

Educational Development in Malaysia in the Eighties

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Kertas ini mengemukakan ramalan-ramalan tentang perkembangan mengenai enam lapangan pendidikan yang utama di dalam tahun lapan puluhan iaitu infrastruktur pentadbiran, pendidikan guru, kurikulum sekolah, pendidikan tinggi, pendidikan bukan-formal dan pendisiplinan di sekolah. Kertas ini meramalkan: Antara lain tidak mungkin berlaku perubahan-perubahan yang radikal di dalam penyusunan dan struktur sistem pentadbiran. Tetapi akan muncul pertambahan pegawai-pegawai yang mendapat latihan berasaskan anika-disiplin; otonomi membuat penentuan-penentuan yang lebih luas di kalangan pegawai-pegawai pentadbir dan guru-guru besar berperanan sebagai katalistor untuk perubahan. Penghujung tahun lapan puluhan memperlihatkan bermulanya perkhidmatan pengajaran siswazah yang dipersatukan, dan pensyarah-pensyarah perguruan dibawa masuk menjadi Nazir sekolah-sekolah untuk membiasakan mereka dengan perubahan yang berlaku di bilikdarjah. Sukatan-sukatan pelajaran yang seragam itu akan diberikan dayasuai yang lebih tinggi untuk menampung kemahuan-kemahuan dan minat-minat kumpulan murid yang berbeza-beza. Perlengkapan buku teks yang seragam akan bertukar menjadi pegemukaan pilihan-pilihan buku teks yang direkomenkan. Dari segi pendisiplinan di sekolah-sekolah kertas ini meramalkan penggunaan dendaan korporal yang dianjurkan oleh setengah-setengah persatuan guru akan dipersoalkan. Pendekatan yang lebih bersifat kemanusiaan akan direkomenkan. Hingga tahun-tahun lapan puluhan diharapkan guru-guru akan sedar bahawa matlamat utama pendidikan ialah memperkemanusiaan murid-murid bukan sebaliknya. Di dalam pendidikan tinggi tidak akan berlaku pertambahan pendidikan peringkat universiti tetapi politeknik-politeknik akan bertambah. Peranan pendidikan bukan-formal akan lebih dihargai. Akan terbentuklah satu Majlis Penasihat Pendidikan Bukan-Formal Kebangsaan untuk menyelaraskan usaha-usaha pendidikan tersebut. Akhir sekali diharap bahawa pendidik-pendidik Malaysia akan bersedia untuk menghadapi cabaran masa depan dengan cara inovatif dan semangat berbakti.

Introduction

I have been asked to contribute an article on "Educational Development in the Eighties" to the first issue of *Pendidik dan Pendidikan* upon my retirement from the Centre for Educational Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia. The reason for the request is that because I teach and have written about educational development in Malaysia before the eighties, I should be able to predict what will happen after the seventies. The trouble is that I have not acquired as yet the skills of fortune-telling and so I am not certain if I can successfully meet the requirements.

From the academic viewpoint, writing about the past is comparatively easy. There are primary and secondary source materials to fall upon and whatever is written can be verified in one way or another by available evidence. Writing about the future is a more challenging undertaking. Only time can tell whether the forecast made is right or wrong. However, "fortune-telling" is quite a harmless hobby as long as the predictions made will not be interpreted as premonition that will upset people's peace of mind. Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that however "objective" a prediction can be, it inevitably reflects the assumptions and hopes of the predictor himself about the future.

Administrative Infrastructure

Let me begin first with educational planning and administration. This area is given priority because I believe development of quality education is determined to a large extent by the administrative infrastructure which must form the basis of sound and positive development.

It has always been and is still the practice in Malaysia to have educational administrators appointed from among members of the teaching profession regardless whether such appointees have had any formal qualifications in educational administration and the relevant experience. It is assumed that because a teacher has had a number of years of teaching experience, he will automatically be able to fulfil the role of an administrator. This might have been the case when educational opportunities were restricted to the privileged few and when school enrolment was small. However, with the unprecedented quantitative expansion of education after 1957, prompted chiefly by explosions of population and aspirations, the demands and problems associated with planning and administration have become increasingly complex.

Over the last few years there has been an increasing awareness of the need for formal training to provide administrative and planning skills. Yet, there is little evidence that such a training programme is being offered as a regular feature of the curriculum by any of the institutions in Malaysia. It is true that at Universiti Sains Malaysia and the University of Malaya, an elective course on educational administration is made available to students enrolled for the teacher education programme. But no one can seriously claim that the training provided is adequate.

The main difficulty lies in getting the kind of experts with the necessary qualifications and proven local experience to conduct such a course effectively. The Ministry of Education is fully aware of the problem and the pressing need for such specialised manpower. Over the last few years, hand-picked officers have been sent overseas to acquire the needed qualifications. Universities under their own staff training schemes have also been sending staff members abroad to meet the projected requirements.

