

School-based assessment: Are we doing it right?

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The determination shown by a group of teachers, Suara Guru Masyarakat Malaysia (SGMM), to mount a protest against the school-based assessment (SBA) on February 22, caught my attention.

Dubbed the “222 Gathering to Abolish PBS”, these teachers insist on going ahead with the protest despite assurances by the Education Ministry that the SBA will be re-evaluated

As of today, the Facebook page, "Kami Mahu SPPBS Dimansuhkan", has received close to 70,000 likes.

These are indications that something is wrong with SBA. The SBA was first introduced in primary and secondary schools in 2011. In the meantime, the E-Prestasi, which has just been introduced recently, also received numerous criticisms.

As a person closely related to the education field, I view this as a crucial issue as it concerns the next generation.

In order to have a clearer picture on this issue, I contacted a friend of mine, who is currently teaching in a primary school in the Klang Valley. Her immediate response was one of frustration, and she has her reasons.

The SBA requires teachers to key-in data on each student on a daily basis. So can you imagine if you have hundreds of students?

Teachers are clearly upset and exhausted. Apart from the usual teaching and administration workloads, they have to spend ample time “fighting” with the system. “Fighting” in the sense that there are always technical problems, such as missing data or server congestion or any other reasons.

Most teachers have no choice but to do it in the early hours of the day or when everyone is asleep.

The SBA's intention is to avoid students from becoming “exam machines”. However, this good intention has not been achieved three years since its implementation.

According to my teacher friend, in reality, some parents and teachers still prefer the examination system, because there is a “clearer” way of evaluating the students.

This resulted in a situation where some schools operate a dual system to assess students, the SBA and exam.

The role of headmasters is very important in ensuring the success of the SBA.

Speaking from her experience, she expressed great disappointment that some headmasters are more interested their schools' popularity as far as their performance in examination is concerned, rather than to educate the students.

As such, the examination system is a better system for such purpose.

My friend revealed another major issue. Some headmasters claim that by purchasing more school workbooks, students' performance can be improved. But the “real” reason is to earn extra income through "commission". Although this issue is not new, it has not been tackled by the Education Ministry.

In order to “finish up” the school workbooks, teachers have no choice but to speed up their teachings apart from the tedious paperwork. This has directly affected the effectiveness of teachings.

When asked about her opinion on the policies introduced by the Ministry and her hope for the future of the Malaysian education system, she painted a pessimistic view that problems occurred every now and then. Unfortunately, most of the time, the Ministry would turn a deaf ear to complaints.

Various drawbacks and criticisms again reflect the shortsightedness of the Ministry and their ignorance to complaints.

These problems are attestations of the weakness of the top-down approach as is usually practised.

The intention of the Ministry is good. SBA is nothing new in countries such as Australia, New Zealand, England, Hong Kong, South Africa and others.

By introducing the SBA, the Ministry tries to have a fully computerised school administration system and up to date with the evolution of the education method.

If only the Ministry had conducted detailed research and long-term planning before introducing new policies, the SBA could be a much better system to assess students.

I welcome the intention to reduce the emphasis on examination. After all, one of the key advantages of the SBA is to produce well-rounded students instead of those who only excel at academics.

When it comes to education matters, the Ministry has to realise that it is everyone's concern. As such, whatever new policies should take a bottom-up approach. – February 17, 2014.

** This is the personal opinion of the writer or publication and does not necessarily represent the views of The Malaysian Insider.*
