardised training Malaysian teachers are more than qualified and equipped to teach the minds of tomorrow. **Regardless urban or rural, teachers have gone to great lengths to not contribute to the education gap, but help to close it.**

## Lending A Hand To Close The Divide

Although there is an education gap, between the rural and urban communities of Malaysia, the government as well as changemakers and even members of the community are all working hard to close the divide.

The Ministry of Education has been implementing an “Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013 - 2025” that covers developments from preschool to post secondary school education throughout the country. This blueprint covers the necessary targets to build a strong and efficient education system. **These targets have definitely paid off with the SPM academic achievement gap between urban and rural areas shrunk by 29.5% from 0.61 Average Grade (GP) in 2012 to 0.43 in 2018.**

Changemakers all over Malaysia have also taken it upon themselves to contribute in any way they can. Providing free tuition classes to teach the poor, providing financial aid for uniforms, stationary, and movements to provide free laptops during recent MCO so that no one is left behind with E learning are just a few of the initiatives that have taken place. An example changemaker would be the [Teach for Malaysia](#) non-profit organisation on a mission to give all children in Malaysia the opportunity to attain an excellent education.



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When asked to comment on the topic, a Teach For Malaysia campus leader, Shawn Stanly mentioned that education inequity exists across geographic regions. The common perception that urban areas are far better off than the rural areas is true, however, education gaps do exist in urban areas too with a different set of challenges. There is no general answer to why the education gap exists as many factors come into play. In my own understanding of this issue, commonly the socioeconomic background of a child or family contributes hugely to this education gap which often hinders a child to dream far and to see beyond. To term it simply, **education is a privilege for some and a luxury to others.**



**Wiki Impact: *What is being done to overcome it, and what more can be done?***

Shawn Stanly: More and more people are getting involved in education, this includes the collaboration between the government and private corporations/individuals in the recent years. Collaboration as such is very important as the way I see it, in this sense, everyone addresses the need to solve this education inequity. Apart from that, the recent pandemic had evidently proven so as we saw many private corporations/individuals were helping schools, teachers and also students from the B40 communities making learning possible for everyone.

**Wiki Impact: *Can a regular citizen get involved with helping to close the gap?***

Shawn Stanly: Yes. Most definitely! Education is everyone's business. All you need is the heart and passion to be part of the change that you speak of. There are many volunteering opportunities with different organisations who are actively involved in the fight to end educational inequity and I am sure they would welcome anyone who is driven enough to be part of their cause. **All it takes is the desire to bring change which will motivate you to be the change !** The time to help give the gift of education to the children of Malaysia is here. It is time to step up, and step forward in fueling the minds of tomorrow.

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This whitepaper was put together based on a few shorts that we have written on our website. If you have additional data related to this topic or other social issues in Malaysia, please get in touch with us. For more facts and stories, visit [www.wikiimpact.com](http://www.wikiimpact.com).

