

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MORAL EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract: Moral Education (ME) has been employed in the Malaysian education system for more than two decades. Policies have changed, and syllabi have been reviewed. The many challenges faced by makers, educators and students of ME have been analysed and evaluated continuously. In this article, the writer explains that Malaysia has come a long way where ME is concerned. The historical, religious and sociocultural aspects of Malaysia have been of concern since the first ME syllabus was constructed. The ME syllabus was revisited a decade ago, and now it might undergo another evaluation and revision. In-depth research needs to be done to ensure that ME in Malaysia is unique and dynamic within a multicultural setting.

Keywords: Moral Education, development, historical, multicultural

Abstrak: Pendidikan Moral (PM) sudah bertapak dalam sistem pendidikan di Malaysia selama lebih daripada dua dekad. Polisinya juga sudah berubah dan sukatan pelajarannya telah dinilai. Pelbagai cabaran yang dihadapi oleh penggubal polisi, pendidik dan pelajar PM telah dianalisa dan dinilai berkali-kali. Dalam artikel ini, penulis menerangkan bahawa Malaysia telah mara ke hadapan dalam perkembangan PM. Penekanan diberikan dari aspek sejarah, keagamaan dan sosiobudaya di Malaysia sejak penggubalan sukatan pelajaran PM yang pertama. Sejak itu, sukatan pelajaran PM telah dikaji semula sedekad yang lepas, dan kini ia mungkin akan dinilai dan disemak semula. Kajian mendalam perlu dijalankan untuk memastikan PM di Malaysia unik dan dinamik dalam dalam rangkaian budaya Malaysia.

Kata kunci: Pendidikan Moral, perkembangan, sejarah, pelbagai budaya

INTRODUCTION: TAKING A TRULY MALAYSIAN VIEW OF MORAL EDUCATION

It is essential to understand the various factors connected to Moral Education (ME) in the Malaysian setting, and since this chapter focuses on such matters, a truly Malaysian view of ME is necessary to understand the purpose of humanistic subjects like ME in Malaysian schools. First, it should be clarified that ME in Malaysia caters to the non-Muslim cohort of students in primary and secondary schools. The non-Muslim cohort includes students from different faiths, such as Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, Taoists, Sikhs and believers in animism and

paganism. While non-Muslim students study ME, Muslim students study Islamic Studies.

THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN MALAYSIA: AN OVERVIEW

Education is viewed as a life-long process in the Malaysian setting. Education is expected to integrate the nation (Mukherjee, 1983) and aims to create a harmonious environment between the different ethnic groups living in Malaysia.

In the early years, when Malaya (the pre-independence name of Malaysia) was ruled by the British Empire, there were four distinct strands of education and four distinct types of school that helped to reinforce the racial, social, linguistic and cultural groups in the country (Mukherjee, 1983). The four strands of education include the informal religious school conducted in *madrrasah*, local Malay schools, Chinese vernacular schools and Tamil vernacular schools. The Malay vernacular school system was made up of Islamic religious schools and was located in rural areas where the Malays lived. These children were given six years of elementary education. Three objectives were defined for Malay education: (1) to familiarise Malay boys with the simple arithmetic needed to handle small business transactions, (2) to develop a better sense of hygiene; and (3) to train the sons of the Malay aristocracy in English to serve the colonial masters (Abdullah Hassan, 2007).

Tamil schools were mainly located in rubber plantations where the Indian plantation workers lived. Indian students were also given six years of elementary education and were expected to provide labour for the rubber plantations and railways. This was a deliberate policy to deny them both economic and geographical mobility. By contrast, Chinese schools were located in towns and urban areas where primary and secondary schools were built. The Chinese were allowed to establish their own schools and use curricula, teachers and textbooks from China, as the British colonial government did not consider it an obligation to provide education to the transient population (Annual Report of the Resident-General of the Federated Malay States, 1901).

There was no mention of ME in any of the vernacular syllabi, though Malay children were taught, in the *madrrasah* schools, to memorise Quran verses and facts about good and bad virtues according to Islam philosophy. Christian missionaries came to Malaya and set up some English medium schools from the 19th century onwards. These were given some government aid. They implemented ethics and catechism lesson in their syllabi. The ethnic groups in Sabah and Sarawak were on their own too, schooling their children in their own informal, traditional way.

