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Students all for move to English, poll shows

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Primary and secondary students in national, Chinese and Tamil schools nationwide overwhelmingly support the teaching of Science and Mathematics in English, a survey by the National Union of the Teaching Profession revealed.

NUTP secretary-general Datuk N. Siva Subramaniam said at a Press conference today considering that the issue has been politicised, the views of students had been largely forgotten even though they were the ones directly affected by the move.

Siva Subramaniam said the results of the survey would be forwarded to Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at a meeting soon to convey the "pulse of the people" and "the true picture on the ground" to the Prime Minister.

Besides the NUTP, there would also be representatives from Cuepacs and the Malaysian Trades Union Congress, headmasters and principals at the meeting.

The survey, conducted at urban and rural schools, also revealed that most parents and teachers supported the move. However, most of the headmasters polled were not supportive.

Siva Subramaniam said the respondents in the survey were headmasters, teachers, parents and students.

"According to the results, 62.5 per cent of respondents supported the teaching of Science and Mathematics in English, while 37.5 per cent did not agree with the move."

He said 64 per cent of students polled supported the move, while 36 per cent did not.

"Among parents, 72.5 per cent supported while 27.5 per cent did not. For teachers, 56.6 per cent supported while 43.4 per cent did not.

"Only 42.9 per cent of headmasters polled supported the move while the rest did not. Herein lies the danger as they are the implementors."

He said the reason behind their lack of support could be that they did not understand the rationale behind the move.

The Education Ministry, he said, did not help instil confidence with its conflicting statements on the issue. "It has not given the public its total plan of implementation, only bits and pieces."

Siva Subramaniam said parents supported the move as they wanted their children to be able to compete in the era of globalisation.

Besides questions on whether they supported the move, Siva Subramaniam said respondents were also asked what other subjects could be taught in English, whether the move would affect the position of Bahasa Malaysia, and whether students could understand what was being taught.

"All reactions were positive," Siva Subramaniam said.

On other methods to improve English, he said schools should use the grammar approach and not the current integrated strategy to teach English.

"Language laboratories must also be established and teachers must be adept in English."

He said setting up English-medium schools was not a viable method to help improve English.