

Research Team on *Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025*

Reforming National Education

Analyses and Recommendations on Malaysia Education Blueprint



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By

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REFORMING THE NATIONAL EDUCATION SYSTEM:

Analysis and Feedback on the Preliminary Report of Malaysia Education Blueprint, 2013-2025

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Published by LLG Cultural Development Centre

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First Published on July, 2013

ISBN: 978-967-11616-3-0

Printed by Pencetakan Advanco Sdn. Bhd.

23, Jalan Segambut Selatan, Segambut,

Kuala Lumpur, Kuala Lumpur, 51200

Tel: 03-62589211

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Executive Summary

FOREWORD

The Blueprint Independent Study Group is jointly set up by 16 Chinese organisations to present a cohesive feedback regarding the Preliminary Report of Malaysia Education Blueprint (henceforth referred to as the 'Blueprint') to the government based on our holistic recognition of the national education as dutiful citizens of Malaysia and education-related organisations. After two months of intensive study and discussion, we hereby submit the official reports of our Study Group for the reference of all relevant government bodies.

This report consists of our technical analysis and assessment of the Blueprint and our professional suggestions based on our study. We hope the government and all who are concerned about our national education can benefit from our studies and take further action to improve the quality of our national education. This report is divided into two parts:

1. Part I: An analysis and assessment of the current performance of national education based on data presented in the Blueprint.
2. Part II: Our feedback and suggestion based on pedagogic principles on six difference aspects of our national educations: value and mission, administration and management, teacher professionalism, syllabus and methodology, assessment and examination, and vocational education.

The concept of 'equal opportunities' of education is an important principal of modern education. It can be traced back to Confucius and more recently, to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in which the UN stated that "everyone has the right to education". We interpret 'equal opportunities' as such: Everyone shall have the same opportunity to receive education and have access to educational resources fairly and equally. In the process of education, receive the opportunities to fully develop one's potential and learn fundamental skills and knowledge in order to function in human society.

We are of opinion that our national education face severe quality issues, and requires full revamp. However, the more pressing issue is how to let every students enjoy quality education fairly. We deeply believe that our education reformation must be built on the principal of equal opportunities and incorporate multiculturalism in order to really benefit our nation.

PART I: ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT PERFORMANCE OF NATIONAL EDUCATION BASED ON THE BLUEPRINT

I. Quality of Education

- 1. Government public examination lack of the ability to assess and reflect objectively the academic proficiency of students.** According to exhibit 3-18 (pg 3-14), there is a startling 'misalignment' between what we and what the international community (TIMMS) considered as 'excellent'. Also, according to exhibit 3-11 (pg. 3-8), not only did our students performed poorly in (TIMMS assessment of) higher level thinking, they had difficulties with basic knowledge. It is a very serious problem.
- 2. Our actual level of our national education is far behind the international average.** According to exhibit 3-10 and 3-13, not only do we have less students with high level thinking skills than other countries (2% vs Singapore 40%), the number of our students who performed below minimum in TIMMS assessment in all three skills of reading, mathematics and sciences was more than double that of OECD countries.
- 3. Poor TIMSS results in Science and mathematics are caused by using English syllabus.** The Blueprint mentioned three possible reasons for declining TIMSS results in year 2007 (pg. 3-9): the degree to which the content in the national curriculum matches that which is tested in TIMSS, the shift in language policy, and sampling methodology. We believe that the second and third reasons are the main contributing factors.

The switch in language policy could be an important factor. In fact, in 2009, when the PPSMI policy was reversed, DPM Tan Sri Muhyiddin admitted that only 3% of the students benefited from the program.

Also, it was given to our understanding that during the sampling process for TIMSS in 2007, it was monitored closely by the authority and students were selected according to the type of school they go to. We think it could have affected the results of TIMSS assessment.

- 4. The interpretation of the poor Performance in PISA: superficial and selective, as a tool to rationalize the standardization of BM curriculum among the national and national type primary schools. according to MOE understanding, the reason of poor performance in PISA is related with relatively weaker BM achievement in the national type school, resulted in the difficulty of understanding the PISA questions. The fact is, PISA is a test amplify on student literacy and critical thinking skills,** therefore, we are skeptical on the suggestion in Blueprint to standardize the BM curriculum among the national and national type primary school, as to increase the literacy ability in the PISA. The suggestion is utterly deviated from PISA objective, as simply increase the BM standard it cannot nurtures the critical thinking ability.
- 5. Schools with poor performances are downplayed.** According to Exhibit 3-16, in TIMSS 2007, we have no schools which can be considered as Excellent. In PISA 2009, not only do we have no schools which can be considered as Excellent or Great, 121 (80%) of our schools are considered poor. However, in the Blueprint, these indications of a failing education system were not prominently displayed. Instead, the Blueprint displayed a full page exhibit of the so-called 'achievements' of the HPS (Exhibit 3-17). The same tactics were employed in E-6, Exhibit 4. We believe that this has downplayed the severity of the failures of our national education system.
- 6. The difference in English grades between SPM and Cambridge English language grades highlighted the importance of native language learning.** We fully agree with the Blueprint explanation of the difference in English grades in terms of non-native language proficiency. We also agree that non-native users should not be judged according to standards set for native users.
- 7. School complete rates are no sufficiently explored.** In exhibit 3-20, the Blueprint told us that 36% of 2000 year 1 cohort did not meet the minimum requirement of SPM in 2010. However, it did not attempt to explain the data, and did not provide further data for our analysis. Also, we are concerned about the 8%

who are 'out of school system'. The statistic suggests that our education system is not able to account for one student in twelve. This is a statistic worthy of further discussion and analysis, but is unfortunately lacking.

8. **The Jobstreet survey of graduates (Exhibit 3-21) has no direct implication to primary and secondary educations.** We believed that the industry perspective have more relevance to tertiary education and is a poor reference for the reformation in primary and secondary education. We also think that it does not accurately reflect public opinion about primary and secondary education.
9. **The assessment of holistic development is inaccurate.** In the Blueprint, holistic development is explained to include intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical development. However, the data used to suggest the occurrence of holistic development is mainly disciplinary in nature. We find that a poor benchmark for holistic development and instead reflects the ministry's emphasis on obedience among students.

II. Equity in Education

The Blueprint uses students' performance in public examinations as a benchmark of Equity in Education. There are two fundamental problems with it. First, performance in examination is the product of many factors in the education system. By itself, it is a poor indication of any singular aspect of the education system, including equity. Secondly, our national public examinations have questionable credentials, and are known to have changing benchmark under various circumstances. Thus, we reject the notion of using students' results as a benchmark in measuring equity in education. Instead, we propose to use different benchmarks specific to the topic under discussion.

III. Maximising Efficiency

In general, in a study of public spending efficiency, we should focus on three aspects: Whether there is sufficient funding, whether the funding is distributed fairly, and whether the funding is being used effectively.

We find the total absence of discussion and analysis on the distribution of education funding a regretful oversight. We also find little to no discussion about the ineffectiveness of public spending on education, which warrant more in-depth discussion as according to Exhibit 3-15, it is a severe issue. Our nation seemed to have spent more than other countries to achieve worse results. It is unfortunate that the Blueprint did not have the courage to explore the reasons for such low effectiveness, which are usually related to corruption and usually requires public supervision to overcome.

IV. Opportunity for Education

We notice there is an over-emphasis on the number of students enrolment and a lack of other meaningful statistic. This has reflected that our ministry pay more attention to quantity instead of quality.

V. Building unity through Education

According to Contact Hypothesis, on which the Blueprint seemed to have based, four criteria must be present for the Hypothesis to have effects: equal status, common goals, acquaintance potential, and support of authorities, law and custom. It is regrettable that The Blueprint did not explore whether the four criteria is present.

We reiterate that the discriminative policy segregating different ethnic groups is the main factor contributing to interracial tension. We urge the ministry of education to confront the issue honestly and openly, make policies in accordance with a pluralistic value system, and train teachers to better understand the attitude and skills required when facing diversity and multiculturalism.

Furthermore, although the Blueprint emphasise that there is no ethnic requirements to school enrolment, it failed to mention that institutions belonging to MARA system seemed to be the exception. The Blueprint needs to provide a sensible explanation to such an exception.

With respect to the JNJK school inspection mentioned on page 3-24, we have the following questions. First, how representative is the inspection if only 20 schools out of 10,000 are selected? Secondly, if the result of the inspection indicates a satisfactory level of unity, why is there an emphasis on said topic? Thirdly, what is the situation of interracial unity in SK and SMK? Are students from different ethnic background friendlier to one another, or are they discriminative against others? Do the majority attempts to infringe on the rights of the minority?

Finally, we are of opinion that a social issue as important as interracial harmony must necessarily be grounded on solid theoretical foundation and backed up by sufficient data. It is irresponsible and dangerous to mould our education policies based on subjective opinions and wild fantasies.

PART II: REFORMATION OF NATIONAL EDUCATION

I. Visions and Aspiration of National Education

Our Feedback:

1. Education politicized

Our national education laws and policies have consistently been subjected to political and administrative considerations, resulting in poor executions and frequent changes in policies. These have been a great hindrance to the accomplishments of our goals and aspirations. We believe that these are the key questions the Blueprint needs to explore and assess.

2. Discrimination Hinders Unity

Since our independence, the government has claimed national unity to be the most important objective of national education. On the other hand, the government practices discriminative policies in areas of politics, economies and society. School of different types are treated differently, and as such, rendered the goal of national unity a convenient lip service.

3. Unequal Distribution of Education Resources

Our multi-stream education system is a natural product of our history, and is congruent to the present reality of our society. However, non SK and SMK schools did not receive their fair share of education resource to fulfill their duty of national education, and thus there is a serious disparity between the level of development between different streams of schools.

Our Suggestion:

1. Clarify the Objective of National Education

There are multiple objectives to National Education, including general knowledge, vocational skills and character building. Unity among people is an aspect under social skills, not an overriding objective of education. It can be one of the benchmark, but shouldn't be seen as the main objective.

2. Implement Fair and Equal Education Laws and Policies

The implementation of education laws and policies must go through multiple public and expert consultations. We believe that holistic policies which take into consideration of academic qualities and go through strict assessment and adjustment will effectively promote the achievement of our visions and aspirations.

3. Promote the Philosophy of Multicultural Education

Our nation must reject the obsolete concept of homogeneous language and culture and education policies and laws which promote it. Instead, we should promote the value and contribution of a multicultural education, and adhere to the principle of native language education in primary and secondary education. Besides developing every types of primary schools, we propose to implement the promises made to SMJK during the restructuring, so that they may fulfil their role of provided multicultural education to our nation. We propose to include the ability of inter-cultural communication in multiple languages as a goal of our national education. We also propose an even distribution of national education resources to institutions which include Chinese independent schools, pre-schools, and non-profit private schools.

4. Localised education objective

As a federal state, it is inevitable that different regions of our nation possess different levels of development and unique local characteristic. We propose to set different educational development goals for different regions of the nation, taking full considerations of the local cultural and demographical characteristic.

II. Education Administration and Management

Our Feedback:

1. Over-centralisation of the Education Institute

The reformation proposed in the Blueprint still adopts a top-down approach, with the centre government withholding the rights of decision. As such, it is difficult to avoid the conservative mentality of bureaucracy, which will result in low efficiency. Furthermore, in such a system, the political will of the person-in-charge often override professional principle, point in case, PPSMI.

2. Overly Homogenous Composition of Education Department Officers.

According to data mentioned in the Blueprint (pg. 3-24), we are concerned about the high 81% Bumiputera composition of teachers. Since the education department promote its officers from the teacher pool, we derived that there is a homogenous composition of Education Department Officer.

3. Lack of independent public supervision and feedback system

Professional educational supervision plays an important role in the elevation of the quality of our education. There is a distinct lack of public supervision and feedback system in our Education Department. We regret that the Blueprint has sidestepped the issue.

Our Suggestions:

4. Delegate Decision Making to Local Governments

The '56 Razak report (article 30 ~ 37) proposed to have a localised education system. Local governments would be relatively more independent to make decisions in various fields like delegations, system, administration, pedagogy and taxation. Considering the current situation of our education system, we should consider the proposal of Razak Report and delegate more rights to the local governments.

5. Diversify the Composition of Officers

We are of opinion that the composition of officers in the education depart must reflect the composition of our people in all levels, so as to better convey the needs of different communities in the society. This is especially important in the decision making unit.

6. Restructure JNJK to be an independent office

We propose that the JNJK to be restructure as an independent 'Department of Educational Standards'. This department is responsible for the supervision for the teaching and administration in schools, and should be of the same level as the Depart of Education and report directly to the National Congress. Its duty includes:

- a) To provide a report on the quality of national education to the Congress.
- b) Provide suggestions and feedback to the national education system upon the request of the Minister of Education.
- c) To provide supervision suggestion to schools.

7. Create an 'Education Ombudsman'

We request the creation of an independent, neutral and objective "Education Ombudsman" to supervise and survey the exercise of public rights of the education department, to ensure that it is fair, legal, sensible, transparent and effective. At the same time, it should prevent corruption and enhance the effectiveness and quality of government policy execution.

People should be able to lodge their complaints to the Ombudsman on grounds of mismanagement, discriminative practice, illegal administration, power abuse, obscuration of public information and unreasonable delay. The Ombudsman has the rights to hold hearings, investigation and prosecution either independently or after receiving complaints. The Committee will be formed by the Congress, and will report to the Congress. Its annual report will be subject to the examination of

the Congress. It also has the duty to make results of investigation public when it does not infringe on the rights of individuals making complaints.

III. Teacher Professionalism

Our Feedback:

1. Oblique objective of Reformation

In Chapter 5, the Blueprint pointed out that teachers and school leaders are the bedrock of the achieving a student-centered education system. However, there isn't a clear explanation of why the concept of "student-centered" should become the leading principle of our nation, and how is it suitable to our schools. Measures proposed by the chapter did not appear to have a clear direction with respect to teachers development. The chapter focused on giving suggestions to structural problems (such as hiring criteria, appointment, promotion and compensation), but lack discussion on the means and goals of achieving professionalism in teaching career.

2. Over-emphasizing techniques in teachers' development

The Blueprint proposed two development plans for existing teachers: one, to develop e-Guru online library as an archive of videos of excellent teachers for the reference of teachers; two, to assign full-time specialist coaches to instruct teachers in schools. Both plans have the tendency of simplifying good teaching into a technical issue, which can be learnt through imitating. Many other important factors in good teachers, such as ideology, methodology, experience and attitude, are blithely ignored.

3. Lack of discussion of teacher's role in Equity of Education

The Blueprint should pay more attention to how the quality of teachers affects the quality and teaching, and the equity in education in schools. Below are some of our queries:

- a) What is the teachers' view on pluralism?
- b) Are teachers capable of handling differences in students?
- c) During their training, are prospective teachers prepared to accept students with multiple background, and are they equipped with the skills to deal with them?
- d) Can teachers provide fair and quality education to these students and reduce their difference in academic achievements as to achieve equity in education?

If the Blueprint does not confront these problems, then, equity in education will only be an exercise in futility with the participation of teachers; it has no basis of becoming reality.

Our Suggestion:

1. Promote a student-centered approach in teachers' training

All prospective teachers, before they start their teaching career in schools, must be exposed to the ideology of a student-centered approach in their training. They must be trained in relevant theories and methodologies. The Blueprint, must therefore outlined in greater details and clarity, how existing teacher training facilities will incorporate said ideology into their syllabus and how we should adjust our syllabus for the new generation of teachers.

2. Respect the professionalism of teachers

One of the main criteria for teacher to practice a student-centered approach is to have the rights of making professional decisions. They must need to have rights of making independent, professional decisions regarding the needs learning characteristic and the needs of students, so as to select and put together the resources needed by the students, create lesson plans and learning situation suitable for the students, and assess the results of the students' learning fairly and objectively. To achieve a student-centered education, the Blueprint should raise the issue of codifying professional independent decision-making of teachers, and enhance the role of teachers in decision making of education policies and exercising professional determination.

3. Build a 'School-based' approach in training teachers

'Quality teacher' does not existing independently. It relies on a supportive framework: administrative support, good distribution of resources, rights of professional self-determination, learning mechanism of peers, guidance of senior teachers, a culture of sharing among peers, etc. The Blueprint should use the school as a basic unit, and assigning a greater role to schools in the field of teachers' development, study the criteria of implementing said measures in-depth, and also demonstrate firm determination and support of the authority towards school-based training.

4. Review the Teacher's training system and promote multiculturalism among teachers

The Blueprint should highlight the importance of teachers in accomplishing the missions and goals of the reformation outlined in the Blueprint. It should fully review the existing teachers' development program, and clarify the development

objectives of teachers' development before and during their tenure. It should encourage teachers to accept plurality, respect differences among students and adopt a differentiated teacher methodology, in order to provide a strong foundation to creating a quality education system.

IV. Syllabus and Pedagogy

Our Feedback:

1. Misalignment between Proposed Syllabus and Goals of Achieving Equity in education

The Blueprint unilaterally emphasizes the importance of using a singular language of instruction and standardized syllabus without taking into consideration the different needs of the different ethnic groups in our country. This is contradictory to the stated goal of promoting equity in education. Despite numerous researches and studies of education in mother tongue and its relevance to course contents, and surveys of dropout rates of our schools, the education department still neglect to acknowledge the importance of education in mother tongue. We also did not see active measures proposed to solve issues of the high dropout rate among minorities. Also, the distribution of educational resources is obviously biased towards Malay education.

2. Effectiveness and Balance of Course Structure

The ultimate objective of our national education is to enable our students to achieve balanced and coordinated growth intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically. However, when this objective is translated into course structure and teaching objectives, it loses its effectiveness and balance. This mainly manifests itself in health education, expressive arts and social studies.

