

Malaysia's Teaching System in a Meaningless Vacuum

By Mohd Khairul Ramli

The 2022 PISA results are a stark reminder that education, already facing challenges, has been dealt a devastating blow. Across the board, scores in reading, math, and science have declined, painting a picture not just of learning loss, but of a systemic malaise demanding immediate and critical attention. While the pandemic undoubtedly played a role, attributing the decline solely to school closures and online learning is a dangerous oversimplification. Instead, we must see these results as a symptom of deeper, pre-existing issues that the pandemic merely exacerbated.

Firstly, the narrative of "disrupted learning" obscures the truth. School closures and online learning exposed existing inequalities and inadequacies. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds, often lacking access to technology or conducive study spaces, were disproportionately affected. Furthermore, the shift online highlighted the digital divide in teacher training and resources. While some educators embraced virtual tools, others struggled, leaving students with fragmented learning experiences. Attributing the decline solely to "disrupted learning" ignores the pre-existing disparities and lack of preparedness that the pandemic amplified.

Secondly, the focus on curriculum changes deflects from deeper issues. While adaptations were necessary during the pandemic, framing the decline as a result of "incomplete coverage" masks the rigid and outdated nature of many curriculums. Rote memorization and standardized testing often dominate, leaving little room for critical thinking, creativity, and personalized learning. The pandemic merely shone a light on a system already struggling to equip students with the skills they need to thrive in a complex world.

Thirdly, the decline in scores exposes a fundamental crisis in teacher quality. Attributing the problem to "lack of quality" recruitment and development is a gross oversimplification. Many teachers are dedicated and passionate, but they are overworked, under-resourced, and often trapped in systems that stifle innovation and creativity. The current paradigm, with its emphasis on standardized tests and

accountability measures, fails to attract and retain the most talented educators, leaving students with under-equipped guides.

Finally, the lack of training in innovative pedagogies and virtual methods is merely the tip of the iceberg. It highlights a system-wide failure to invest in continuous professional development. Teachers need ongoing support to adapt to changing technologies, evolving learning styles, and the ever-growing demands of the 21st century. Viewing teacher training as a one-time event sets them up for failure, ultimately impacting student outcomes.

INSAP believe by critically examining the systemic issues at play and taking concerted action, we can chart a new course for education. Here are some key recommendations:

- Invest in teacher training and development and need to go beyond basic technology training and empower educators with skills in innovative pedagogies, differentiation strategies, and data-driven instruction.
- Prioritize curriculum coherence and equity and analyse the impact of curriculum adaptations and address any learning gaps. This ensures continuity and alignment across grade levels, while adapting content to cater to diverse learning styles and needs.
- Enhance supportive ecosystems for educators by provide ongoing professional development, mentorship, and adequate resources to boost teacher morale and empower them to innovate. Address workload concerns and create a supportive school environment.
- Utilize available data from national assessments and school-level evaluations to pinpoint specific areas of concern and track progress towards improvement.
- Collaboration between educators, parents, and community stakeholders to create a shared vision for education and develop context-specific solutions.

The PISA decline is not just a pandemic aftershock; it's a systemic wake-up call. Instead of quick fixes and scapegoating, we need a fundamental shift in our approach to education. This means investing in teachers, empowering them with autonomy and resources. It means rethinking outdated curriculums and embracing innovative pedagogies. It means addressing the digital divide and ensuring equitable access to

quality education. Only then can we truly heal the wounds inflicted by the pandemic and build a system that prepares all students to thrive in a rapidly changing world.