

**THE ROLE OF THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT IN THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF ETeMS**

Dr Rabiah Ghani

Director

English Language Teaching Centre, Malaysia

Rabiah Ghani has been in teacher education for more than 20 years. She has acted in various capacities as deputy principal and principal in three different teacher training colleges. Prior to her present appointment as Director of the English Language Teaching Centre, she was the head of the Academic Sector in the Sarawak State Education Department.

Her interests are in English language teaching and assessment.

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the implementation of the Teaching of Science and Mathematics in English (TESME) and its implications for the State Education Department (SED). It identifies the issues and challenges faced by the State Education Departments in getting the program implemented.

Introduction

Change is endemic to any dynamic organization. The Ministry of Education Malaysia is very much in tune with developments around the world. Its latest initiative involves the change in the medium of instruction for the teaching of science and mathematics.

The change is timely as the country moves towards industrialization in the technological era. For over 20 years, Bahasa has been the medium of instruction. While Bahasa has fulfilled its role in national unity, it has also promoted a monolingual culture among students the past generation. This is evident in the negative attitude towards the learning of English, which has for many years been relegated to second language status. Performance in English has declined over the years.

Multinationals attracted by our trade incentives have set up numerous companies. However, our graduates have not been able to tap into these companies for lack of a strong command in English. Increasingly there is a push to enhance the learning of English. Over the years various proposals were put forward by various stakeholders, one of which was to teach some subjects in English. However, this proposal was not well received at that time.

The impetus for change however, came from a different direction. The move towards industrialization and the need to communicate and to network with the global world requires a citizenry that is strong in technological skills and knowledge. However, most of these are written in English. One cannot deny that most of the work in science and technology are in English. It is imperative that the present generation be prepared to face the many challenges of the global world. The interest in enhancing the learning of English is thus revived.

In May 2002, the Ministry proposed the use of English for the teaching of Science and Mathematics. The Cabinet approved this in July.

The journey of a policy

State Education Departments play a crucial role in education policy implementation. They are the intermediaries between policy and teaching. They interpret policies for implementation within their own context.

In terms of structure, the State Education Department replicates the organizational structure of the central body, the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education is a highly centralized organization made up of various divisions comprising teacher education, curriculum development, examinations, textbooks, technology, private education and higher education (see Appendix A).

As a centralized system, policies and directives trickled from the central organization comprising core departments and divisions. Proposals are debated at various levels within the Ministry before they are presented to the Cabinet for approval. At that stage, all documents are considered confidential in nature.

Policies decided at the central level are conveyed by the Schools Divisions to the respective State Education Departments, which in turn disseminate the information to the sectors and units of management concerned within the department. The sector or unit concerned will conceptualize an operational plan or strategy that mobilizes all the resources and personnel necessary to implement the policy.

At the state level, a director heads the department assisted by a deputy. This level of management is assisted by sector heads. Each sector takes charge of different aspects of the operations that come under the units. (See Appendix B). Directives are issued through the Sector Heads for Unit Heads to work on with the assistance of Unit officers. The crucial bit here is the correct identification of the Sector. If a policy is directed to a sector that is not the target sector, then policy implementation becomes a communication nightmare. It will be very difficult for the sector to approach another sector for assistance because the sector would be seen as taking over the target sector's work.

The next crucial aspect is the interpretation of the policy. Because most State Officers are not directly involved in the debate on the new policy, interpretations of the new policy will be subjected to the scrutiny of past experiences and the beliefs system of the officers.

The ETeMS story at the State Level

When ETeMS started I was the head of the academic sector in Sarawak. I remembered we were very busy with the Curriculum Development Centre' induction program for the new curriculum. There were 60 subjects for the induction as both primary and secondary school curriculum were involved. The whole State machinery was deployed for that purpose.

The decision to teach mathematics and science in English is bold and timely and it required immense political will. More importantly, it underscores a landmark decision in Malaysian education the impact of which is multifaceted and far-reaching. The debate surrounding the decision goes on unabated, at least in private, but it must be seen as a pragmatic, calculated and informed move. This decision is also fortuitous in that, seen in the proper perspective it comes at the time of a major curricular review. The move has



arguably had a positive impact on local education but has brought with it numerous challenges as well. This paper dwells on these challenges and positive outcomes from the viewpoint of the State Education Department and especially the Academic Sector.

The state education departments have a central role in the dissemination of information, resource management, training and deployment of staff, and monitoring and evaluation of the various curricular changes. Under normal circumstances much of what is required of the state education departments would have been routine and fairly predictable but this has been a momentous year. There has been a flurry of activity which can be linked directly to the major revamp of the national curriculum.

At the State Education Department level, there has been immense pressure for tactical and strategic planning to mobilize limited resources to implement the various programmes that are a logical outcome of any major curricular change. This year, more so than ever before, there had been a need for a concerted, inter-divisional, inter-departmental, interdisciplinary approach towards conceptualizing, planning, managing, implementing, monitoring and assessing curricular change. Management patterns and practices have had to be reviewed.

The supply of federally funded resources for the mathematics and science classrooms has been extraordinary and this in itself had posed immense logistical challenges and necessitated meticulously detailed distribution plans to ensure a fair and equitable allocation of assets to all schools.

Perhaps for the first time, and certainly not since the 70s, was there a mobilization of teachers on such a massive scale. The need to train a large number of teachers in a short time brought with it attendant difficulties and challenges and training-related decisions had a profound effect at the school and classroom levels.

The decision to teach science and mathematics in English is a watershed. It has called for not merely a change in the medium of instruction but the creation of a new repertory of resources- conventional and multi-medium which have as its end users not just the students but also teachers.

This has necessitated the need for measures to ensure optimal use of resources and competent classroom practice, which translates into a key word – training.

Key teachers need to be trained as trainers. As the CDC's program is still on, it was challenging to find other teachers who are proficient enough to be trainers. At the end, we have to manage with less proficient trainers for otherwise there will not be enough trainers to go round.

In Sarawak, besides the problem of getting proficient trainers, there is a larger issue that involves the distances teachers have to travel to a training site. The time spent in traveling on foot the arduous terrain did not make the two-day on-site training appealing. Furthermore, the rural location also did not have the accommodation needed to house the participants. The best way therefore was to reorganize the proposed model to a fully residential model.

Monitoring is a challenging prospect. We need to find teachers who are proficient and are pedagogically strong in science and mathematics. Most of these teachers are senior teachers who have gone through the English medium. However, there are not enough of them. Furthermore, they are often not the ones teaching the required levels.

Recommendations

The overloading at the State Education Department particularly in the Academic Sector requires additional assistance. It is recommended that teachers be seconded to the department to help out with the work.

More empowerment should be given to the State to continue with the induction and training. The State is in direct contact with teachers and makes it ideal that they be involved in the monitoring.

Appendix B: An example of a State Organizational Set-up

