The regression in Moral Education


Sunday, 21 Feb 2021

RECENTLY, I was asked to write about the development of Malaysia’s Moral Education as a subject by the officer in charge of Moral Education in Japan’s Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Ministry.

While it was an honour, it was also very challenging because the last I wrote about the subject’s development was in 2010, in an international journal called the Asia Pacific Journal of Educators and Education.

It has been 11 years, and since then, much improvement has been explicitly seen in its development in Malaysia.

Universiti Malaya was the pioneer in bringing in Moral Education as a minor programme for students undergoing its Teaching of English as a Second Language (TESL) programme.

Then, other local and private universities started introducing it as one of their major and minor programmes. More and more teachers were trained to be Moral Education teachers, and the curriculum was revised and textbooks were rewritten.

The philosophy of Moral Education, which centres around educating individuals as people who are equipped with knowledge, skills and values in moral reasoning, moral emotions and moral action, seemed to be understood more and more.

Only when all three domains are taught, practised and assessed, can we proudly say that Moral Education is progressing in the Malaysian education system. Sadly, in centralised assessments, this has never been the case.

Moral Education assessment at the centralised level is regressing and does not even test its curriculum components.
At the end of 1993, the first cohort of Form Five students sat for their centralised examination, which had objective, subjective and essay questions.

I was shocked to see multiple choice questions for a subject which focused on allowing students to enhance their understanding of moral dilemmas, seeing the choices available and making choices based on moral orientations learnt.

It was also absurd focusing on written Moral Education. You cannot test moral emotions and moral action just by providing paper-and-pen examinations.

After much discussion and several revisions of the curriculum, the SPM assessment was divided into two papers – the written component and the project component.

The Moral Education project provides an avenue for students to apply what is learnt in the classroom to real-life situations, and it was a real hope for many other Moral Education educators and me to see the subject come alive.

However, Moral Education projects are not taken into consideration in the final marks and grades in the SPM, even though students and teachers put in so much effort.

Only a certificate of completion is provided for the two domains that are assessed, namely, the emotional domain and the moral action domain.

Teachers who do not have an understanding of the Moral Education philosophy merely focus on the written work and the evidence of the Moral Education projects.

There are students who resort to cheating just to produce the evidence. What an irony in a humanity subject like Moral Education.

It is also an insult to the philosophy of education in Malaysia, which focuses on the holistic growth and development of each individual who undergoes schooling life.

ASSOC PROF DR VISHALACHE BALAKRISHNAN

SULAM@Service Learning Coordinator directorUniversiti Malaya Centre for Research in International and Comparative Education