
Teachers In Malaysia - Are They Evolving Or Dissolving?

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ABSTRACT

Malaysia has seen many changes to the education system over the last fifty years and the rapidity and frequency of those changes in the last twelve years have lead parents, employers and even the teachers themselves to ask where are we going, what is being taught, how is it being taught and most importantly who are the people that now teach. Do they have the qualities of character, passion, and motivation? If the future of a nation rests on the professional educator are we attracting the best role models, mentors and skill imparters? This qualitative research proposal seeks to explore whether the quality of Teachers in Malaysia is improving and evolving or is the quality of the Teacher and the teaching profession going downhill. The findings are based on the perception of three parent cum professional educators from different economic background, gender, race and working environment. The study found that what matters most - the passion and pride in the teaching profession, is really dissolving, albeit slowly yet surely. MOE's emphasis on qualifications, higher salary and better career path does not seem to translate into quality educators, more like working around the edges of the issue rather than finding the answer. Thus, the findings within the limitations of this study strongly suggest that recent efforts to enhance the quality of teachers are failing implicating that further study and investigation into the 'soft' skills required in the education of the educator is greatly needed.

Key words : teaching profession; qualitative research; teacher commitment.

INTRODUCTION

The ammunition that brings that powerful instrument into the lives of the majority of children and adults alike are Teachers. The teaching profession is constantly observed, evaluated and the individuals who are involved in the education of any nation analysed, assessed, and by turns, both revered and reviled.

This qualitative research proposal seeks to explore whether the quality of Teachers in Malaysia is improving and evolving or is the quality of the Teacher and the teaching profession going downhill through the eyes of a select group.

This study will look at the quality of the teachers through the perceptions of teaching parents, those with a strong vested interest in education from both a work perspective and as concerned parents who want to see happy successful children. They are uniquely placed to see both sides of the 'fence', in regard to the passion and commitment of teachers in Malaysia today.

In 2005, the Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein announced that in a bid to "enhance the quality of teachers in the country", all teacher training colleges may soon be elevated to teacher education institutes.

More recently Datuk Seri Idris Jala, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department and CEO of PEMANDU, stated in an article in the *Malaysian Insider* 'Improving teacher quality in the education system is a top priority for PEMANDU' (Idris Jala 2010).

In 2009 a policy research paper for UNESCO 'Toward Providing Quality Secondary Education: Training and Retaining Quality Teachers in Malaysia' identifies among its initiatives, the need to select those candidates 'that have the interest and inclination to be teachers' (Mokshein et. al. 2009) .

Datuk Yaacob Wan Ibrahim during his presentation to the 11th Malaysian Education Summit (2007) addressed the audience with the primary importance of the holistic; 'Knowledgeable, intellectual, innovative/creative, high moral values; National Unity –a prerequisite to development of Strong Malaysia Nation;(the) Degree of quality manpower depends on the quantity and quality of education received by the people.

Despite Government initiatives and statements to the growing academic achievements of Teachers and the opportunities for gaining higher levels of education in the teaching profession the concerns of parents, educators and employees that the trend they see is reduced quality of teachers as a whole and consequently the ‘quality’ of school leavers in terms of their abilities to lead holistic lives, develop successful careers and be the valuable citizens that will benefit the country seems to be moving further away rather than evolving as hoped.

This study seeks to explore this dilemma; from a grass roots perspective in an effort to understand and define what is causing these issues.

OBJECTIVE

To explore the concerns and beliefs about the teaching profession, through the eyes of parent/teachers.

To compare and contrast the views of the parent/teachers with the documented policy, vision and reports of the Malaysian Ministry of Education

To identify international trends, expert opinions, and research that may have relevance to the concerns and beliefs in the teaching profession in a global perspective.

METHODOLOGY

The research style used will be based on the style of an interpretive ‘case study’ in which there is a principled resistance to pre-specifying the details of the research. The design of the research is seen as emerging during the investigation. (Robson C 1994). This allows for flexibility when exploring the views and feelings of the chosen participants.