3. Remove Class

The Blueprint did not properly review the remove class system which has been in practice for over 50 years; and instead saw it as dispensable. This is a gross neglect towards students graduated from SRJKs, in other words, neglect towards weaker students. This reveals the elitist and homogenous tendency of the Blueprint.

Our Suggestion:

1. Fulfill the education needs of different ethnic group evenly

- a) Develop classes conducted in mother tongue. Protect the diversity of our languages in schools.

- b) Support and assist the development of school-based lessons, including delegating decision rights to schools to improve the relevance of lessons.
- c) In recognition of the theory language acquisition, Malay Language in SRJK should be taught as a second language.
- d) Recognise, promote and develop mother tongue education. A multiracial education system can become a unique asset of our country.

2. Ensure fair distribution of education resources to protect equal opportunities for all students.

3. Improve the effectiveness of Health Education

- a) Cultivate in students a good attitude and habit towards health and personal hygiene, to improve their resistance to infectious diseases.
- b) Ensure that the schools pay attention to the issue of psychological fitness, including taking care of their mental health, teaching them to face anger, fear and sorrow, so that students may learn to better handle stress.

4. Fill the Gap in Expressive Arts Education

- a) Develop courses like dancing, drama, art and design.
- b) Cultivate in students the capability of creating, performing and appreciating art.

5. Fill the Gap in Social Studies

- a) Develop content relevant to social and political sciences.
- b) Ensure that all subjects, especially history, reflects the reality of a multiracial society in our country.
- c) Cultivate a healthy attitude and approach towards conflict in students. Encourage respect and open-mindedness when facing conflicts caused by the differences in viewpoints and values.

6. Review the Remove Class System

- a) Fully review the accomplishments of the remove class system for the past 50 years. Decide whether to discontinue the remove class system after considering relevant statistic and professional analysis.
- b) Review not only the continuity of language, but other subjects as well. Students in Remove Class are weak in more than just the language. Providing a remove class helps students prepare for the secondary schools, and thus reduces the dropout rate.
- c) Administrative leaderships from the ministry to the headmasters need to adjust their mentality. If they care about weaker students and provide them with sufficient support, the students will build self-respect and confidence as well.

V. Examinations and Assessments

Our Feedback:

1. LINUS is not a language test

The phrasing in the blueprint suggests that the Ministry view LINUS as a language assessment. It is actually an aptitude test which is only effective when assessed in a student's mother tongue.

2. PBS is full of loopholes

The requirements of PBS is not the same as our syllabus, therefore the teacher couldn't perform the necessary assessment. On the other hand, some teachers assume syllabus not covered in the PBS is not important and can be skipped. Another worrying trend is that some teachers taught according to the standard content and performance standard provided by the ministry, which in fact defeat the purpose of PBS. PBS requires the teachers to be not only the educator, but also the examiner. Many teachers feel unprepared for the dual role. These are several problems worth looking at for PBS.

3. Exam Questions Testing Higher Level Thinking Skills

Exam questions testing higher level thinking skills are difficult to set, and could take up a lot of manpower and time, especially subjective questions. To increase high level thinking skills questions to 75% of SPM in 3 years is an unrealistic goal. Although open-ended questions are good for judging higher level thinking, but can be very difficult to mark and lack objectivity. Also, if mishandled, it might create a situation where students only study for exams.

4. Loss of credibility of Public Exam

As shown in Exhibit 3-18, the results of our students are lower than our neighbours by 2 to 3 years. This is an indication that our examination system is not up to par with the international average, and cannot reflect the standard of our students when measured against the international average. Average students getting good scores, and below average students getting average scores, is one of the biggest problem facing our examination system.

Our Suggestion:

1. Provide LINUS in multiple languages

We suggest that the ministry develop screening in Chinese and Tamil in LINUS 2.0, so that the assessment can be valid and reliable.

2. Re-examine and Restructure the PBS system

- a) Regularly supervise the teaching activities in schools to ensure that education principals are followed, and avoid teaching according to examinations.
- b) To monitor closely the scheme of work for teachers, to avoid teachers trying to cut corners and rush lessons, which affect the student's learning.
- c) Reduce standard tests.
- d) Develop more efficient and clearer PBS measures, to avoid unnecessary paperwork which overload the schools' administrative and academic resources.
- e) Provide teachers with training of assessments skills.
- f) To effectively run PBS and encourage higher level thinking teaching, class size should be controlled below 25.

3. Improve higher level thinking skills in everyday lessons

- a) Reduce or even abandon using objective questions during teaching. Teachers should avoid the tendency of assessing based on the only answer or the best answer. Instead, use more open-ended questions to let students have the freedom of expressions.
- b) Pay attention to both quantity and quality. Improving the thinking skills of students can also be done during classroom teaching, and doesn't have to rely solely on tests. Even assessments come in many forms, not just paper-and-pen.
- c) Systematically enhance teachers' skills in teaching thinking skills, and ensure teachers participate in courses on setting higher level thinking questions to avoid low quality questions.
- d) Build quality question bank.

4. Empower the LP to be more independent

- a) It should be part of the first-wave
- b) Publicise report on the reliability and validity of our public exams.
- c) Improve the objectiveness, transparency and accountability of the marking of public exams.
- d) Learning from the MPM, ensure the independence of the LP through lawmaking, to avoid interference from the ministers and other administrative officers.

VI. Vocational Education

Our Feedback:

1. The course ratio of 70% vocational and 30% academic (7-9) is too rigid

Workforce today demands not only professional and specialized skills from a person, but also a solid foundation of general knowledge, so as to facilitate career change or further personal development. Literacy and numeracy is especially important for a working person. Therefore, vocational studies should balance training students in specialized knowledge and skills with sufficient general education. Vocational education at upper secondary level should be especially mindful of general education.

2. Corporate Partners Listed in the Blueprint (Exhibit 7-9)

Besides high-tech industry, the vocational education should also try to fulfill the demand of medium-low ranging industries in our nation, even the world. The ministry should do a study of existing demand of our industries and train people according to the results of the study.

3. Compulsory Practicum in Vocational College (Exhibit 7-7)

Although meaningful, compulsory practicum can have certain potential pitfalls:

- a) Low quality training at the workplace
- b) The training provided is too biased towards certain aspects of their vocation.
- c) Corporate tend to use students as cheap labour.
- d) Corporate partners lack training skills and plans.
- e) Place of practicum is not in alignment with the interest of students.

4. Improve the quality and enrolment of vocational education

We acknowledge the reasons rose in the Blueprint regarding why vocational education is not well-received. However, we are of opinion that those reasons are partial and superficial. We believe one of the main reasons why vocational education is not well received among non-bumiputra is due to its homogenous study environment and its location.

5. Lack of cooperative framework between public and private sector and ways to collect feedback.

There should be a cooperative framework that includes the government, the corporate and trade union, as a body for decision consultation and feedback collection. This organization can participate in designing lesson plans, determine

the technical field to focus and to develop a standard operation process for practicum.

Our Suggestion:

1. Provide specialized training without sacrificing general academic education

- a) Re-examine the ratio of 70% vocational education and 30% academic education. Increase the ratio of academic education in phases, so that students will not suffer in the future during career change or further development.
- b) Ensure the aptitude for literacy and numeracy, and provide special assistance to weaker students.
- c) Vocational educations need to train students in general skills, so that they may effect a career change when necessary. At the same time, certain specialized training should be provided.

2. Training skilled workers based on demand of labour market

The corporate and trade union should participate in the setting of lesson plan for vocational study, to ensure that the course is in alignment with the current demand of labour market.

3. There should be a standardized procedure for practicum

- a) Provide incentive for business owners to provide practicum. It can be done in forms of direct compensation, tax reduction and special tax arrangements.
- b) There should be a standardized legal framework for practicum. The framework should clarify the legal rights and obligation of both the business owner and the students. For examples: both side should be able to obtain basic information from each other, the students should receive supervision and a stipend, and the training plan of the business owner should be approved by the ministry of education.
- c) Quality assurance of the training provided at workplace. Since all participating corporates enjoy certain form of compensation and tax reduction, the ministry should demand that these corporates follow certain guideline, to guarantee the quality and direction of the training provided.
- d) Provide practicum according to the interest of the students. Doing so will improve the efficiency and productivity of the training. Forcing students into practicum will achieve the reverse.

4. To improve the language environment of vocational schools

We demand that the ministry improve the language environment of vocational schools, for example, to provide bilingual instruction, opening more vocational schools at non-bumiputra area, and open PAV in SMK.

5. Wider involvement of corporate and more detail research

- a) Set up an organization to promote corporate involvement in vocational education. It can be done nation-wide, state-wide or in individual schools. Nation-wide organization can participate in the designing of vocation education syllabus and training policy, whereas at school level, such organization can improve relationship between schools and the corporate and encourage interaction.
- b) Establish a research institute for vocational education, to collect and analyse reliable statistic about the labour market, perform case studies and finally report their findings.

6. Provide teacher's training in vocational education

There is no mention of a plan to train teachers for vocational education. We request that the Blueprint make necessary addition to the section on vocational education, and provide the following suggestions:

- a) The ministry should encourage corporates to allow their employee to become part-time trainers in vocational schools, so that students can be exposed to the latest development in their relevant field.
- b) Requesting teachers in vocational schools or colleges to spend at least one or two months in working environment and hiring part-time instructors from corporate to ensure that the schools stay relevant to actual market demand.
- c) Develop special vocational teaching training programmes for skilled workers who are interested in teaching. The programmes should be flexible to cater to the different needs of instructors and trainers.
- d) To award professional vocational teaching certificate to develop professionalism and attract people of high caliber.

CONCLUSION

We believe that the Blueprint must adopt the position of objectivity, fairness and practicality and attitude of respect towards a national society in order to properly review the current education policy. Our national education has a history of over half a century. We believe that the old education policy has reached a bottleneck and is no longer adequate to face a global challenge.

If we continue to ignore the real reason of the falling standards of our education, and continue to make unrealistic and superficial “reform”, we will repeat the tragedy for the several “education blueprint” of the past, exacerbating our shortcoming and widening the gap between our country and the international standards.

Finally, we strongly request, again, to establish an independent, neutral and impartial “education supervisory committee” to supervise the ministry so that the exercise of its public rights is legal, rational and effective. It aims to prevent corruption, improve the quality and efficiency of the execution of our governmental policy, enhance the standards of the education in our nation, and ensure the long-term development of our national education.

We hope that our effort in providing feedback to the Blueprint can be of constructive value to the future of education of our nation. We welcome feedback from all concerned parties.

Foreword

“Education for all without discrimination” is a concept that is certainly familiar to all of us. In educational studies, this refers to equal opportunities for all to be educated, i.e. the education system should be able to provide opportunities for all members of the society to adequately develop their capabilities. Such an ideal is an extension and enhancement of the notion of “equal opportunities in education” and this can be traced back to the thoughts of Confucius and even the philosophy of democratization of education as expounded by John Dewey.

In 1948, the United Nations specifically mentioned two principles in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: (1) All human beings are born free and equal; (2) Everyone has the right to education. These two principles form the core in the idea of “equal opportunities in education”. Since then, the idea of equal opportunities in education has become one of the key aspects of the education reforms in many countries around the world.

The issue of equal opportunities in education is closely related to the distribution of educational resources. There are four main types of educational resources: (1) human resources including teaching and administrative staff; (2) physical resources including school buildings and various teaching facilities; (3) land resources, with emphasis on space for the expansion of campuses; and (4) financial resources including funds for administration and development.

Equal opportunities in education can therefore be defined as: “To provide equal opportunities for everyone to receive basic education, to adequately develop his or her personal potentials in the process of education and to have equal access to the various educational resources so that he or she may acquire fundamental skills and

knowledge.” Such a definition comprises three levels: equity in access to education, equity in the process of education and equity in the outcome of education.

The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 Preliminary Report (henceforth referred to as the Blueprint) states that an ideal education system must have five major elements: accessibility, quality, equity, unity and efficiency. Of these, accessibility, equity and unity are closely linked to equal opportunities in education.

As of today, education in Malaysia has become widely accessible and thus the issues of equity in the process and outcome of education have emerged as major concerns.

Chapter Three of the Blueprint, which is entitled “Current Performance”, devotes 12 pages to the discussion on the quality of education. This accounts for almost half of the contents in the chapter, indicating that quality of education is a very important theme in the Blueprint. Based on the statistics and charts provided in the Blueprint, we conducted further analyses and found that there are indeed very serious problems with the quality of education in Malaysia that call for an overall reform. However, we are of the opinion that it is more important to adopt a comprehensive approach in ensuring equal opportunities for all students to enjoy quality education.

Another theme of considerable importance in the Blueprint is unity. The issues involved include schools using different language, language policy, strengthening command of Bahasa Malaysia in Chinese and Tamil primary schools, Chinese independent secondary schools etc. The Blueprint claims to have given recognition to the heterogeneous nature of education in Malaysia, but we feel that it is still adopting a homogenous mindset in drawing up such an important document that will affect education in Malaysia in the next 13 years.

From the perspective of pedagogy, the existence of schools using different languages is consistent with the principles of education in mother tongue. As concluded by a research report from UNESCO of the United Nations, education in mother tongue is a basic human right and also the most effective method of learning. This is a fact beyond dispute.

Besides, in discussing the issue of unity, the Blueprint has totally ignored another very important question, i.e. distribution of resources.

Equity in education emphasizes the development of every individual's talents and personalities. Every individual is unique and no two individuals are the same. Equity in

education also means respecting and accepting diversity and differences. Therefore, we believe that the issue of unity should be discussed under the framework of equity in education to have practical significance and real effects.

In fact, in today's globalized world when we have to cope with international competition and demand, diversity in culture and language is no longer regarded as a burden to a nation. Instead, it is cherished as an invaluable asset. The Ministry of Education should not see schools using different languages as a hindrance to national unity. On the contrary, in order to improve the quality of education in our country, it should strive to develop and promote mother tongue education.

Under the concept of equity in education, the nation's educational resources should be distributed based on transparent and fair principles. For the less privileged groups, adequate and effective assistance should be provided, particularly at the stages of pre-school and elementary education. The Ministry of Education should allocate more resource to schools with majority of the students from less privileged groups instead of those schools with so-called high performance. What the Ministry of Education is currently doing is actually intensifying inequality in education and thus leading to disparity and polarization of the society.

In fact, Malaysia does not lack schools and students with outstanding performance. However, a serious problem in Malaysia is the overall low standard of education that needs to be upgraded in a comprehensive manner. The plan of investing more resources on 15 percent of the students as advocated in the Blueprint will not solve the quality issue.

As shown by the data and description presented in the Blueprint, Malaysia has ample budget for education. Therefore, dealing with the problem of quality in education without compromising equity in education should not be a major issue, as long as the Ministry of Education could seriously look into the problem of low efficiency and possess adequate political will to resolve the problem.

We are of the opinion that education reform in Malaysia must be built upon the basis of equity in education and the adoption of the multicultural mindset.

Based on the holistic understanding of the problems of national education, we have formed the Malaysian Education Blueprint Study Group comprising representatives from 16 organizations as follows:

1. LLG Cultural Development Centre
2. Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies
3. Kuala Lumpur and Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall
4. Penang Chinese Town Hall
5. Malacca Chinese Assembly Hall
6. Negeri Sembilan Chinese Assembly Hall
7. The Federation of Chinese Associations, Johore State
8. Persekutuan Persatuan-persatuan Alumni Sekolah Cina Malaysia
9. The Federation of Alumni Association of Taiwan Universities, Malaysia
10. The Association of Graduates from Universities and Colleges of China, Malaysia
11. Japan Graduates' Association of Malaysia
12. National Association of Secondary School Principals
13. Merdeka University Berhad
14. Malaysia's Nantah Alumni
15. Persatuan Persahabatan Berpanjangan
16. Persatuan Kebajikan Guru Bahasa Cina Sekolah Menengah, Malaysia.

The group took more than a month to conduct in-depth analyses and research on the Malaysia Education Blueprint Preliminary Report and we hereby formally present this report entitled “Reforming National Education: Analyses and Recommendations on the Malaysia Education Blueprint”.

In this report, we focus on problems and serious inadequacies in the Blueprint and present our feedback. The text of the report is divided into two parts.

The first part deals with analyses and evaluation of the current performance of national education, based mainly on data presented in the Blueprint. We try to incorporate different perspective and understanding in our analyses and comments.

The second part presents our views and recommendations, based on pedagogic principles, on six specific issues on education, i.e. educational philosophy and objectives, education administration and management, professionalism of teachers, curriculum design and teaching, assessment of teaching / examination and evaluation, as well as vocational education.

This document is a report of our professional analyses, evaluation and recommendations on the Blueprint. It is hoped that the government and various parties concerned with the quality of our national education will give serious consideration to the text contained herein, so that we might work together to upgrade the quality and standard of education in our nation.

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Part 1

Evaluation of educational performance and problems as presented in the Blueprint

The Blueprint contains eight chapters. The first two chapters provide a conceptual overview. From Chapter Three onwards, the Blueprint reviews the quality of our national education and discusses the various problems it faces. Such discussions form the basis upon which the Blueprint proposes reforms to national education and measures to upgrade the quality of our education. In particular, the Blueprint provides detailed data analyses and reviews of the poor performance of our national education as revealed in various international assessments. These analyses and reviews constitute the foundation of the Blueprint.

We are of the opinion that to resolve the quality problem in our national education, we must trace back to the source of the issue to obtain a clear understanding of the root causes before proposing measures for improvement or reform.

For this reason, this report first attempts to interpret Chapter Three (Current Performance) of the Blueprint. This is done based on data presented in the Blueprint. In particular, we refer to the English version of the Blueprint.

Chapter Three contains five topics as listed below according to the original order:

1. access to education;
2. quality of education;
3. equity in education;
4. building unity through education;
5. maximising efficiency.

