

Muhyiddin's Creative Manipulation Of Data
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On 30 March 2012, Muhyiddin Yassin pronounced Malaysia as having better quality of education than United States (US), Britain and Germany. He based his statement on one partial study in the World Competitiveness Report by World Economic Forum (WEF) on quality of education. In that specific study, Malaysia was ranked 14th as opposed to Germany (17th), Britain (20th) and United States (26th).

However the above "rankings" were arrived by surveying 87 local businessmen with the question: "How well does the educational system in your country meet the needs of a competitive economy?" by rating it between a scale of 1 to 7.

This particular survey question was never intended by the WEF, nor is it in any way adequate to provide conclusive ratings on the quality of the Malaysian education system. However, the Education Minister, who is also our Deputy Prime Minister clutched at the straw to declare proudly that we have indeed performed better than Germany, Britain and the United States.

Muhyiddin has repeated the stunt 3 days ago when he cited a recent survey by Introspek Asia, which revealed yesterday that 55 per cent of Malaysian adults believe that our education system is comparable to other countries, while 35 per cent said it is "better than that of developed countries".

Once again, when we peel through the "surface" conclusions of the survey, it became crystal clear that the survey is again fundamentally deficient in measuring the quality of our education.

After studying the survey in detail, we can arrive at the conclusion that the results are pretty much meaningless because of the sample used for the survey.

The survey had 1,800 respondents, of which only 4.8% had qualifications of a university degree or more. On the other hand, 85.3% of these respondents had either SPM qualifications or less. Without prejudice to those who were unable to secure tertiary education due to circumstances beyond their control, this is perhaps the most inappropriate sample structure to ask about our Malaysian education system, if the intent was to have a measure of its quality.

Perhaps what is worse is, less than 5% of the sample has had no experience or even in-depth knowledge of education systems in developed countries. Hence the outcome of the survey as to whether "Malaysian adults agree that our education standard are comparable, better or much better than developed countries" is at best a trivia to analyse how Malaysians are shut off from the real world out there.

Ironically, the income status of the respondents – with 73.2% earning less than RM3,000 per month in itself proved the inadequacy of our education system to enable them to earn a higher income.

In essence, Muhyiddin is relying on the opinions of those who didn't get very far with their education to measure the standard of Malaysian education against those of developed countries. And the Education Minister used the result to boast about the achievements of his Ministry.

Muhyiddin has chosen to ignore the latest Performance for International Students Assessments (PISA) study conducted in 2010 showed that we are ranked in the bottom third in the world, as well as the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) data over 1999, 2003 and 2007 which proved that the standards in education has been declining drastically over the past decade.

Muhyiddin's complete lack of ability to understand simple surveys, the context of their conclusions and implications proves how unfit he is to become our Education Minister. By choosing to ignore reality or

failing to grasp the significance of survey results, we fear that our education system will be led into a cycle of perpetual decline that will cause irreparable damage to the future quality, productivity and earnings ability of our Malaysian students.

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