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Restore the 1119 English test paper

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WE are often reminded by our parents, teachers and our esteemed leaders like Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad of the importance of the English language.

Indeed, English can be considered the key to progress and modernisation in our country. But what is said is contrary to what is being practised.

Until today, no effective programmes have been formulated which will help to improve the standard of English in Malaysia.

Sad to say even the new SPM 1322 English language paper, announced by the Education Minister recently, is unlikely to change things.

It is supposed to be of equivalent standard to the 1119 English language paper. In my opinion, it is not.

By comparing the new 1322 and 1119 papers, it is easy to see the vast difference in standard between them.

I wonder which foreign tertiary educational institutions will recognise the former as a valid entry qualification.

On the other hand, a credit in the 1119 is accepted by the National University of Singapore and the Nanyang Technological University.

Another proven advantage of the 1119 is that owing to its high standard, most students with a credit can easily sail through the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) and IELTS (International English Language Testing System) which in turn will help them gain entry into universities in the United States, the United Kingdom Canada, New Zealand and Australia.

As such, the 1119 can be regarded as a vital key to overseas tertiary education. In other words, a 1119 holder can kill not two, but several birds with one stone.

Frankly, it is presumptuous to equate the standard of the new 1322 with the 1119.

The former, to say the least, is a very haphazardly formulated paper.

Although it contains some features of both the 1322 and 1119, as far as standard is concerned it is nowhere near the 1119. A brief comparison will give a clear picture of the situation.

1119: \* Comprehension passage contains about 1,500 words;

\* Twenty difficult subjective questions plus five vocabulary questions; and,

\* A summary of about 160 words. Points to be derived from about 50 lines in the passage.

1322: \* Comprehension passage contains about 670 words only;

\* Seven easy subjective questions plus four vocabulary questions of which the answers can be easily found in the passage; and,

\* A summary of about 80 words only. Points to be derived from 19 lines.

1119: \* A composition of 60 minutes with an expected length of about 350 to 600 words; and,

\* A short structural composition of 30 minutes and one compulsory question.

1322: \* A composition of 60 minutes with an expected length of about 250 words; and,

\* A short structural composition of 30 minutes. Candidates choose one out of two questions.

Other notable features of the 1322 are:

\* The vocabulary and contents of the passages are simple. \* There are

two passages which require objective answers.

It is interesting to point out that in Kertas 1 Passage 2, the eight questions can be answered by using common sense. It is not necessary to read the passage.

Besides, identification of errors, forms and functions and filling in the blanks make up the two-and-three-quarter-hour paper - perhaps to hoodwink people into believing that being a longer paper it is of a higher standard vis-a-vis the 1119.

Another rather puzzling feature is that candidates will be graded twice; one for 1322 and the other for 1119.

If it is so, it is very ridiculous. Just what is the Examination Syndicate trying to prove?

Is it a super two-in-one paper that can be wielded like a magic wand to arrest the decline of the English standard?

Frankly, it is difficult to fathom the rationale to scrap the 1119 and replace it with the new 1322.

To say the least, the 1119 paper is not only useful and important but it is also prestigious.

It is necessary for those students who regard it as a yardstick to their standard of English. Indeed, it directly helps to motivate them to improve their English.

To those who aspire to further their studies overseas, it is all the more important.

So, if the 1119 is scrapped for good, the standard of English in our schools will definitely deteriorate even further and faster.

Sooner or later the standard of our English will go to the dogs.

The bottom line is the 1322 will never, and can never, replace the 1119 in view of its inferior standard.

Hence, it is naive to expect overseas tertiary institutions to accept it as an entry qualification.

It is understood that some concerned parents are contemplating to send their children to sit the "O" level English in Singapore, which is equivalent to 1119.

This will create unnecessary inconvenience to parents and students.

It is earnestly hoped that the education authorities will re-consider the matter and bring back the 1119 from 1997 onward.

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Batu Pahat

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