

English offers more choices

EDUCATION is for everyone and we all want to seek a good solution that will allow our children, in their most formative years, to be able to interact with all races to study and play together, like in the good old days.

Understandably, the debate on vernacular schools at the primary level will continue to surface now and then, but we also need to be concerned about the standard of English at the secondary school level and beyond.

We should therefore consider a bold move to give what all parents want for their children – quality education in English, Maths and Science, which should be possible for the Government to provide by allowing English to be used as a parallel medium of instruction in secondary schools.

As former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad often stresses, proficiency in English is the key to knowledge and a successful career depends on it, because it is the international language for learning, research and business.

A country that is proficient in English will have an added advantage in the competitive world that we live in.

Former Singapore prime minister Lee Kuan Yew, when asked in an interview, said that although China might surpass the United States in Gross Domestic Product by 2020, it cannot beat the Americans as a fully developed nation because it does not use English.

He said that since Chinese is an incredibly difficult language, foreigners will not use it. His logic explains why he made English the dominant language for Singapore.

In Israel, English is also widely used despite the nationalistic feelings that as Jews, they must learn in the Hebrew language to maintain their cultural identity. With English, Israel has become a favourite place for academics, researchers and innovators from the West to live and work.

As a result, their economy has advanced tremendously. More of the latest discoveries in medicine and technology, including high-tech

military gadgets, are coming from Israel.

In Malaysia, many parents want their children to work with the big multinational corporations here or overseas to gain knowledge and advance in their career before they settle down in the country.

At home, children grow up speaking English and parents with money often spend on expensive private tuition in school subjects as well as on music and sports coaching and take their children on foreign vacations, all helping to give their kids a better start in life.

For the great majority of children, however, their education and preparation for life depend entirely on what they get at school, because most parents cannot afford to give them more.

It is therefore a matter of justice and equity that they too should get a strong education in English, to enable them to compete with the children of the urban elite for good jobs in the country and overseas.

Teaching English as a language for a few hours a week does not

produce the same proficiency as using it as a medium of instruction in class.

Students will have a better command of the language when they are made to use it for studying and as they become accustomed to it, they will have more confidence in themselves when they go for job interviews or go abroad for studies and for work.

It is a fact that those who are good in English are more mobile and have more choices in their life decisions.

I strongly support the proposal that secondary education should be in one stream as this will help to promote national unity and would like to propose further that to make the country more competitive in the global economy, English be used as a second medium of instruction so that all children, especially children from poor families and rural areas, will get equal opportunities in life.

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