After a detailed analysis of Chapter Three, we have rearranged the sequence of these topics according to the severity of the issues based on our observation as follows:

1. quality of education;
2. equity in education;
3. maximising efficiency;
4. access to education;
5. building unity through education.

Following this new order of topics, we present below our interpretation of important data as recorded in the Blueprint.

I QUALITY OF EDUCATION

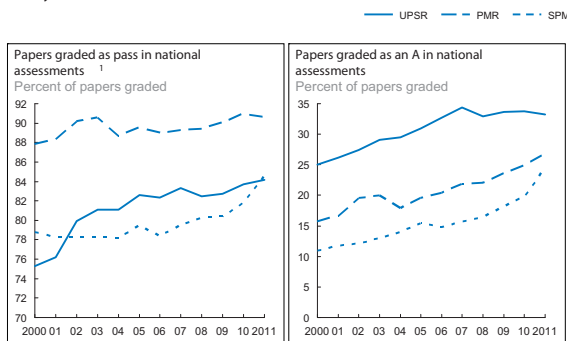
Judging from the data provided in the Blueprint, we feel that the quality of education in our country is indeed facing grave issues. Therefore, this is the first topic that we wish to discuss.

1. The biggest problem relates to public examinations in the country: poor differentiating ability, inability to reflect objectively the students' levels of learning

As described in the Blueprint: "Student performance in national examinations has consistently improved each year" (page 3-5). (Please refer to Exhibit 3-5.)

EXHIBIT 3-5

Malaysian national examination results (2000-2011)



1 In UPSR, failing grades are D and E. In PMR, the failing grade is E. In SPM, the failing grade is G9.
Note: Data for SPM 2003 is not available and is interpolated

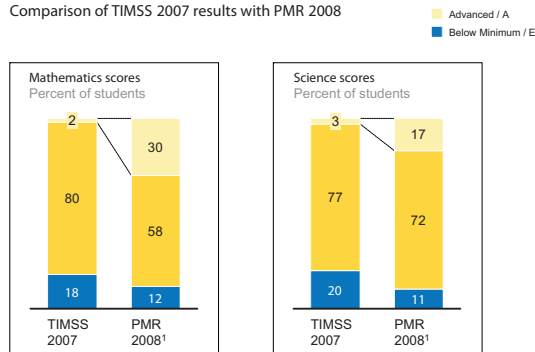
SOURCE: Examination Syndicate

In fact, as we have seen in newspaper reports every year, the passing rate and percentage of students scoring grade A in national examinations have been rising over the years, thus painting an encouraging picture of the education development in our country. However, in international assessments, our students had performed poorly. Take PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) 2009+ assessment as an example: of the 74 countries which took part, Malaysia's performance was in the bottom third and below the international as well as OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) averages.

A good public examination paper must be measured in four metrics: (1) reliability; (2) validity; (3) differentiating ability; (4) levels of difficulty. Reliability refers to the stability and credibility of the examination paper. It is mainly concerned with the reasonable structure of the examination paper, appropriate design of the questions, credibility of the answers and the quality of the assessors. Validity is concerned with whether the examination paper can achieve the stated objectives and this includes consideration of whether the scope of examination questions is representative and in line with the syllabus. Differentiating ability refers to whether the results of the paper can reflect the different levels of academic achievement of the candidates. In general, an examination paper that is of high differentiating ability allows candidates of high capabilities to score high marks while those of low capabilities would get low marks. The level of difficulty relates to the reasonable distribution of the questions in an examination paper into three levels of degree of difficulty: high, medium and low. Questions of high degree of difficulty normally take up 10 percent of the entire examination paper.

EXHIBIT 3-18

Comparison of TIMSS 2007 results with PMR 2008



¹ The distribution of grades illustrated is for schools that participated in TIMSS 2007

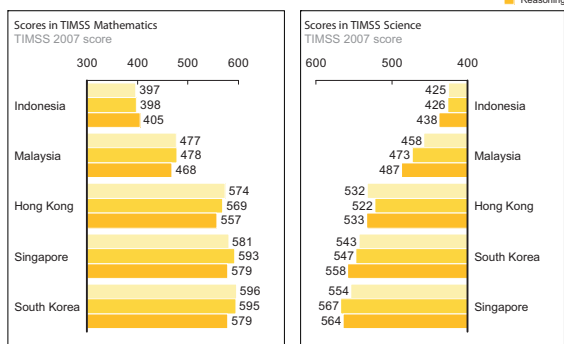
SOURCE: TIMSS 2007: Examination Syndicate

As shown in Exhibit 3-18, it is obvious that public examinations in Malaysia have low differentiating ability such that mediocre candidates are able to score good results while the poor students can also obtain satisfactory grades. This means that public examinations in Malaysia are not able to correctly reflect the quality and standard of education in the country and thus they do not form a fair and impartial basis for the selection of talents. This is a very serious problem.

Moreover, in regard of such a significant disparity, the explanation given in the Blueprint is totally irrelevant. The Blueprint explains: One possible reason for this misalignment of standards is that the national and international assessments have different testing foci. PISA, for example, focuses on questions that test for higher order thinking skills such as application and reasoning. Malaysia's national assessments, on the other hand, have a heavier slant towards questions that test for content knowledge (page 3-14). However, judging from Exhibit 3-11, our students have shown poorer performance not only in higher order thinking skills but also basic knowledge.

EXHIBIT 3-11

Comparison of TIMSS 2007 student performance along the dimensions of knowledge, application and reasoning



SOURCE: TIMSS 2007 for 8th Grade

This is obviously not due to different testing foci. It boils down to the fact that the standard of education in our country is indeed lower when compared with other countries. Therefore, the basic question is: why are the public examinations in our country unable to correctly reflect the actual standard of our education?

2. Actual standard of education in Malaysia: Far below international average standard

The Blueprint points out that 15-year-olds in Malaysia are performing as though they have had three years' less schooling than 15-year-olds in the countries that Malaysia seeks to compete against (page 3-9) and compared to Shanghai, the world's best-performing school system in PISA 2009+, the gap is equivalent to four years of schooling (page 3-9).

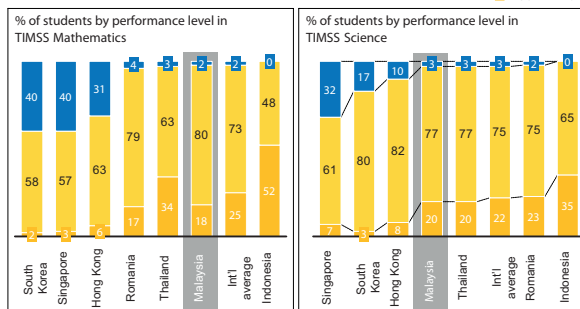
However, when it comes to offering explanation, the Blueprint has made the same mistake of failing to correctly interpret the relevant data.

For either TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) or PISA, the Blueprint focuses its attention on the percentages of Malaysian students performing at the advanced skill level (pages 3-8, 3-10). For instance, in TIMSS, only 2-3% of Malaysian students perform well at this highest benchmark level as compared with more than 30% of students in Singapore; in PISA, only 0.1% of our students are performing at the advanced level as compared with 8% in the OECD countries. Such a focus seems to imply that Malaysian students only lose out to their peers in other countries in respect of performance at the advanced level.

However, based on Exhibits 3-10 and 3-13, it can be seen that not only do we have lower percentage of students performing at the advanced skill levels but more seriously, the percentages of our students who failed to achieve the minimum proficiency levels in Reading, Mathematics and Science are more than double as compared with those in OECD countries.

EXHIBIT 3-10

Comparison of Malaysia's 2007 TIMSS performance against other countries



¹ Advanced benchmark: able to organize information, make generalisations, solve non-routine problems and draw and justify conclusions from data

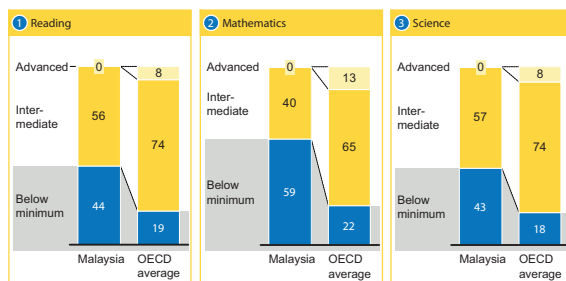
Note: Countries arranged by proportion of students in advanced level in descending order

SOURCE: TIMSS 2007 for 8th Grade

EXHIBIT 3-13

Comparison of Malaysia's performance in PISA 2009+ by skill level against the OECD average

Percentage of students at different performance levels on PISA 2009+¹



¹ Advanced includes proficiency level 5 and level 6; Intermediate includes proficiency level 2, 3, and 4; and Below minimum includes proficiency level 1 and below

Note: Score is an average of sample of schools in Malaysia: 80% National secondary schools, 3% Religious schools, 4% technical and vocational schools, 3% full boarding schools, 3% MARA Junior Science Colleges, 7% private schools by students

SOURCE: PISA 2009+

3. Explanation for Malaysia's performance decline in TIMSS: Negative impact from teaching of Mathematics and Science in English

For the decline in Malaysia's performance in TIMSS from above the international average levels in 1999 and 2003 to below the levels in 2007, the Blueprint has specifically provided the explanation (page 3-9). Three possible reasons are mentioned: (1) the degree to which the content in the national curriculum matches that which is tested in TIMSS; (2) the shift in language policy; (3) sampling methodology.

However, the Blueprint further states that all these three reasons are "deemed to be unlikely to be a major driver" and this is attributed to the following factors: (1) while there has been some drop in the common content between the Mathematics test questions of TIMSS and the national curriculum between 2003 and 2007 (from 98% in 2003 to 75% in 2007), the overlap for Science remains high at 90%; (2) Bahasa Malaysia and English language questions were both provided as options in the TIMSS assessments for Malaysia and therefore results should not have been affected by the language of testing used for TIMSS; (3) the sample of schools tested in TIMSS reflects the overall performance of Malaysia's schools as it is based on a distribution of schools by national performance band.

As such, in the final analysis, what is actually the major driver? The Blueprint stops here and offers no further analysis.

We are of the view that the second and third reasons as mentioned above constitute the major driver. The second reason, the policy shift to the teaching of Mathematics and Science in English, could be significant. This new policy was implemented from 2003 to 2009 and the timing coincided exactly with that of the two TIMSS assessments. The problem with this language policy shift is not just confined to the usage of a language but involves the teaching of the subjects in a language that the students were not familiar with, thus affecting the students' grasp of the knowledge and skill learning. In fact, the teaching of Mathematics and Science in English was abolished in 2009 primarily because it had affected the student's learning. Minister of Education Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin had also openly admitted that the policy had achieved only an effectiveness of 2-3 %. Therefore, the policy of teaching Mathematics and Science in English appears to be the major driver for the students' performance decline.

The third reason relates to sampling. Since it is impossible to assess all the schools, sampling is necessary and this involves the methods of taking the samples. TIMSS assesses the overall standards of education in various countries and thus the samples taken must cover schools of different performance grades in specific ratio. For example, if the school performance is graded based on three levels: excellent, intermediate and poor, then the samples taken must cover schools of all these three different performance grades in a specific ratio such as 100, 400 and 600 schools respectively to comply with the ratio of 1: 4: 6. It is understood that the sampling of Malaysian schools for the international assessment prior to 2007 was not done in accordance with the specified ratio and subsequently, the international assessment organizer thus implemented strict controls over the sampling methodology in 2007. Sampling of schools was thus conducted according

Testing possible factors for Malaysia's performance decline in TIMSS

Three factors have been raised as possible reasons for Malaysia's decline in the TIMSS assessment: the degree to which the content in the national curriculum matches that which is tested in TIMSS, the shift in language policy, and sampling methodology. However, all three are deemed to be unlikely to be a major driver for the following reasons:

Incomplete coverage of the concepts assessed in TIMSS by the national curriculum is unlikely to account for the decline.

While there has been some drop in the common content between the Mathematics test questions of TIMSS and the national curriculum between 2003 and 2007 (from 98% in 2003 to 75% in 2007 based on the Ministry's self-assessment), the same cannot be said for Science, where overlap remains high at 90%.

Bahasa Malaysia and English language questions were both provided as options in the TIMSS assessments for Malaysia. Therefore results should not have been affected by the language of testing used for TIMSS.

The sampling approach is unlikely to be a major driver.

The sample of schools tested in TIMSS reflects the overall performance of Malaysia's schools based on a distribution of schools by national performance band.

to the ratio in that year and this had been one of the reasons for Malaysia's performance decline.

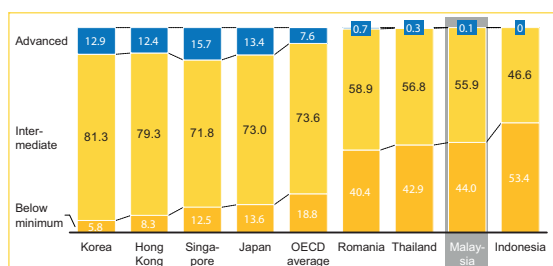
4. Explanation for Malaysia's poor performance in PISA assessment is lopsided and selective, aimed at paving the way for implementing measures to strengthen teaching of Bahasa Malaysia in Chinese primary schools

In respect of Malaysia's performance in PISA assessment, the Blueprint specifically presents the percentages of students with poor performance in Reading, Mathematics and Science (page 3-9). It also indicates the comparison of Malaysia's performance in Reading by skill level against other countries (please see Exhibit 3-14), but no similar comparisons for Mathematics and Science are presented. Apparently, this is an attempt to pave the way for subsequent proposal to implement measures to strengthen the teaching of Bahasa Malaysia in Chinese primary schools.

EXHIBIT 3-14

Comparison of Malaysia's PISA 2009+ performance in Reading by skill level against other countries

Percentage of students at each performance levels¹ in PISA 2009+ Reading



¹ Advanced includes proficiency level 5 and level 6; Intermediate includes proficiency level 2, 3, and 4; and Below minimum includes proficiency level 1 and below

SOURCE: PISA 2009+

The Reading test in PISA assessment has in fact been widely misunderstood and most people perceive it as an appraisal of the students' standard of English language. In reality, it is not.

Actually, the original version of PISA assessment was conducted in English and French. Countries or regions using languages other than English and French for the assessment have to translate the test questions into their local languages; for example, Chinese is used in China, Japanese in Japan and of course, Bahasa Malaysia in Malaysia.

According to the government's understanding, the poor performance of Malaysian students in PISA was attributed to the poor standard of Bahasa Malaysia among students of Chinese and Tamil primary schools, i.e. these students found it difficult to understand the reading test in PISA due to their low proficiency of Bahasa Malaysia. We suspect that the Ministry of Education has used this as a superficial reason to demand the increase in teaching time for Bahasa Malaysia in Chinese and Tamil primary schools, thus making these schools the scapegoats for the poor performance in this international assessment.

In fact, the poor performance of Malaysian students in PISA is certainly a reflection of the fact that the quality of Malaysian education has declined. However, this poor performance is not due to the language issue. Language is just a medium of learning and it does not truly reflect the students' learning ability. If the Malaysian government is liberal enough, it could have provided the assessment test questions in four languages, i.e. Bahasa Malaysia, Chinese, Tamil and English, so that the students have a choice the language used.

What is important is that PISA assessment does not assess how much knowledge of the subjects the students have acquired. Instead, it is concerned with whether the students have learnt the basic knowledge and skills related to their lives in future. It seeks to test whether they can creatively apply these knowledge and skills to real life situations so that they can play their roles in the society as expected of them when they become adults.

Therefore, PISA evaluates the students' reading skill mainly in three aspects:

- a) the ability to acquire information: whether they can speedily find the information they require from the materials that they read;
- b) the ability to understand information: whether they can, after reading, correctly interpret the meanings of the information in the reading materials;
- c) ability to think and judge: whether they can relate what they have read to their knowledge, opinions and experiences and make their own judgement to form their own views.

It can be seen from here that the reading ability referred to in PISA is not the normal ability of reading and writing but the ability to handle information, i.e. acquiring, analyzing, assessing, integrating and presenting information as well as the ability to think independently. In other words, a student who has much linguistic knowledge but lacks the ability to think independently would not be able to perform well in the PISA reading test.

The Blueprint has suggested in a later chapter that the standard of Bahasa Malaysia at national type primary schools should be elevated to be on par with the standard at the national primary schools in order to improve the students' performance in the PISA reading test. Such a suggestion is unprofessional as it has no factual basis. Such a suggestion is not only inconsistent with the objective of the PISA assessment but could be perceived as a disguised attempt in displacement of concepts.

5. School performance (page 3-11): Majority of schools show poor performance but they are neglected in the Blueprint

In both TIMSS and PISA assessments, the schools are divided into five performance brackets: Excellent, Great, Good, Fair and Poor. The Blueprint emphasizes that while Malaysia's performance as a system on the international assessments is not as strong as is desired, there are Good and Great schools in Malaysia worthy of study and replication (please refer to the headline and contents on page 3-11). It has also presented Exhibit 3-16 to show evidence.

EXHIBIT 3-16

Malaysian school performance by performance bracket for TIMSS 2007 and PISA 2009+

Performance bracket for TIMSS 2007

TIMSS 2007 Participating schools by performance bracket		
Performance bracket	Number	Percent
Excellent	0	0%
Great	17	11%
Good	45	30%
Fair	64	43%
Poor	24	16%
	150	100%

PISA 2009+ Participating schools by performance bracket		
Performance bracket	Number	Percent
Excellent	0	0%
Great	0	0%
Good	11	7%
Fair	20	13%
Poor	121	80%
	152	100%

SOURCE: TIMSS 2007; PISA 2009+

To put it bluntly, presentation in such a manner is but an attempt in window dressing to gloss over certain facts. Any country with poor overall performance in the assessment would certainly have some schools considered as Good. This is just common sense. Malaysia is certainly no exception but the real issue lies in the percentage of such schools.

