Nurturing the right values and mindset

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Students registering for a new semester at Universiti Malaya earlier this month. Educators should provide a holistic education by emphasising knowledge, skills and values.

LETTERS: Education has always been a priority for us, from the day we were born to the day of our final breath.

As once mentioned by a famous neurobiologist friend of mine, humans are the most vulnerable species on Earth as without education, they will not be able to survive for long.

Education is given so much priority in every nation, be it formal, informal, private, or public. Education is the most important factor in human social mobility and the building of human civilisation. But do all of us focus on the complete domains of education?
When parents send their children to school, they want their children to be smart and do well in examinations, and then go on to further their studies at the best universities and do excellently well there as well.

Then, parents want them to get a good job, earn well and lead a prosperous life. I use prosperous because in many cultures, prosperity is connected to external wealth.

Coming back to education, according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, education is a human right for all throughout life, and it transforms lives. In most nations, education policies encompass three main domains, which are knowledge, skills, and values.

Among the three, values are the most difficult to instil and educate. Why? Knowledge is basically known as facts, concepts, theories, principles, or any information that is acquired through education and experience. I have added experience because students are not empty vessels.

Paulo Freire, a famous Brazilian educator, said teachers should never treat students as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge, but the knowledge acquired by students should be meaningful and can be linked to their own prior experience and knowledge.

How many of us can confidently conclude that everything we learnt in school made sense to our real-world experiences?

Skills are learnt abilities to perform an action, make a decision based on several choices, be able to be flexible, adapt and adjust to any situation.

Skills can be domain general and domain specific. How many of us were taught financial literacy from young?

Do we have the skills to say no to immoral invitations or even the skills to voice out bravely in situations of social injustice?

Education also includes values that are principles, or standards or behaviour, and includes one's judgment of what is important in life.

Values becomes the fundamentals that guides and motivates one's daily action. Within values itself, it has three smaller domains — the cognitive, emotive and actus (determination) domains. Values are the ends to which one acts and behaves.

Among the three — knowledge, skills and values — values are the most difficult to educate, partly because values are not external, and it cannot be measured easily like knowledge and skills.

For example, we might have met individuals who are wealthy and skilful in their profession, but their values of no integrity, no humility or manipulating others for their own greed and power show that education did not materialise fully within that individual.
The Covid-19 pandemic has proven that one needs to have the right values and mindset to transform in any challenging situations. Just like rubber balls, the skills to bounce back no matter which surface one hits, goes back to the type of values one was instilled with.

Educators should remember and educate their students with knowledge, skills, and values to ensure that holistic education is provided to all students.

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