It is envisaged that by the eighties an increasing number of such experts will be available to initiate changes and improvements. It is then not unlikely that there will be radical changes in the present highly centralised administrative structure and organisation. With an improvement in the quality of teacher education and expansion of training opportunities for prospective educational administrators, a larger measure of autonomy in decision-making will be delegated to administrators at both state and school levels. Principals of schools, for example, will be permitted to select textbooks from recommended lists considered suitable according to the levels of abilities of their pupils in place of those centrally provided, as at present, by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. False economic considerations will give place to sound educational requirements. Alternative curricula will also be provided to ensure that pupils with different aptitudes and abilities will be given opportunities to pursue their interests under the guidance of their teachers. Quality education will be interpreted as fulfilling defined objectives of learning programmes designed for different groups of pupils. Such decisions will be made at the school level by the school administrators in consultation with teachers.

The topmost administrative posts in the Ministry of Education will be occupied by educationists who have had exposure to a multi-disciplinary approach to educational planning and administration. Exposure to this approach will enable them to discharge responsibilities from policy development through implementation and management to evaluation and programme change. In general, educational administrators at all levels will no longer perceive their roles merely as enforcement officers of rules, regulations, directives and departmental circulars but as catalysts of change and development providing inspiring professional leadership to teachers to cope with changes and demands in the school system.

Teacher Education

Teacher education is the next area in which I would like to indulge in some speculations as to the trend of development. Currently, Malaysia has a binary system of teacher education based largely on the British tradition. Teachers for primary and lower secondary schools are trained at Teachers' Training Colleges administered by the Teacher Training Division of the Ministry of Education. The duration of training is two years at the end of which successful students are awarded certificates. Teachers for upper secondary schools receive their training at universities. The pattern of training varies from a nine-month post-graduate diploma course to a three or four year concurrent academic-cum-professional programmes.

One major problem relates to the fact that, at present, graduate teachers are paid according to the kind of academic degrees acquired. No consideration is given to the quality of professional attainment. An honours degree graduate teacher receives a higher initial salary than a pass degree graduate. The result is predictable from our experience at Universiti Sains Malaysia, most education students over the years have tended to spend less time on their professional studies than on the academic disciplines. Therefore, although the concurrent programmes gives more time for education lecturers and students to interact in both term-time courses and teaching practice sessions, the emphasis on honours classification in the academic component reduces the programme's effectiveness to produce, with some exceptions, highly competent and committed graduate teachers.

The other serious problem is the discrepancy in the provisions of facilities between teachers' training colleges and universities. The staff of the teachers' training colleges are required to accomplish an almost impossible task. Within a duration of two years and handicapped by inadequate facilities, they are expected to teach both academic content and professional skills to enable students to play their roles as teachers effectively in the primary and lower secondary schools. By the eighties measures would have been taken to reorganise the entire binary system of teacher education in order to narrow the gap that exists between universities and teachers' training colleges in terms of staffing, facilities and quality of students. It is envisaged that the duration of training for primary and lower secondary school teachers would by then be extended to three years leading to the award of a pass Bachelor of Education degree.

At the five universities, teacher education curriculum would be re-designed to give more time and emphasis to the professional studies; at the same time the content of the academic disciplines would also have been re-structured to meet the requirements of the school system to a larger extent. The nine-month post-graduate Diploma in Education course found inadequate to meet the new demands of the teaching profession would have been dropped and replaced by a four-year integrated Bachelor of Education degree programme. The end of the eighties will see the beginning of an all graduates' teaching profession and every opportunity will be provided mainly through the university off-campus programmes for non-graduate teachers to acquire degree qualifications. The teaching profession will be moving towards the achievement of a truly unified service, members of which be accorded parity of esteem irrespective of the levels of teaching they are engaged in. Primary school teachers will then be as professional in dealing with children as secondary school teachers in dealing with teenagers. There will be a more balanced development of education from the qualitative point of view.

An innovative measure to further improve the quality of teacher education is an arrangement by which teacher educators can be seconded for a period to the Federal Inspectorate to visit a wide range of schools both rural and urban in order to familiarise themselves with classroom teaching and learning problems of different nature. Attachment to the Inspectorate will also provide opportunities to teacher educators to do some teaching in the schools they visit. This is essential if teacher education is to keep up with changing requirements of the school system. In return, the secondment of Federal Inspectors to training colleges and universities will also help them to update their teaching skills and to have time to re-examine their inspectoral practices. This exchange programme will result in exchange of experiences and ideas to benefit our education

system. All institutions of teacher education will enjoy a larger measure of autonomy and will no longer be administered by the Teacher Training Division of the Ministry of Education. A National Teacher Education Advisory Council can be formed to advise and co-ordinate the development of teacher education curriculum to ensure that the particular needs of the country are met.