FINDINGS

The study identified the feelings and perceptions in regard to teachers today were encapsulated in such headings as; the lack lustre attitude, no passion or commitment to helping the students; the desperation to get the students through exams; the lack of character, moral fibre; the apparently poor subject knowledge and pedagogy displayed by teachers, relative to the teachers they remembered during their school days.

Attitude is the most common concern with a real feeling among the Parent/Teachers interviewed that the teachers they see today are just not really interested in teaching.

Ms C says of her experiences as a teacher trainer

Ms C “they (teachers) know what they should do but they don’t practice it... If you don’t have the spark in you, you can go and do all the ra ra ra but when you go; what then? Do they sustain?”

Ms M remembers the attitude of her teachers “there was firmness and strictness but they were involved, they went beyond....”

Mr T “they (my teachers) were tough they wanted more than the syllabus, gave that little extra knowledge, they wanted to share.”

The frustration in the lack of passion and enthusiasm of the teachers today spilled over into a feeling of almost dereliction of duty when it came to effort put into the classroom with suggestion that the rising trend in tuition is in many cases a deliberate ploy by the teacher to increase income and creates ‘favourites’ with several cases cited by the interviewees of Teachers who make it clear that if you come to them for tutorials you will get advanced knowledge of exam questions and guaranteed good grades.

Mr T talking about his son's experience. "the teacher says in the class come to me, join my tuition class, [and] those who attend her tuition will pass of course because she has guided them".

Mr T remembers how his teacher would work with the whole class pairing up the less capable with the best students and challenging them all to pass together, his feeling now is teachers prefer to see the less capable students moved into other classes and they want to work with the ones who make them look good.

Ms C was particularly passionate in her response to teachers offering tuition "these teachers they make me quite angry.... When I was head of department I cannot believe some of my teachers give tuition, charge for tuition, guarantee passes, they are their students they should be doing it for free!"

Ms M remembers her Aunties as teachers that they worked hard and would attend serious workshops "they (her Aunties) took a lot of training on weekends, but not just this coffee break every half hour which seems to be the thing today. They were really into it and would come back so enthusiastic."

Across the board all three felt that far too many teachers came into the profession for all the wrong reasons and with the wrong perceptions.

Mr T "That they will be working less hours, half day la, and getting lots of holidays, extra money tuition la!"

Ms M. "I hear teachers complaining about extra duties, but there were always extra duties, my teachers were always there long before the bell, and I would see them after badminton

practice, still in the staffroom. Teachers always had to do this and that, only now they complain about it.”

Ms C stated in even stronger terms her believe that the wrong people are coming into teaching for all the wrong reasons and consequently they don't start with the qualities needed to make a good teacher

Ms C. “There are so many reasons why this is not working look at who is doing it... You don't get the quality the ethical attitude you know, no commitment, dedication; [its] for the money and as a stepping stone.

It is clear that the experiences cited by the interviewees would suggest that the quality school leavers that the profession would hope to draw in, see other careers as being more exciting, enjoyable, and lucrative, with more far reaching career prospects.

Generic qualities that all interviewees identified as important for a ‘good’ teacher coincide with the results of many researchers as do the concerns that teaching is not drawing the right calibre of person to its ranks.

CONCLUSION

In researching the issue of what is happening to Teachers in Malaysia today, are they evolving or dissolving, and looking at national and international dialogue on the issue of creating and sustaining a quality teaching profession. I was struck by a prize winning essay written by a Malaysian student studying in the UK in it she says

“In the old days before ‘Merdeka’, teachers were looked highly upon by society as educated intellectuals that were of enlightened thought. These role models were a source of

motivation and inspiration for many of today's doctors, lawyers, scientists and other professionals [and] teachers were seen as the key to a life of prosperity and wealth.”

(Balasundram 2011).

This encapsulates the essence of how the Parent/Teachers felt about their teachers and highlights what they feel is dissolving, the passion and pride in the teaching profession itself.

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