

Consumers' Association of Penang

SEMINAR ON EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

18 - 22 NOVEMBER 1983

PENANG, MALAYSIA

EDUCATION FROM A GRASSROOTS' PERSPECTIVE

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EDUCATION FROM A GRASSROOTS' PERSPECTIVEABSTRACT

This paper examines the objectives of schooling as perceived by 540 secondary school leavers, 60 teachers, 3 principals and 60 parents of Kuala Langat district, Selangor in Peninsular Malaysia. School objectives, categorised as vocational preparation, self-development, social skills and cultural understanding, and cultivation of interest are examined with reference to perceived importance and extent of success achieved.

The disparity between what schools are expected to do and what schools do is highlighted. Evidence of the latter is provided by examining selected aspects of the schooling process in relation to specific school objectives. These aspects relate to (1) usefulness of and interest in school subjects (2) classroom teaching and learning (3) extra-curricular activities and (4) inter-ethnic interaction.

The link between examination success, certification and job opportunities in the modern sector influenced the experiences of secondary school leavers. Subjects which were examined and valued by potential employers were found to be useful and interesting. Although teacher-centred lessons were the norm rather than the exception, Bahasa Malaysia teachers were more examination-oriented than Civics teachers. Half of the secondary school leavers did not participate in games or clubs though there was moderate support for societies. In the school context, intra-ethnic rather than inter-ethnic contact was prevalent.

Some of the considerations for action relate to changes in the patterns and procedures for examining, diversification of the curriculum and evaluation of school performance so that objectives as perceived by students, teachers, principals and parents match with those of politicians and educational planners.



Leong Yin Ching

### What Schools Are Asked to Do

The overriding objective of the Malaysian education system is the promotion of national integration. This is to be achieved through the continued implementation, in stages, of Bahasa Malaysia (Malay language) as the main medium of instruction at all levels, inculcation of national values, development of character through curricular and extra-curricular activities and narrowing of the gap in educational opportunities among the various regions and races in the country. To meet national manpower needs, the education and training system is to be expanded and oriented towards greater emphasis on science and technology.<sup>1</sup>

Schools were seen by politicians and planners as one of the primary instruments for achieving national integration<sup>2</sup> and developing knowledge and skills to support the economic and technical bases of a developing nation.<sup>3</sup> There is a tendency to assume that these objectives, once formulated and accepted by the politicians and educational planners at the national level, will be shared by the participants in the school system - students, teachers, principals and parents. However, it needs to be emphasised that the mere formulation of educational objectives does not necessarily ensure their acceptance and successful implementation at the operational or grassroots level. Alongside the objectives of the government are the values and aspirations of the local community. For them, schooling may have other meanings and other ends.

### Scope of Paper

The verification of the statement made constitutes a central interest of this paper based on an exploratory and empirical study which examines school objectives as perceived by secondary school leavers, teachers, principals and parents in terms of their importance and success achieved. Efforts are made to examine the influence that specific school objectives may have upon the activities and experiences of secondary school leavers within the schooling process. The implications of the findings and suggestions are also discussed with the aim of stimulating a dialogue regarding the ends and means of education and schooling.



### Categorisation of School Objectives

A thorough delineation of school objectives will necessitate explicit definitions within a historical and philosophical framework.<sup>4</sup> Here it will suffice simply to use the term 'objective' generically with appropriate modifiers. For example, statements of what ought to go on in schools and perceptions of what actually goes on can be considered as ideal and apparent objectives of schooling.

In all, eighteen objectives were rated by 540 secondary school leavers, 60 parents, 60 teachers and 3 principals of Telok Datok in the Kuala Langat district, Selangor.<sup>5</sup> To facilitate analysis and discussion, these objectives have been classified into four categories (1) those concerned with vocational preparation - getting as good a job as possible, examination success, learning about different kinds of jobs and the ability to speak and write English well (2) self-development - making the most of oneself, knowing what is right or wrong, developing one's character and learning to be responsible and confident (3) social skills and cultural understanding - learning how to get on with others, acquiring a knowledge of traditions and customs and developing a sense of duty towards the local community, and (4) cultivation of interest - running of clubs and societies, visiting places outside school and developing an interest in subjects other than those examined. Inevitably, these categories overlap and merge into each other. For example, self-development is crucial in vocational success while cultivation of interest is conducive to self-development. The sole value of the classification is that it will facilitate discussion of the data and help to bring out similarities and differences between the perceptions of the various groups involved in the schooling process.

