

COMMENT

Raising world-class teachers

HIGHER STANDARDS:
All educators must equip themselves with at least a master's degree

TRUE leadership at any level, in any domain, is selfless and has strategic boldness undeterred by detractors. The intention and initiative for transformation articulated by true leaders are founded on virtuous thought.

Leaders become great when they use imagination with sincerity, transparently, with no covert motives and are able to inspire and mobilise people to a common vision to achieve transformational goals.

Human history is full of the foresight and transformative commitments of leaders, such as Abraham Lincoln for the abolition of slavery, John F. Kennedy for man's space explorations and Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad for Vision 2020.

In Malaysian education, Tun Musa Hitam drove the comprehen-

sive transformation of the primary and secondary curriculum in use; Datuk Seri Najib Razak embedded private education in the education system and Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor focused on talents of the gifted. Most of these actions were driven against odds and resistance.

If we are serious about honing the potential of every person and developing one of the world's best education systems, we have to take strategic actions and go beyond rhetoric and altercations. There should be focus on teacher attitude, competencies and performance. We should have one of the best teaching forces in the world.

We took more than 40 years after independence before we decided to articulate and implement the policy that all teachers are university graduates.

We must now have the resolve that all Malaysian teachers must have master's degrees and thus be an example to all in Malaysia and to the world. The quality of the education system will not be greater than the quality of the teaching force.

The policy suggestion is not new.

It was implemented by Institut Aminuddin Baki and the Education Ministry in the 1990s when thousands of teachers obtained their master's degrees through twinning programmes with universities abroad and locally.

In many ways, it is easier to ensure that teachers obtain the master's degree than the undergraduate first degree. An undergraduate degree takes more than four years of full time and part-time study, and requires 145 credits. A master's degree requires 32 credits.

Teachers will have more than 35 years of their career to complete the master's degree. With accredited continuous development and in-service training, which are accredited, a large portion of the credits can be transferred towards the master's degree. From the cohort of master's degree teachers will come those who would continue to pursue doctoral degrees.

We now have several facilitative and strategic policy agenda as follows:

THE democratisation of higher education;

LIFELONG learning and development of knowledge workers;

THE teaching profession as the profession of choice; and,

MALAYSIAN education programme standards define teachers not just as operatives but also as scholar teachers who would raise the level of education in the knowledge society.

There are now expanded capacities of higher education to provide master's degrees in relevant fields. Graduate teachers are required to have at least master's but increasingly doctoral degrees. There must be no large gaps between teachers in educational institutions, teachers' training colleges and universities if we are to be a strong knowledge society.

With teachers having master's degrees, the profession will be raised to a higher professional stature and many of the 11 thrusts of the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2015 can be achieved.

The spillover impact of teachers having master's degrees will be that they are catalysts to resolve three of the long-standing challenges in Malaysian society, namely the development of a reading culture, a research culture and writing culture.

When teachers acquire higher

degrees, they will always be up to date and more confident in guiding the next generation of learners, including those digital natives with information at their fingertips.

If we do not make the strategic policy decision, other nations will make the decision for their society, and we will be in awe and eventually follow what we consider to be their best practices, although we have encountered those ideas and initiatives earlier, and failed to make the significant decisions. Finland and Singapore have already begun the journey.

Leaders and advisers must listen to people who have vision, perspective, deep knowledge, those people who know, and not those with negative minds, with self-defeating logic, with personal psychological and intellectual baggage and barriers projected onto the nation.

Leadership failure is typically, doing too much too soon, too little too late and not doing what should be done as responsible during the leadership watch.

Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe intuits: "Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it."

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