Based on the data provided by TIMSS 2007 as presented in Exhibit 3-16, no schools in Malaysia were listed as Excellent while 17 were assessed as Great and 45 as


Good. These 62 Great and Good schools accounted for 41% of the total 150 schools assessed and the figure is close to the 66 High Performing Schools (HPS) in Malaysia. Besides, 24 schools or 16% of total assessed were found to be poor.

In the same Exhibit, the data for **PISA2009+¹** show a much more serious situation. No schools were listed as Excellent and Great whereas only 11 schools or 7% of the 152 schools assessed were considered as Good. There were 121 schools under the Poor performance bracket, accounting for 80% of the total number of schools assessed. However, in the Blueprint, the fact that 80% of the schools were found to be poor is not deemed to be a problem. Instead, Exhibit 3-17 is presented on page 3-13 to highlight the performance of the HPS in Malaysia. This is obviously an attempt to gloss over the fact on poor schools.

EXHIBIT 3-17

Selected profiles of High Performing Schools in Malaysia

66 schools were awarded HPS status in recognition of their excellence across all aspects of education



SK Ulu Lubai, Sarawak

SK Zainab (2), Kelantan

SJK(C) Foon Yew (2), Johor

SM Sultan Abdul Hamid, Kedah

SMK Aminuddin Baki, WP Kuala Lumpur

- 100% pass rate in UPSR since 2006
- First rural school in M'sia to achieve HPS status

- Consistently a top performer in UPSR
- Outstanding performance in co-curricular activities such as taekwondo and public speaking.

- Consistently a top performer in UPSR
- Excellent track record in international academic competitions in Mathematics and Chinese

- Consistently achieved a 100% pass rate in SPM
- Outstanding performance in co-curricular activities such as orchestra and rugby.

- 100% pass rate in SPM for five consecutive years
- Excellent record in international sporting events, for example swimming

High Performing Schools is an initiative under the NKRA aimed at elevating the quality of schools to world-class standards. Schools awarded HPS status are granted greater operational flexibility to innovate and continue raising the bar. These schools will also support raising standards across the entire system by coaching other schools to improve performance.

SOURCE: Fully Residential and Excellent Schools Management Division

1 PISA 2009+ was held in 2010 with 10 countries taking part, including Malaysia. As it was still using the test papers in PISA 2009, it is denoted as PISA 2009+.

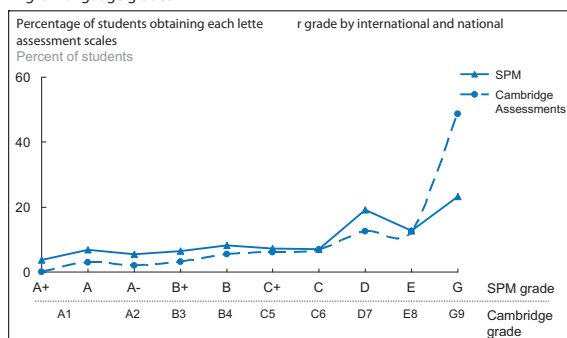
In fact, in its executive summary, the Blueprint has also presented the data in a similar manner (see Exhibit 4 on page E-6). Moreover, the data from Exhibit 3-16 are not included in the executive summary and members of the public who read only the executive summary would not realize that such a serious problem has emerged.

6. Differences in results of English papers (page 3-14): Issue of native speakers and non-native speakers is still a critical factor

The Blueprint points out that there are differences between the results of SPM English paper and those of Cambridge English 1119 paper (see Exhibit 3-19). Under the Malaysian grading scale, only about 20% of students failed; but under the Cambridge grading scale, 50% of students could not achieve the minimum standards. The explanation given is that the two grading scales set different cut-off grades as the English 1119 paper is meant for native speakers of English. Therefore, it can be seen that the Ministry of Education is very reasonable in dealing with the issue of English language standard, stressing that Malaysian students are not native speakers of English and thus it is acceptable if they have lower achievement in the English test. It has also allowed different cut-off grades for the English papers.

EXHIBIT 3-19

Comparison of SPM 2011 English language grades with Cambridge English language grades

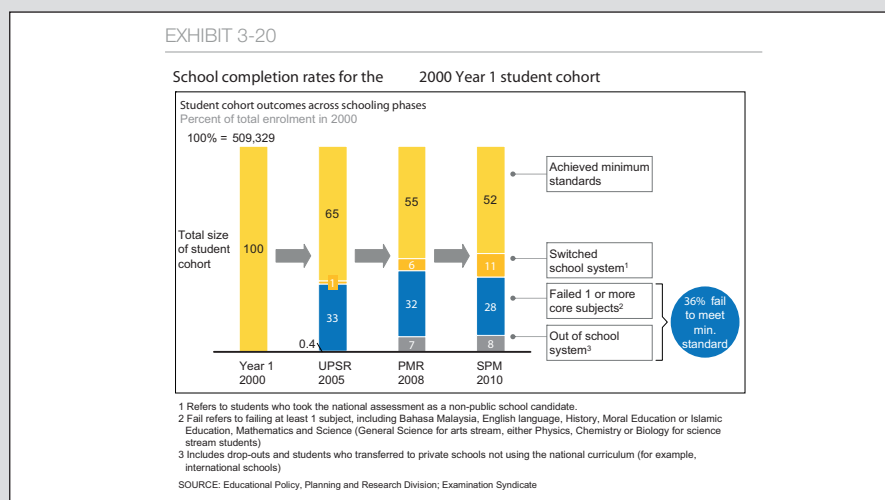


NOTE: SPM English language assessments are assessed once, but receive two grades per paper based on national and international cut-off points respectively

SOURCE: Examination Syndicate

7. Student completion rates: No detailed analysis

Student completion rate refers to the percentage of students entering primary schools who could achieve the minimum standards in Form Five. The data can reflect some problems in the education process such as school dropouts. They are therefore very important data. However, apart from presenting the data in an Exhibit, the Blueprint makes only a brief mention of the issue in one paragraph. There are no detailed explanations for the different problems reflected in the data.



Nevertheless, Exhibit 3-20 still reveals that for the cohort of students entering public primary schools in 2000, around 36% have failed to achieve minimum standards in SPM examinations. This is indication of a serious problem with the education process in Malaysia but the Blueprint does not go further to identify the reasons and provide relevant data for further analysis.

It should also be noted the 36% of students include two portions: 28% of the students have failed in at least one core subject while the other 8% are students outside the public school system, including those who have dropped out and those transferred to private schools that do not adopt the national curriculum. Based on Exhibit 3-28, less than 1% of students had studied at international schools in Malaysia in 2011. As such, we can estimate that of the 8% of students not within the public school system, at least 7% had dropped out. The rate of school dropouts is in fact a very important data set for reference and we do not understand why the Ministry of Education had chosen to avoid discussing it.

8. Public perception of the quality of education (page 3-15): The surveys have no direct relevance to the performance of primary and secondary school students and cannot be used as the basis for improvements to basic education

The Blueprint has listed the opinions on this issue from three sources: industry perspective, student perspective and public opinion polls. The students feel optimistic about the education in the country while public opinion is mixed. However, the most important is the industry perspective. The Blueprint describes that employers are concerned about two major problems among students: (1) the lack of higher-order thinking skills, and (2) the low level of English proficiency. In a nutshell, the students' capabilities are not up to mark.

In addition, based on Exhibit 3-21, the so-called industry perspective actually refers to employers' opinions about university graduates and these can be summarized into five weaknesses listed in descending order of severity as follows: (1) unrealistic salary demands; (2) bad character, attitude and personality; (3) poor command of English language; (4) lack of good communication skills; and (5) too choosy about the job. In summary, the students' problems relate more to attitude than capability.

EXHIBIT 3-21

Results of 2011 Jobstreet survey on graduate employment



SOURCE: Jobstreet survey (October 2011)

The Blueprint discusses the problems of basic education in Malaysia but it brings in at this juncture the employers' views about university graduates and offers no real explanation and analysis. Perhaps it is trying to show that the declining quality in primary

and secondary school education has affected the quality of university graduates or that in the education system of Malaysia, problems have cropped up not only in the students' grasp of knowledge and learning of skills but also in their ways of interacting with people and handling their personal matters.

In any case, we feel that the underlying reasons for such a problem should be investigated further. However, the Blueprint merely indicates that attention would be given and offers no further discussion on the issue.

On page 3-16, the Blueprint also presents a list of three main points on the feedback from the National Dialogue: (1) teacher quality; (2) school quality; and (3) student learning. However, these are mentioned in brief and it is indicated that more details on the points raised can be found in Appendix III.

In fact, although the general public do not have specialized training in education, they can, based on their personal experience, point out that the biggest problem with education in Malaysia today lies with the quality of teachers. If this could be probed further, it will definitely reveal the actual shortcomings in the training of teachers in Malaysia. The issue involves not merely the criteria for admission into teachers training institutions but also the entire process of training in such institutions, including aspects on curriculum development and quality of lecturers. However, the

Blueprint just stops at listing the feedback from the general public without giving any detailed explanation and analysis.

Feedback from the National Dialogue

During the National Dialogue, the Ministry consulted with almost 12,000 members of the general public in addition to specific stakeholder groups. Malaysians from all walks of life highlighted the importance of raising the quality of the education system. Three critical factors were identified by participants (listed in order of frequency of citation):

- **Teacher quality:** Teachers, parents, and students alike spoke extensively on the need to enhance the quality of teachers. Specific aspects touched upon included administrative burden, training, performance management, and remuneration;
- **School quality:** Specific aspects highlighted for improvement include providing a better learning environment in terms of infrastructure but also student discipline. Participants also suggested enablers to achieve those improvements (e.g., renewed performance management, greater school-based management; and
- **Student learning:** Participants expressed a desire for a more relevant curriculum and better language proficiency and communication abilities for students.

More details on points raised during the National Dialogue can be found in Appendix III.

9. Holistic development of students is occurring (pages 3-15, 3-16): But only discipline is used as the criterion of evaluation

The Blueprint mentions that holistic development of students in Malaysia is occurring and the supporting data quoted comprise three aspects: (1) self-assessments conducted by schools generally showed positive scores on student outcomes; (2) targeted school inspections found that discipline is not a major issue; and (3) reports furnished by the schools showed that only 2% of students posed disciplinary problems for their schools. Based on data from these three sources, the Blueprint concludes that our schools do provide holistic development to students.

Reading such kind of inference as presented in the Blueprint, we cannot help feeling doubtful as to whether the relevant writer has had a proper understanding about education. Holistic development, according to the traditional definition adopted by Chinese schools, refers to equal emphases on five aspects: moral, intelligence, sports, socialization and aesthetics. By now, another aspect, diligence, has been added. The Blueprint has earlier mentioned in its executive summary that the Malaysian school curriculum is committed to developing the children holistically along intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical dimensions. For this purpose, Islamic Education or Moral Education has been made compulsory for all students from Year 1 through to Form 5 and every student is required to participate in at least one sport, one club and one uniformed body activity (page E-4). Apparently, the writer is not oblivious of what holistic education is all about. However, in the detailed contents, the Blueprint has simplified the evaluation of holistic development to only one criterion: discipline. On one hand, this could perhaps be attributed to the difficulty of evaluating spiritual, emotional and physical developments in quantifiable criteria. On the other hand, it has indirectly revealed that our Ministry of Education is actually more concerned with students being obedient and compliant. In a nutshell, it sees holistic development as being achieved simply if students have no discipline problem.

II EQUITY IN EDUCATION

The Blueprint points out that the students' socio-economic status is closely associated with their performance. It has also discussed the present sources of inequality in education and has listed six issues of variations. We will comment on these issues one by one in the following paragraphs.

Before we present our comments, a question should be dealt with first, i.e. how inequality in education should be measured?

In the Blueprint, performance in examinations is taken as the main tool for measuring inequality in education. Such an approach is flawed. Firstly, performance in examinations is an outcome, not a cause. Secondly, public examinations in Malaysia lack credibility as the result cut-off points can be changed based on specific needs. As such, performance in examinations is not a good criterion for measuring inequality in education. Instead, other more suitable criteria should be adopted depending on the different nature of the issues involved.

1. Regional gaps (pages 3-17, 3-18).

Here, the basic unit used is 'state'. The Blueprint uses only performance in public examinations to show that achievement gaps exist between and within states, but does not go further to examine why such gaps exist. In fact, in academic discussion of this issue of regional inequality in education, performance in examinations is just one of the factors considered and more attention is given to distribution of resources such as funds, standards of teaching staff, school infrastructure, the local economic development etc.

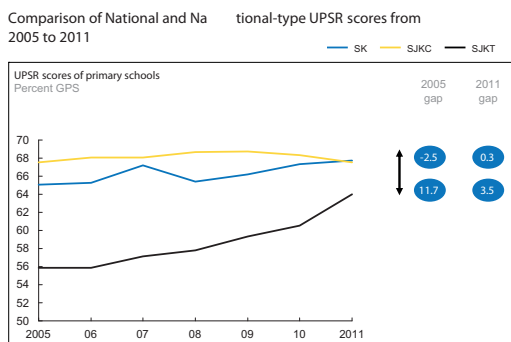
2. Urban-rural gaps (page 3-19).

The Blueprint indicates that achievement gaps between urban and rural schools are narrowing, and the only tool used for this measurement is still the performance in examinations. Such a revelation actually does not have much significance and the discussion should, as in the previous case of regional gaps, give more attention to the distribution of resources.

3. Gaps between different types of schools (page 3-19).

The Blueprint indicates that the gaps between national and national type schools are also narrowing over time. It still uses performance in public examinations as the criterion to measure such gaps (Exhibit 3-25) and there is totally no mention of distribution of resources such as teachers, allocations etc.

EXHIBIT 3-25



4. Gender gap (page 3-20).

The Blueprint points out that the higher rate of dropouts and lower academic performance among boys is a cause for concern for the Ministry of Education. Alienated youth are a source of great social and political instability, as has been seen across the world in the recent past. In other words, the Ministry of Education is viewing the gender gap problem from the perspective of social stability.

5. Socio-economic gaps: a flawed analysis (page 3-20).

The Blueprint first emphasizes that strong impact of students' socio-economic status on their performance is a phenomenon experienced by many education systems around the world and Malaysia is no exception (see Exhibit 3-27). The Blueprint also stresses that the Ministry of Education has committed itself to eliminating this inequality through various initiatives including the provision of financial assistance to disadvantaged students.

As shown in Exhibit 3-27, in good schools under Band 1 and 2, only 7% have more than 2/3 of their students receiving KWAPM financial assistance. In average schools under Band 3, 4 and 5, such students account for 19%. For poor schools under Band 6 and 7, the percentage is as high as 52%.

Subsequently, however, the Blueprint makes a sudden twist and its discussion and refers to the PISA 2009+ report to point out that only 10% of the Malaysian variance between schools can be explained by socio-economic factor. This means that of all factors affecting Malaysia's performance in the assessment, socio-economic factor has only a weightage of 10% and it is thus considered as not very important.

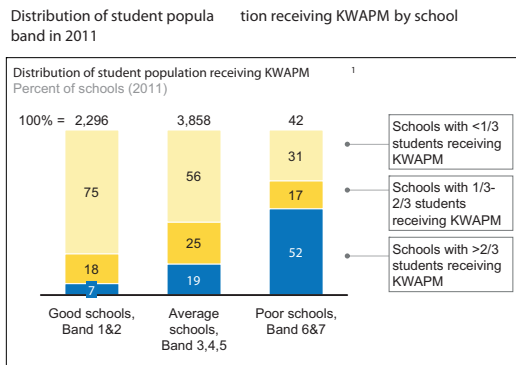
There is wide disparity between the explanation obtained from the PISA 2009+ report and the phenomenon reflected in Exhibit 3-27. The former is an international assessment while the latter is a set of national statistics. Most people would think that the international assessment should be more reliable. However, in terms of methodology, this is flawed because of the following reasons:

- a. Sample size: PISA assessment is based on a sample size of 152 schools whereas the national statistics cover 6,196 primary schools in the country.

- b. Target of assessment: PISA aims to assess students aged 15 and thus the sample consists of secondary schools and not primary schools. The statistics shown in Exhibit 3-27 relate to primary schools. There are wide differences between secondary schools and primary schools. How could the statistics on secondary schools be used to explain the phenomenon in primary schools?

From the perspective of methodology, the national statistics are definitely more accurate than the data from the international assessment. Therefore, the analysis here should be based on Exhibit 3-27.

EXHIBIT 3-27



SOURCE: Finance Division; National Key Result Area; EMIS database

In fact, the social inequality as reflected in the rich-poor divide is the real cause leading to inequality in education. Resolving the problem of inequality in education that arises due to social inequality is a mammoth task that will involve more than just the education sector. It entails political endeavours to implement measures of socio-economic reform, improve social mobility and allow the poor to break away from the viscous circle of poverty that has plagued them for generations. Only then will there be hope of finding real solutions. The attempt by the Blueprint in using the analysis from the PISA 2009+ report to explain the problem of inequality in education as caused by social-economic factor is, in our opinion, an evasive move and a serious flaw.

6. Gaps between public and private schools (page 3-21).

The Blueprint makes only a very brief mention of the gaps between public and private schools and not much can thus be said of such a treatment.

III MAXIMISING EFFICIENCY: NO DISCUSSION ON PROBLEM OF FAIRNESS IN DISTRIBUTION OF RESOURCES

In general, discussions on education expenditure will revolve mainly around three themes: (1) Is expenditure allocation adequate? (2) Is there fair distribution? (3) Is the expenditure effective? In the academia, it has been well recognized that Malaysia's expenditure allocation for education is adequate and this does not entail elaborate efforts to prove. However, the Blueprint has used two pages (3-25, 3-26) just to highlight the fact that expenditure allocation for education in Malaysia is more than adequate and among the highest in the world.

