

Gabungan Bertindak Malaysia (GBM)

Submission

on

Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025

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INTRODUCTION

GBM is a non-partisan, multi-ethnic and multi-religious coalition of twenty five civil society organizations. During the past year its partner organizations have undertaken various in-depth studies and reviews of the National Education System.

GBM and its working partners welcome the Ministry of Education's initiative in preparing a consultative and inclusive Malaysia Educational Blueprint 2013-2025. Whilst we are appreciative of the Ministry's efforts at educational reform, we would like to express our deep concern that the Education Blueprint is being finalized without adequately taking into consideration the findings and recommendations of civil society organizations.

Many of our concerns touch on crucial aspects of the Education Blueprint such as the national education philosophy, vocational education, vernacular education, the teaching of languages, the dropout issue and the teaching of history, geography and literature.

To ensure that our concerns and recommendations are fully reflected in the final Education Blueprint we call on the Ministry of Education to:

1. extend the closing date of Education Blueprint consultation to 31st March, 2013 so as to provide the public with more time to study the draft. It would be unwise, given the importance of the subject, to finalise the Education Blueprint in haste.
2. convene a meeting for us to present our recommendations.

We look forward to receiving a positive response.

In the meantime we are submitting our list of priority concerns and recommendations to the Ministry of Education.

1. EDUCATION MISSION AND PHILOSOPHY

1.1 (Executive Summary E-4) The mission of education in the country should aim at releasing and empowering capabilities, developing analytical abilities, instilling confidence in the individual's mental and physical prowess, and providing the skills and knowledge as well as spiritual and ethical concerns that will enable the individual to become a self-motivating agent of change, serving the best interests of the individual and the community.

1.2 A balanced educational system should be our goal. To achieve the aspirations of *JERI (jasmani, emosi, rohani, intelek)* as contained in the *Falsafah Pendidikan Kebangsaan* or National Philosophy of Education, value-based education should be provided so as to encompass human, physical, religious and spiritual aspects.

1.3 Students' character is greatly influenced by the parents, the schools and the society at large. The parents, schools and community should work together to mould the character of the students.

2. EQUITY CONCERNS

2.1 (Chapter 3: 3-20) The focus of education should go beyond the achievement of the top learners to encompass the advancement or progress of weaker learners and the whole cohort group of learners to the maximum extent possible. Schools should be tasked to reduce the number of drop-outs or under-achievers and provided with adequate support and resources.

2.2 The Education Blueprint emphasis is elitist and insufficient emphasis is given to the slow learners and students from the disadvantaged social and economic backgrounds.

2.3 Special support should be given to disadvantaged children. While some middle- and upper-class parents can move their children to better schools, such choice is usually unavailable to lower income and rural-based parents. This has inhibited

upward social mobility for the poorer groups. Instead of addressing these inequalities at a later stage through ethnic based affirmative action, it would be more productive for the government to channel more fund and resources to schools where the disadvantaged children are enrolled.

2.4 Every school should enjoy adequate financial allocation on an equal basis such that even those with very low enrolment in sparsely populated areas are not marginalized. Reduction of drop-outs and under-achievers should be made a key performance indicator (KPI) in the evaluation of schools.

3. EQUALITY CONCERNS

3.1 (New Recommendation) All education streams should be recognized as “national schools” and be entitled to equal treatment.

3.2 (New Recommendation) New educational streams, including that in English or other vernacular medium, should be allowed if there is a demand from a sizeable number of parents.

3.3 (Chapter 2: 2-3) All non-commercially run schools, be it vernacular, religious or private (such as Chinese Independent Schools or Sekolah Rendah/Menengah Islam), should be recognized as part of the National Education System and should be entitled to financial allocations and other supports.

3.4 (New Recommendation) Pre-school, primary, secondary, college and university for Chinese, English, Tamil, Iban, Kadazan and Dusun languages should be allowed, with the proviso that the existing streams of schools are not affected.

3.5 (Chapter 7: 7-6) The existence of vernacular schools is a right provided for in the Federal Constitution. The Ministry must ensure that the vernacular schools and their students as citizens of the country receive equal treatment, grow and develop together with national schools.

4. UNITY CONCERNS

- 4.1 (Chapter 3: 3-21) Programmes that promote national integration and unity such as joint co-curricular activities must involve all schools.
- 4.2 (Chapter 3: 3-21) The government must take immediate and stern action to address the growing problems of racism and religious prejudice in schools. These problems should not be attributed to the existence of vernacular schools.
- 4.3 (New Recommendation) The Biro Tata Negara (BTN) has negatively affected the attitude of teachers, civil servants and students. It should be revamped to promote genuine national integration and unity.