Against each of the eighteen school objectives, the categories provided in the questionnaires and interview schedules ranged from (1) most important/most successful (2) very important/very successful (3) fairly important/fairly successful (4) not very important/not very successful (5) not important/not successful at all and (6) do not know. For the purpose of analysis and interpretation, categories (1) and (2) were collapsed to read 'very important/very successful' and (4) and (5) were aggregated to indicate 'not important/not successful'. Categories (3) and (6) remained as they were to denote 'fairly important/fairly successful' and 'do not know' respectively.

### Importance of School Objectives: Grassroots Perceptions

Table 1 indicates how the young school leavers, parents and teachers have rated school objectives in terms of their importance. Immediately striking is the very broad support given by the secondary school leavers to



Table 1

Importance of Objectives : Percentages of Secondary School  
Leavers, Parents and Teachers Rating Each Objective  
'Very Important'

<u>Objectives</u>	<u>'Very Important' Rating (in Percentages)</u> <u>Given by</u>		
	<u>Secondary School Leavers</u>	<u>Parents</u>	<u>Teachers</u>
<u>Vocational Preparation</u>			
Help you (them) to do as well as possible in national examinations like SPH, STP	91.1 (492)	90.0 (54)	88.3 (53)
Teach you (them) things which will help you (them) to get as good a job as possible e.g. job application and interview	75.2 (406)	73.3 (44)	51.7 (31)
Ensure that you (they) are able to speak and write English well	74.1 (400)	85.0 (51)	58.3 (35)
Provide you (them) with information about different kinds of jobs so that you (they) can decide what you (they) want to do	59.8 (323)	66.7 (40)	53.3 (32)
Develop skills and abilities which will be of use when you (they) begin work	57.6 (311)	73.3 (44)	58.3 (35)
Take you (them) on visits to factories or offices or other work places to see the different kinds of jobs there are and what the work is like	41.5 (224)	41.7 (25)	25.0 (15)
<u>Self-Development</u>			
Teach you (them) about what is right or wrong	79.8 (431)	83.3 (50)	85.0 (51)
Give you (them) experience of taking responsibility	76.3 (412)	83.3 (50)	85.0 (51)
Teach you (them) to be confident when you leave school	73.1 (395)	76.7 (46)	86.7 (52)
Help you (them) to make the most of yourself (themselves)	67.0 (362)	71.7 (43)	86.7 (52)
Help you (them) to develop your character	66.3 (358)	86.7 (52)	88.3 (53)



Table 1 (continued)

<u>Objectives</u>	<u>'Very Important' Rating (in Percentages)</u> <u>given by</u>		
	<u>Secondary School</u> <u>Leavers</u>	<u>Parents</u>	<u>Teachers</u>
<u>Social Skills and Cultural Understanding</u>			
Encourage you (them) to have a sense of duty towards your local community	47.6 (257)	45.0 (27)	56.3 (9)
Help you (them) to learn how to get on with others e.g. those you work with	41.7 (225)	48.3 (29)	73.4 (4)
Teach you (them) about important traditions and customs of different cultures in Malaysia	31.1 (168)	35.0 (21)	48.2 (2)
<u>Cultivation of Interest</u>			
Take you (them) on visits to places like the District Office or Law Courts to learn what is going on in the world outside school	32.8 (177)	35.0 (21)	31.1 (1)
Ensure that you (they) are aware of aspects of subjects which you (they) do not have to know for the examination	31.9 (172)	23.3 (14)	31.2 (2)
Run clubs and societies (hobbies, games etc.) for pupils after school hours	47.6 (257)	28.3 (17)	51.3 (3)
Enable you (them) to develop an interest in subjects other than those studied for examinations	51.3 (277)	46.7 (28)	63.3 (3)

Note. Figures for the three principals have been excluded in view of the fact that the small number involved renders little variation in the statistical data. Frequency percentages indicating importance of eight school objectives tend to be either 100 per cent or 66.7 per cent.



the instrumental role of schools, that is, those aspects which provide keys to success in later life. These items relate to examination success, getting as good a job as possible and character building. In contrast, items pertaining to social skills and cultural understanding are given less importance - getting on with others, developing a sense of duty towards the local community and learning about traditions and customs of different cultures in Malaysia. School objectives in the cultivation of interest category were least valued. In the eyes of the secondary school leavers, the most important objective of the schools was to provide the tools necessary for success in later life.