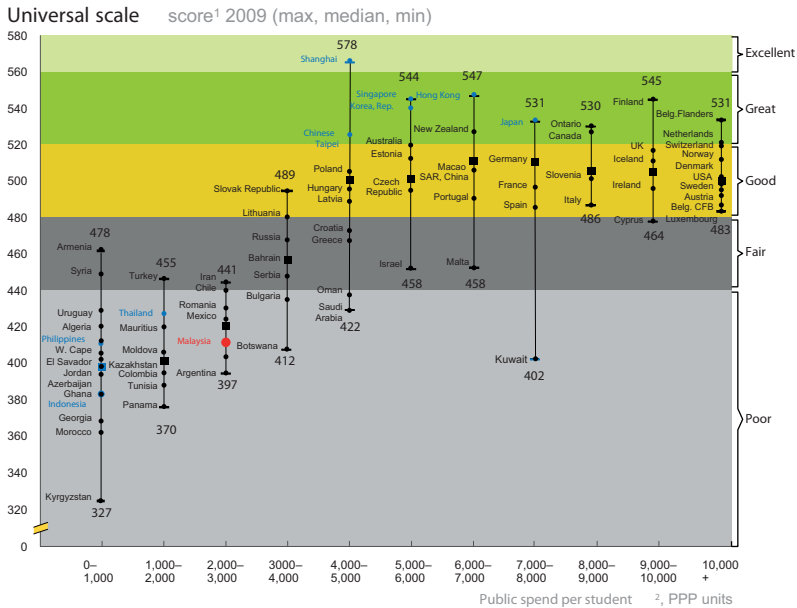
On the second theme regarding fairness of distribution of expenditure allocation, the Blueprint makes no mention at all. As for the third theme on effectiveness, the Blueprint gives a brief discussion, pointing out that high spending on education in Malaysia has translated into better student outcomes in terms of access but not necessarily in terms of quality.

Based on Exhibit 3-15, the distribution of expenditure allocation for education is in fact a major problem. As shown in the Exhibit, Malaysia falls within the group of countries with average public spending per student of between USD2,000 and USD3,000. However, our performance is almost two grades below that of Thailand which is one of the nations in the USD0 to USD1,000 category. We have spent more than other countries but our outcomes are no better than theirs. Is it not a major problem?

Furthermore, in academic discussions of the effectiveness of expenditure on education, corruption as a relevant factor will invariably be deliberated on before the issue of how to implement control is examined. However, the Blueprint makes no mention of the impact of corruption on the effectiveness of expenditure on education.

EXHIBIT 3-15

Country performance in international assessments relative to public spend per student



1 Universal scale based on Hanushek & Woessmann methodology, to enable comparison across systems.

2 Public spend per student for basic education (pre-school, primary, and secondary school levels) for 2008 current prices

Note: Malaysia 2008 public spend is USD3000

SOURCE: World Bank EdStats; IMF; UNESCO; PISA 2009+; TIMSS 2007; PIRLS 2006; Global Insight; McKinsey & Company.

IV ACCESS TO EDUCATION

As mentioned earlier, this is not a topic that is worth discussing because it is mainly a question of whether there is adequate expenditure allocation for education. In reality, for a developing country like Malaysia, the enrolment rate achieved has been satisfactory.

The Blueprint mentions, at the outset of this section, two elements to the issue of access to education: enrolment rate and school life expectancy. The former reflects the extent of access while the later relates to the standard of education. However, in the subsequent detailed contents, the Blueprint discusses only enrolment rate and does not provide any statistics to analyze the situation concerning school life expectancy in Malaysia. The skewed emphasis given by the Blueprint to enrolment rate could reflect

that the Ministry of Education is only concerned with the quantitative aspects and not the quality aspects of education. If such an inference is not true, then we can only say that the Blueprint is trying to highlight the minor issue while avoiding the major issue. Nevertheless, even if the Ministry of Education is concerned with the data on school life expectancy, it should be remembered, as we have mentioned earlier, that the quality of education in Malaysia is about three years behind as compared with the advanced countries. Data on school life expectancy should therefore be adjusted accordingly before they are used for international comparison, lest the real standard would not be reflected.

V BUILDING UNITY THROUGH EDUCATION: A SIMPLIFIED AND LOPSIDED UNDERSTANDING

The Blueprint uses considerable number of pages to discuss this topic. It appears that the issue is deemed to be significant and major but the final conclusion is that there is no problem.

First, let us look at the Blueprint's introduction to this section in the opening paragraph (page 3-21). It mentions two main points: (1) Malaysia's diversity is unique; (2) schools have a unique potential to foster unity. We are of the opinion that the diversity in Malaysia is not something unique and schools are not the only place for fostering unity because education is not a means to achieve unity.

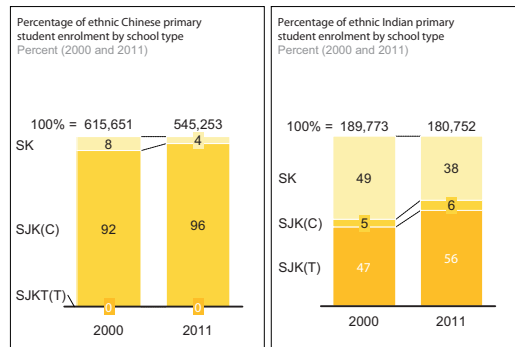
Next, there is the problem of methodology, i.e. how should we measure 'unity'. The Blueprint points out that the various streams of primary schools have highly homogenous environments, making it less likely for students to be exposed to peers of different cultures and ethnic groups and thus less likely to develop the respect for diversity that is critical for unity. The environment in secondary schools is slightly better but students who enrol in private schools have moved beyond the sphere of influence of the Ministry of Education. Thereafter, the Blueprint claims that the country's diversity is reflected in schools and thus the criterion for 'unity' is the enrolment trend of various ethnic groups in schools of different streams.

Here, the Blueprint has discussed at length the enrolment trends of various ethnic groups in various schooling options. However, in terms of methodology, this is just a discussion of a phenomenon without exploring deeper to identify the underlying reasons. For example, in Exhibit 3-30, enrolment of Indian students in Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan (Tamil) increased from 47% in 2000 to 56% in 2011 (page 3-24). Based on the unity theory of the Blueprint, such a phenomenon would be unfavourable for national unity. However, in respect of such a phenomenon, it is logical to ask: what are

the reasons behind such a phenomenon? It is certainly insufficient just to discuss the ‘influence’ due to such a phenomenon. The Blueprint has made no attempt at all to probe deeper for the root causes.

EXHIBIT 3-30

Enrolment trends in National and National-type schools (2000-2011)



SOURCE: EMIS database

In fact, the Blueprint bases its theoretical basis on the Contact Hypothesis. The Contact Theory postulates that interactions among various ethnic groups can reduce inter-racial prejudices and promote the building of empathy (Allport, 1954). In accordance with this theory, the Blueprint infers that the different streams of schools for the various ethnic groups in Malaysia are not favourable for fostering national unity. More importantly, the Contact Hypothesis has also indicated the need for four essential favourable conditions: (1) equal status; (2) common goals; (3) inter-group cooperation; and (4) support from the authorities and laws. Only with the fulfillment of these four favourable conditions could there be positive contacts among various ethnic groups. However, the Blueprint has mentioned nothing about such important conditions for fostering unity. If we look at the present education system and social realities in Malaysia, we can see everywhere the existence of unequal rights among various ethnic groups, the division of the citizens into Bumiputeras and non-Bumiputeras in policy matters, various laws safeguarding the special status of specific ethnic groups etc. Such situations have not only hampered the effective interactions among the ethnic groups but also intensified the feelings of dislike and prejudices.

In reality, as the Blueprint mentions, Malaysia's diversity is reflected in the schools (page 3-21). This means that the schools are but the reflection of the society and henceforth,

the root causes of unity (or disunity) should be identified by focusing attention on the society itself instead of the education sector.

At this juncture, we reiterate that the unequal treatments accorded to various ethnic groups are the main reason for the deterioration of racial problems. History has proven that under policies of homogenous mindset, racist and ethnic ideologies intensified by unfair distribution of social resources are the major cause leading to ethnic conflicts that may erupt into war.

Furthermore, incidents of teachers who are involved in making extremist and racist remarks have emerged repeatedly in Malaysia. The training programmes with heavy racist inclinations conducted by Biro Tata Negara (National Civics Bureau) have further distorted the racist mindset of the teachers. These factors have created an environment that is highly unfavourable for interaction among ethnic groups, thus leading to the existing racial problems in Malaysia. The effectiveness of inter-racial interactions is built upon proactive and positive promotion of racial unity by the educators. It cannot be achieved by simply putting students of various ethnic groups under one roof. Therefore, we request the Ministry of Education to identify the right approaches for resolving problems, formulate policies based on the value concepts of the various cultures and provide re-training for teachers so that they can adopt a proper attitude in understanding, respecting and accommodating the differences of various ethnic groups.

The Ministry of Education must recognize that schools should focus on teaching as their real objective so that students can be taught the relevant knowledge and proper value concepts. The contacts among students of various ethnic groups would not ensure improvement in their relations or enhance mutual understanding. In the event that such forced contacts are impacted by unfavourable factors in the macro environment, outcomes contrary to our expectations could often emerge.

We support an education system with schools of multiple streams based on the understanding that mother tongue education is most favourable for the learning process in children. This does not mean that we reject the need to promote contacts among students in schools of various streams. Education system with various streams of schools is not necessarily a system that segregates the ethnic groups. Without denying the existence of the multi-stream education system and with the four favourable conditions of the Contact Hypothesis fulfilled, the interactions among students of various ethnic groups should certainly be encouraged.

Another important view is that schools of different streams do not impose any racial

restrictions on student enrolment. They do not bar students of any ethnic groups from entering the schools and nor do they set any quota. In addition, they do not have any rule requiring that students from a specific ethnic group must enrol in schools of a certain stream. These schools respect the rights of the parents to make their own choices. In contrast, educational institutions under MARA have racial restrictions for enrolment. The Blueprint should thus explain to the society why the Contact Hypothesis is not applicable to these MARA institutions.

Schools are places for training our children who will grow up to further develop our society in future. They are not places for political struggles and maneuvers. The existing racial problems in Malaysia are not caused by schools of different streams and education is not a tool for fostering national unity. Therefore, we hereby reiterate that education should be left to carry out its original functions and should not be used as a political tool.

In addition, the Blueprint also mentions the issue of teacher diversity in schools (page 3-24). The ratio of Bumiputera teachers in national schools increased from 78% in 2001 to 81% in 2011 whereas that of Indian teachers remained at 5% and that of Chinese teachers fell from 17% to 14%. This issue is in fact more significant but the Blueprint has just mentioned it in brief. It is apparent that the Blueprint is aware of the problem but it does not attempt to probe further for the causes and to discuss the solutions. As such, we request the Ministry of Education to publish the relevant data, including the percentages of teachers of various ethnic groups in national and national type primary and secondary schools. Partial data cannot be used for effective analysis and can be misleading.

The Blueprint also mentions that inspectors from JNJK of the Ministry of Education had conducted an inspection of 20 schools in 2011 (page 3-24) and found that student interactions indicated a good level of unity.

There are three questions that we feel should be raised in this regard. First, with only 20 schools picked as samples out of the 10,000 schools nationwide, how accurate could the inspection be? (Anyway, since it is an inspection conducted by the government, we may just accept it for the time being.) Secondly, if there is already a good level of unity, then what is the purpose of the elaborate analysis of enrolment trends presented earlier in the section and why the need to stress the issue of unity? Thirdly, how are the inter-racial relations among students in national primary and second schools: are the students of various ethnic groups more united? Or are they rejecting each other? Are the rights of the minority groups neglected by the major groups? These questions can only be understood in a comprehensive manner through many studies.

Ethnic relation is a sensitive issue in Malaysia and relevant studies are difficult to conduct. This is particularly so for case studies in respect of primary and secondary schools. The Ministry of Education has planned to conduct questionnaire surveys every year on racial unity among students in Year 6 and Form 5. We adopt an open attitude to such a plan and hope that the Ministry can conduct the surveys in a professional and academic manner. We also urge the Ministry to uphold the principles of open and transparent operations by releasing the relevant survey results and data for reference by the public and academic researchers.

Finally, we wish to state our stand that efforts to explain and analyze any social issues must be made based on sound theoretical basis and supported by proper data. There should be no attempts to discuss based on empty imagination and to make education a scapegoat.

Part 2

Proposal for the Reform of National Education

I PRINCIPLE AND OBJECTIVE OF NATIONAL EDUCATION

Education is the foundation of nation building and social development. It is with high quality of national education that we can nurture talents needed by the country and society. Hence, we agree that the fundamental principles and objective of our National Education is to nurture Malaysian citizens who are physically and mentally healthy, who can fully actualize their potential to be a force of contribution to their personal life, their family, the society and our nation.

To achieve the above-mentioned objective, we are of opinion that the national education policy must be revised, improved and executed strictly according to principles and theories of education, to ensure that national education is managed in accordance to the principals of pedagogy.

The current principle and objective of our national education system contains the following issues:

1. Education Being Politicized

In Malaysia, education policies often suffer from political and human interference. Frequent changes made to existing policies and prejudices during its execution have caused serious hindrance to the achievement of our educational objective. The inconsistencies in our educational policies are key issues that should have been explored in the Blueprint.

2. Prejudice is the Obstacle to Unity

Since our national independence, the government has set national unity as the most important objective to be achieved by our national education, and entrust the task of maintaining a multi-cultural society and national unity to our national education. However, the government's policies in the political, economical and social aspect of our nation are often biased. As a result, schools of different types experience unequal treatment, and thus rendering the objective of national unity unachievable.

3. Inequality in Education Resource

The existence of multiple school types in our education system is a result of our nation's history and reflected the social reality of multi-ethnicity. However, apart from national primary and secondary school, other types of schools face difficulties in getting equal treatment in curriculum design of academic and mother tongue subjects, teacher's training, academic assessment, administration, and expansion of campus to meet the needs of the community. This has hindered the achievement of the objective of our national education and results in serious development gap among schools of different types.

4. Our Suggestions to the Principle and Objective of National Education

1. Clarify the Objective of National Education

The objective of education should include the cultivation of knowledge and skills, core competencies, healthy physical, mental and moral development. National unity is a social objective, and cannot be viewed as the overall goal of the national education. As students differ in language proficiency and academic achievement, they will differ in achieving social objective. Therefore, national unity can only be one of the indicators of education, not overall goal.

2. Ensure Fairness in Education Policy and its implementation

The implementation of new policies must undergo many rounds of public and professional consultation to ensure that it is beneficial to the quality of our education. It must also undergo careful experiment and assessment, followed by necessary revision, before it can be implemented nationwide. This will ensure education principles are adhered to and educational objective met.

3. Diversity in Education is an Important National Heritage and Asset

Malaysia must abandon the outdated education policies which promote homogeneity, and reassess the value of a heterogeneous school system. Based on the principle that mother tongue should be used as a language of instruction in primary and secondary education, the government should develop schools from all types equally, and implement the promise to restructure national type secondary school, in order to capitalize on the advantage of our heterogeneous school system. This reflects the multi-cultural and multi-lingual reality of our nation. We propose that national education must include the cross-lingual and cultural communication ability as an objective, and allocate national educational resources equally to Chinese independent schools, pre-schools and non-profit private education institution.

4. Different Education Objective for Different States or Principalities

As development gap exists among different states of Malaysia, as a Federal nation, we must recognize the different characteristics of each state and allow for differing education objectives. This may include education objectives which reflects the cultural and linguistic complexity of the region.

Through an effective education in accordance to pedagogy, we can nurture students who are able to perform life-long continuous learning effectively, think creatively and independently, learn individually and in-group, evaluate and criticize based on logic, apply knowledge to real life, and develop competencies needed by the society. Not only are they self-respected, they consciously maintain their physical, mental and emotional health and have firm beliefs and aspirations. They empathize with others and can manage themselves. They pursue a healthy and active lifestyle, are self-aware and conscious of their social responsibilities to the community and the world. They are independent, can handle sudden changes and make informed decisions. They achieve success in their chosen field. They are entrepreneurial, self-reliant and resilient. They work well in groups and take initiative to provide leaderships. They learn to think critically and solve problems.

II EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT

The style of education administration, depending on the division of responsibility and authority between the Federal government and the State government, may be divided into two types: centralized and decentralized.

The educational administration in Malaysia is centralized, and according to the Blueprint, the 2012 UNESCO review noted that (6-3) “Malaysia arguably has one of the largest central (federal) education administrations in the world, relative to the number of schools.” Hence, although Malaysia is a Federal State, it employs a highly centralized bureaucracy. This may result in many challenges like the decline in effectiveness, stagnation, rigidity.

Therefore, according to the Blueprint, Ministry of Education is going to implement the reformation of JPNs and PPDs at three areas (6-1): 1. Review the roles and responsibilities of each level in the Ministry of Education and build a professional mechanism to provide effective communication; 2. Empower JPNs and PPDs, to enhance their roles in communication and supporting the schools; 3. Enhance the core functions of federal states. In short, it aims to improve administrative effectiveness via decentralisation.

There are three levels of decentralization: 1. Execution decentralization: transfer the execution of task to local agency while keeping decision making at the central; 2. Authorized decentralization: local agency may exercise decision making power within the framework determined by the central authority, and major decisions are still made at the central agency; 3. Complete decentralization.

Based on the description in the Blueprint, the reformation falls under the first level of decentralization, i.e. execution decentralization. Since decision making is still done at the central, it is hard to avoid the rigidity, low effectiveness and conservativeness of the bureaucracy. Moreover, in a centralized system, the political consideration of the leader often overrides professional and administrative needs; the teaching of Science and Mathematics in English is one such case.