After several decades and World War II, the Chinese and Indians in Malaya realised that they were not there on a temporary basis and demanded that education be provided to them by the government. The different ethnic community leaders got together and demanded that the colonial government accept responsibility for educating their children and their future generations. These demands made the British formulate an education committee and devise a report. The gist of the Report of the Education Committee (1956: 1) calls for:

A national system of education acceptable to the people of the federation as a whole which will satisfy their needs and promote their cultural, social, economic and political development as a nation, having regard to the intention of making Malay the national language of the country whilst preserving and sustaining the growth of the language and culture of other communities living in the country.

According to the Education Ordinance of 1957, a system of education was to be established to fulfil the needs of the nation and to initiate cultural, social and political development. There was nothing mentioned about ME, though an important exception to the common content principle is Islamic Religious Studies, which was made a compulsory, examinable subject for all Muslim students. Schools were provided the flexibility to teach other religions or ethics systems according to their own arrangements, not as part of the state-approved curriculum provisions.

From the post-independence period, education in Malaysia evolved through four different eras. The Razak Report (1956) and Education Ordinance (1957) are seen as parts of a consolidation period.

The next stage was the updating period, which included the Rahman Talib Report and Education Act (1961). During this period, emphasis 3M basic education including *membaca, menulis dan mengira* (reading, writing and arithmetic). A strong spiritual education and the desired elements of discipline; a Malaysian curriculum; upper secondary education of two streams (academic and Vocational); opportunity to continue education from 9 years to 11 years; and facilitation of education management procedures to improve the overall quality of education. ME was not in existence yet, but Islamic Studies was implemented as a core subject in all primary and secondary schools for Muslim students.

The third era saw further implementation of the 1979 Cabinet Report and was the most important era for ME. As a result of the 1979 Cabinet Report, ME was structured and introduced on school in 1983. The need to focus on the deterioration of moral values and indiscipline among teenagers, especially school-going children (Rosnani, 2007), was one of the rationales for formulating

such a subject. It was also necessary to fill a vacuum of moral instruction for non-Muslim pupils. Since then, ME has gone through various developments.

The fourth stage came about after the Education Bill (1995) was tabled in Parliament. It focused on the need for the national education system to be re-designed to produce world-class education in order to achieve the nation's aspirations. The National Education Philosophy became the base for national education policy. During this period, the first ME syllabus was evaluated and revised according to national and global changes (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2000).

In 2006, under the Ninth Malaysian Plan, the Major Plan for Education Development (2006–2010) was introduced. The main purpose of the plan is to revisit the implementation of the present educational programs and stabilise the process of developing human capital comprehensively and continuously so that the output achieved is capable of fulfilling local and international needs as well as stabilising Malaysia's position in the global arena. To achieve these aims, two approaches have been identified. First is to resolve unfinished business in the five-year plan, which was designed to ensure that education was accessible to everyone and to create a just, equal ground of competition for all students. Second is to bring the excellence of schools and institutions that is now present to a higher level and to improve the image of the education system in the world's view. Six basic strategies have been identified; they are to build a national nation, develop human capital, upgrade national type schools, decrease the educational difference among individuals, dignify the teaching profession and increase the excellence of educational institutions (Malaysian Government, 2006).

The one strategy linked directly to ME is to develop human capital. The strategy focuses on the possession of knowledge and skills. Students would be inculcated with noble values which they appreciate and apply in morals and acquire positive attitude in building self-disciplined persons (Malaysian Government, 2006). And since this is on a par with the philosophy of ME in Malaysia, it is essential that the development of human capital in the Malaysian setting begin from the students themselves.

HISTORICAL EVENTS INFLUENCING ME IN MALAYSIA

After independence and the start of a new era in education in Malaysia, several events took place which made the Malaysian government look seriously into the Education Ordinance of 1957. On 13 May 1969, the country experienced one of the worst riots of the century (Mukherjee, 1983). The whole incident, racial in nature, was very bloody. Many lives were lost, and every ethnic group became suspicious of the others. Many days of curfew were declared, and the ruler declared a state of emergency. From that time until today, the political, spiritual, and ethnic community leaders have been cautious about trying to create national integrity and harmony among the different ethnic groups.

