

The examination quandary
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First, the government abolished fees for the major examinations in the country and this includes the UPSR, PMR and SPM. When doing this, they might have overlooked the fact that the amount of money needed to pay examiners yearly for all these examination papers is just exorbitant. Where - now and in the future - is the government going to get this money to pay the examiners? The number of students taking these examinations is increasing yearly.

By abolishing the examination fees, the government has now to look for funds elsewhere to ensure that all these examinations could be sustained. This is going to cost the government a lot of money. Abolishing examination fees - a populist approach - in the first place was an unwise move by the government.

Seemingly, the country's education vision and mission keep on shifting. When politicians are involved in the education process, we could see the goal posts being often shifted to suit their whims. Gambling or experimenting with the education process is detrimental to the nation in the long run.

For instance, the government fumbled and wasted billions with the introduction of PPSMI in which they introduced the learning of science and mathematics in English. The government has now backpedaled after a huge sum was wasted on this plan. And now the ministry is contemplating abolishing the UPSR and the PMR examinations. The public in actuality does not know the actual reasons for this.

No empirical or in-depth study has been done on this issue other than listening to public opinions or perhaps at the later stage coming to a convenient conclusion just after having a round-table talk. By abolishing these important examinations, is the ministry trying to save money from paying the examiners that runs into millions each year or is it because these examinations are no more relevant?

The public needs more clarification on this issue. If it's for the former reason then the government was just not farsighted enough to anticipate the monetary problem it would face by abolishing examination fees. If the latter is the reason, then the government is taking an erroneous route to cheer students on in becoming less competitive in schools.

Ask those who have direct experience with teaching in schools and universities and they would tell that without formal or standard examinations, students will not make a serious effort to study. To substitute these standard examinations with school-based assessment is again preposterous as it's going backward in our education process.

In most cases where examinations are school-based or institution-based, marks can be given at the whim and fancy of those in charge without going through a standard gauging instrument. It merits no recognition. That's the reason why world-recognised examinations such as the ACCA, TOEFL, GMAT, A-levels or the external Law examinations, to name a few, are standardised throughout the world.

Alas, our Matriculation certificates, for instance, are not recognised by prominent universities in the world. Students still have to sit for the A-levels to be admitted into these renowned universities. For that matter, most of our local-based examinations, to an extent, are only for home consumption. This should not be further doomed by scrapping the UPSR

and the PMR.

School-based examinations can without doubt be tampered with. It would not serve the public any form of satisfaction as they know that schools will 'massage' or push up the marks to show that their students or schools are better than the others. If the government thinks that school-based examinations can replace these existing standard examinations then it is blemishing the examination system in the country much to the chagrin of those who seek quality in education.

The whole examination system will end up becoming a laughing stock in the eyes of the public. Internationally we shall be isolated as far as academic integrity is concerned. No country will look up to our education system as a process to follow. The perception will be further exacerbated as it comes from a yet-to-be developed country like Malaysia.

Examinations are noble ways of gauging one's performance in studies and this process has to be there periodically to tell us of one's level of performance. Instead of abolishing the UPSR and the PMR, the ministry should consider introducing more subject choices for these examinations.

One purpose of education is to make children discover their individual passion in school and go about to enhance this passion. The UPSR for instance – focussing only on four subjects – does not really cover or gauge the varied talents and aptitude of students. If a child has the passion for music, arts or computer skills he should be allowed to discover his or her passion at an early stage and go ahead with the subject up to the highest level.

And these subjects among others should be included as a subject to be assessed at the UPSR level. The education system cannot force the child to be good in a subject if the child has no aptitude or passion for it.

The system should see whether examinations are able to measure the varied aptitude and intelligence students have. Regrettably, UPSR and PMR basically test specified subjects and do not really take into account general subjects students have passion for. In fact, students should be allowed to take five to six subjects at the UPSR level which should include elective subjects such as arts, music, computer skills and another language perhaps. The Bahasa Malaysia Paper I and II should be incorporated into a single paper.

In other words, students will have to do Mathematics, Science, English, Bahasa Malaysia and one or two elective subjects they have a passion for. The PMR should also consider including more subjects for students to choose from in a broad-based education system.

Standard examinations – as opposed to school-based examinations – would still be the best way to measure one's performance in the academic. Major examinations such as the UPSR, PMR and SPM have to be standardised for proper recognition and let the school-based assessment be confined to non-major examinations as is presently practised. Let's not tamper with the existing approach which has long been proven to be effective.

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