Besides decentralization, another important issue is supervision. Education supervision plays a very important role in managing and improving the quality of education and JNJK is responsible for education supervision. Examination Board is also responsible to control the quality of education. Despite major issue in the quality of our national education, the Blueprint doesn't offer much discussion on these two institutions.

Besides this, although the Blueprint intends to strengthen the involvement of different stakeholders, it doesn't propose a mechanism for various stakeholders to get involved and supervise the Ministry of Education during the drafting and implementation of new policies. Transparency of the Ministry is important for the availability of information. The Blueprint also doesn't mention the implementation of a feedback mechanism. Both the supervision and feedback mechanisms reflect the willingness and seriousness of the

Ministry of Education to carry out reform. They also increase the people's confidence towards the Ministry.

We make the following suggestions for education administration and management.

1. Implement a Decentralization System

Our country should learn from Finland, where the decentralization of the administration of education system was implemented and transformed the education of the whole country. After the administration was decentralised, the central agency does not interfere with the syllabus and learning objective of the states, thus giving the local agency more freedom and flexibility to implement its education objective.

To be exact, the central body defines the core curriculum by providing teaching outlines and learning objectives for each subject; The methods of implementation are completely decided at the local level. This enables different regions to customize their curriculum to suit the local demand, while achieving an overall educational objective. Stakeholders like parents and students are encouraged to participate in the process of implementation.

It must also be noted that the education administration system suggested in Razak Report (1956) contained elements of a decentralized system, especially from articles 30~37. We include its summary below:

- a) The Ministry is responsible for policy setting at the Federal level, and will work with State Governments for the local secondary, post-secondary and vocational education, as well as providing training for teachers and organizing public examinations.
- b) To establish local education authorities through legislation.
- c) Local education authorities may establish education committees and delegate authority unto them.
- d) Local education authorities may raise fund locally and the region boards may determine the distribution of financial resource.

Razak Report 1956 recommended a local decentralization system which follows the education system of United Kingdom. In short, the local authorities are the local councils. Education committees which comprise experts and councilors were formed beneath local education authorities. Education Boards are formed to implement the policies and the heads are appointed by the local council.

Article 37 of Razak Report states “Full details of these proposals are now being incorporated into a draft legislation which, after due consultation with the various stakeholders, will be published in the form of a Bill and presented to the Federal Legislative Council.” It seems that there was already a detailed implementation proposal then. Considering the current situation of the education in our country, we should reconsider the recommendations made in Razak Report 1956 and refer to them to implement a suitable decentralization system.

Besides this, according to the year 2011 data shown in the Blueprint, 81% of the population of teachers is Bumiputra and most education administrators are promoted from a teacher, resulting in a highly homogenous racial demographic among education administrators. This has caused the problem of misunderstanding and insensitivity towards the multiple school system and also caused serious obstacles in communication and training of teachers.

2. Improve the Diversity of Education Officers

Regardless of the methods to implement decentralization suggested in the Blueprint, another pressing issue is the diversity of the administrators. The Blueprint doesn't address the issue of racial diversity among administrators at all. It only mentioned briefly on the diversity of the teachers. (3-24)

We think that while pushing for decentralization, we must also push to diversify the racial representation of each level of administration in the ministry to ensure information can be communicated effectively and to fully reflect the needs of all races. This will finally lead to better communication between different levels of the ministry, which is especially important for policy makers.

3. Grant more autonomy to the Inspector board of Schools (JNJK) and set up Education Quality Control Department

Although the Blueprint mentioned the importance of JNJK at various places (6-8, A-18, A-36), and explored the possibility of granting autonomy to JNJK so that it has greater flexibility and freedom in its operation and more transparency and independence in its appraisal, it is easy to overlook.

To confront the problem of poor quality education in Malaysia, we must identify the source of the problem to have a chance of solving the fundamental issues and prioritise correctly. We should not assess our national education using PISA, held once every 3 years, or TIMSS, held once every 4 years. We must have our

own review and feedback system. In order for the review system to be reliable and effective, it must be autonomous.

We propose that the JNJK be separated from the MOE and operate as an independent unit, to regularly monitor the administration and teaching quality in the school, and make the reformation of education its first priority. Given the British roots of our JNJK system, we should take a page from the Britain 1993 restructuring of its school inspector board. The School Inspector Board was separated from the Ministry of Education and was renamed the Office of Education Quality (XX Check the official name from British government website). It runs parallel to the Ministry and reported directly to the Parliament. Some of its functions include:

- a) Report to the Parliament on the quality of national education in UK.
- b) Provide feedback and recommendations on the education system upon request from the Minister of Education.
- c) Make inspection and recommendations to the schools.

4. Establish Education Ombudsman to ensure all levels of education institution are transparent, fair and effective

According to the Blueprint, The Ministry of Education will set up an effective Education Delivery Unit to implement the changes in the Blueprint and to report the progress to the public and collect feedbacks from them. Secondly, the Ministry of Education will continue to have closed door meetings with relevant organization to collect feedbacks from all strata of society. Ministry of Education will also publish a performance report annually in order to keep the public abreast of the progress of the implementation of the Blueprint. (8-9, 8-10)

We are glad that the Government is willing to listen to the people and increase the transparency of the administration; however, this is not enough. We demand the Government to set up an independent and impartial Education Ombudsman to supervise the Ministry of Education, so that it may exercise its public rights justly, reasonably, effectively with greater transparency. It can also prevent misconduct and hence strengthen the effectiveness and quality of the National education.

To ensure the independence, fairness and professionalism of the Education Ombudsman, it must adhere to three principles during its establishment: to avoid partisanship, to be independent from other government bodies; and have no relation with the target of investigations.

Public can lodge complaints to Education Ombudsman on mismanagement, unlawful administration, injustice, discrimination, abuse of authority, negligence, refusal to provide information, unreasonable delay and other similar issues. Education Ombudsman may independently or after receiving public complains, hold public hearing, investigate and prosecute. The Ombudsman is selected by the Parliament and will report to the Parliament. Its annual report will be reviewed in the Parliament. Also, the Education Ombudsman may publicise its report to advocate for the rights and welfares of the whistleblowers.

Furthermore, the Education Ombudsman must become a member of the International Ombudsman Institute. Its member must also hold the professional certification from International Ombudsman Association and abide to the code of conduct established by this association.

III TEACHING PROFESSIONALISM

All issues related to teachers and school administrators are discussed in Chapter 5 of the Blueprint. It proposed many reforms closely connected to the quality of teacher's training. Based on the proposal, a few issues can be discussed.

1. The Reform Objective of Teacher Training is Not Clear

The measures stated in the Blueprint (improving teaching profession to be the first-choice-profession, increasing the application requirements and standards of teacher education, improving the effectiveness of teacher education and providing continuous professional training, develop promotion system which is based on ability and performance, providing opportunities for teachers who ill-perform to change to a new job scope) and the content of three levels in New Teacher Career Package obviously do not respond to the “student-centered” idea. This has caused the detachment of the measures to the objective.

In short, various measures stated in Chapter 5 of the Blueprint are not able to show people the objective of teacher training (for example, what kind of teachers do the schools need in the future?); its content mainly revolves on the structural problems of the teaching profession (recruitment requirement, appointment, promotion and incentives) and recommendations on this area, but there isn't any discussion on the teaching professionalism and its professional objective.

2. Skill Oriented Current Teacher Training Programme

According to the Blueprint, a research in year 2011 found that 50% of the current teaching and learning in school has not met satisfactory standard; there is no student engagement, it focuses on achieving surface-level content understand and not cultivating the students' higher-order thinking skills. (5-2) This research outcome is worth pondering for the educators, it reflects the teaching and learning level of the teachers, the teaching ability and the problems caused by teachers.

To improve the teaching and learning level as well as ability of the current teachers, one important factor is the school, apart from the assistance provided by other training institutions. School is not only a place to educate the students; it is also a place for the teaching profession to grow, because the professionalism of the teachers is developed through daily tasks. A training which is school centered and designed from the teachers' perspective, will suit the teachers' needs more as it is more focused and practical. The effect will be better compared to the training programmes conducted by third party training institutions. In fact, the writer of the Blueprint also agrees on this. (5-10) Hence, the Blueprint has proposed two counter suggestions: 1) Launch the e-Guru Video Library, good teaching and learning will be taped and uploaded on the internet for other teachers' reference; 2) Send full-time specialist coaches to school to guide the teachers personally on curriculum, teaching and learning assessment and teaching methodology. (5-10)

Both of these proposals have good intention; however, they are skill oriented programmes, especially the e-Guru Video Library. A good teaching and learning has a concrete technique, ways, steps and process, but these blend together with the teachers' education ideology, perspective towards students, teaching and learning style, experience, working attitude and so on. It cannot be seen as a purely technical issue, whereby teachers can imitate a good teaching and learning. Apart from this, we should also discuss about whether school is a place which nurtures good teaching and learning.

3. Neglect the Function of Teachers in Education Equity

The Blueprint has pointed out that an ideal school education must have "equity" as one of the key elements – education targeting at all students, regardless of ethnicity, gender, location, socio-economic status and family background, the aim is 50% reduction in achievement gaps caused by urban-rural, socio-economic and gender by 2020.

In various factors which cause the learning achievement gaps, the Blueprint has discussed more on “urban-rural” and “socio-economic status” (3-19, 3-20), “gender” is discussed in a short paragraph (The “Lost Boys” Issue, 3-20), but there is very little discussion made on “ethnicity” (only a paragraph stating that primary schools of different school system has shown smaller gap in their UPSR result from year 2005 - 2011).

To achieve equity in education, the Blueprint suggested expanding LINUS and pre-school education programme, provide education fund, improve the quality of special education, increase the number of special student in normal schools, and provide specific modules for indigenous people and minority groups, train teachers to teach indigenous people. (4-14)

In fact, if the schools are to practice equity in education, the Blueprint has to focus on the quality of school education and its function towards equity in education, and the deciding factor towards contributing to education quality: teachers’ quality. These need to be given attention apart from “hardware” such as providing resources and setting up new programmes for the indigenous people.

According to the statistics, in the whole secondary school students’ population, 88% of them is studying in national secondary schools (3-22), these students are coming from various types of primary schools (national primary school, Chinese primary school and Tamil primary school). National secondary schools are open to children from all ethnicity, from the perspective of enrolment; the students are enjoying equal chances to enroll into the school. However, equal opportunity in school enrolment is only one of the basic forms of education equity; the true education equity must be practiced to let all the students who enroll into national secondary schools are entitled to education of good quality, not having different treatment because of their ethnicity or background.

When children from different school types and ethnicity enter the national secondary school, it immediately forms the multi-racial population of the school. What kind understanding do the teachers have towards this diversity? Are they capable of handling the differences in their teaching and learning process? Does the training of national secondary school teachers prepare them to face the reality of diverse population in the schools and cultivate their ability to education students from different background? Will they be as stated in the Blueprint, to provide equal and quality education to all the children regardless of their ethnicity, religion, gender and financial status, to decrease the achievement gap between children from different background and eventually achieve the equity in education?

Teachers have the responsibility to practice equity in education in the process of educating people, especially in the multi-racial context of our country. If the Blueprint does not focus on these problems, and make changes on the training modules for national secondary school teachers to have them prepared mentally to accept the students' diversity, respect difference and able to teach accordingly, then "equity in education" will only be an illusion absented by the teachers, it will not have the foundation to be realized.

4. Our Suggestions to Teaching Professionalism

1. Must be Inline with the "Student-Centered" Educational Ideology

- a) The direction of teachers' training must be inline and synchronous with the future development of school education. If "student-centered" teaching and learning is the direction agreed by all educators, then before it is implemented in the classroom teaching strategy or methodology, it must be first be believed and agreed as a common educational ideology before it is reflected in the training process of the teachers.
- b) Before teaching in the schools, all teachers must have the chance to learn about student-centered ideology and the theories about it, also to practice the teaching and learning strategies and methodologies which are student-centered in their process of training as a teacher.
- c) The Blueprint needs to state clearer on how can the current teachers' training institutions able to transform the "student-centered" education ideology into the guiding ideology for all students in the teachers' training institutions and how will the teachers' training module be reformed or adjusted to train a new generation of teachers who are student-centered.

2. Empower Teachers with Professional Autonomy

- a) Apart from educational ideology and methodology, one important condition for the teachers to practice student-centered teaching and learning is: professional autonomy – they must have certain power to judge the students needs and learning characteristics independently, select and organize the learning resources needed by the students, develop or create learning plans and situations which are suitable for the students, and to assess the students' learning outcome fairly.

- b) Respect the teaching professionalism of teachers, lessen the teachers' burden in handling red tapes and paperwork which are not directly related to teaching and learning, in order to implement a platform of student-centered teaching and learning.
- c) The blueprint needs to propose how to improve the teachers' professional autonomy and expand the space for teachers to participate in educational decision making process and exercise the professional autonomy.

3. Develop School-based Teachers' Training

"Good teaching and learning" does not exist alone; it is depending on the supportive environment: administrative assistance and allocation of resources, teachers enjoying and practicing the professional autonomy, peer-learning system, supervision from experienced teachers and sharing culture between colleagues. Similarly, the full time specialist coaches have to know about the servicing school, consider the needs of school development and teachers' growth, and develop good relationship with the teachers to give them guidance. When it is back to the school to think, it is the spirit of school-based school development and teachers' development. Hence, besides proposing technical solutions, the Blueprint has to give a position to school-based training in the development of teachers' professionalism and school reformation, discuss deeply on the conditions to implement school-based training and show the authority's willingness to allocate resources into school-based training.

4. Review the Teachers' Training Education, Improve the Teachers' Knowledge and Ability towards Diversity in Culture

How big a school education objective or vision is, it eventually needs to rely on the first-lined teachers to realize it through daily teaching and learning process. Hence, the Blueprint needs to highlight the teachers' role and position in achieving various educational reformation objectives, review the current teachers' training education, and clarify the developmental objective of pre-teaching training and on-going education, to create more useful foundation and conditions for good quality school education.

IV CURRICULUM DESIGN AND TEACHING AND LEARNING

1. Overall Assessment on School Curriculum Design

Our country has gone through continuous changes and development, and this has made the highly multi-racial phenomenon in terms of language, culture and socio-economic status. The differences has caused different groups and individuals to have different levels of pressure and needs, hence, a diverse education curriculum is in need. On the other hand, the planning of education policies such as setting curriculum standards, does not only affect the students' mental and emotional growth, it also brings influences towards the development in culture, economy and politics of different groups in Malaysia. This is because education is one of the most important motivation factors to push for the country's development. Therefore, a perfect and effective overall curriculum is one that is equal, balanced and has humanity values.

Below are the discussions on the equity and balance issue of the current curriculum.

1. The Inequality in Curriculum Design

The Blueprint only stressed the importance of standardizing medium of instruction and curriculum standards, overlooking the contradiction caused by the curriculum and the educational objectives and the different needs towards diverse education from different groups and individuals. Although the Blueprint constantly mentioned about equity in education and has set an objective to close the achievement gap between different groups of students by half in year 2020, according to some of the more concrete suggestions that have been made, the Ministry of Education only selectively discussed on the enrolment opportunities, socio-economic status, rural-urban differences. The problems on how a standardized curriculum has affected the equal opportunities in language and culture development of different groups in Malaysia were not discussed. The Blueprint has not proposed a comprehensive strategy, and the supporting arguments to these decisions are often confusing, misleading and only stand on the surface level. These caused queries and weaken the reliability of the suggestions made by the Blueprint.

a) **The Equity Problems of Mother Tongue Education and Bi-lingual Education Policy**

The Opportunities to Learn Mother Tongue

Though Malaysia has a total of 137 languages (preceded only by Indonesia and the Philippines in South East Asia), we can only learn seven languages through school education; these languages are Bahasa Malaysia, English, Mandarin, Tamil, Arabic, Iban and Kadazan-Dusun. Among the seven languages, only Bahasa Malaysia and English are listed as compulsory languages, others are elective subjects. The unequal status of mother tongue is reflected in the education system of Malaysia.

The language education policy discussed by the Blueprint only restricts to Bahasa Malaysia and English Language, and policies on Bahasa Malaysia are prioritized. For instance, the Blueprint has mentioned that only when the proficiency level of Bahasa Malaysia in national type primary schools are similar to national primary schools and when the teaching of English Language has been enhanced, the Ministry of Education will hire more English teachers, develop English Language curriculum and increase the teaching hours of English Language. On a contrary, the Blueprint does not have any concrete developmental strategies for elective language subjects; it only roughly stated that the Ministry of Education will increase the number of teachers and schools to teach these languages before year 2020.

We do not oppose the attention paid on Bahasa Malaysia and English Language; however, the language policy should not neglect or even harm the chances of students learning their mother tongue. This is especially important for the mother tongue education of vulnerable groups in the country. If the Ministry of Education does not pay attention to the problems faced by mother tongue education, we cannot imagine how long the diversity of language in the country can sustain. When languages of vulnerable groups disappear, it does not only bring impact to the diversity of social culture in the country, more importantly, the relevant group will endure permanent damage on their culture dignity and rights.

Bi-lingual Policy and Second Language Learners

When the Ministry of Education drafts the language education policy, it has neglected the language ability and learning ability of the non-

mother tongue learners (second language learners). This has caused inequality in language learning. Although learning Bahasa Malaysia or English Language using first language teaching methodology is not a problem for students who have strong language ability, it will cause a lot of unnecessary disruptions to mediocre students in their learning process. In fact, most students (except excellent students can only master basic Bahasa Malaysia after six years of learning Bahasa Malaysia as a second language in national type primary schools. Their language proficiency cannot be compared and shouldn't be compared with those learning it as first language. Hence, it is a very normal and reasonable phenomenon if students from schools which are not using Bahasa Malaysia as medium of instruction are not having good achievements in Bahasa Malaysia compared to Malay students. For the latter, they should have the rights to choose languages which are suitable for their learning ability and learn the languages using the second language learning theories.

