

Meeting the Challenges of Globalisation in Education

Globalisation and the IT revolution are transforming the economic environment. New economic ideas such as E-commerce are gaining widespread attention and companies are being forced to restructure and become more innovative in order to stay competitive. Missing out on new technology or new markets can spell the end for companies. Such is the competitive nature of the new global market. With the advent of the third industrial revolution and the shift to a new economic paradigm comes also a shift in the way work is carried out. Due to the increasing importance of information communication technologies (ICTs) in our day to day work activities, a different set of skills are required in the workplace. For example a young person entering the workforce will be judged not so much on knowledge and skills he or she has acquired, but on the capacity for lateral thinking, creativity and an integrated approach to learning. The education system is expected to bridge the fundamental shift from an production-based economy to a knowledge-based economy.

Most of the developed countries have positioned themselves early in this competition to enhance their stocks of human capital and technology, with education playing a major facilitating role in this regard. As high quality human capital is developed through high quality education systems, with tertiary and secondary education providing the advanced skills that command a premium in today's marketplace, most, if not all, developed countries have emphasised higher education in order to ensure all their young people are prepared for the coming of the knowledge-based society.

The challenge to developing countries is not only to catch up, but also to set up and institutionalise a system of educational planning and implementation that will produce the skilled manpower and knowledge workers required by them today and in the future. As the economic environment undergoes a rapid transformation to become a borderless, knowledge-driven economy, based mainly on the production, distribution and utilisation of knowledge and information in all economic activities, the success of developing countries and national enterprises will depend increasingly on the effectiveness in

gathering and utilising knowledge for both teachers and students. It cannot be denied that we need multi-skilled people who are not only specialists but also those that are well attuned to general issues. Therefore, there is a need for the education authorities to reorient their education policies to make the curriculum more innovative. This move will certainly help develop the capacity for critical and analytical thinking in order to provide a sufficient pool of well-educated, highly-skilled and strongly-motivated labour force, as well as to produce responsible citizens with high moral and ethical values.

Another promising approach, which may be used in the schools or universities is “applied learning”, wherein students use what they have learned in real-world contexts. One obvious strength of applied learning is to capture students’ interest and thus motivate them by showing the relevance and usefulness of what they are learning. It can be a very effective way to motivate students to learn complex academic concepts. The exam-oriented education system leads to children being spoon-fed with vast amounts of information without any encouragement for originality. Accordingly, there is also an additional need for students to be empowered and to feel responsible for their own education. Thus, the students will have to be taught the art of acquiring more knowledge on their own and they will have to be stimulated to do things in different ways, so that they will become proactive rather than reactive, willing to take risks and learn from mistakes.

In order to strengthen the development of "life-long learning", subjects such as communication, learning and thinking skills will have to be incorporated into the discipline-based teaching and learning process. But merely offering such courses doesn't guarantee success. Where students do not perform well in demanding classes, teachers will need better instructional strategies. Toward this end, definite steps must be taken, because teaching is not like building a house or cooking a meal. There is no blue print or recipe for reaching every child in every lesson. Some students will absorb and retain information better by reading on their own or listening to their teachers, others will learn better by working out their ideas with their peers, and some by actually doing something that requires the application of that knowledge in a real world context. Therefore, the key

challenges facing the country is to train the teachers to be more innovative and computer-literate in order to produce quality human resources.

In the Malaysian context, much has changed in our education system over the years. A market-sensitive education system is evolving here in Malaysia. Malaysia is therefore putting in place the hardware and software to equip students to take advantage of the opportunities offered by an increasingly interconnected world. Our schools and universities are taking up the challenge of globalisation by changing not only the content of curriculum and programmes but also more importantly the delivery systems. Therefore, training for teachers must place emphasis on both remedial teaching and practicum. To make teaching increasingly interesting and effective, teachers must undergo a constant learning process. It must also be said that teaching facilities and equipment must be adequate and up to date, so that teaching and learning would be more current and meaningful. According to the mid-term review of the Seventh Malaysia Plan (1996-2000), some 1,230 teachers were trained to conduct the Computer-in-Education (CIE) programme in schools. Technical teachers were also provided training in the use of Computer-aided Design/Computer-aided Manufacturing (CAD/CAM) for designing and programming. In addition, all teacher training colleges were provided with facilities for computer training. The Smart Teacher Teaching Programme was also launched for 479 resource teachers involved in the smart schools initiatives to provide them with greater understanding and knowledge on IT applications. In addition, 90 teachers were provided training under the Dengkil Smart School project.

Malaysia has a young vibrant population with tremendous potential for the acquisition of new knowledge and skills. Their versatility and ability to absorb new technologies will help put the country at the forefront of global science and technology development in the new century. Therefore, the Ministry of Education will have to play a more collaborative role to realise the overall quality Education Plan. We have to race ahead to achieve a significant transformation of our educational infrastructure in order to meet the new millennium as a technologically competent and scientifically adept society.