

Roundtable Discussion on PPSMI

Friday 17 July 2009

3:00p.m. – 6:00p.m.

Seminar Room 1&2, Wawasan Open University,
Kuala Lumpur Regional Centre

Roundtable Report

For the PPSMI roundtable discussion, there were three speakers who presented on the subject of PPSMI.

The first speaker was **Prof. Dr. Kuldip Kaur** who presented the following:

1. Standard of education must be raised. If the standard is good, there will be less complains about PPSMI. There is a cry for good education and good teachers.
2. Three questions were raised:
 - Firstly, how satisfied are we that schools have created a learned society? Whether 18, 19 year olds can use intellect critical thinking.
 - Secondly, how confident we are that content is delivered at the highest level. Have to consider whether there is sufficient debate and discussion and deliberation.
 - Thirdly, are we contended with the level of literacy, especially mathematics, science and English literacy? Retrieval is good, but how is the interpretation of knowledge, can we create new ideas, concepts.
3. Therefore the way ahead, irrespective of what language, we need to make schools matter. First is the going to school. This involves the wearing of uniforms, attendance and syllabus. Second is tuition. We have institutionalized tuition. The question arises as to whether we need tuition if our schools are good.
4. The other problem in primary school is the prescribing pedagogy, meaning there is only one way and one answer, also known as the prescriptivist method.
5. There is also the need to make school less exam-oriented. Instead of gauge learning, it is more to answering exams. The actual work that the teacher does; learning, explaining context must be more. Qualitative is more important than quantitative.
6. There is a need for a more participative role rather than central role. This will enable us to know our focus.

The second speaker was **Prof. Dr. John Arul Phillips** who presented the following:

1. The distinct feature from other systems, every time we see classes, the teacher is standing, holding a textbook and teaching the classroom, typical way.
2. Firstly, the philosophy behind the move was to enhance understanding in science and mathematics.
3. Second was to enhance proficiency in English.
4. The trouble with education is that people discuss everything in offices, behind four walls. The way they are designed and implemented, education is suppose to spread to all but is done in such a short time and politically.
5. In Chinese schools the only of its kind in the world where a subject is taught in 2 languages. As a result students don't have a life.
6. There is only talk about urban schools. Sarawak, Sabah, and Kelantan are left out. There English is the third language. We forget that they don't use English, and don't listen to English stations or radios. They are more inclined to see English as being taught as a second language.
7. Shouldn't make English an exam as it'll be exam oriented again. Teachers will only concentrate on the 60 percent while the other 40 will be left behind.
8. More seriously have to make classes smaller.
9. In Europe English is the third language but they are still proficient.
10. Have to move away from centralize system.
11. It has to be contextual. If teaching an Iban child, it has to be different. The way we train the teachers, because of centralization, many just follow.
12. In terms of higher education, there are problems. Some say using English is against the constitution. English cannot be used but most universities use English.
13. The pertinent question is whether we have the desire, as in Japan, and Taiwan they carry a dictionary everywhere they go.

The third speaker was **Dr. Ganakumaran Subramaniam** who presented the following:

1. The rationale behind the usage of English was the government's concern to build human capital as cutting-edge technology and knowledge comes hot in English.
2. Was surprise at the removal of English as a medium of instruction when results were not good as that was not the purpose
3. The policy has made a small difference but not a negative difference.
4. The problem was everyone was not committed. Many thought that it would be debated again and contemplating when the switch back will happen again.
5. Another thing was when the language switched, methodology must also be switched. Facilities were given but people were not taught how to use these facilities. In other countries the difference of methodologies used could be seen.
6. The short notice in which it was implemented was the reason why it failed. This is the same as the 1-4-1-4 formula. We are doing now the same mistake we have done the last time.
7. There is also the worry on accessibility but there are others who say that if you don't understand in the first place there is no point in accessibility. UNESCO has said that mother tongue is better but if that were the case in Malaysia, Indians would have to go to Tamil schools, Chinese must go to Chinese schools and national integration will be difficult.
8. Other countries have followed Malaysia in the usage of English in science and mathematics. Philippines, Vietnam, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Mexico, Netherlands, and Belgium included. Fluency is important, but more importantly is the concept and ideas.
9. This not to say mother tongue is abandoned. At the age of 14, Singapore has the most people who can understand science concepts; English is used as the medium without abandoning mother tongue.
10. The government policy of reverting back but to focus on English will also fail. Adding 2 hours will not improve anything if the other things don't change.
11. PPSMI has improved the usage of the English language. A good command of English is important to succeed in mathematics and science. Now the motivation to learn and improve is no longer there.
12. The gap between the haves and the haves-not will widen.

Recommendations

Allow options

1. Make schools that use English as a medium of instruction, or schools that use English to teach science and mathematics, an option available to the public
2. Allow choice to use English in secondary schools

On the PPSMI implementation

1. Create incentives for the usage of English, as without incentives nothing will improve (e.g. teaching of science and mathematics in English)
2. Take steps to accommodate and facilitate students who will be going to Form 4 in 2012.
3. Before scrapping any policy, allow a cycle to take place. 6-7 years is not enough. Need to see students through the education policy.

Quality Education

1. Enhancing the quality of education is more important, regardless of whatever language used.
2. Encourage or let the best people or crème de la crème become teachers.

On English Teachers

1. There is a need for more English teachers, science teachers; government has to bring in more.
2. Bring back TESL teachers.

On English Lessons

1. Proposal to teach grammar explicitly
2. Changing the culture of don't want or against English
3. Do not increase periods for English and then reduce periods for other subjects.

On the Education System as a whole

1. If want to do policies, don't let politicians do. Refer to professional educationists.
2. The other thing is encourage and allow democratic participation in decision making.
3. Make sure schools ensure the improvement of English. Then measure or equate them with the national benchmark, whether they conform to it.
4. Build data on an individual basis, with on-going evaluation review/assessment.
5. Create a feedback system.
6. Look at skills and competency to be achieved at each level.
7. Reduce students to 30 per class
8. Consider bilingual tertiary education. E.g. China: one subject: two books in different languages
9. Different mediums of instruction do not lead to or hinder disunity. Government policies do.
10. The usages of Mother tongue, go ahead, but have to be good in it.