Broadly, the perception of parents in relation to the eighteen school objectives is similar to that of the students. Items which deal with examinations and vocational success as well as self-development received a higher percentage of scores in the very important category than those on social skills and cultural understanding, and cultivation of interest.

There were considerable differences between the perceptions of teachers on the importance of the various school objectives and the views expressed by the students and their parents. The objectives most broadly seen by over 85.0 per cent of the teachers as of great importance were developing of students' character, learning to be confident, helping to make the most of themselves, teaching about right or wrong and giving school leavers experiences in taking responsibility. Self-development was more widely regarded as an important category of objectives by teachers than young school leavers or their parents.

Generally, the principals were more supportive of the role of the school in vocational preparation than the teachers, though less so when compared to students and parents. All of the three principals agreed that getting students through examinations and developing skills for work were very important school objectives.

To summarise, the most important school objective as perceived by almost all students (91.1 per cent), teachers (88.3 per cent, principals (100.0 per cent) and parents (90.0 per cent) was to help youngsters to do as well as possible in national examinations. Educational success was equated with good examination grades which enabled youngsters to enrol in Form VI classes or enhanced their opportunities of securing jobs in the modern sector. The drive for examination success is a rational response to social contingencies which reward students not for the acquisition of knowledge and skills but for procuring certificates which hold the keys to preferred categories of employment that confer high income, social power and prestige.



While both students and parents consider job preparation to be an important task of the school, teachers tend to reject the role of the school in initiating young people into jobs. Instead, teachers tend to see their responsibilities as preparing students for the whole of their future lives and stress the importance of objectives relating to self-development, social skills and cultural understanding, and cultivation of interest.

Contrary to expectations of teachers (58.3 per cent) and principals (66.7 per cent), both parents (85.0 per cent) and students (74.1 per cent) indicated how important it was for the schools to ensure that youngsters would be able to speak and write English well. Though English has been relegated to a second language, its importance in education, particularly for oversea studies, and international transactions is recognised. Besides, the concern shown is understandable in view of the fact that the decline in the standard of English is nation-wide,<sup>6</sup> particularly in rural areas where the environment hardly motivates students to speak and learn the language aside from the 240 minutes of English on the time-table per week.

It appears that the Malaysian educational policy, calculated to promote nationalism and therefore, by implication, to minimise the focus on individual interests will, in the end, lead to almost exclusive stress on individual achievement and development. All the participants in the schooling process relegated objectives within the social skills and cultural understanding category to a lower rank order in relation to vocational preparation and self-development categories. If this pattern of perception continues, it may mean that lip-service will be paid to the social role of the school - an agent of socialisation to foster national integration - as conceived by the policy makers.

The grip that examinations have on students is so strong that the cultivation of interest is perceived to be the least important of the four categories of objectives, more so by parents than students or teachers. All the participants of the schooling process felt that it was of least importance that students be made aware of aspects of their subjects which they did not have to know for the examinations - an objective which ranked almost at the bottom of the list.

Our analysis leaves us without any doubt whatsoever that the most important objective of the school as perceived by students, parents, teachers and principals is to help youngsters to do as well as possible in national examinations. All the participants in the schooling process in Telok Datok tend to equate educational success with good examination performance. The sole merit of teaching and learning in the schools appears to be the acquisition of examination certificates. This deification of certificates and the pursuit of paper qualifications have brought about adverse effects, some of which are discussed in the pages which follow.



## What Schools Do

For the schools themselves, their priorities - influenced by social pressures - are set by principals and teachers in accordance with what they perceive students and parents want most. These priorities for education in schools are best revealed in the various aspects of the schooling process namely usefulness of and interest in subjects, classroom teaching and learning, extra-curricular activities and inter-ethnic interaction within and outside classes.

