

CHAPTER 3

KNOWLEDGE OF CURRENT EVENTS

Juliana Othman

Introduction

In a fast changing world as ours, where knowing about current events is a responsibility of every citizen, it is important that our adolescents develop a desire to seek and appreciate knowledge about national and world issues. While current events and technology are constantly changing, there is nevertheless a body of lasting knowledge that should form the core of an adolescents' general knowledge. Such solid knowledge includes, for example, important events of world history, knowledge of people, events and ideas.

This is important because, in order to make informed decisions and to understand how the choices they make will affect their lives, adolescents need access to relevant and reliable information from a variety of sources, including parents and other family members, teachers, the mass media and peers.

A number of studies seem to suggest that students' knowledge of current events is quite poor (Johnston, Brzezinski & Anderman, 1993). Related to the issue of exposure to current events, and of concern to educators, are the findings that high school students do not appear to be intrinsically interested in serious news (Johnston, 1995, Whitmore, 1993). Self-reports of interest in various news topics by high school students indicate that students are most interested in topics that relate to teens or current events that deal with entertainment and sports and are least interested in foreign news and politics (Johnston 1995, Whitmore 1993).

In the United States, studies conducted by the National Association of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported generally poor performance in the national assessment of geographic knowledge (NAEP, 1990). The 76-item test measured knowledge of four topics: knowing locations, using geography skills and tools, understanding cultural geography and understanding physical geography. Overall, the national sample of twelfth-grade students answered only 57 percent of the items correctly. An assessment of 8,205 eleventh and twelfth grade students in private and public schools in 33 states revealed vast ignorance of key concepts, such as the gross national product, inflation, monetary policy and opportunity costs (Walstad & Soper, 1988). Better performances in the NAEP studies about civics, geography and history were associated with the following factors: educational attainment of parents, a home environment where reading and information are valued, a stable family structure, limited television viewing and regular performance of school assignments at home.

In the local context, there seems to be a lack of studies done on the Malaysian adolescents' knowledge of current events. Much has been mentioned about the Malaysian adolescent based on information from various agencies such as the police, welfare agencies and education authorities.