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## Futures of education in the post-pandemic era



By [Dzulkifli Abdul Razak](#) - June 1, 2021 @ 5:37pm



Transformative education starts with the individual, independent of the ecosystem. -  
NSTP/ASROL AWANG

While Covid-19 rages on worldwide unabated, so is the concern over containing this by flattening the educational curve, as it were.

The association between the two is more than just a coincidence. In fact, one could argue that the pre-pandemic days have done little to prepare us for what many had predicted many years ago, but little was seriously contemplated.

The assumption that advances in scientific knowledge (sans wisdom) is enough to deal with the future come what may is not entirely accurate. Similarly, the assumption that we need to focus only on what we can "count" (or "measure") with our five senses is all that matters has backfired.

Faced with an "invisible" enemy of epic proportions, we quickly lost our marbles, despite being labelled as a so-called "knowledge society" which is unparalleled to that of the past. In fact, often times we displayed even worse behaviours in handling crises ranging from that of environment to the more recent pandemic.

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This is evidently because pre-pandemic education too was very much framed on "counting" things, giving little comfort, if at all, to the "soul" (or the deeper emotions of being human). In other words, the current "education" was not sufficiently oriented for students to emotionally and mentally respond to pressing challenges in appropriate and humane ways.

Some termed this "education without soul", which is one of the main points highlighted by the Unesco International Institute for Higher Education (IESALC) report released on May 25 following intense consultations with higher education experts, including from Malaysia. As part of the Futures of Education project by Unesco, IESALC produced a report entitled: Thinking Higher and Beyond to innovatively generate new perspectives for higher education (HE).

For example, under the subtheme "Engaging with soul and in solidarity", the report captures the ways in which HE engages and fulfils its commitments encompassing several principles for stewarding HE into the years ahead. At the system and institutional levels, HE should be organised around values in providing "education with a soul".

Leveraging on these "soulful" values, HE can better stand and act together in collectively responding to global challenges on behalf of humanity not only for livelihood but also for life holistically. At the same time, it can shape the world around it by raising its voice in the global arena and reconsider transformative engagement by pursuing mutually inclusive internationalisation as highlighted in the report.

Earlier on, from May 17-19, a Unesco World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development (SD) took place. In the session on Transformative actions for SD Goals, various diverse testimonies were provided to demonstrate how values can drive transformative engagement in SD. And contributing towards structural changes in the society for a sustainable future.

This can be at societal level where thousands of children and parents living on a mountain of trash, struggling for life in Madagascar, were involved. For some 32 years, more than 650,000 were helped in solidarity against poverty. At an organisational level, a former political activist recounted how values of diversity, collaboration and pragmatism with all sectors can deliver transformative SD in Denmark.

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Still, age cannot stand in the way when a Unesco ESD Youth Ambassador from Trinidad and Tobago showed her dedication and commitment towards transformative future. What is clear from all these significant experiences and more, are a number of commonalities involved despite the different context: culture, location, age, gender and so on.

Foremost, transformative education starts with the individual, independent of the ecosystem. There must be room for empowerment, flexibility, innovation and accountability for the transformation to happen.

Moreover, they must be synergistic towards a "whole" approach that breaks down silos between disciplines, organisations and technological divides as it stands today.

The focus must be on humanity where "all lives matter" – human and non-human - based on holistic universal values in creating a balanced and peaceful environment informed by indigenous wisdom of sustainability (sejahtera) to bring back the "soul" of education shared throughout the human heritage. In short, the futures of higher education post-pandemic are in own hands to formulate in the best way possible learning from the past.

\* The writer, an NST columnist for more than 20 years, is International Islamic University Malaysia rector

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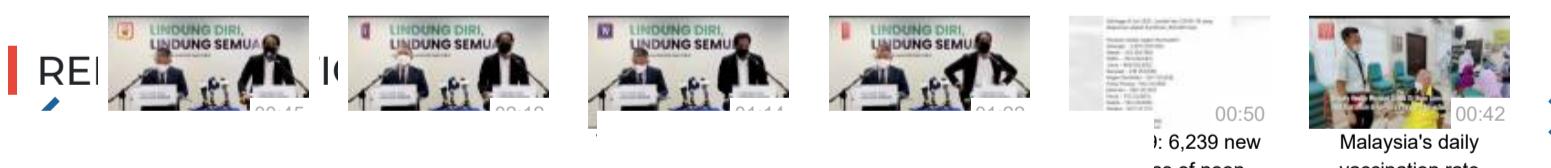


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