

Get to the root cause

I HAVE been in the teaching profession for more than 20 years, but I still cannot understand the rationale of the numerous moves made by the Education Ministry.

The latest directive involves testing of thousands of Science and Maths teachers to ascertain their competence in teaching these two subjects in English.

Shouldn't this have been done **before** the programme to teach Mathematics and Science in English was implemented?

Now four years later, has it suddenly dawned upon the Ministry to have a reality check?

Secondly, does the Ministry think that sending teachers who are not proficient in English for short courses will help when all the years (at least 11 years) in school have failed to produce proficient learners?

Surely, the Ministry is barking up the wrong tree. There must be something wrong with the way

»Only those fit to teach English should be allowed to step into the English class«

English is taught in schools.

So I propose testing the English teachers before testing Mathematics and Science teachers.

In Hong Kong, there is an annual assessment of English teachers. Those who fail badly are even barred from teaching.

But in Malaysia, all English teachers, regardless of their level of proficiency, enjoy an allowance (5 per cent of their salary for secondary school teachers and 10 per cent for those teaching in primary schools).

But unless colleges and universities responsible for teacher training set higher benchmarks, pupils will continue to be taught by teachers whose proficiency in English is questionable.

Thirdly, who will be marking the papers for the thousands of Mathematics and Science teachers? Would they be the English teachers whose own proficiency needs to be ascertained? Or are we to employ massive numbers of native speakers from overseas?

Assuming we have the funds to do so, it is a myth to think that all native speakers are proficient in English.

Just surf the BBC site for education and you will find that pupils in

England are having problems with the 3R's; employers are lamenting the fact that school-leavers and graduates can't even write simple letters or reports in grammatically correct English (sounds familiar, huh?).

In conclusion, the English language has to be taught correctly and effectively in the English class.

Only then can we be assured of a generation of Malaysians proficient in English. Test the English teachers. Only those fit to teach should be allowed to step into the English class.

If there is a shortage, retired English teachers could be roped in to work part-time, but only after they have been tested too. And please make sure that the English examiners themselves are truly proficient before they evaluate others.

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