Various programs, advertisements in the media, and other government campaigns have been used from time to time to remind the nation that in order to develop, different ethnic groups must live together and make their diversity their strength. The introduction of *Rukun Negara* (National Ideology) is one of the strategies used in this campaign, and it stands as a source of values for both the primary and revised ME syllabus for secondary schools in Malaysia.

RUKUN NEGARA

In 1970, the *Rukun Negara* was introduced nationwide. The *Rukun Negara* was officially proclaimed by the fourth *Yang di-Pertuan Agong* (King) on 31 August 1970 (Malaysia's 23rd Independence Day). The *Rukun Negara* was formulated with the intention of providing guidance for nation-building efforts. The pledge of the *Rukun Negara* is as follows:

Our nation, Malaysia, is dedicated to: achieving a greater unity for all her people; maintaining a democratic way of life; creating a just society in which the wealth of the nation shall be equitably distributed; ensuring a liberal approach to her rich and diverse cultural tradition, and building a progressive society which shall be oriented to modern science and technology.

We, the people of Malaysia, pledge our united efforts to attain these ends, guided by these principles:

Belief in god,
Loyalty to king and country,
Upholding the constitution,
Sovereignty of the law, and
Good behaviour and morality.

One important event in the early development of ME was the Cabinet Committee of Education's request that the Ministry of Education set up machinery for the development and formulation of a ME curriculum. The requirement stated was that the curriculum should extend throughout the 11 years of schooling period and be focused on non-Muslim students. The latter requirement came about because, at that time, Muslim students were already learning Islamic Religious Knowledge in their school curricula. The new ME syllabus was required to be examinable, since the *Ugama* syllabus was an examinable subject (Report of the Cabinet Committee, 1979, para. 127.1). All activities in regards to ME were based on the 1979 report of the Cabinet Committee on Education to review the implementation of education policy. In this report, it was stated that:

To build a disciplined, cultured and united society, it is recommended that while Muslim students study Islamic Religious Knowledge, and this includes other pupils who choose to follow this subject, Non-Muslim pupils should be taught moral and ethics education. All pupils who study this subject, Moral and Ethics Education, must take it in the examination. In both these subjects, respect for individual, freedom to embrace any religion in a multi-religious society must be cultivated (para 127.1: 49).

The decision made resulted in the formation of a few working committees. The Ministry of Education directed the Curriculum Development Centre to formulate a ME syllabus to be tabled at Parliament. During the Central Curriculum Committee meeting of October, 1976, it was decided that a ME Committee be established (Nor Hayati Abd Rashid, Nasriah Haji Maghribi & Asmah Mohd Taib, 1994). The Head of the School Inspectorate was appointed as the chairperson, and representatives of various religious and voluntary groups and heads of schools, colleges of education, universities, and other divisions of the Ministry of Education were appointed as members (Mukherjee, 1983). The role of the committee was to discuss, debate, and finally formulate a suitable syllabus for non-Muslim students in Malaysia. It was of great importance to involve as many people as possible, from all walks of life and different faiths, to provide feedback, suggestions, and ideas for the new subject.

ME Committee

The ME Committee was a large committee headed by an eight-member syllabus committee whose task was to produce a draft syllabus for ME (Mukherjee, 1983). The other members of the committee were given the responsibility of conducting studies on the existing school curriculum regarding the teaching of moral values in the curriculum and co-curriculum. In addition, religious bodies and non-governmental bodies were given the opportunity to identify the niche areas and

values that needed to be taught in the newly formulated subject. Representatives of various religious and voluntary groups and heads of schools, colleges of education, universities, and other divisions of the Ministry of Education were appointed as members of the ME Committee (Mukherjee, 1983). The findings and input from the different working levels were submitted to the main committee from time to time for further discussion and amendment.

Around the same time, Malaysia became involved in a series of workshops on ME in Asian countries. The whole project was sponsored by UNESCO and organised by the National Institute of Educational Research (NIER) in Tokyo, Japan (NIER Research Bulletin, 1981). Participating countries shared their opinions and experiences in ME, which was practiced either formally or informally in their respective countries. One of the objectives of the workshops was to identify universal moral values that participating countries could adopt and use as part of the core content of their ME programmes (Mukherjee, 1983). The idea of having 16 core values in the premier ME syllabus was one outcome of this project.

