

Parents' Voices Unheard: An Evaluation of National Education Dialogue

Background

- Under the leadership of YAB Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, the Ministry of Education is conducting a major review of our national education policy. This review is perhaps the most important exercise on education that the government is undertaking today. It is indeed most welcome.
- The review comprises several different stages, which can be simplified as follows:

Time	Activity	Output
August 2011 – March 2012	Commissioned research and studies, not directly involving members of the public.	Laporan Penilaian Sistem Pendidikan Negara (Education System Review: Malaysia) which is a major report presented to Ministry of Education, outlining nine key themes that must be addressed.
April – August 2012	National Education Dialogue series in major cities of all states to gather feedback and inputs from the public.	Combined with the report above, an early plan would be announced.
September – December 2012	Further consultations and research	New national education “blueprint” that may be applicable for at least the next 15 years.

Note: This table is heavily simplified in order to give a “big picture” of the full process.

- This Policy Ideas looks specifically at the public engagement process that has taken place so far, especially the National Education Dialogue Series.

How the Ministry of Education is engaging with the public

- The main method of public engagement so far is through the National Education Dialogue Series, which is being held in 15 major cities around Malaysia. Eight dialogues in five states have already taken place, and eight more will be held (Table A).
- The Ministry has also set up a website (www.myedureview.com), Facebook page and Twitter account.
- By far the public dialogues have been more successful in attracting inputs. Up to today (30 May 2012) we estimate that at least 4500 people have attended the dialogues. The event in Putrajaya attracted around 1000 participants, while the rest had roughly 400 – 800 each.
- However, the Facebook page only has 451 “likes” while the Twitter account only has 88 followers.



- Each dialogue event takes around 3 hours and follows the same format:
 - o Brief opening remark by chairperson
 - o Audience providing inputs
 - o Brief conclusion from the chairperson
- There are also smaller, more focused meetings with invited stakeholders held by the Ministry to supplement the above. However, these meetings are not within the scope of this Policy Ideas.

Table A

Date	Place
29 April	Putrajaya
6 May	Perak
12 May	Perlis and Kedah
19 May	Sabah
26 May	Sarawak
2 June	Negeri Sembilan and Melaka
9 June	Selangor
16 June	Pulau Pinang
23 June	Pahang
30 June	Kelantan
7 July	Terengganu
14 July	Johor

Observations on the dialogue series

IDEAS attended the dialogue series in all the 5 states so far to observe the proceedings. We feel the Ministry has planned the series well, and, that it is also a very important part in ensuring the new education blueprint is inclusive.

- **Opportunity to speak**
 - o Everyone in the audience was free to speak. Some participants spoke for longer than others but most chairpersons played their role well to ensure as many people as people can speak.
 - o The chairpersons neither interfered nor responded in great length to points raised by the audience. They listened. This was a good approach as it ensured the audience did not have to debate with the organiser.
 - o Those who were unable to speak at the event itself were encouraged to submit their views online.
- **Representativeness of the audience**
 - o The vast majority of participants were teachers, and some Parent Teacher Association (PIBG) representatives. Only rarely did we find participants from outside these two categories.
 - o There were also no or very low representations from the private sector, parents with children with special educational needs, and parents from the “bottom 40%” category.
 - o Representativeness is a significant weakness of the dialogue series because it means the opinions gathered from the dialogue series reflect only the perception of these two narrow groups (i.e. teachers and PIBG representatives).
 - o We spoke to some of the participants. Some of the teachers told us that they were instructed



to attend. This is understandable because any event organiser would want to have a guaranteed number of audiences. But it does raise the question on whether or not this is truly a “public” dialogue or merely a dialogue with teachers and PIBG committee members.

- **Issues raised**

- o Many of the issues being raised in the meetings were related to teachers’ welfare (workload, promotion, facilities, allowances, salary, etc).
- o Some of the issues were quite specific and not about policy at all (e.g. complaints about not being put in the salary scale they feel they deserve).
- o Most of the PIBG representatives spoke about funding issues and the need for government grants for PIBG to be continued.
- o Only a handful voiced out concerns around strategic issues such as:
 - Curriculum and syllabus
 - School management and organisation
 - Governance of the Ministry of Education
 - Quality of teaching and learning activities
- o Some of the more ‘sensitive’ issues were not sufficiently raised. For example, IDEAS held our own dialogue with community leaders in Kuch-

ing on 25 May 2012. Among the concerns raised were efforts to convert school children into Islam by Muslim teachers and teachers’ insensitivities towards cultural differences. But these issues were not mentioned at all in the Ministry’s dialogue held the next day also in Kuching. In fact, the community leaders who attended our dialogue complained that they were not even aware of the Ministry event.

- o Some participants we spoke to stated that they did not want to speak up for fear of negative repercussion towards their careers.

- **Overall picture**

- o The dialogue series has been successful in bringing a large crowd. But the crowd comprises of a very narrow section of society – teachers and PIBG representatives.
- o This means the findings from the dialogue series would be heavily skewed towards the opinions of these two groups only, and cannot be seen as representative of society as a whole.
- o The use of online tools is good, but, it would be wrong to expect parents, especially underprivileged parents, to use this medium to submit their views.

Recommendations

- **Ministry must ensure inclusiveness in the dialogue series**

- o More vigorous campaigns need to be done to attract a more diverse audience.
- o There should be public announcements on print and broadcast media to encourage parents to attend.
- o Schools should produce leaflets inform students and parents about the meetings and encourage them to come.
- o School should not make attendance compulsory for teachers because this will skew the data.

- **Background information should be made available.**

- o Taxpayers have already funded the production of “Education System Review: Malaysia” which was presented to the government in April. This report should be made public and not kept as a secret.
- o The document is important because it provides key background data to help the public understand our challenge.
- o As it stands, a huge amount of taxpayers’ money is being spent again for the dialogue series, but many issues discussed might be a repetition of what is already in the report.

