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UNDER the Government Transformation Programme's National Key Results Area for Education, there is the School Improvement Programme which looks at the four levers - principals, teachers, student and parents, and infrastructure. This is because under the NKRA for Education, the main aim is to go back to the basics and start a consolidated measure to improve the Malaysian education system from its core.

For starters, the GTP has taken a giant step to ensure there are enough pre-schools nationwide to instil the important literacy and numeracy skills. This is indeed a good thing but no matter how many thrusts and programmes and plans are drawn out, the education system and the results of education in the country will never move forward without quality teachers.

There is just no two ways about it and it has to be borne in mind that quality teachers are not born - they are made. Quality teachers will make quality education, and quality education will in return produce quality students and graduates who will make quality teachers. It is a cycle.

The quality of teachers has been discussed and debated for a long time. It is hoped under the GTP, the issue of quality of teachers would be given due attention and treated with utmost importance.

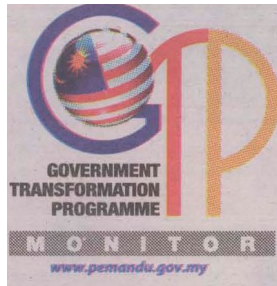
Although it is not easy to get good candidates from our present education system to create quality teachers, the Education Ministry has to start somewhere and all efforts to improve the quality of teachers should be lauded.

All those in charge of upgrading the education system would have to come together and be sincere in upgrading the quality of teachers.

The ministry should be the main driver and the education minister should be fully hands on to ensure the quality of teachers are not only upgraded but also continuously improved.

For that, the education portfolio, which

Creating quality teachers



> The main aim of the NKRA for Education is to improve our education system from its core

includes teachers' upliftment, should be an exclusive portfolio and free of interference other than from those with the interest of the education system at heart.

If at all the ministry needs a role model, it should look at the Sabah Social Welfare

Department (Kemas). Kemas

requires its kindergarten and nursery teachers to have at least a diploma in education. This is the attitude needed. Its director, Marsidi Katong, had said a diploma would improve the skills and knowledge of a teacher, resulting in high-quality early childhood education at kindergartens and nurseries nationwide.

Marsidi said that of the 864 Kemas pre-school teachers in Sabah, 361 have been sent to pursue a diploma at institutions of teacher education. So far, he said, 48 had received their diplomas in education and returned to their duties.

This is the way it should be. No doubt they would have been very shorthanded when the teachers went to pursue their courses, but in the long run, the quality would definitely improve.

The problem of quality teachers should be tackled from the entry point before the trainees are accepted into teacher training colleges.

I was part of a class of 40 trainee teachers in the early 1990s and only two had As in English in SPM. And after 15 years of teaching English in primary schools, many from that same class were still not able to speak or write English properly.

Many of us would not forget the uproar

The main thrusts of the NKRA for Education:

- **Increase** participation rate of pre-school (aged 4+ and 5+) children and improve the quality of the system by making all government and private pre-schools part of the national education system. Current enrolment rate stands at 72%;
- **Every** child will acquire basic literacy and numeracy after three years of primary education by 2012. Current literacy and numeracy rates stand at 65% and 74% respectively;
- **Create** high performing schools with ethos, character and a unique identity which continually push the boundaries of student excellence, and lift the performance of other schools in the system; and
- ? **Develop** a new performance based assessment to evaluate principals and head teachers with meaningful rewards and consequences for both top and bottom performers respectively.

created by an incensed parent when her child came home insisting that "leopard" was pronounced "li yo pat", knowledge imparted by her "trained" teacher. This is still happening and is not confined to those teaching English.

The government has to, first of all, ensure that when trainees are accepted into the colleges, they are vetted and only the best with the right qualifications and attitude are taken in.

The present teachers in colleges should be given courses by qualified instructors and even

sent abroad to do courses - just like how we used to send our teachers to Kirkby teacher training colleges in Britain in the early 1950s and 1960s.

Turning teacher training institutions into universities is not the answer unless the institutions are overhauled. Quality of teachers will not improve overnight merely by upgrading the certificate to a degree. What we need is injection of quality into teachers, especially the new batch of teachers-to-be.

Also, those in charge of improving the quality of teachers should understand that teaching is more than a job. In addition to competency, one needs to have the right attitude and passion. Therefore, teachers should be exposed to teaching and learning concepts and methods which will turn them into quality teachers.

One method is to become friends with the students - a method which is rare in our authoritarian traditional teaching methods. For example, in explaining that to persuade students to do quality schoolwork, teachers must first establish warm, totally non-coercive relationships with their students.

Eventhough the syllabus must be completed, teachers must start thinking and teach only useful materials; and move from teacher evaluation to student self-evaluation.

Further, the stress should be on the students acquiring the literacy and numeracy skills properly rather than just moving on with the whole class, thus individual attention to students who are weak while at the same time giving full attention to the whole class is a skill which must be picked up by our teachers.

Yes, all these courses and efforts would be costly, especially when the trainers and facilitators might have to be brought from the more successful Countries where education is accorded the highest priority.

The Education Ministry would do well if it brings the teachers' unions in to help it achieve its targets in the GTP. They are, after all, the knowers and the doers in this domain.

Also, pride and prejudice from those in positions high above should be put aside, if we want to really improve our education system. We are, after all, talking about the future of the country.