

LEARNING CURVE **PERSPECTIVE**
**DZULKIPLI  
ABDUL RAZAK**

# It is all in the execution

**T**HE Malaysia Education Blueprint (Higher Education) 2015-2025, which was unveiled on Tuesday, is expected to chart the transformation of tertiary education in the country. Aimed at producing “holistic and balanced graduates with an entrepreneurial mind”, it is value-driven in that students are moulded on positive values in terms of the ethical, spiritual and moral.

This aspiration mirrors closely the country’s National Education Philosophy (NEP) which reads: “Education in Malaysia is an ongoing effort towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonious, based on a firm belief in and devotion to God. Such an effort is designed to produce Malaysian citizens who

are knowledgeable and competent, who possess high moral standards, and who are responsible and capable of achieving high level of personal well-being as well as being able to contribute to the harmony and betterment of the family, the society and the nation at large.”

Indeed, Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, who is also the Education Minister, said: “A key goal is to nurture well-rounded individuals who are experts in their areas of expertise, strongly grounded in ethics and spirituality, and capable of taking up jobs in any high-income economy.” It is noteworthy that the first of the 10 shifts is clearly stated as producing holistic, entrepreneurial and balanced graduates. And, by implication, this refers to the intellectual, spiritual, emotion and physical aspects as clearly stated in the NEP. The challenge is to ensure that each aspect is given equal emphasis and weightage in making the first shift a reality. It calls for a deeper understanding of what

needs to be done in terms of curriculum development and pedagogy, beyond the normal religious and moral classes as conducted today, without the proper context. The reality is to comprehensively fulfil all the requirements and demands of life as an individual and the community, both locally and globally, so that life itself becomes more valuable, relevant and balanced universally. Hence, the integrative role of education to nurture a balanced way of life plays a vital part, particularly today, given the pronounced imbalance (read: the many divides) that is so pervasive globally.

Despite the five billion of the world population (out of the seven billion that make up the total), with belief in their respective religions, the spiritual vacuum in education cannot be more obvious to the discerning. Hence, the oft-repeated concern of “an education without a soul”.

That said, it is important to distinguish between a “balanced individual” (in the context of NEP)

and “human capital” that has, of late, seemingly taken centre stage as the aim of contemporary education. In fact, this could entirely mislead the final objective of the NEP since the underlying ideas between the two terms are worlds apart. The term “human capital” is laden with neoliberal principles, according to E.J. Hyslop-Margison and A.M. Sears (*Neoliberalism, Globalisation and Human Capital Learning*, 2006) who noted that the term has affected the world by deviating vital elements of “education” to a form of “exercises” and “skills”, and a “student” is changed to become a “customer”, while “competition” is prioritised more than “collaboration”. Education has become a traded commodity, since “capital” is the essential element in all forms of trade according to the understanding of neoliberalism.

Unless put right, ramifications include wide-ranging consequences on the other shifts, notably financial sustainability, empowered governance, innovation

ecosystem as well as global prominence. This is because, in the language of neoliberal education, the capital referred to here is in the form of “people” – at once disparaging issues of innate wisdom in human existence as a creation of God, as implied in the NEP. In this sense, generally, universities have somewhat lost their way – of who they are and what they are about – when “students” are turned into “customers”, “education” into “training,” “graduates” into “products” and “citizenry” to “marketability”, each with its price tag.

In the final analysis, the ultimate shift that must be undertaken is to firmly reinstate the idea of *insan seimbang dan harmonis* in its rightful place as per the NEP. Only then, higher education can lay claim to the true ethos of education as the quest for truth and the search for a deeper meaning to life beyond the logic of the marketplace alone. To quote Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak: “It’s all about execution, execution, execution.”

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