### Usefulness of and interest in subjects

From the selection of school subjects that were considered to be most useful by students and parents, the choice appeared to have been based upon the fact that the subjects were (1) examined in national examinations and (2) valued generally by potential employers. Bahasa Malaysia is perceived to be the most useful in view of the fact that a pass grade is mandatory not only for the award of the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) certificate but also for applications to white-collar jobs in the public sector. Also, language (Bahasa Malaysia and English) and sciences (General Science, Pure Sciences and Mathematics) are perceived to be more useful than the humanities (Geography and History). For a similar reason, Art and Craft has the least value in relation to examined subjects since it is useful mainly in the creative world of advertising and commercial art - occupations which are generally not awarded a high status by Malaysian society. Non-examined subjects such as Civics and Physical Education are seen to be the least useful of the subjects in the curriculum.

It appears that the most important school objective of getting through national examinations has influenced the perception of students and parents in terms of usefulness of various subjects. When the perception of the usefulness of school subjects is based on the criteria of whether they are examined or not and their value to employers, there are negative implications. For instance, the objectives of students in pursuing the various courses of study are likely to be at variance with those of the curriculum planners and policy makers. The opportunities that a subject such as History provides in the study of social processes and the consequences of different social systems and individuals' decisions are unlikely to be appreciated. Instead, History is perceived to be a cut and dried subject which involves a considerable amount of learning and memorisation of dates, events and names of personalities for examination purposes. Knowledge is not acquired for its own sake or for constant later use in a real life situation but solely for the once-and-for-all purpose of reproducing it in an examination. Acquiring knowledge for this purpose is unlikely to develop in students qualities and skills which they will probably require to cope with the social, economic and political demands of a



developing society in which they will work and live. Some of these qualities relate to the ability to display initiative, creativity and curiosity, use leisure time effectively and learn for the sake of learning.

Greater interest was shown by students in subjects which they were offering in the SPM examinations than those which were not examined at the end of the school year. Their selection of examination subjects indicated that interest was likely to be determined primarily by the efforts of teachers in helping them to get through national examinations. If this is so, a subject will be seen to be interesting when teachers provide copious notes, highlight aspects of topics which are likely to be examined, dictate model answers to possible examination questions and allow for considerable class revision. Interest in a subject, in this instance, is unlikely to be based on the stimulation of curiosity, creativity and originality.

### Classroom teaching and learning

The necessity of passing examinations does not affect students alone. Teachers themselves feel the pressure from their principals and the parents to help as many youngsters as they possibly can to clear examination hurdles. To verify the contention that this emphasis on examinations affects the work of teachers in the classroom, two subjects are discussed: Bahasa Malaysia which is examined in the SPM examination and Civics which is non-examined.

Our analysis suggests that irrespective of whether the subject is examined or otherwise, teacher-centred lessons are the norm rather than the exception in the three secondary schools in Telok Datok. However, the difference appears to be in terms of orientation since Bahasa Malaysia teachers are clearly more examination oriented in their approach to the teaching of the subject than Civics teachers.

Bahasa Malaysia teachers feel the burden of teaching an examination subject in which all of their students will have to obtain a minimal pass in the SPM examination. They realise that their professional abilities will be judged on the number of distinctions, credits and passes shown in the SPM results. Thus it is a rare occurrence to find that a Bahasa Malaysia teacher has not turned up in class since every period has to be used to ensure not only the coverage of the syllabus but also to provide ample practices of questions that are likely to be asked in the examination. In contrast, Civics teachers are more relaxed, sometimes to the point of reflecting a 'tidak apa' (cannot be much bothered) attitude. Hence, principals and senior assistants hardly turn up in class during Civics period and of the teachers who do, some of the time is used for self-study or revision purposes, particularly at a time prior to the trial and final examinations. When the school authorities and teaching staff display such indifferent attitudes, students



are hardly to be blamed for considering Civics to be inessential. The extra period is taken as an inconvenient addition of another forty minutes to an already over-extensive school curriculum.

Since Bahasa Malaysia and Civics teachers were perceived by a majority of their students to be talking most of the time, it is unlikely that these discourses are punctuated with class discussion or reference to audio-visual aids. More than two-thirds of the secondary school leavers in Bahasa Malaysia and Civics classes indicated that charts, diagrams and other visual aids were seldom/almost never used. There was also a tendency for teachers in both the subjects to teach from the textbooks only and reference to further reading was seldom made.

