The Star

Youths' wish list for new syllabus

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THE Education Ministry is working out a new national school curriculum in collaboration with stakeholders, it says recently.



In a statement on Aug 24, the Ministry said it had engaged in 21 sessions through the Curriculum Convention with 1,600 individuals comprising teachers, lecturers, parents, non-governmental organisations and education sector players.
In response to public concerns on the suitability of some subtopics for schoolchildren, it said a review would be done.

The Ministry also ran the "2027 Schooling Curriculum Implementation Survey" from Aug 25 to Sept 15.

It was aimed at inviting members of the public to give their feedback on the current school syllabus in preparation of the 2027 school syllabus.

While the adults have much to say about the hot button topic, what about the students themselves? Here, two youths give their take.

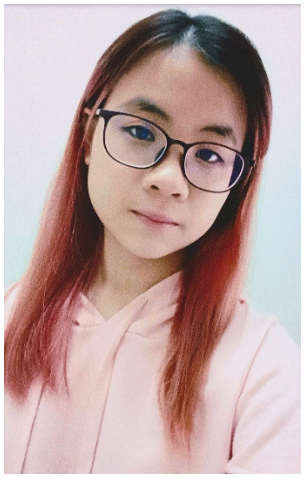
More emphasis on soft skills

I applaud the Ministry's effort to provide an education that is relevant to students' needs.

An effective transformation of our national education system is highly needed to ensure that the nation's future leaders are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to steer the country towards growth and development.

Currently, subjects like Mathematics and Science emphasise theoretical concepts, which are a burden to primary and secondary school students.

These students should instead be exposed to more practical applications of the subject knowledge, which would help ignite their interest and encourage engagement.



The more complicated aspects, such as theories and formulas, should be reserved for higher education when students decide to specialise in particular fields.

It can be seen that our current education system tends to prioritise specialised knowledge over essential soft skills. In relation to that, I would suggest the integration of more essential life skills, such as communication skills and leadership skills, into our curriculum.

Charis

While it is undeniable that acquiring specialised skills, such as chemistry and computer science, is critical for students to explore potential career paths, life skills are vital in shaping potential leaders in our country.

Students must be equally equipped with soft skills that aid in their abilities to have more meaningful and effective interactions with others. This includes their abilities to resolve conflicts, communicate ideas and make critical decisions.

Such core skills benefit everyone, regardless of career, because every occupation involves social interactions and interpersonal relationships.

Our education system at present appears to revolve around mental cognition and criterion-based assessments, which often discourage students who are lacking academically despite their achievements beyond academics.

This underscores the urgent need to reevaluate our assessment methods and how students are valued and recognised.

This is not to put criterion-based assessments in a bad light but they should go hand in hand with other means of appraisal, such as practical coursework and co-curricular achievements.

This allows us to acknowledge students not only for their academic accomplishments, but also for their talents showcased outside of traditional classrooms, such as participating in debate teams and sports activities.

Moreover, in an education system heavily reliant on assessments, self-development is an element that deserves greater attention in our curriculum.

This attention is needed to enhance personal identity and socio-emotional development among our youths, especially with their extreme exposure to pressures like academic demands and materialistic desires.

Hence, our education system should emphasise the significance of religious and moral studies in shaping individuals' intrinsic values.

Religious and moral education can serve as a medium for our youths to explore and develop themselves holistically, ultimately helping them find deeper meaning in life.

This approach ensures that the younger generation is grounded by a strong understanding of themselves and their core beliefs, making them less susceptible to extrinsic influences.

I see the ongoing transitional effort by the Ministry as a promising opportunity for our nation to march towards a future characterised by holistically developed citizens.

This should be a joint effort from both the government and our citizens, especially those who will primarily be affected by the amendments. – **Charis Chiang En-Hui, 20, Kuala Lumpur**

Reducing difficulty not the answer

Teachers' opinions matter the most in determining the syllabus, instead of parents' and students'. Their years of teaching experience enable them to gauge students' level of understanding better than anyone else.

The abolishment of exams for Year One to Year Three pupils was a smart move by the Ministry as it takes the pressure off pupils and allow them to enjoy learning.



But what exactly are primary school pupils learning? Year One pupils are already learning multiplication, while those in Year Two are being taught the factors of the decline of discipline among students and their counterparts in Year Five are learning about financial literacy.

Nieha

Yes, these topics are important but isn't it too early to be teaching multiplication to Year One pupils, for example?

Reducing the difficulty of the entire syllabus is not the answer but reshuffling the topics according to the level that is suitable for the age groups is much needed. This allows the pupils' academic growth to be more organic.The amount of content in subjects for the upper secondary level should also be cut down. Every year, teachers struggle to finish the syllabus for Forms Four and Five.

During the year I was to sit for my Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) exams, my teachers completed the syllabus only a week before the trials. They were not to blame at all, because it's impossible to cover a syllabus with so much content in just 10 months.

Upper secondary students spend an inordinate amount of time juggling eight to nine subjects, not to mention the ones who take extra subjects.

Switching your attention from one subject to another is not easy at all. Imagine doing that for eight subjects with so much to absorb every day.

That said, I believe that abolishing the Primary School Achievement Test (UPSR) and the Form Three Assessment (PT3) is a mistake.

The Ministry's approach to introduce school-based assessment (PBS) in place of an exam-based system is beneficial for the holistic development of students.

The downside of this approach is that students start to laze away as they don't need to study for exams anymore.

Instead, the Ministry should adopt the tertiary education system by introducing 50% continuous assessment and 50% summative assessment. Continuous assessment will be equivalent to PBS and summative assessment will be final exams like the PT3 and the SPM.

Lastly, implement the Dual Language Programme (DLP) in every national school. We need to bring back the English language as the medium for Science and Maths. This helps in increasing the economic competency of Malaysia in the future.

Teachers must also teach these two subjects solely in English. Although teaching in students' native languages helps them understand better, it will not help them to answer exam questions. It simply causes confusion as they need to switch between languages.

All in all, making the entire syllabus easier is not the answer. We should not encourage our future leaders to settle for mediocrity when they can settle for so much more.
– **Nieha Mitrallini, 20, Melaka**
Both Charis and Nieha are participants of the BRATs Young Journalist Programme run by The Star's Newspaper-in-Education (Star-NiE) team. To join Star-NiE's online youth community, go to facebook.com/niebrats.

Now that you have read the article, test your understanding by carrying out the following English language activities.

1. With an activity partner, pick out three points each from Charis' and Nieha's comments. Then, role-play their conversation with each other on the changes needed in the national school curriculum. Have fun!

2. What is your own wish list for your school syllabus? Create a list. How similar or different is your list from your activity partner's?

The Star's Newspaper-in-Education (Star-NiE) programme promotes the use of English language in primary and secondary schools nationwide. For Star-NiE enquiries, email starnie@thestar.com.my.