School Curriculum

School curriculum is the third area in which positive changes are likely to take place in the eighties. Curriculum may be interpreted as prescribed areas of knowledge, skills and attitudes designed to achieve defined objectives morally acceptable to the people of a country.

Common content syllabuses which were considered essential to foster national unity and social integration of children of different ethnic origins during the first twenty years after Merdeka would be liberalised in the eighties to allow alternatives to meet the different needs and interests of the different groups of pupils. This is not to say that the aims of national unity and social integration will no longer be considered important. Thirty years after independence will have produced a new generation of Malaysians who can be relied upon to owe complete allegiance to Malaysia and to regard it as their native home irrespective of their racial origins. A balance would be maintained between political considerations and educational principles.

The objective of educating Malaysians to be productive economically as well as being able to contribute to the political, social and cultural development of the country will be given greater emphasis. The productivity of Malaysia must be increased in order to meet the increasing demands of development. Appropriate curricula must be so designed as to ensure that the relevant skills can be acquired and positive attitudes inculcated among the young. A great deal of the content in many of the school syllabuses such as history and geography will be reduced and re-structured to give more emphasis to an understanding of concepts, principles and processes rather than to memorization of facts and incoherent piecemeal information. In other words, there will be an emphasis on learning how to learn.

By the eighties every Malaysian who has gone through the Malaysian education system will be proficient in the use of Bahasa Malaysia. English will continue to be taught but the objectives of learning will be re-defined to meet the changed language situation. English will no longer be taught as a second language for the simple reason that with the replacement of English by Malay as the medium of instruction, the majority of people who want to communicate in English will not be able to do so. Experience can be drawn from the neighbouring countries of Malaysia. The Indonesians communicate among themselves in Bahasa Indonesia, the Thais in Bahasa Thai and the Japanese in Nippon-Go. English can be described as a second language only when people are able to use it as a means for communication in addition to their mother tongue. But when English is learned primarily as a tool to acquire knowledge and skills, it is more appropriate to label it as a foreign language. Obviously the approach to and methods of teaching a foreign language are quite different from those required to teach a second language. Reading with understanding skills will be given priority for those who commit themselves to an academic career as ability to read reference books and journals in English must be considered an almost indispensable requirement. Then there are those who choose to work in travel agencies and shops that cater to English speaking clients and customers. For these people skills to converse in English on topics related to their specialised needs will be an asset.

At the moment not many are aware of the implications of the rapidly changing language situation in Malaysia. By the eighties, the impact will be felt and as the demand for people capable of using English to meet special purposes increases, a mushrooming of English tuition centres will take place as is evidenced in Taipei and Tokyo. Chinese is likely to remain an important and popular commercial language in Malaysia for two main reasons: (a) about 38% of the population are of Chinese origin, and (b) expansion of trade with China. A market of 900 million customers for Malaysia's rubber, tin, palm oil and other products cannot be ignored in the development of

export trades. Like the people of Holland and Scandinavian countries it will be common after the eighties to find many Malaysians capable of speaking three languages: Bahasa Malaysia, English and Chinese (or Tamil). The school curriculum will reflect and cater to this new situation.

Discipline Problems

In talking about what may happen in the schools, I would like to make a few observations on the present clamour for a more extensive use of corporal punishment in order to restore discipline in schools.

Advocates of a wider use of corporal punishment claim that the recent increase in cases of vandalism and discipline problems in schools is due mainly to an inadequate use of the almighty cane. The argument continues that if only teachers were permitted to use the cane freely, discipline in schools would be restored.

Let us discuss from the practical viewpoint the viability of the above proposal. Two questions come up to my mind:

- (a) Would a woman teacher want to use a cane on a big hefty boy when he has committed an offence,
- (b) What will happen if a boy retaliates when a cane is used on him even by a male teacher. A fight will probably ensue which might result in a free fight for all between pupils and teachers.

It is not to be misinterpreted that there should be no punishment for breach of school regulations or for an offence committed. Punishment and reward exist in any civilized society. Schools are miniature societies that prepare pupils to take their place in a wider society. However, the following questions merit consideration: Should the power to use corporal punishment be delegated to all teachers? Is corporal punishment the best way to inculcate discipline and to maintain order? Are there no better means which have both educative and reformatory values to deal with discipline problems? Have we ever asked and taken the trouble to find out what could be some of the causes underlying discipline problems? Answers are numerous but some of the obvious ones may be summarised as follows:

- (a) With a marked increase in the school enrolment prompted by the provision of free and universal education, there is a corresponding increase in the range of abilities and interests among the pupils. Most of our teachers have not been trained to teach the average and slow pupils. As a result, attention is generally given to the 'high flyers' and the average and slow pupils often suffer neglect from the early years of schooling. Before long they are alienated from their teachers and look upon schooling as an unpleasant task imposed upon them by their parents or guardians.
- (b) The inflexible curriculum proves, in many cases, irrelevant to the needs and interests of the less academically inclined pupils. To make matters worse, often objective tests are used repeatedly as methods of teaching and reams of notes and model answers are dished out to stifle whatever sense of curiosity remains in the pupils. To every question asked a right answer is expected. Consequently most pupils are afraid to open their mouths or ask questions. Is it surprising to find that many lively children feel incarcerated in the four walls of the classroom wanting to liberate themselves from such an unnatural atmosphere?