5. GENDER PERSPECTIVE

- 5.1 (Chapter 3: Exhibit 3-26) Although dropout rates for boys are higher than for girls, girls should not be penalised for their success. Programmes and resources should be channeled to both groups equally. Girls and boys should be treated equally. This must be reflected in our education system.
- 5.2 (New Recommendation) Intake into TVET courses of all kinds, such as hair dressing and cosmetic make up, tailoring, cooking, welding, electrical and mechanical, should be equally opened to both girls and boys.
- 5.3 (New Recommendation) The concept of substantive equality as provided under Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), an international convention ratified by the Government in 1995 should be applied at all levels from pre-schools to tertiary education.

6. DECENTRALISATION OF EDUCATION

- 6.1 (New Recommendation) Public education is over centralized with the constitutional power on education solely within the federal government. The

responsibility for service delivery should be devolved to state and local governments. Moreover, service delivery decisions and functions can be further delegated to the level of the school. This will enable a more responsive approach at local level between the school and the community for the betterment of all concerned. Issues of management capacity, funding and system support must be reformed to realize the positive potential of decentralization.

Education should be made a Concurrent Subject in the Ninth Schedule of the Federal Constitution so that education becomes a field of responsibility of state governments and the local authorities under them with the federal government acting in formulating policy, coordinating, facilitating and supportive role.

7. PLANNING SYSTEM

7.1 (New Recommendation) The demographic growth and parental preferences must be given priority in school planning. The whole planning process should be transparent, objective and systematic.

7.2 (New Recommendation) An Education Commission should be established to monitor policy and all provisions of education. This will help to ensure that implementation of education policy is free from discrimination as provided for in the Federal Constitution.

7.3 (New Recommendation) Scholarships should be given to all deserving students irrespective of ethnicity or religion.

7.4 (New Recommendation) At all levels of administration of the Ministry of Education, in particular the Jabatan Pelajaran Negeri (JPN), there shall be personnel who are fluent in Chinese, Tamil or other local languages to facilitate communication.

8. TEACHING STANDARDS

- 8.1 (New Recommendation) Teachers are pillars of the education system and as such they must be trained to become professional educators, fully supporting the National Philosophy of Education.
- 8.2 (New Recommendation) A short and long-term plan should be made to train enough teachers of quality for schools of all educational streams, especially those marginalized or disadvantaged. The main medium of instruction for teacher training should be in the mother tongue language of the target learners.
- 8.3 (New Recommendation) The recruitment and promotion of teachers and senior officials must be solely based on merit and qualification. Having any explicit or implicit quota is irrational and self-defeating as the nation's younger generation will then be denied the tutelage of the brightest minds.

9. ASSESSMENT AND EXAMINATION ISSUES

- 9.1 (Chapter 3: 3-5) The deterioration of Malaysian education is partly due to lower standards of assessment that fail to reflect the real achievement of students. Lowered standards have provided a false sense of student achievement to parents and teachers and the community at large.
- 9.2 (New Recommendation) The examination authorities must publish full report to demonstrate transparency and accountability in public examination, especially high stake examinations such as SPM, STPM, and Matriculation.
- 9.3 (Chapter 7: Exhibit 7-1) The present pre-entry qualification to public universities which equates matriculation to STPM as an entry requirement is an anomaly and has led to differential standards. The matriculation system is long overdue for reexamination and reform.

9.4 (New Recommendation) Official recognition should be accorded to the existing Chinese independent schools and their United Examination Certificate (UEC) should also be recognized by the government. The UEC Certificate is already recognized in many other countries.

9.5 (New Recommendation) The grading of SPM Chinese subject examination should be reviewed. It has been consistently reported that students have received lower grades than their normal performance.

10. LANGUAGE ISSUES/REMOVE CLASS

10.1 Learning of languages other than Bahasa Malaysia, English, Chinese and Tamil (such as Arabic, French, Spanish) should be made as convenient as possible.

10.2 (Chapter 4: 4-9) The proposals requiring the “National-type” primary schools to switch to the same Bahasa Malaysia language curriculum as National schools and to do away with the Remove class by 2017 should be withdrawn.

To achieve the desired objective of raising the standards of teaching and learning in the “National-type” primary schools, the government should carry out a comprehensive study on current remove classes and introduce reforms to improve their standards instead of abolishing it. In the longer term, improvements should be made such that vernacular schools achieve comparable standards in Bahasa Malaysia.

10.3 (New Recommendation) The teaching of Bahasa Malaysia and English for the vernacular schools should be taught as a second language and an effective teaching method should be adopted. Language teachers should be trained to meet the needs of these vernacular schools.

11. CURRICULUM ISSUES

11.1 (New Recommendation) The curriculum of schools should be subjected to regular review to ensure that they are effective in producing learners who are

of high integrity and responsive to the changing social and market needs. At the core of the curriculum, there should be principles and practices that nurture the critical and innovative thinking of the learners.

