

MP questions alleged lack of open tender for new English textbooks

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The Ministry of Education (MOE) has been asked to explain why the new English textbooks had allegedly not been procured through open tender, unlike the previous ones.

Bukit Bendera MP Zairil Khir Johari said this week in Parliament that he had exposed MOE's 'incredulous decision' to use new "imported" Super Minds and Pulse 2 textbooks, to replace existing KSSR (Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah) and KSSM (Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah) textbooks for Year 1 and Form 1 students respectively.

The earlier textbooks had been approved "not long ago", through an open tender process, he said.

"While the local textbooks are subject to competitive open tenders, the purchase of the 'imported' textbooks through local publishers Pan Asia Publications for Super Minds and Desa Fikir for Pulse 2 were seemingly done by direct negotiation.

"Therefore, MOE owes the Malaysian public an explanation as to why they decided to replace the local textbooks with 'imported' ones at such short notice and without a proper tender procedure," he said in a statement today.

"This also begs another question: why decide to use new 'imported' books barely less than a year after local books had been approved and purchased?" asked Zairil (*photo*), who is also DAP parliamentary spokesperson for education, science and technology.

When contacted, Zairil told *Malaysiakini* he had been informed about the purported lack of tender from "inside sources" and hoped the ministry could clarify the matter.

"For local textbooks, tenders are conducted every year. But there was no tender called for these imported books," he told *Malaysiakini* in a message.

Earlier this week, Zairil **slammed** the ministry for the switch to the more expensive books, which he said was unjustified as they were also printed locally despite the content being from European sources.

The previous texts would cost an estimated RM7.1 million based on current student enrolment figures, he said, while the two new books would cost an estimated RM33 million if supplied to all Year 1 and Form 1 students nationwide.

Students to go to the UK?

On Thursday, Zairil also pointed out how the texts appeared to have been copied wholesale from the originals, including references and examples that were not familiar to locals, such as a trip by American Amish youths to London.

Today, he continued to criticise the new books' foreign content and contexts specifically meant for the home countries' users.

Examples he cited ranged from specific questions based on Scotland's Edinburgh Fringe Festival and asking students to volunteer themselves over the weekend by helping out at Chester Zoo or planting flowers at Dartmoor National Park in the UK.

“I don't think one weekend is enough if our students really do attempt to engage in these activities, what with the long travel time required.

“Is it quite unbelievable that MOE can approve such content,” said Zairil.

He also pointed out “almost every page in the textbooks” referred to digital content that is not supplied with the Malaysian versions.

“In other words, MOE has purchased these textbooks without their accompanying digital content, even though these books cost four times more than their local counterparts.”

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