Also, second language acquisition cannot be done in a few years' time. The Ministry of Education should have comprehensive planning for students to learn Bahasa Malaysia in schools which are not using Bahasa Malaysia as medium of instruction. The Ministry has to take the whole primary and secondary education into consideration to ensure students can master Bahasa Malaysia in proper order, the key consideration must be put on the changing of medium of instruction from *Peralihan* class to lower secondary education. Regrettably, the Ministry of Education thinks the problem is on national type schools. The Ministry is in the view that the students from Chinese and Tamil primary schools do not have enough exposure in Bahasa Malaysia and the level of teaching and learning as well as assessment in Bahasa Malaysia is too low. Hence, the Ministry has suggested implementing Bahasa Malaysia curriculum of national primary schools in national type primary schools starting from standard four students and using the standardized examination. This is an example of forcing the students to grow in an inappropriate way. The policy which does not differentiate between mother tongue learners and second language learners, but enforcing the same curriculum is not practical. Therefore, we think that to implement Bahasa Malaysia as first language teaching and assessment in national type primary schools does not only hinder the students' effective learning, it also violates the students' rights.

b) The Equality Issue in Curriculum Resources Allocation

A learning ability screening and reinforcing programme like LINUS is function to reinforce the students' learning abilities. However, if we observe from the overall curriculum, we find that the policy is presenting an unequal phenomenon, programmes like LINUS is only limited to Bahasa Malaysia, Mathematics and English Language subjects. On the contrary, in a document like the Blueprint which will guides Malaysia in educational development in the 13 years to come, it does not propose any supporting programmes to subjects like mother tongue (second languages), Science, History and Geography.

Similarly, the remedial class after school proposed in the Blueprint is also limited to Bahasa Malaysia. In the proposed new primary school curriculum (KSSR), standard four to standard six, students who have non-compliance result in Bahasa Malaysia must participate in an after-school remedial class of five hours weekly. That means following students must spend 570 minutes in Bahasa Malaysia learning activities. The problem is, if the students are facing difficulties in other subjects, are they going to get the same assistance?

Regarding the allocation of teachers. According to the Blueprint, to improve the level of Bahasa Malaysia among non-Malay students, the Ministry of Education prepare to train more Bahasa Malaysia teachers to tackle the shortage of teacher which does not exist, as the current Bahasa Malaysia teacher has already exceeding the need. However, there is no discussion for solving the shortage of the teacher in other subjects.

All the above suggestions have shown that the Ministry is biased in curriculum resources allocation. If this is not adjusted, we are worried that the development of the students will be imbalanced, and this has obviously against the National Education Philosophy and objectives.

c) The Equality Issue of Medium of Instruction

The international educational research has continuously shown that there is a positive relationship between mother tongue education and the students' learning outcome. According to the report, learning through mother tongue will helps the students in their learning process, respecting and protecting the students' concern towards their own language and culture. UNESCO has also agreed to this many times.

The educational research done by America and European countries have proven that students who are interrupted by the switching of medium of instruction, their achievements usually two or three grades lower than other students. Local research has also shown that the dropout percentage of Chinese and Tamil primary school students after enrolling into national secondary schools is as high as 30%. (In fact, the Ministry of Education has all these figure but refused or seldom publish this into the educational report.) In the discussion on learning conditions of indigenous students, the Blueprint has also admitted the influence of medium of instruction towards learning outcome: “for some students, Bahasa Malaysia is not their mother tongue, this has affected their studies.”

The educational guidelines and policies stated in the Blueprint are against the educational principle. Mother tongue education (except Bahasa Malaysia) has almost complete denied in Malaysia. Moreover, the Ministry's attitude is also against mother tongue education. For example, although Ministry of Education consulted opinion from UNESCO when drafting the Blueprint, it refuses to admit the importance of mother tongue education eventually, mainly stresses on the policy to improve national type primary school students' Bahasa Malaysia level. Also, although the Ministry of Education has stated clearly the reason to call off the teaching of Mathematics and Science in English is because most students are unable to adapt to the switching in medium of instruction, on the other hand, the Ministry still requests students from non native speaker to learn Mathematics and Science in Bahasa Malaysia.

We feel that forcing the students to use a foreign and unfamiliar language in their learning will only add to the learning difficulty and hindered the students from developing in all aspects. We're also worried that if the students experience learning difficulties in a long time, it will cause psychological and mental problems such as loss of confidence and dignity, too stressful, hatred towards learning and even depression. We certainly do not agree to make the students sacrifice their own mother tongue and culture. As renowned linguists J. Cummins and Collier, V. P have suggested, learning is based on the foundation of mother tongue, if the mastery level of mother tongue is high, the intellectual development of the students will be better. On the contrary, if the students are not able to master their first language (mother tongue) or face interruption in the medium of instruction, they will experience

difficulties in the intellectual development. Hence, we strongly demand the Ministry of Education to review the mother tongue education policy, abandon the views that other mother tongues will threaten the status of Bahasa Malaysia, increase the opportunity to use mother tongue in learning, develop the diversity in medium of instruction. Let us have a more equal education; this will be the best apparatus to ensure the students achieve optimum intellectual development.

d) The Equality Issue of Curriculum Relevance

Numerous education research have shown that curriculum relevance to the students' life experience (especially indigenous group) has positive impact towards students' learning. The relevance in curriculum will increase the students' sense of identity towards their own culture, increase the learning's meaning and values, therefore improve their learning attitude. Researches have also shown that when the curriculum content is connected with the students' knowledge or experience in life, the students will get assurance on the knowledge and experience which they accumulate from daily lives and this will boost their level of confidence and dignity.

Fortunately, the Ministry of Education has implemented *Kurikulum Asli and Penan*, KAP in 14 indigenous schools and six Penan schools starting from year 2007. This curriculum has two main elements – simplify and remain the core curriculum and adds in content which are suitable to indigenous life experience. According to initial assessment, KAP has not only increased the students' ability to learn new words and count, it also builds up the students' confidence and dignity. This coincides with findings of other educational researches.

However, KAP only benefits small group of students. According to the 2010 Annual Report of *Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli* Malaysia, JAKOA, the drop out percentage in the standard six to form one stage for year 2009 and 2010 are 1405 students (31.77%) and 1286 students (29.02%); while the students who are not able to finish form five are 1160 students (49.55%) and 1183 students (45.75%). Statistics in the Blueprint have shown that 70% of the indigenous students are not able to complete secondary school education. Compared to national secondary school dropout percentage (28%), we believe that the medium of instruction and curriculum's low relevance to students' daily lives are the key reasons why these groups of students are experiencing high dropout rate.

In terms of medium of instruction and curriculum relevance, the current curriculum has forced the vulnerable groups in our country to pay double the price: on one hand, the low level of education has limited these groups to develop their culture, economy and language; on the other hand, those indigenous students who have successfully completed standard secondary education are facing pressure from outer culture, language and values which force them to abandon their own culture. Hence, we can see that the inflexibility of the standard curriculum has smashed the development of vulnerable groups in the country; this is one equity problem which the Ministry should pay attention on.

2. The Issue of Curriculum Balance and Effectiveness

According to the National Education Philosophy, the educational objective “is a continuous effort towards enhancing potentials of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner in order to create individuals who are well-equipped intellectually, spiritually and emotionally. This effort aims to produce knowledgeable, ethical and responsible Malaysian citizens who are can contribute towards the harmony and prosperity of the community and nation.”

When this objective implemented on the levels of the Blueprint: curriculum structure or teaching and learning, it begins to lose balance or effectiveness. This can be seen in the reformation of health education, expressive arts, social studies and history subjects.

a) The Effectiveness of Health Education

Regardless of the achievement of a student in his or her learning, a student (primary and secondary school) will always need to face pressure brought by individual, family or society, either physically, psychologically or emotionally. Therefore, the objective of health education curriculum is to ensure students are capable to have and maintain a healthy lifestyle, help them to protect themselves, ease the psychological or emotional pressure to lessen the health problems in life. This is not only about knowledge mastery. On the surface level, our country has a relatively comprehensive health education curriculum, apart from sports education, all primary and secondary school students need to attend health education, under the policy of *Satu Murid Satu Sukan*, all student need to participate in one sport at least. However, if we examine some reports regarding Malaysia citizens' health condition (for example the Malaysian National Health Morbidity Survey, UNICEF

Report, National Suicide Registry Report), we will find that Malaysians are still facing severe challenges physically (high blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity, diabetes, smoke addiction and HIV transmission) or psychologically (the ratio of children having psychology problems and suicide rate). Hence, we suspect the health education has derailed from its track at the teaching and learning level. Ministry of Education is responsible to find out a reason why health education is ineffective, including investigating the teachers' teaching strategy, methodology and the effectiveness of students' learning activities, study the effect of teachers' attitude and ideology towards health education on the teaching and learning process. From that, the Ministry should find a way to enhance the effectiveness of this curriculum.

b) The Issue of Curriculum Balance of Expressive Arts

In many countries and regions, expressive arts include arts and design, theater performance, dance and musical curriculum. From the perspective of educational objective, these kinds of curriculum aim to provide students with attractive opportunities for them to unleash their imagination and creativity, to express their feelings towards the world through diverse and creative presentations and performances, to stimulate their inspiration and feel the fun, to develop the aesthetical and cultural values, to be foundation for future artists. Students have the chances to participate in inter-cultural art activities, build the cultural confidence and dignity, cultivate an open-minded and respect other cultures' attitude through the interaction with the others, at the same time appreciate and support the community's art activities. Only by providing students with rich and diverse curriculum, they are able to have the opportunities to grow in this aspect.

In contrary, the expressive arts in Malaysia are uninteresting and ineffective. There are three main reasons: 1. The Ministry of Education only provides musical and art curriculum and only musical education is selected as compulsory subject, we do not have dance or theater performance as elective subjects and students have limitation in selecting subjects; 2. Many schools are simplifying or even cancelling music classes due to insufficient teachers or the teachers' and schools' attitude towards these subjects; 3. The music classes in Malaysia are more to knowledge delivery or being simplified to singing activity only. In fact, this class should be based on creating, performing and appreciating, knowledge and theory delivery as assisting element. To

achieve this objective, we must first ensure that the teachers possess teaching knowledge and capability in this area.

c) The Content Balancing and Teaching and Learning Effectiveness of Social Studies

The curriculum of social studies should include history, geography, society, politics, economy and commerce. The importance of this curriculum is to let the students understand the places they live in, including the legacy left by their families and communities, to learn their own group and understand the behaviours and values of other groups in different era, regions and situations. Students should learn about the achievements of mankind, understand the meaning of social change, the reason and foundation of conflict, and the issues regarding environment. Then, the students have the opportunity to become an informed and responsible citizen. They will respect others; actively and responsibly participate in political, economical, social and cultural activities. They are capable to develop an understanding towards the world and Malaysia, understand different beliefs and cultures, make informed decision or choice, comment on issues related to environment, science and technology, and make an argument which is informed and logical based on a complicated issue.

Hence, social studies curriculum, especially the curriculum, content and teaching and learning of history subject must be in-line with true facts of multi-ethnicity in Malaysia. The history and culture of different ethnics should be given fair treatment; they should be inserted into the curriculum fairly and being educated correctly. This subject should also be based on a spirit which is educates the students to respect, understand the tolerate each others. Therefore, some contradicting historical facts must be clarified, for example the Islamic Civilization Era, the contributions of different ethnics towards nation building, Japan Occupation and May 13, to return the original history of the country, so that students can learn the real history of Malaysia. Only then, students have the opportunity to learn about different levels of Malaysian society, study and comprehend the reasons behind conflicts in our society, cultivate the spirit to respect, understand and tolerate each other, in order to learn how to face and solve conflicts.

All in all, a perfectly designed and effective curriculum should be fair and equal, and must be in-line with the educational theories. At the

same time, it has to contain humanity values. We expect our Ministry of Education will serious face and solve the above problems so that the students in our country are able to develop into a person who is physically and mentally healthy, knowledgeable, able to think, and with the correct attitude.

2. Thoughts on *Peralihan* Class Curriculum

The Blueprint only mentioned about *Peralihan* classes twice: 1) Shift 2: Ensure every child is proficient in Bahasa Malaysia and English language; 2) Wave 2 (2016-2020) Accelerate System Improvement. The Blueprint only stated about cancelling *Peralihan* class in year 2017 when it mentioned about standardizing standard four Bahasa Malaysia curriculums of national primary school and national type primary school in year 2014.

We think the Blueprint must consider the following facts before suggesting to cancel *Peralihan* class in year 2017:

- a) *Peralihan* class is a language programme tailor-made for Malaysia special education system, its three main objectives are: a) let the students master Bahasa Malaysia and prepare for secondary school education; b) let the students communicate with Bahasa Malaysia effectively; c) cultivate patriotism spirit and cultural values of Malaysian society. In conclusion, *Peralihan* class is designed for the students from national type primary school to adapt to the medium of instruction in national secondary school.
- b) When the Government transformed Chinese secondary school to national type secondary school, the medium of instruction has been changed to English language and later on Bahasa Malaysia, *Peralihan* class is a year for students from national type primary school to master new medium of instruction before entering secondary school. This is a rational arrangement that should be done for the students after the Government canceled the Chinese secondary school.
- c) There is no review on *Peralihan* class which has been conducted for 50 years by the Blueprint before it is cancelled. This is an obvious negligence towards graduates from national type primary school. It is also negligence towards students who are less successful in studies. We can see the signs of the Blueprint's unilateral and elite oriented thinking.

- d) The main focus of the Blueprint is to standardize the standard four Bahasa Malaysia curriculums of national type primary school and national primary school and eventually cancel Peralihan class. Similarly, the Ministry of Education has not done a comprehensive review on the teaching and learning of Bahasa Malaysia in national type primary school to find out the reason for low proficiency level of Bahasa Malaysia, before this plan is announced. The Ministry thinks that by adding the teaching and learning hour and intensify the levels of curriculum will increase the students' proficiency level of Bahasa Malaysia, without considering the theories of language learning. A plan without considering the current situation will not increase the proficiency level of the students, but will only prevent the students from having a balanced education and healthy physical and emotional development.

3. Our Suggestions to Curriculum and Teaching and Learning

1. Treat the Educational Needs of Different Ethnic Groups Fairly

- a) Under the principle of equality, the Ministry of Education must not violate opportunities to learn other mother tongue when it is enhancing the bi-lingual policy. We suggest the Ministry to open up more mother tongues (especially those vulnerable mother tongues) and protect and diversity of Malaysian languages through school education.
- b) Recognise mother tongue education, assist to expand and develop mother tongue education, and let multi-school system education be our country's distinguishing feature.
- c) Set up an administrative unit to handle the drop out problems of the students (especially indigenous students), send officials to keep contact with the drop outs and help them to go back to school.
- d) Enhance the curriculum relevance of different groups of people, including studying the relevance of curriculum content with the life experience of different groups, enhance the teachers' ability to select suitable teaching materials, giving out the authority to develop curriculum, assist and support to develop school-based curriculum.
- e) Respect and acknowledge the principles of language learning, Bahasa Malaysia should be thought using second language learning method in national type primary school.

2. Ensure Developing Resources of Different Programmes (LINUS, Teachers' Training and After-school Remedial Class) are balanced

To Make Sure All Students Have Equal Learning Opportunities and Resources,

Not Only Limited to Bahasa Malaysia, English Language or Mathematics.

3. Enhance the Effectiveness of Health Education

- a) Review the learning outcome of health education; focus on instilling the correct attitude and behavior of health and hygiene to the students to strengthen their resistance towards diseases.
- b) Make sure the schools are concerned on the students psychological and hygiene problems, including asking the teachers to take care of the students' psychological health, teach the students how to face anger, panic and sadness to enhance the students' resistance to pressure and their resilience.

4. Correct the Problem of Losing Balance and Effectiveness in Expressive Arts Subjects

- a) Develop more dance, theater, art and design programmes to improve the insubstantial situation of expressive arts subjects in Malaysia.
- b) Ensure the schools implement expressive arts subjects and prevent the schools from simplifying or cancelling the classes.
- c) Upgrade the pedagogical content knowledge and assessment ability of the teachers in expressive arts subjects, require the teachers to focus on cultivating the students' ability to create, perform and appreciate.

5. Correct the Problem of Losing Balance in Social Studies Curriculum

- a) Ensure the curriculum and teaching materials reflect the true situation of all ethnic groups in Malaysia, including adding the contribution of different ethnic groups towards nation building in curriculum of History subject, and return the multi-faceted truth of historical facts such as the Japanese Occupation and May 13 incident.
- b) Ensure the teachers emphasize on the students' understanding towards conflicts and learn to face different points of views and values with a respectful and open-minded attitude to solve the conflicts.

6. Review the Curriculum and Teaching and Learning of *Peralihan* Class to Improve Its Quality

- a) Review the effectiveness of *Peralihan* class which has been conducted for 50 years and do a comprehensive research on the teaching force and curriculum of *Peralihan* class. Then, we can consider whether to remain or cancel this programme based on statistical figure.

- b) Review the curriculum content of *Peralihan* class. It should not be only focusing on language convergence; the convergence of other subjects should also be paid attention on. The students of *Peralihan* class are not only weak in Bahasa Malaysia, they are normally weak in other subjects as well. Hence, *Peralihan* class should be a year to help these students to enhance their foundation in order to decrease the drop out rate.
- c) The management should adjust their mentality – from Ministry of Education to the Principal, on the perception and attitude on *Peralihan* class. If they are able to concern these students and support *Peralihan* class, the negative impression towards *Peralihan* class will be uprooted and the students are able to build their confidence and dignity.