11.2 (New Recommendation) The curricula of history, geography, literature and other subjects should provide adequate and unbiased knowledge of all different parts of the world and major civilizations as well as the various ethnic groups in Malaysia.

11.3 (New Recommendation) The introduction of history as a subject in lower forms and as a compulsory pass subject for SPM should not be implemented. The current syllabus of history should be reviewed to reflect the multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious make up of the nation.

11.4 (New Recommendation) Teaching of Pupil's Own Religion should be included in the standard curriculum. This can be done by utilizing the current teaching hours for Agama and Moral classes for the teaching of Pupil's Own Religion and a common class that imparts understanding of religions, cultures and humanities. Such a measure is designed to recognise the diversity of Malaysian society and to encourage understanding and thus, harmony amongst students of different religions and faiths.

11.5 (New Recommendation) Appreciation of multiculturalism and human diversity should be included in the curriculum, either on its own or as part of some humanity courses. This would help learners to examine their attitudes towards other ethnic groups and learn about the dynamics of prejudice and racism and how to deal with them in the classroom.

12. SEKOLAH MENENGAH JENIS KEBANGSAAN (CONFORMING)

12.1 (New Recommendation) The shortage of Chinese language trained teachers has been a long standing unresolved issue. It is alarming to note that the

number of teachers in this category has fallen from 17% in 2000 to 14% in 2012. Top priority should be given to resolve this issue without any further delay.

12.2 (New Recommendation) The principals and vice-principals of conforming schools must possess minimum credit in SPM Chinese subject to ensure they are proficient in Chinese language. The Board of Directors shall be the authority to recommend these two important personnel to the Ministry of Education.

12.3 (New Recommendation) The government should fulfil its promise of maintaining Chinese culture in the SMJK. For this purpose, 50% of the teachers in SMJK must be proficient in Mandarin and knowledgeable in Chinese culture.

12.4 (New Recommendation) The counseling teachers in SMJK must know Mandarin and be knowledgeable in Chinese culture.

12.5 (New Recommendation) Every school should be provided with a well-stocked library and attended to by staff fluent in Mandarin.

12.6 (New Recommendation) The government should give SMJK its full entitlement as agreed to in the 60's when they were made to conform as national schools, specifically the following:

a) Restore their position and legal status;

b) Recognise the status of SMJK irrespective of whoever owns the land.

12.7 (New Recommendation) Only those students from the Chinese National-type primary schools should be admitted to Form 1 in SMJK. This will enable the student to adapt easily to the new environment and be better prepared for the Form 5 Chinese subject examination.

12.8 (New Recommendation) SMJK is becoming more popular as a school of choice for Malaysian parents. To accommodate the increasing student population,

the government must build new SMJK in places where they are required and they must be accorded government funding.

13. PRE-SCHOOL

13.1 (Chapter 7: 7-4) The Ministry of Education has a duty to provide pre-school education to every child aged 4 to 5 years old as well as to ensure day care centres for young children. This should be done without any discrimination against any community, parents or children.

13.2 (New Recommendation) Pre-school and primary education should be allocated per capita funding, without discrimination, to enable every student to acquire basic education and skills in a conducive environment. More state-run pre-school institutions should be set up to ensure universal access.

13.3 (New Recommendation) Pre-school and primary education should be given free to all children, including the children of foreigners and stateless persons.

13.4 (New Recommendation) Pre-school and primary education should enable a strong basic education in reading, writing and arithmetic that will enable all children to further develop these skills at higher levels.

14. TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION TRAINING (TVET)

14.1 (Chapter 7: 7-7) Technical and Vocational education training (TVET) institutions should be upgraded and their status enhanced. Government TVET institutions must be made conducive to and accommodative of the needs of our multi-lingual, multicultural and multi-religious students. They should be set up in areas where particular communities are concentrated.

14.2 (New Recommendation) Consideration should be given to assigning students to Pendidikan Asas Vokasional (PAV or Basic Vocational Education) courses based on their achievement in the UPSR examination. At the same time, we

should allow the parents or students who do not agree with the assignment to withdraw from PAV.

14.3 (New Recommendation) All government TVET institutions should be placed under Ministry of Education.

14.4 (Chapter 7: Exhibit 7-9) Public TEVT schools should offer various courses for both low-cost and high-technology industries.

15. TRUST SCHOOL (SEKOLAH AMANAH)

15.1 (Chapter 7: 7-22, 7-23, 7-24) The Trust School Concept should not be implemented hastily but instead should be open for public consultation. It should address the fear of commercialization of education which may eventually result in the government abandoning its educational obligation to cater for all groups. Implementation of trust schools also raises the specter of cronyism.