The First ME Syllabus

The New Primary Schools Curriculum (NPSC) was implemented in 1983. For the first time, ME was officially introduced as a core subject in Year One in all primary schools throughout Malaysia. The programme was implemented in stages, on a year-by-year basis, and was completed in 1988. The subject was then taught from Year One to Year Six. In 1989, with the implementation of the Integrated Curriculum for Secondary Schools, ME was extended to all secondary schools as well on a year-by-year basis. By 1993, all primary and secondary schools had ME as a core subject in their school curriculum.

At the end of 1993, the first cohort of Form Five non-Muslim students sat for their centralised examination in ME. Since ME is a core subject in the secondary education syllabus, every non-Muslim student must take the subject and sit for the examination. Because morality itself is so subjective, assessing it as objectively as possible is another continuous challenge. After several revisions, the assessment has been divided into two sections. One tests knowledge, and the other is project work where students' commitment to the affective and physical domains of morality is assessed (Vishalache, 2004a).

In the pioneer syllabus, ME emphasises the spiritual, humanitarian, and social aspects of the total development of the individual. It stresses the inculcation and internalisation of the noble values found in Malaysian society, based on the various religions, traditions, and cultures of the different communities and also consonant with universal values. The general objective of ME in primary and

secondary schools is the development of an individual who recognises, accepts, and internalises his/her role as a responsible decision-maker regarding moral values in a democratic society, such that his/her actions are governed by moral principles in all situations.

The first curriculum for ME consists of values observed and upheld by the individual and society. These values are essential to ensure the healthy interaction between the individual and his/her family, peers, and society and the institutions of which he/she is a member (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1988). In the premier syllabus, 16 values are taught in secondary school. The values are:

1. Compassion
2. Self-reliance
3. Humility
4. Respect
5. Love
6. Justice
7. Freedom
8. Courage
9. Physical cleanliness and mental health
10. Honesty
11. Diligence
12. Cooperation
13. Moderation
14. Gratitude
15. Rationality
16. Public spiritedness

It is the practice in the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) in Malaysia to revise syllabi that are outdated (usually more than 10 years old) or when complaints are received from authorities like teachers and the public (CDC Central Report, 1988). One of the main weaknesses of the premier ME syllabus was repetition of content. The other was that the value clarification and cognitive development strategies failed to recognise the sociocultural richness that students brought into the ME class. The teaching of ME as static, compartmentalised, and predictable made students of ME unhappy, and complaints flowed in from different parties to the media and Ministry of Education. With all these challenges and complaints, the CDC decided to revise the ME syllabus.

THE REVISED ME SYLLABUS

In the first ME syllabus (1988), the National Philosophy of Education, the Federal Constitution, and the *Rukun Negara* provided basic guiding principles for a faith-based moral education. In the revised ME syllabus (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2000), the Malaysian Vision 2020, was included. Vision 2020, an ideology suggested by the previous prime minister of Malaysia, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, includes nine challenges that the country foresees in nation- and global-community-building (Mahathir Mohamad, 1991). They are: to form a nation that stands as one; to produce a Malaysian community that has freedom and strength and is full of self confidence; to develop a mature democratic community; to form a community that has high morale, ethics, and religious strength; to cultivate a community that is mature and tolerant; to form a progressive science community; to cultivate a community rich in values and loving culture; to ensure the formation of a community with a fair economy; and to cultivate a prosperous community. The essence of Vision 2020 has been included in the content of the revised ME syllabus for secondary schools.

According to the Malaysian Country Report presented in the "Values Education for Peace, Human Rights, Democracy and Sustainable Development for the Asia-Pacific Region" in Bangkok, 1998, ME in Malaysia is based on certain basic assumptions:

1. Values are not passively received, but are actively built up by the cognitive learner. In other words, values are socially constructed over time.
2. Values are not a collection of isolated rules and facts. Instead, they can be perceived as a network of ideas, where each idea is connected to several others. To be useful, values should be taught as a unified body of knowledge.
3. God has a major influence on people's lives and, thus, there are absolute values based on the teaching of religion and relative values created by human minds.
4. There are some parallels regarding what is perceived as good by one religion and similarly by others. Since Islam is the official religion in Malaysia, non-Islamic values could also be viewed in the light of their relationships with Islamic values.
5. School is not neutral, but a value-loaded enterprise. Teachers need to play the role of moral educators, instructors, facilitators, and exemplars.

