

Teacher training colleges in wrong 'place'

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Comment

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AS Malaysia looks for a new economic model to enable it to become a high-income country, it is inevitable that the current education system must be reviewed, if not changed. Time and time again, history has shown that economic and education systems change in tandem with one another.

More frequently, education leads the way for a new economic model.

Thus, the current education system that resembles an assembly line has outlived its usefulness in trying to spur the future economic system which is largely based on creativity and innovation. And worse, if we are seeking a more sustainable economic model inspired by creative knowledge and technologies.

Therefore Malaysia's recent request from Unesco to help review the country's education system is a bold move.

Bold, because reviewing an education system is a hugely complex undertaking, particularly when the deputy prime minister-cum-education minister recognises that "education must move in tandem with, if possible ahead of, what's happening around the world".

In not so many words, he is alluding to the futuristic role of education that can cause what is often referred to as "creative destruction" in order to allow for a new and different system to emerge.

The process is no less transformational and requires a change throughout the system from its inception.

Changing just the primary education for example, without looking into what pre-school has, too often is a waste of time.



Malaysia's recent request from Unesco to help review the country's education system is a bold move.

So is the case for the subsequent levels of education. And there can be no other body that is authoritative enough to do this given that Unesco is the lead agency that is mandated to ensure that education, in the context of science and culture, is relevant for the future generations.

At the very least, during such a comprehensive review, the system is properly aligned and supports, if not enhances one another.

It should be able to iron out any anomaly or "kink" in the whole system as such.

One rather obvious long-standing example perhaps relates to the teachers' education which is now under the ambit of the Education Ministry, instead of the Higher Education Ministry.

At the time when the original Education Ministry was cleaved into two, teacher education came under the new Education Ministry.

And teacher training colleges have been turned into what is called Institut Pendidikan Guru (IPG) that are entrusted with the power of awarding university degrees in education.

The apparent reason for this may be due to the interconnection between schools and teachers. So if educating schoolchildren is under the Education Ministry's portfolio, it could be rationalised that the same would apply to teacher education, to the extent of awarding the relevant degrees.

Unfortunately, this notion alone is odd, since degree-awarding institutions by definition should be under the Higher Education Ministry, which is also the legitimate body to confer recognition to all other university degrees in Malaysia without exception.

Even Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia is placed under the Higher Education Ministry, rather than the Ministry of Defence for the same reason. So should be the case for IPG and the like.

Other reasons to advocate the move include the fact that universities by nature are very academically diffused institutions, encompassing various fields of studies, consultancy and research among the core activities.

In this case, Universiti Perguruan Sultan Idris (UPSI) is no exception, which is not the case for many if not most of the IPGs.

The concern here is that student-teachers (the fountainhead of education) who are not fully exposed to such a university milieu would not reap the full benefits that it offers, namely the breath of knowledge acquired, albeit informally when interacting with the diverse campus population.

And this could prove to be a disadvantage, socially at least, as compared to if they were to be in a university before the separation took place.

Moreover, in the days of knowledge trans-disciplinarity and convergence, the disadvantage can be a real concern in the education of teachers for the future.

Clearly on the logistics side, many of the education faculties in the local universities today are held in abeyance because of the seemingly "duplicative" move.

The separation of the Education Ministry has actually put a large question mark on the need to build such faculties in the first place.

Or more appropriately, the creation of IPGs just because they are to be placed under the Education Ministry.

Consequently, the prevailing education faculties are not optimally used, and worse, could lead to closure when it comes to the crunch.

This is something which could have been easily avoided if only teachers' education is more comprehensively thought of in the national context rather than in silos of the various ministries.

As it stands today, not to have IPG under the Higher Education Ministry, let alone creating it, seems redundant and is not an academically-sound decision.

This is the one point that needs to be boldly reviewed for the betterment of Malaysian education.

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