

Proposal for Education Reform in Malaysia

Introduction

Malaysian education system is currently guided by the National Education Philosophy which states:

'Education in Malaysia is an on-going effort to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable and competent, who possess high moral standards, and who are well responsible and capable of achieving high level of personal well-being as well as being able to contribute to the harmony and betterment of the family, society and nation at large.'

The challenge for Malaysia now is in the implementation, and how to transform a culture that is focused on rote learning and highly focused on examinations into one that values a holistic approach, designed to nurture critical thinking and creativity.

The aims of the educational reforms should begin by improving the quality of teachers and encouraging teaching to become a profession of choice, shaking up the curriculum and methods of assessment away from rote learning.

Current shortfalls

1. Federal policy makers thus far seem to have had a hand in the designing of the curriculum (thus the inconsistencies in text book (historical facts). As a result there is a mismatch between reality and historical facts in the implemented curriculum in the classroom

2. The emphasis by students, teachers and parents is on performing well in public examinations, which are considered the only valid measures of academic attainment. Other values and attitudes, which are important elements in the development of a well- rounded individual with respect to intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and physical development according to the national philosophy of education, are irrelevant in this context.

3. Need to cater for different levels of ability amongst the pupils by means of remedial and enrichment programs and to practice continual assessment of the child's progress (formative and summative assessment).

4. An attempt was made in the 80s with the introduction of KBSR (Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Rendah). The underlying philosophy of KBSR is a "child-centred curriculum" However, this was not implemented effectively simply because teachers were ill equipped without the necessary resources, due to large numbers of students in each class (35 to 40 students) and with no teacher assistant to support the teacher. It was, therefore extremely

difficult to cater to every child's needs and yet fulfil the requirements of the curriculum effectively under the current education systems and practices.

Reforms to consider

1. Curriculum: Revise to include critical thinking
2. Malaysia needs active learners who have acquired the skills of problem-solving, independent thinking, and autonomous learning. Schools need to emphasise different kinds of teaching and learning strategies such as co-operative learning, group work and other learner- directed activities.
3. School performance indicators should perhaps have some relevance. Teachers' attitudes, feelings, and perceptions must be recognised well before the launching of any innovation.
4. Building an education system that gives children an appreciation of their unique identity as Malaysians.
5. A single type of school that foster unity and can satisfy everyone.
6. School infrastructure: smaller classes, well equipped and working equipment which promotes conducive learning

Recommendations

1. A bilingual education system: Students are exposed to Bahasa Malaysia and English simultaneously with a 50/50 programme (half a day is spent with a teacher who teaches in English and the other half in Malay. The syllabus is divided equally to complement. Include mother tongue an option for everyone and celebrate it.
2. A continuous monthly Professional development courses to allow teachers to evolve with the times.
3. Technology as a tool of education (to facilitate , not to be used as a means to an end)
4. Teacher assistant (interns from universities, teacher's training colleges) to assist teachers with paper work, differentiations to cater to the different needs of children.
5. Teacher Training colleges to be mindful and choose teachers who are passionate and meet the criteria for teacher training.

Proposed future curriculum

Between 2011/12, Agensi Inovasi Malaysia, a department with the Prime Minister's Office started an Education pilot project called 'Transforming curriculum and pedagogical practices in Malaysia' with International Baccalaureat (IB) which resulted in 10 IB accredited MYP schools (12-15 year olds).

Based on the outcome of this initial pilot project, the idea was to build on it and to implement a full IB the programme nationwide across all Malaysian schools, thus bridging the gap between rural and urban schools. Unfortunately, this was not carried out.

It is our understanding that between 2011 and 2013, more than 800 educators were put through extensive IB MYP professional development on curriculum design and delivery. These IB trained teachers can form the core group on which to build the proposed IB programme.

As the IB regional office in Singapore has already worked with the Education Ministry, they are well positioned to revisit the Ministry's needs should it want to consider the IB curriculum and are willing to work with us to provide a full detailed long term plan on how to arrest the current shortfalls identified and implement the recommendations outlined. We will also ensure that the solution proposed jointly with the IB will meet Pakatan Harapan's Manifesto Promise 49 as it relates to curriculum and teacher training. (Promise 49: Making government schools the best choice for its people).

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