

**PPSMI: Here we go again**  
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I thought the PPSMI issue (The Teaching of Science and Mathematics in English) was laid down to rest (as it should) when the government decided to discontinue the dumb policy and revert to the old policy of using the national language/mother tongue as medium of instruction for Science and Maths.

But no, apparently the Parent Action for Education Group Malaysia (PAGE), an elitist mob of misguided people, has now intensified its campaign by engaging none other than Perkasa and other Malay nationalist groups (oh, the irony!) to support its cause.

My beef with PPSMI is not connected to shallow nationalism or confused hatred towards our former colonial power. Let me reaffirm my belief that mastery of English is very crucial to the development of individuals and the country. The main issue, for me at least, is the fact that the policy was not based on any sound research or proper planning.

The arguments for PPSMI are mainly based on emotions and twisted logic. The foremost argument is since English is an international language and is widely used in business and technology, then it makes sense to teach Maths and Science in English.

By teaching Maths and Science in English, we could increase students' proficiency in the language and since the reference books are mainly in English, we could improve their understanding of the subjects.

This argument is completely preposterous. First, there is no evidence that teaching any subjects in English will increase proficiency. There are better, proven methods of increasing proficiency in English. Secondly, research has shown that teaching in an official school language that is not the mother tongue is a major barrier in the child's learning.

Then, there is this idea that parents should be able to choose either to stick with PPSMI or revert to old policy. Admittedly, school choice is an interesting and workable idea. It has been successfully implemented in Sweden, Chile and a few other countries.

However, these countries share one characteristic that Malaysia doesn't have – a common language/mother tongue. If parents are allowed to dictate which medium of instruction they want in schools, then how about the teachers?

Teachers' training is mainly provided by government teaching colleges. Teachers sent to teach in Damansara Heights and teachers sent to teach in, say, Jerantut are trained using the same syllabus. How do we decide their placements then? Do we send the good ones to urban schools and the not-so-good ones to rural schools?

I understand the concerns over the declining standard of English in our country. I just don't agree with the solution. The right step for PAGE and its ilk is to use their considerable influence to get the government to commission an in-depth policy research by local (and possibly foreign) universities on our education system.

A proper long-term education policy addressing the weaknesses of current system should be introduced based on the research. The stakeholders in the education system could then be reasonable assured of the direction of the country and its human resources, rather than

being treated like a bunch of lab rats.

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