

Time for holistic relook at education system

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A NEW education plan to improve primary school pupils' proficiency in English is about to be tried out as a year-long pilot project in 50 schools. It will see Mathematics and Science lessons, of which there are seven and three periods respectively, turned into English lessons.

The Mathematics and Science teachers will continue teaching their pupils but their focus this time will be to make their pupils more comfortable with English. Effectively it will mean year one pupils will now do 18 periods of English per week from their present eight.

The programme is called ELITE or Early Literacy Through English. With so many recent innovations – like the recently launched National Education Blueprint 2006-2010) – and the virtual alphabet soup of plans and programmes like Kia2M, JQAF, Kafa, PIP, BCK, BTK, Mekar and Rimup that have been introduced by the Education Ministry it is little wonder that many people are quite confused with the present education system of the country.

It is also not surprising that every time a new adjustment is made some of these people will exclaim "what will they think of next!" Quite a number are wondering whether it is not far better to revamp the whole system and have a new one instead of making so many adjustments to the existing one.

For instance ELITE, just like the blueprint, is formulated in response to public complaints. Many people are quite unhappy with the way the teaching of Mathematics and Science in English is implemented and they have been quite vocal about this.

When that brainwave was being formulated into policy a number of educationists warned that there was just not enough English language teachers who could teach Mathematics and Science effectively to go around. In fact there was just not enough English language teachers. So others had to be roped in and the result was the pupils' learning of English, Mathematics and Science suffered.

A better way, as suggested by several educationists earlier after taking into cognisance the shortage of English teachers, was to start the teaching of Mathematics and Science in English at the secondary school level while improving the teaching of English in primary schools in preparation for them to learn the two subjects in English when they reach form one.

It may still be worthwhile to consider it even at this juncture. While ELITE may be manageable as a pilot for 50 schools, implementing it in more than 7,000 primary schools may pose quite a problem. Maybe the suggestion that a holistic look at the whole education system is worthwhile considering after all.