

Responsive and Responsible Learning in the Malaysian Education System: A Game Changer

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Responsive and responsible learning connects the learner to the content. It is grounded in the teacher's understanding of the subjects taught and connects with each student to not only comprehend the subject but also apply the knowledge to real-life situations. Responsive and responsible teaching should help students build on prior learning to develop skills, mold attitudes, and cultivate independent learning. The pedagogies of teaching, therefore, should be attuned to a student-centered learning approach instead of teacher-centered, which is the practice in most educational institutions around the world including Malaysia. However, the process of teaching should start with early childhood education. Only then can the effectiveness of nurturing students to be independent learners and thinkers, which is the foundation of responsive and responsible learning, be achieved. This chapter, therefore, discusses the weaknesses of the current teaching and learning approaches (pedagogies) practiced in Malaysia and the reasons why a change is desirable (i.e., a game changer).

INTRODUCTION

Education is significant to any nation's social, political, and economic development. Therefore, effective teaching becomes paramount to guiding and assisting children progressing from one level to another in a sociable interactive environment and being independent learners (Béteille, T. & Evans, D., 2021). Effectiveness does not mean passing with excellence or getting good grades during the evaluation processes, but it should be to bring out the best in students holistically (Turdieva N.S., 2021). This starts right from when a child begins schooling, as the Malay proverb states, "Melentur rebung biarlah

daripada rebungnya,” meaning that you can only bend the bamboo while it is still a shoot. Therefore, if a child is to be molded to be a responsive and responsible learner, the process should start from the time they are enrolled in early childhood education and not just when they pursue their studies to the tertiary level at higher education institutions. Moreover, the effectiveness of responsive learning rests in perceiving education in a holistic manner. One of the leaders of the holistic education movement, Ron Miller (1997), stated that holistic teaching does not refer to a specific methodology (Miller, 1997). Instead, it should be viewed as a collection of fundamental assumptions and values that can be seen in various ways. Therefore, responsive and responsible learning with a holistic approach should generate students capable of handling and adapting to any situation.

The author presupposes that the current design of the education system is more akin to one size fits all, as the significance of education was to cater to the industrial revolution. The industrial revolution necessitated skilled human capital. Thus, the education system was interconnected with the needs of the industrial revolution. The needs of the industry were attained through an effective education system that leveraged the workforce to respond to the many facets of the industrial revolution. Therefore, the education system during the Industrial Revolution was based on the factory model of education, i.e., the one size fits all model, a curriculum to train and teach mass numbers to generate factory workers. The belief was that children were solely prepped and groomed to learn essential skills required to become competent factory workers. Students, therefore, were not grouped based on their abilities and needs but rather on their chronological age and industry demands. Alvin Toffler (1974), who criticized the “Industrial Era School” in his book, stated that “Mass education was the ingenious machine constructed by industrialism to produce the kind of adults it needed.” As industrial needs became competitive and advanced, education that turned agrarian human capital into skilled factory workers was not sufficient, especially with the progress of science and technology. Science and technology require cognition for ideas and innovation. A revamp in the education system was necessitated. The focal point or emphasis of education was to prepare an individual for work to suit the many phases and evolution of the industrial revolution and to invent and innovate. Though the current education system still caters to the needs of the industry market, the need for an education system to equip a child to be an independent learner or thinker is gaining superiority. The emphasis, however, is on intellectual intelligence, a knowledge base that stresses the cognitive domain. The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 also emphasizes the cognitive domain;

“Every student needs to develop skills of inquiry and learn how to continue acquiring knowledge throughout their lives, to be able to connect different pieces of knowledge and to create new knowledge. These higher-order thinking skills and the ability to innovate are especially critical in a rapidly evolving technological world. Every student needs to master a range of critical cognitive skills:

- Creative Thinking and Innovation: the ability to innovate, generate new possibilities, and create new ideas or knowledge;
- Critical Thinking and Reasoning: the ability to analyze information, anticipate problems, and approach issues critically, logically, inductively, and deductively in order to find solutions and ultimately make decisions; and
- Learning Capacity: the ability to independently drive one’s learning, coupled with the appreciation of the value of lifelong learning.” Lifelong learning, however, is stated to require more improvement.

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