Both Bahasa Malaysia and Civics teachers express the view that the common practice of using the number of distinctions scored in particular subject areas as the criterion of a 'good' school has contributed to what Whitehead describes as 'the fatal disconnection of subjects'. This disconnection, in turn, has tended to cut off Bahasa Malaysia and Civics from other subjects and real life interactions. Bahasa Malaysia or Civics is then compacted into the covers of a school textbook, devitalised and isolated.

In relation to students' attitudes, Bahasa Malaysia teachers indicated that non-Malay students did not have an intrinsic interest in the subject. Their attitude was that they had no alternative but to take up Bahasa Malaysia as a subject. However, they were passive and attentive in class and, realising the importance of the subject, worked very hard at it. Teachers themselves indicated that there was too much emphasis on examinations and the present need was to stress the importance of Bahasa Malaysia for communication and integration purposes.

All of the Civics teachers indicated, in no uncertain terms, that students' attitudes towards the subject were negative and the study of Civics was a 'sheer waste of time'. Students were brought up in an examination-oriented system and any subject which was not examined did not merit the serious consideration of the students, perhaps even the teachers themselves. One of the Civics teachers began his work with much enthusiasm but was soon discouraged with the negative attitude displayed by students who repeatedly indicated 'bukan untuk peperiksaan, tak payah' (not for examination, not necessary at all).

Our findings suggest that classroom activities and orientation of teachers are partly determined on the basis of whether the subject taught is to be examined at the end of the schooling year. Bahasa Malaysia teachers showed greater concern for students' performance and were significantly examination oriented in their approach when compared with Civics teachers.



The revised syllabi for Bahasa Malaysia and Civics at the upper secondary level were introduced as recently as 1979. Given our findings on classroom activities and teachers' orientation, the objectives of the Bahasa Malaysia syllabus and in particular that of Civics, the non-examined subject, are unlikely to be fulfilled effectively. This indicates how examination policies exert a strong influence on the implementation of curriculum reforms at the grassroot level. To a large extent, it is the teachers in the classroom together with the acceptance or resistance by students and parents who will determine if a curriculum reform is to succeed or fail.

#### Extra-curricular activities

Policy makers perceive extra-curricular activities to be an important aspect of schooling. It is through such activities that youngsters will develop their personality, character and discipline. However, extra-curricular activities are, in fact, considered to be less significant by the participants in the schooling process. More than half of the secondary school leavers in Telok Datok did not involve themselves in games or clubs though there was moderate support for societies, both in attendance and participation in activities. Societies were more popular because their programmes and activities were related to school subjects while clubs were set up mainly to stimulate and develop interests in the youngsters.

The more popular reasons given for participation in extra-curricular activities were to develop interests outside the classroom, leadership qualities and to secure good recommendations in the school leaving certificate. Although secondary school leavers were not asked for reasons why they had refrained from taking part in extra-curricular activities, it was learnt from their teachers that a majority of these students wished to concentrate on preparing for the SPM examination. The need for time to study so as to enhance their opportunities to pass the examination leads almost virtually to the exclusion of most other activities outside the classroom. Besides, excellence in games or activities in clubs or societies did not bring the same rewards and recognition as good academic results.

#### Inter-ethnic interaction

In a plural society, schools have been looked upon as one of the institutions which can promote social integration by providing opportunities for students to share with one another their experiences and interests across subgroup boundaries and their freedom to interact with one another. In the Malaysian context, this has been facilitated by the fact that since independence a common content syllabus and medium of instruction has been implemented. It was the belief of the policy makers that a common language - Bahasa Malaysia - would promote inter-ethnic contact and integration between the three major races in the country.



The secondary school leavers in Telok Datok are among the first cohort of Malaysians who have been educated totally in Bahasa Malaysia from primary to secondary level. English is taught as a second language and for some of the non-Malays, facilities are provided for the learning of their mother-tongue - Mandarin or Tamil. It will therefore be of interest to ascertain the extent to which Bahasa Malaysia has been used not only by the Malays but also more significantly by the non-Malays in the course of interaction with different social groups.