A perfectly designed and effective curriculum should be a fair and balanced curriculum. It must also contain the humanity values. We expect students who have completed their education in Malaysia to be individuals who are passionate about learning, determined to achieve higher learning outcomes and are open-minded towards new ideas.

V EXAMINATION AND ASSESSMENT

On the topic of National Examination, the accountability of public examinations needs to be scrutinized closely. Our response is as follows:

1. LINUS is not a language test

It is mentioned in the Blueprint that the Ministry of Education intends to improve the results of English and Bahasa Malaysia test in LINUS 2.0. This indicates that LINUS is wrongly taken as a language test. In fact, LINUS is a form of aptitude test. There are two areas of assessment: verbal reasoning and math-logical reasoning. Both aptitude test and IQ test must be conducted in the candidate's first language to be effective.

2. PBS is problematic

In section 4-1, the Blueprint states: "The Ministry will ensure the provision of an all-rounded curriculum benchmarked to international standards to produce students with the skills required to compete at an international level... The Ministry will also ensure the holistic assessment of students via National Examinations and School-based Assessments or Pentaksiran Berasaskan Sekolah (PBS). Measures undertaken will include: ... Upgrading assessment frameworks to increase items

that test higher-order thinking skills in both national examinations and PBS, and to move towards standard-referencing in PBS”

The Blueprint also mentioned that the Ministry of Education, under the assistance of UNESCO and *Universiti Kebangsaan* Malaysia, is performing assessment on our current curriculum development and implementation from three aspects: “Written curriculum”, “taught curriculum” and “examined curriculum” (4-2). In 4-4 in the section on “examined curriculum”, the Blueprint touches briefly on the topic of teacher teaching to the test, the shortcomings of our current public examination and teachers’ inability to fully grasp the implication of PBS.

We applaud the effort by the Ministry of Education to improve the correlation between curriculum and assessment, to emphasize on the interrelation among textbook, classroom and examination. We agree with the perspective that assessment is only part of the curriculum, and a test-oriented linear model of education should be avoided.

However, the importance of the test results is deeply ingrained into the whole system. Teachers are mired in teaching to the test. It is not uncommon for teachers to skip content which is not tested, for examination subject to replace non-exam subject. The original purpose of education is severely distorted. To make time for examination preparation, schools frequently rushed a whole-year syllabus in half a year, disregarding pedagogy. Furthermore, once public examination is over, students lose all interest in learning, leading to truancy.

The concept of PBS is commendable. However, the Blueprint did not provide sufficient analysis and detailed assessment. The Ministry of Education is right to point out that the current PBS is problematic. PBS is designed according to the standard of the curriculum, thus, it must follow strictly the scope of the curriculum.

Currently in PBS, student’s results are assessed in 6 bands. However, the levels of the bands are not consistent with the standard of the curriculum, resulting in difficulty for the teachers to set assessment. Furthermore, some of the curriculum is not covered in the PBS, misleading the teacher to feel that those parts of the curriculum are not important and need not be taught in class. Another worrying trend is that some teachers taught according to the examples of performance standard provided by the ministry, which defeat the purpose of PBS. PBS requires the teachers to be not only the educator, but also the examiner. Many teachers feel unprepared for the dual role. These are some issues facing PBS that require serious consideration.

Our national education still emphasize too much on conclusive assessment, and lack formative assessment. All levels of administration from school, province to state still promote a “unified” examination. A standardized, homogenous examination system may cause neglect in the process of learning and personality development of students. The tendency of using MCQ in examination which only allows for one answer also limits and ruins creative thinking.

3. Realistic Considerations of Higher Thinking Order Test Question

It is appropriate and urgent that the Ministry of Education attempts to train students with critical thinking skills, creativity and innovative thinking to meet the increasingly competitive international environment. In the area of assessment, the Ministry plans to increase the number of test question which assess higher order thinking skills. However, since the Ministry has already decided that pen and paper examination is not the only way to assess a student's learning results, it should then consider other forms of assessment, rather than mechanically increasing number of relevant test questions year-by-year.

Higher thinking order test questions are difficult to produce, often time-consuming and requires a lot of effort. It is especially true for objective questions. Objective questions are generally suitable for assessing low level learning skills of the candidates such as factual material, understanding and application of concepts. Objective questions require a single correct answer, which will restrict the candidates from utilizing critical thinking skills, creative and innovative thinking, and result in rigid thinking. Objective questions, especially multiple choice questions, can easily lead to cheating and shortcuts. Subjective, open-ended questions are more suitable to assess higher level thinking skills. However, marking such questions is difficult and time consuming, and is prone to bias. Moreover, experienced and specially trained markers are usually required to acquire a certain level of consistency.

In addition, increasing the number of questions in an examination paper as a way to emphasize testing higher order thinking skills, seems too much “testing for testing sake”. If not handled well and deviate from pedagogy, it might cause assessment to be placed before teaching, or rather to create a teach-to-test situation, which is what the Blueprint has criticized.

4. Loss of credibility of public examinations

The statistic provided by the Blueprint on the comparison between PMR results and TIMSS results (Exhibit 3-18) reveal a loss of credibility of our public exams.

When compared to international standards, the level of mathematics and science of our students is lower than our neighbours by 2 to 3 years, but our public exam allows mediocre students to get good results, and poor students to get mediocre results. In other words, our public exams have lost the ability to provide a reference to the quality of our national education, and thus cannot select talent fairly and justly. This reflects a serious issue.

Although the Blueprint mentioned LPs in the section about transformation, it lacks details on how to strengthen the LPs.

5. Our suggestion on Examination and Assessment

1. Provide LINUS 2.0 in multiple languages

The Ministry of Education need to provide LINUS in Chinese and Tamil for the results to be reliable and valid.

2. Review and Revise PBS

- a) Regularly monitor teaching activities of schools to ensure pedagogy principals are observe, and teaching to test is avoided.
- b) To monitor closely the progress of teaching to prevent teachers from shortening or compressing the course which can results in poor absorption by the students.
- c) Reduce standardize test.
- d) To establish a workable and clear plan for PBS. Avoid paperwork and reduce the burden placed on schools administrations and teachers.
- e) Improve the ability of teachers to assess students through systematic training.
- f) To effectively implement PBS and higher level thinking education, students number in every class should be controlled at about 25 people.

3. Improve higher level thinking skills effectively and realistically.

- a) Reduce the usage of objective questions as much as possible in teaching. Give up relying on the only or the best answers. Increase open ended questions, so that students may be allowed to express themselves freely in answering questions.
- b) We feel that to improve higher order thinking skills, both quality and quantity must be emphasized. The Ministry of Education can encourage the improvement of student's thinking skills through teaching, and not only increase the number of higher thinking order questions in the exam paper. Even assessment should take multiple forms, not only using paper and pen.

- c) Systematically improve teachers' ability to teach thinking skills. Require teachers to attend training to set higher order thinking skills questions to prevent low quality questions.
- d) Build quality questions bank with higher order thinking skills questions.

4. To allow greater autonomy to Lembaga Pemeriksaan (LP)

There are a few points under this section: 1. Strengthening the LP should be included in the first wave of the transformation; 2. To make public the reports on the public exams reliability and validity; 3. To improve the accountability, fairness and transparency of the marking of our public exams; 4. To emulate the MPM in ensure professional autonomy of LPs through law, to prevent interference from administrators

VI VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Undeniably, the Blueprint has placed great emphasis in the future of our nation's vocational education and has provided substantial suggestions. The majority of related content is included in the seventh chapter of the Blueprint (System Structure), and accounts for about 39% of the content.

1. Course ratio of 70% Vocational training and 30% of Academic subject is too rigid.

Workforce today demands not only professional and specialized skills from a person, but also a solid foundation of general knowledge, so as to facilitate career change or further personal development. Literacy and numeracy is especially important for a working person. However, these are usually the weakest area of the vocational education. Therefore, vocational studies should balance training students in specialized knowledge and skills with sufficient general education. Vocational education at upper secondary level should be especially mindful of general education. Due to the relative accessibility of tertiary education in modern society, many students from vocational schools choose to further their studies in higher education institution. In Netherland, about one third of vocational students continue their studies in tertiary institute, whereas in Korea, about two-third of students do so.

2. Corporate partners listed in the Blueprint (Exhibit 7-9)

Besides high-tech industry, the vocational education should also try to fulfill the demand of medium-low tech industries in our nation. Medium-low tech technician

such as electronic technician, lift maintenance technician, car mechanics, and machine operators, are in high demand in our country, even the world. The ministry should do a study of existing demand of our industries and train people according to the results of the study.

3. Compulsory Practicum in Vocational College (Exhibit 7-7)

Although certainly valuable, compulsory practicum can have certain potential problems. We list here issues of quality that might be encountered:

- a) Low quality training at the workplace
- b) The training provided is too biased towards certain aspects of their vocation.
- c) Corporate tend to use students as cheap labour.
- d) Corporate partners lack training skills and plans.
- e) Practicum is not in alignment with the interest of students.

4. Improve the quality and enrolment of vocational education

We acknowledge the reasons mentioned in the Blueprint regarding why vocational education is not well-received. However, we are of opinion that those reasons are partial and superficial. We believe one of the main reasons why vocational education is not well received among non-bumiputra is due to its homogenous study environment and its location.

5. Lack of cooperative framework between public and private sectors and channel to collect feedback.

There should be a cooperative framework that includes the government, the corporate and trade union, as a body for decision consultation and data collection. This organization can participate in designing lesson plans; determine the technical field to focus and to develop a standard operation process for practicum. For example, Australia Industry Skills Council provides industrial intelligence of the development of the labor market and recommendations for skills needs of the industry for the Australian government and businesses. In addition, the Council also cooperates with the Government to allocate training placement.

In addition, the Blueprint did not propose a method to collect related data of the labor market. This will cause the direction of our vocational education to be divorced from the real demand of the labor market. It will also provide false information to the graduates and cause oversupply in certain industry. Relevant

data could be used to assess the results of current vocational education for review and improvement.

6. Our suggestion to Vocational Education

1. Provide vocational training without sacrificing general academic education

- a) Re-examine the ratio of 70% vocational education and 30% academic education. Increase the ratio of academic education in phases, to prevent neglecting academic performances, so that students will not suffer in the future during career change or further development.
- b) Ensure basic ability of literacy and numeracy, and provide special assistance to weaker students.
- c) Vocational educations need to train students in general skills, so that they may effect a career change when necessary. At the same time, specialized training should be provided for certain industry.

2. Training skilled workers based on demand of labour market

- a) The corporate and trade union should participate in the development of lesson plan for vocational study, to ensure that the course is in alignment with the current demand of labour market.
- b) Assess objectively the demand for skilled labour in our labour market. Vocational schools should create course based on demand to train low-medium tech skilled workers.

3. There should be a standardized procedure for practicum

- a) Provide incentive for business owners to provide practicum. It can be done in forms of direct compensation, tax reduction and special tax arrangements.
- b) There should be a standardized legal framework for practicum. The framework should clarify the legal rights and obligation of both the business owner and the students. For examples: both side should be able to obtain basic information from each other, the students should receive supervision and a stipend, and the training plan of the business owner should be approved by the ministry of education.
- c) Quality assurance of the training provided at workplace. Since all participating corporates enjoy certain form of compensation and tax reduction, the ministry should demand that these corporates follow certain guideline, to guarantee the quality and direction of the training provided.

- d) Provide practicum according to the interest of the students. Doing so will improve the efficiency and productivity of the training. Forcing students into practicum will achieve the reverse.

4. To improve the language environment of vocational schools

We demand that the ministry improve the language environment of vocational schools, for example, to provide bilingual instruction, opening more vocational schools at non-bumiputera area, and open PAV in SMK.

5. Wider involvement of corporate and more detail research

- a) Set up an organization to promote corporate involvement in vocational education. It can be done nation-wide, state-wide or in individual schools. Nation-wide organization can participate in the designing of vocation education syllabus and training policy, whereas at school level, such organization can improve relationship between schools and the corporate and encourage interaction.
- b) Establish a research institute for vocational education, to collect and analyse reliable statistic about the labour market, perform case studies and finally report their findings.

6. Provide teacher's training in vocational education

There is no mention of a plan to train teachers for vocational education. We request that the Blueprint make necessary addition to the section on vocational education, and provide the following suggestions:

- a) The ministry should encourage corporates to allow their employee to become part-time trainers in vocational schools, so that students can be exposed to the latest development in their relevant field.
- b) Requesting teachers in vocational schools or colleges to spend at least one or two months in working environment and hiring part-time instructors from corporate to ensure that the schools stay relevant to actual market demand.
- c) Develop special vocational teaching training programmes for skilled workers who are interested in teaching. The programmes should be flexible to cater to the different needs of instructors and trainers.
- d) To award professional vocational teaching certificate to develop professionalism and attract people of high caliber.

CONCLUSION

The objective of the Blueprint to lead the nation out of the mire of poor and failing education is commendable. However, this guideline to our national education policy presents a conflicting image in its objective and action, ideals and reality, intent and execution.

We worry that the racist undertone of the Blueprint will hinder the realisation of its stated vision.

We also are concern very much about the rights of minority education and Chinese education in the Blueprint. The Blueprint has clearly reflected the government's objective and policy of "encouraging unity through language education".

According to our analysis, the reformation mentioned in the Blueprint is built on the fact that our country is weak in PISA and TIMSS performances. Yet the reformation has involved many levels of education, including differences between urban and suburb, basic facilities, differences in the level of language among students of different ethnic group, vocational education and computer technologies. It is a rather holistic blueprint for reformation. Under closer scrutiny, however, the budget allocated for this Blueprint is only about 1.9 billion. Only 4 projects are planned to be completed by year 2015, and if we take away spending on basic facilities, only 3 projects are expected to be completed. In 10 years between 2015 and 2025, how the ministry would proceed with the reformation and how much would it cost the federal budget, is not mentioned in the Blueprint at all.

Looking at the content of the reformation mentioned in the Blueprint, we noticed that in the second wave of reformation (chapter 8) related to PISA and TIMSS, the Blueprint mentioned in 2016 the number of higher order thinking skill questions will be increased to between 75% and 80%. In the same chapter, however, it is mentioned that the government will only start the curriculum reformation in 2017. We find it hard to comprehend how exam questions reformation can precede the curriculum reformation by a year.

We are of the opinion that the Blueprint is built on a few important pillars of curriculum, assessment, teaching resources and even the administration and management and accountability of MOE. However, the proposed reformation measures in chapter 8 are singular and weak, and on a whole irrelevant to our weakness in mathematics and science and poor quality of educations.

Due the lack of consistency and abovementioned deficiency, we found it confusing and difficult to find reference. Therefore, it became impractical to provide an organised response and feedback to all the points in the reformation plans.

That was why when we provide our feedbacks, we also include our own proposal to illustrate the fair, objective and reasonable education in our ideal.

Regarding all the mistaken explanation and application of education theories, in the first part of our report, we provided a detail analysis based on current situation of our nation's education, including its quality and academic performances, its equity, its efficiency, and its accessibility.

In the second part, we provided a holistic proposal on education ideology and objective, administration and management, teachers' professionalization, openness and fairness of curriculum, competitiveness and global advantages of a heterogeneous society.

In conclusion, the Blueprint must re-examine the current education policy with a perspective of objectivity, fairness, and realism, and an attitude of respect towards the civilian society. Our national education is more than half a century old, and the current education policy has reached its bottleneck.

If we continue to disregard the real reason behind the decline of our education standards, and perform reformation on the surface, we will repeat the failures of our past endeavours and widened our gap with the international society.

Our national education requires a total revamp. An open, democratic forum to discuss what sort of new education policy will benefit the country more is badly needed.

Finally, we stress again, to establish a highly efficient Education Delivery Unit is far from enough. We request that the government setup an independent, neutral and fair "Regulatory Committee of Inspection for Education" (Ombudsman) to inspect and regulate the Ministry legality, rationality and effectiveness in exercising its public rights, to prevent corruption from happening, to enhance the efficiency and quality of government, to improve the nation's education standard, and to safeguard the long-term development of our national education.

We hope our reports can be of benefit to the future of our national education. We welcome feedbacks from all quarters of the society.

LLG Cultural Development Centre; Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies; Persekutuan Persatuan-persatuan Alumni Sekolah Chinese Malaysia; The Federation of Alumni Association Of Taiwan Universities, Malaysia; The Association of Graduates from Universities and Colleges of China, Malaysia; Kuala Lumpur and Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall; Negeri Sembilan Chinese Assembly Hall; Malacca Chinese Assembly Hall; Penang Chinese Town Hall; The Federation of Chinese Associations, Johore State; Japan Graduates' Association of Malaysia; Persatuan Persahabatan Berpanjangan; National Association of Secondary School Principals, Merdeka University Berhad; Malaysia's Nantah Alumni; Persatuan Kebajikan Guru Bahasa Cina Sekolah Menengah, Malaysia.

ISBN:978-967-11616-3-0



A collaborative research project initiated by 16 Chinese organizations: LLG Cultural Development Centre; Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies; Persekutuan Persatuan-persatuan Alumni Sekolah Chinese Malaysia; The Federation of Alumni Association Of Taiwan Universities, Malaysia; The Association of Graduates from Universities and Colleges of China, Malaysia; Kuala Lumpur and Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall; Negeri Sembilan Chinese Assembly Hall; Malacca Chinese Assembly Hall; Penang Chinese Town Hall; The Federation of Chinese Associations, Johore State; Japan Graduates' Association of Malaysia; Persatuan Persahabatan Berpanjangan; National Association of Secondary School Principals, Merdeka University Berhad; Malaysia's Nantah Alumni; Persatuan Kebajikan Guru Bahasa Cina Sekolah Menengah, Malaysia