6. God creates human beings for specific purposes, and values education should stress an integrated view of man, in as much as human character involves the interplay of four basic elements: spirituality; knowledge; attitudes and values; and action.

(UNESCO, 1998: 119–120)

Instead of following a certain aspect of psychology, several approaches, such as cognitive developmental, values clarification, and character education, are combined to form the epistemology of the syllabus. It is an integrated ME syllabus and in line with the National Educational Philosophy of Malaysia, which focus on the "development of meaningful relationships, that is, the relationship between body, mind, and spirit; the relationship between one's responsibility to God, one's self, the universe, and the community; and the relationships between various domains of knowledge".

(UNESCO, 1998: 119)

One major difference between the premier ME syllabus and the revised version is the wider scope of the latter. Since the concern for globalisation has increased, more critical and broader issues were covered in the UNESCO meetings and workshops, and as a result, the ME Syllabus was also revised to suit current needs. The ME curriculum aims at developing responsible individuals of high moral standards who are able to contribute to the peace and harmony of the country and the global community (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2000).

The focus of teaching and learning is based on several main principles of producing holistic individuals physically, intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, and socially. The principles are to:

1. Be responsible towards self, family, and others;
2. Be steadfast towards one's religion;
3. Be caring towards the environment;
4. Sustain a peaceful and harmonious life;
5. Be patriotic;
6. Respect human rights; and
7. Practice principles of democracy in life.

(Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2000: 1. Writer's translation)

The principles clearly guide the content of the revised syllabus. The content of the syllabus are divided into several learning areas. The teaching and learning of ME in schools focus on several learning areas. For example, in secondary schools, seven learning areas have been identified. The aspects given priority are

spirituality, humanity, society and culture. Learning fields given prior importance are:

1. Values related to Self Development;
2. Values related to Family;
3. Values related to the Environment;
4. Values related to Patriotism;
5. Values related to Human Rights;
6. Values related to Democracy; and
7. Values related to Peace and Harmony.

The values included in self-development are belief in God, trustworthiness, self-esteem, responsibility, humility, tolerance, self-reliance, diligence, love, justice, rationality, and moderation.

The values related to family are love for the family, respect and loyalty towards family members, preservation of family traditions, and responsibility towards family.

The values relating to the environment are love and care for the environment, harmony between man and the environment, sustainability of the environment, and sensitivity towards environmental issues.

The values included in the learning area related to patriotism are love for nation, loyalty to the King and nation, and willingness to die/sacrifice for nation.

The values to be learned in human rights are protection of children's rights, respect for women's rights, protection of labour rights, respect for rights of the disabled, and protection of consumers' rights.

The values included under democracy are respect for rules and regulations, freedom of speech and expressions, freedom of religion, participation in nation-building, and open-mindedness.

As for learning area seven, which focuses on peace and harmony, the values are living together in harmony, mutual help and cooperation, and mutual respect among nations.

In the revised syllabus, though the learning areas and the values are the same, the scope and emphases for each form are different because the moral issues that are discussed become more complex according to the needs and maturity of the students. In addition, emphasis is also placed on students acquiring various skills, such as generic skills, critical and creative thinking skills, conflict resolution

skills, and social skills. The hope is that these skills will prepare students to face the world of information technology and communication with confidence and have social and moral responsibility. The skills are also expected to help develop resistance in students to the pressures and challenges of student life.

Future Development of ME in Malaysia

It has now been a decade since the revision of the current ME syllabus. With the rebirth of Civics and Citizenship Education (CCE) in 2004 (Vishalache, 2004b), the current ME syllabus for both primary and secondary schools is being revisited for further improvement, so that there will be no overlap between ME and CCE. The diversity of Malaysia is vast. The challenge of educating such diverse students in Malaysia through ME is indeed something worth investigating further. It is important that ME encourage students within their sociocultural domains to discover the needs of the state, their culture and their religion, as well as the changes within a global community.

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