Malay students were inclined to use the mother-tongue to the exclusion of other languages in communicating with social groups. Non-Malays, however, appeared to live in two separate worlds, one at home and the other in school. The mother-tongue of the Chinese and the Indians was used mainly as a medium of communication with members of the family and relatives. In school, however, the language used most for communication by the Chinese and the Indians was Bahasa Malaysia, probably a result of social approval in the school context and to improve their command of the national language for examination purposes. Of the ethnic groups, it was the Indians who were more inclined to use English or Bahasa Malaysia rather than the mother-tongue to speak to their friends in and outside the school. Given the present national language policy, it is likely that the next generation of educated Malays and non-Malays will increasingly encourage the use of Bahasa Malaysia more than English.

The choice of first best friend suggested that there were greater opportunities for intra-ethnic rather than inter-ethnic contacts. Indians chose their best friend from among the Chinese and the Malays, probably because the Indians themselves constituted the smallest group of secondary school leavers. Chinese and Malays, more often than not, chose Indians to be their third best friend. Comparatively, the number of Malays who chose a Chinese vice versa were low.

Comparatively, a higher proportion of Malay than Indian or Chinese students were found to be nationally oriented. Communal orientation, on the other hand, was more pronounced among Chinese than Indians or Malays.

#### Attainment of School Objectives

Based on what schools do and achieve, getting youngsters over examination hurdles was not only perceived to be the most important school objective but also the most successful. The need to do well in national examinations and the energies spent in maximising its attainment have indeed been a factor which diverts attention and effort from other school objectives, apart from helping youngsters to do as well as possible in national examinations. Other objectives within the vocational preparation category were perceived to be less successfully attained. Here, students' perceptions were more in line



with those of the teachers than the parents.

On the whole, schools were perceived to be more successful in attaining objectives within the self-development category than in vocational preparation, social skills and cultural understanding, and cultivation of interest. In the self-development category, students and parents more than teachers perceived that the objectives were achieved successfully. With the exception of the running of clubs and societies for students after school hours, objectives within the social skills and cultural understanding, and cultivation of interest categories were generally given lower rankings in terms of the extent of success achieved by the schools.

### Implications and Suggestions

At this point, we draw together the findings of the survey on school objectives and the schooling process as perceived by secondary school leavers, teachers, principals and parents so as to paint a composite picture of the real world of school. Being predominantly oriented to examinations and the instrumental value of education, we are inclined to raise the question 'if more schooling does not ensure a better job, what good is it?'. Students tend to work on their own in competition with one another and seldom engage themselves in activities likely to promote school objectives and concerns of their peers. Also, we take or teach mathematics and the objective of learning mathematics is reinforced by tests, examinations and grades in mathematics. What goes on in schools is rarely viewed as though contributing to the development of the mind and character. Instead of developing creativity, aesthetic expressions, self-discipline and confidence, a desire for life-long learning, flexibility and independent thinking, we are implicitly teaching - practically in a virtually affectless environment - dependence upon authority, linear thinking, social apathy and passive involvement. This so called implicit or hidden curriculum is disturbingly apparent in Malaysian schools.

The picture implies that what goes on in schools today is unlikely to match effectively the expectations of politicians and policy makers, namely, to promote national integration and develop manpower to meet national needs. If they are serious in formulating such expectations in the first instance, then it appears that profound changes are necessary in the conduct of schooling.

To bring about fundamental and pervasive changes, there is a need to restructure societal values and priorities. While schools have changed little, what have changed and continue to change are the economic, political and social realities of the society in which we live. Schools and people involved with them must be responsive to these changes.



Considering that the schools in the sample are in the 'urbanised' rural area, the present academic-oriented curriculum is unlikely to serve the needs and interests of the majority of students. The curriculum with an academic orientation is biased towards preparing youngsters for Form VI classes and further education. In this preparation, 'academic' is used conventionally since the examination process described works, in fact, against the development of true academicians.

