

PPSMI students given option to continue in English

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The government has allowed an option to students who are already learning Science and Mathematics in English (PPSMI) to continue in the language in the wake of protests from a number of parents' groups.

However, this solution does not mean the government is reversing its stand to scrap the English language policy, which was decided in 2009.

NONEDeputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin (right) said today the option would be applicable to students who will be in Year 2 in primary schools next year, and they would be allowed to continue studying science and maths in English until they complete their secondary education.

"Taking into consideration of the views of parents, the cabinet decided today to allow students under the PPSMI batch to continue learning mathematics and science in English completely, or in Bahasa Malaysia completely, or in both languages, when they enter Form 1 next year," said Muhyiddin.

The PPSMI policy was implemented by former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad in 2003, despite vocal protests from groups defending Bahasa Malaysia as the national language.

However, six years later the government reverted to the use of the Bahasa Malaysia for the teaching of the two subjects.

"With this, the government's decision to abolish PPSMI is maintained. The government does not intend to reintroduce PPSMI as demanded by certain parties," Muhyiddin said.

Asked on Mahathir's comment that the reversal of the policy might cost the ruling BN government votes, Muhyiddin said: "Mahathir is the greatest supporter of BN. I hope he also understands that we didn't make this decision carelessly.

"We have about 5.3 million students in the system... and parents who hear this decision today will know that their child is not affected.

"That's why we decided in such a way, so that students are not dislocated.... so I hope the parents will understand."

Muhyiddin said the decision was taken after a series of consultations with Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak, who is currently performing the haj in Mecca, Saudi Arabia.

Muhyiddin, who is also education minister, explained that students in Year 3 next year, up to Form 5, would also be granted leeway to learn both the compulsory subjects in the school-preferred language medium.

Similarly, the same system would be in place for vernacular schools, where teachers would be given the choice to teach in English or in their mother tongues.

“The government is confident that the performance of PPSMI students in the Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR) , Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) and Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) will not be affected,” he said after chairing a briefing on the matter at the ministry in Putrajaya today.

PPSMI’s implementation not effective

He pointed out that this was a “soft-landing” approach until 2016 for primary schools, by which time the schools would be using the Malay language for science and mathematics.

Muhyiddin added that only six to seven percent of primary schools from the total of 7,495 classrooms are taught the subject in English.

“As for secondary schools, less than nine percent of the 2,192 schools use English to teach science and mathematics. This finding shows that most students use Malay... and it proves the PPSMI was not implemented as intended,” he said.

According to Muhyiddin, studies by the ministry have also shown that students found it “difficult to comprehend” science and mathematics when taught in English.

“Students take a longer time to understand maths and science concepts in English... and this has forced teachers to teach in Malay, just so that students are able to grasp both the subjects,” he said, adding that it was not just a problem in rural schools but also affected urban schools.

Nevertheless, the abolishing of PPSMI does not mean that the government will neglect the importance of the English language.

“The ministry is working on various initiatives to heighten the mastering of the English language... such as adding contact hours, strengthening the curriculum, hiring native speakers to boost the capacity of tutors... as well as supplying digital teaching equipment in the classrooms,” he said.

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