Let's prioritise civics education

By Associate Professor Dr Vishalache Balakrishnan - September 26, 2019 @ 10:38pm
Recently, Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad launched the third rebirth of Civics Education, which is supposed to be integrated in five subjects: Bahasa Melayu, English, Islamic Education, Moral Education and History.

Some people made this same comment after the second rebirth in 2014: “Now that Civics Education is back in the school syllabus, there’s no more Moral Education, right?”

I cannot blame those who do not understand what is going on in our education system, but the irony is those who complain are educationists themselves.

Let me clarify. Moral Education is taught to non-Muslim students. Muslim students do not study it. Instead, they have Islamic Education.

Moral Education focuses on three domains: moral thinking now developed into moral reasoning, moral emotions and moral action.

For a teacher to qualify to teach Moral Education, he must be trained in moral philosophy, moral psychology, religion and morals, and how to teach students to apply moral values in their lives.

The values must be imbued in their hearts and mind.

A Moral Education teacher cannot be anyone who thinks teaching it is to indoctrinate students to be good and follow rules and regulations.

Students are taught about daily life, moral dilemmas and how to deal with them.

If moral reasoning is not applied, choices can be wrong and students need to face the consequences of their actions.

But they are not damned to hell or are sinners.

They can correct themselves and make better decisions.

Students are also taught to be emotionally alert.

Civics Education, according to Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, means the processes that affect people’s beliefs, commitments, capabilities and actions.

During the second rebirth of Civics and Citizenship Education, three components were prioritised: knowledge, skills and values.

In the current Civics Education, the focus is on “literasi sivik” (civic awareness) and “amali sivik” (applied civics).

If Civics Education is to survive and continue, several actions need to be taken.

First, the tertiary training of teachers in Bahasa Melayu, English, Islamic Education, Moral Education and History must be comprehensive.

Until today, no document nor in-house material has been provided by the Education Ministry to universities to train teachers.

Second, there must be a notion of prioritising humanity subjects, such as Moral Education and Civics Education.

Some schools have principals teaching Moral Education and Civics Education, but, in reality, students are not taught the subject; they “practise” exam subjects instead.

The mindset of “non-exam subjects do not need to be taught” has to be eliminated from the minds of educators if we want to nurture moral and civic-mindedness in Malaysia.

It’s no use having a beautiful syllabus, comprehensive textbook and modules if the subject is sidelined.

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