Almost all of the teachers and principals agreed that students should spend more time on practical subjects such as Industrial Arts and Home Science than on desk subjects. Unfortunately, these subjects are available to students up till Form III only. In view of the fact that the basic facilities for these practical subjects are already provided for in two of the three schools, the authorities may be persuaded to extend these courses to Form V level. A knowledge of Home Science is likely to allow the girls to become better housewives and mothers in the future, even if they fail to be gainfully employed. Learning a trade in Industrial Arts may be the first step towards self-employment. The opportunity to pursue Agricultural Science places the student in a better position to be absorbed into youth farm projects organised by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports. Commerce which provides a basic knowledge of book-keeping, accounting, and business practices imparts to students a rudimentary knowledge of how a commercial enterprise on a small scale can be initiated. A more diversified curriculum may serve better the different needs and activities of students in the Kuala Langat district. However, the logical consequence of this is to extend school hours or to drop some other subjects in the time-table - a move which requires not only the acceptance of the authorities but also the participants of the schooling process.

Even though teachers do not fully endorse the role of the school in vocational preparation, perhaps they can give more emphasis to the application of various skills that are taught in the classroom. The present situation suggests that teaching and learning have little application to real life situations. Thus, students study Bahasa Malaysia to pass the SPM examination but do not see its value beyond school as a communication skill which will be useful in their future lives.

To minimise the practice by students of memorising facts and model answers to examination questions, changes in the patterns and procedures of examining are necessary. The common practice within the Malaysian Examination Syndicate is to involve groups of teachers and curriculum specialists in the design and development of question papers according to guidelines provided by 'Tables of specifications'. As in the case of Integrated Science, the guidelines indicate that about 40.0 per cent of items (30 out of 75 objective



questions) should be constructed to test knowledge. Since the introduction of Integrated Science in lower secondary schools, the figure of 40.0 per cent has constantly been exceeded.<sup>7</sup> With Integrated Science and possibly most other subjects, there is an apparent mismatch between curricula intentions and the formal assessment. Therefore there is a need to develop techniques of assessment and examination which correspond systematically with the educational objectives of new curricula. Also, curriculum officers need to monitor the influence of selection examinations on curricula in order that appropriate action can be taken to ensure that its effect is benign. Perhaps, detailed and explicit feedback of examination performance to teachers and students will provide them with useful information on which to base their future actions. Besides, anxieties on the part of both teachers and students are likely to be reduced if they know where mistakes and misconceptions have been made.

It has been said that the library is the heart of the school and a storehouse of knowledge which, used effectively, will not only supplement the work of the teacher in the classroom but stimulate the interest of students in the learning process. Unfortunately, the libraries in the schools in Telok Datok have not been equipped to carry out this role at all. Even in the relatively more organised and administered of the three libraries, the collection comprises mainly reference books in the way of encyclopedias and publications with model answers and revision exercises for national examinations. Instruction in the use of libraries and books are not given in any of the schools. Three of the major obstacles to an effective school library programme are a lack of financial support, trained personnel and teachers, including principals, who appreciate the value of libraries.

Interest in various school subjects can be enhanced by the authorities within and outside the school. Principals and senior assistants who are responsible for assigning teachers to various subjects and classes may have to exercise more care in ensuring, as far as possible, that teachers so assigned are qualified and trained in the respective disciplines. In the three schools there were eighteen cases of mismatch between teachers' qualifications and training, and the subjects that they were teaching. To quote a few extreme examples, an Economics graduate was assigned to teach Bahasa Malaysia and History, and an Industrial Arts-trained teacher was teaching Physical Education and Civics. A total of 30.0 per cent of the teaching staff were teaching subjects which they had not specialised in at all. This situation is a result of several factors, one of which is that schools are not sent the appropriate teachers in terms of areas of specialisation by the State Education Department. When teachers are required to teach subjects for which they are neither qualified nor trained, this is likely to be an additional barrier to the attempts to make classroom lessons interesting.



Teachers, more than the parents and students, have stressed the need to give attention to items within the social skills and cultural understanding category. However, the Malaysian school system basically upholds traditionalism and is achievement-oriented and individualistic in approach, values which tend to reinforce symbols of materialism and status. The spirit of sacrifice, service and commitment are seldom inculcated in the young through the curriculum. Instead of co-operation, there is the sense of competition between individuals.

