



## **MELTA: Hiccup for DLP as teachers struggle with English**

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NEXT year will be the first time the Dual Language Programme (DLP) Year One cohort will be entering secondary school.

This 2017 cohort has been learning Mathematics and Science in English throughout their schooling lives.

There are now concerns that there will not be enough DLP classes in secondary schools to accommodate all these students.

Education Minister Datuk Dr Radzi Jidin said the number of classes in secondary schools is higher than that in primary schools. There were 2,291 schools – 737 primary schools and 1,554 secondary schools, he told Parliament in August 2020.

The number of secondary schools, however, may not be enough due to the distribution of DLP classes. Some schools may have enough DLP classes while the demand far exceeds the available classes in others.

According to the Education Ministry's DLP Improvement Guidelines 2021, the District Education Offices are tasked with the mapping of recipient schools and feeder schools for the continuity of the programme from primary to secondary level.

It is not, however, as simple as adding more classes to accommodate existing needs. Schools must meet a certain criteria – including having proper resources, teachers who can teach in English and Bahasa Malaysia (BM) and parents who are supportive of the programme – before more classes are approved.

Many schools are unable to offer this option, Malaysian English Language Teaching Association (Melta) president Dr Ramesh Nair noted, because the subject teachers are not proficient in teaching English.

To understand the DLP dilemma, one must understand the rationale of its introduction into the Malaysian education system.

"Its roots lie in the birth of the Teaching and Learning of Science and Mathematics in English (PPSMI) policy, which was abandoned nine years after its implementation," he told StarEdu.

The policy was implemented "rather quickly" in 2003 despite concerns about the capability of Science and Mathematics teachers to teach the subjects in English. Although all in-service Science and Mathematics teachers underwent training, their capability to teach in English remained in doubt until the policy was finally scrapped in 2012. The DLP was part of the government's ongoing efforts to uphold BM while strengthening the usage of the English language.

It was introduced following appeals by parents and stakeholders to continue the teaching of Science and Mathematics in English.

The fact that DLP classes are still popular today is evidence that there is a preference for the teaching of these subjects in English where the option is available, Ramesh noted.

There have been continuous debate on the most appropriate medium of instruction, namely, whether the subjects should be taught in the student's mother tongue or in English. And the issue is not confined to Malaysia.

“A recent study in Spain, for example, revealed that primary school pupils studying Science in their native language performed slightly better than those who studied the subject in English.

“In contrast to such findings, other researchers in the area of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) opine that offering subjects in a target language such as English helps raise proficiency in that language,” he said, adding that there are concrete points raised on both sides of the divide.

“The fact that the DLP is still around suggests that the Education Ministry is aware of the merits of both alternatives.

“However, while empirical evidence and the views of experts should help direct policies, practical considerations and careful planning are critical in ensuring the programme’s success.”