- (c) Has it not occurred to us that pupils who are found inattentive to our lessons are prepared to sit for hours in front of the 'magic box' watching a television programme? Do we have the honesty and humility to admit that often our lessons are presented in such a boring and lifeless manner that they fail completely to arouse the interest of our pupils?

The answer to the present discipline problems which certainly are not peculiar to the Malaysian school system alone is not to rely on the use of force which will only engender the use of more force and will eventually turn our schools into large scale concentration camps. History has demonstrated more than once that 'those who use the sword will be perished by the sword'. What is needed is a more humane and humanistic approach to education and a more sympathetic understanding of the learning problems facing the less academic children. It has to be appreciated that the average and slow pupils constitute the majority of our school population. With the extension of educational opportunities to all, the aims of education need reformulation, and there should be a re-appraisal of the teacher education programmes, school curriculum and the examination system to ensure that the different interests and needs of the pupils are met. Education has become a very complex enterprise and teaching a very demanding profession. The one most formidable challenge to a teacher is to be able to motivate a reluctant learner to want to learn and to win the respect and affection of the so-called "problem children". To quote A.S. Neill of Summerville School "There are few problem children but many problem teachers and problem parents". Children are born innocent and are eager to learn. "It is bad schooling that kills education", so said Mark Twain. By the eighties it is hoped that most teachers will have awoken to the realisation that the main aim of education is to humanise and not to dehumanise our pupils.

Higher Education

The late sixties and early seventies witnessed a proliferation of institutions of higher learning. Since 1969 four more universities have been established either by conversion of existing colleges or in the form of new institutions to meet increased demand for high level manpower and to accelerate economic development. In the eighties, the trend of development is likely to be in the direction of consolidating the existing universities. The crying need will be for more middle level manpower to give support to the specialists. An increase in the percentage of unemployment of university graduates will also help to re-orientate attitudes of students towards para-professional courses that will lead to better employment opportunities. There will likely to be an increase in the number of polytechnics, one or two in Peninsular Malaysia and one each in Sabah and Sarawak.

As mentioned earlier, teachers' training colleges by the mid-eighties will have been given degree-granting status either as affiliates to the existing universities or as fully autonomous units.

The off-campus academic programme currently provided by Universiti Sains Malaysia will continue to expand to offer opportunities to people who are already employed to enhance their knowledge and skills and also to satisfy the aspirations of some who want to acquire knowledge for its own sake. Other universities will most probably initiate their own off-campus programmes to cater to rising needs.

All universities will be able to offer programmes that will lead to the award of doctorate degrees. Malaysian academics will go overseas to gain post-doctorate experience. An increasing number of specialists interested in the different aspects of development in the third world countries will choose to come to Malaysia to carry out research. In this respect Universiti Sains Malaysia is suitably situated geographically to serve as a centre for South East Asian Educational Studies.

Non-Formal Education

No attempt to forecast the trend of educational development will be complete without including the role of non-formal education in national development. It is being increasingly recognised that a great deal of training and education are being conducted by different agencies, governmental as well as private, outside the formal education system. The role of the Ministry of Agriculture in the training of extension workers, the different training schemes provided by the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture for school leavers and the efforts of the Ministry of Trade and Industries in up-dating managerial skills are now fully appreciated. In the eighties the need to co-ordinate the wide range of non-formal educational programmes will be met by the establishment of a National Non-Formal Education Advisory Council whose main function is to ensure that the developmental efforts of non-formal education programmes will complement and supplement those of the Formal Education System. By then it will have been realised that there are more people outside than within the Formal Education System who need continuing education in order to cope with technological changes. Formal schooling will then be seen as the initial part of a meaningful life-long education process.

Meeting the Challenges

After twenty years of efforts, Malaysia has made impressive progress in educational development from the quantitative point of view. The challenges ahead are more quantitative in nature as implied in my amateur dabbling in prognostication above. But these are the kind of challenges that make the education profession so exciting. I have confidence that Malaysian educators – especially the “young blood” – will face up to these challenges with innovativeness and commitment. We have to start preparing ourselves now.