Although contact between student of different races is relaxed in the playground and in extra-curricular activities, including games, there is a tendency to form cliques on an ethnic basis. The almost homogeneous population in one of the schools does not provide opportunities for students to learn how to get on with others of different ethnic origins. However, social integration, an objective of the education planners, may not be the sole responsibility of the schools. Indeed, unless society in general and politicians and policy makers in particular practise what the schools preach in the area of social integration, it is questionable whether the schools can have much impact at all.

Possible strategies to enhance the role of schools in promoting national integration are outlined below. There is a need for schools with a homogeneous population to be desegregated to allow for a more representative group of students on an ethnic basis. Although residential secondary schools have proved to be a success in producing a body of rural students qualified for tertiary education, this should not in any way diminish the drive to improve the quality of rural secondary schools. If existing rural schools are neglected, the result will be an elitist system where non-residential rural students are denied educational opportunities. Ethnic sponsorship of education should not lead to a neglect of the educational needs of non-Malays. This problem of accommodating the educational needs of Malays as well as non-Malays has to be faced up to squarely by the political and educational authorities.

Attempts to sever the link between examination, certification and employment call for a rethinking of existing employment policies in both the public and private sectors. Presently, entry into jobs in the modern sector is based on minimum educational qualifications but few have questioned the purpose of such a requirement. Empirical research suggests, however, that employers do not make a conscientious effort to match educational attainments to job requirements.<sup>8</sup>

That education is related to productivity is a truism which few have thought to question. Up to the 1970s, productivity had been measured in terms of income but since salaries depended so much on educational qualification, it appeared unenlightening to argue that the more educated were more productive.



Empirically, this assumption between education and productivity has been questioned. Further research which treats the education variable in less conventional terms than years of schooling may convince (1) educational manpower planners to turn their attention to qualitative improvement rather than quantitative expansion of the system and (2) public and private employers to re-examine the bases of their own practices for setting minimum educational qualifications and explore other sources of manpower development besides schools and universities. Until there is a revolutionary approach to employment policies and practices, schools including those in Kuala Langat district will continue to strive for examination success as a means of access to employment in the modern sector. This objective which lies behind the demand for education will effectively swamp any alternative definition of educational objectives, evidence of which is ample in this investigation.

Thus, it seems crucial for politicians, educational policy makers, communities, teachers and young people to think more carefully and dispassionately about the objectives and process of schooling. They must decide what are realistic expectations for schools and what effects they can and should have upon students and societies. The effective implementation of educational objectives calls for a system which permits feedbacks and evaluation of outcomes at the local, state and national levels. Otherwise schools and schooling may not only fail to attain their objectives but also create more problems for society than they can solve.

1. Malaysia, Fourth Malaysia Plan 1981 - 1985, Kuala Lumpur, National Printing Department, 1981, p.343 and 353-4.
2. Manning Nash, 'Ethnicity, centrality and education in Pasir Mas, Kelantan', Comparative Education Review, v.16, no.1, February 1972, p.4-15, John Charles Bock, 'Education and nation-building in Malaysia: a study of institutional effect in thirty-four schools', Ph.D., Stanford University, 1971 and Chai Hon Chan, Education and nation building in plural societies: the West Malaysian experience, Canberra, Australian National University, 1977.
3. F. Harbison, Human resources as the wealth of nations, London, Oxford University Press, 1973, Chapter 6 and Mark Blaug, An introduction to the economics of education, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1976, Chapter 1.
4. Such a presentation is given in J.I. Goodlad, What schools are for, Bloomington, Ind., Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 1979.
5. While the secondary school leavers responded to two questionnaires, parents, teachers and principals involved in the study were interviewed. The data were collected between 31 March, 1980 and 16 May, 1980.



6. University of Malaya's Vice-Chancellor, Royal Professor Ungku Abdul Aziz, commented that 'The fact simply is that despite 11 or 13 years of learning English as a subject in our schools, we were still getting students who were unable to read academic textbooks in English' in 'Crash course in self study: language skills project for varsity students', New Sunday Times, 24 February, 1980.
7. Keith Lewin, 'Curriculum renewal and examination reform: a case study from Malaysia', IDS Bulletin, v.11, no.2, May 1980, p.36.
8. John Oxenham, 'Employers and qualifications', IDS Bulletin, v.II, no.2, May 1980, p.6-12.

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