

ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Teachers must embrace lifelong learning

RAJA NOR SAFINAS RAJA HARON
AND LIM BEE YOKE
education@nst.com.my

THE national-level Teacher's Day celebration 2017 was held in Johor Bahru on May 16. The theme for this year's Teacher's Day is "Guru Pembina Negara Bangsa" or "Teachers Foster Nation Building". This theme emphasises the impact of teachers upon a nation.

Teachers' contributions and commitments have always been appreciated and therefore, it is not surprising that Malaysian National Laureate Usman Awang also held teachers in high esteem in his poem, "Guru Oh Guru". In it, Usman describes the teacher's role in shaping a child's journey up until he enters the working world.

Teaching is a noble profession whereby teachers play a critical role in building, developing and moulding the future generation. With the advent and advancement in education over the past decade, teaching is becoming more challenging and demanding. Teachers need to keep pace with the fast-changing world of education and meet the demands of the ever-evolving education system.

Teachers who are in the education system, be it those who are beginning their career or currently serving, need to be constantly equipped with new knowledge and skills related to curriculum change, assessment, integration of technologies and resources to meet the educational needs of the 21st century.

The teaching and learning approaches and strategies must empower our children with the Four Cs — Critical Thinking, Communication, Collaboration and Creativity. Teachers are at the forefront in delivering 21st century education in the language classroom.

The English Roadmap 2015-2025 addresses several important components which directly impact the quality of English language teachers in its aim to raise the standards and quality of English language teaching and learning in schools and higher education institutions to international levels.

The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) has been adopted for selection into the teacher education programmes, pre-service ELTE curriculum, in-service training programmes and the accreditation of English language teachers.

All English language teachers should achieve CEFR C1 as a minimum requirement. Teachers are required to develop their skills and abilities throughout their careers in order to make up a high quality English teaching force.

The Professional Upskilling of English Language Teachers or known as Pro-ELT is one of the initiatives carried out to uplift the standards of proficiency.

Change is inevitable. If teachers are to remain relevant, they need to move with the times. They need to embrace change and be the agents of change. To uphold this profession and its demands, teachers should make continuing professional development a top priority in their agenda.

Annually teachers who serve in government



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schools are required to fulfill seven days of professional development by attending courses, seminars or conferences to upskill and upgrade their professional self.

The programmes are well-developed and designed so that teachers are able to transfer their knowledge and competencies into classroom practices which will benefit their students.

The Ministry of Education (MoE) provides a menu of courses that teachers can choose from throughout the year. Most of these professional development and in-service courses are organised and managed by the English Language Teaching Centre (ELTC), Ministry of Education.

Teachers can select the courses based on their needs and related to their field of work. More importantly, teachers are given the autonomy to chart, reflect and assess their own professional development and success.

It is the aspiration of the MoE to raise the percentage of school-based professional development activities or on-site training grounded in the classroom.

Schools are empowered to deliver professional development courses.

The Ministry of Education introduced professional learning communities (PLCs) to schools in 2012 as a professional platform for teachers to work together to improve upon the teaching practices in the language classroom.

The mentoring and coaching system is encouraged among teachers to provide continuous support. This system also enables teachers to learn from one another by sharing best practices.

The support systems to enable schools and teachers to manage changes in the education system are via School Improvement Specialist Coaches (SISC+) and FasiLINUS.

These officers facilitate, coach and mentor teachers by working hand-in-hand with them to address the challenges and issues in the class-

room. This collaboration and communication among teachers to improve the quality of education delivered to students epitomises 21st century education.

Such initiatives have shown remarkable improvements in teachers' professional development through the spirit of collegiality and inculcate a positive and conducive environment.

Becoming a teacher is a lifelong journey with true commitments. This journey includes equipping oneself continually with the knowledge and skills to be an effective and quality teacher.

Having high values and being passionate in teaching and learning is central for sustaining interest in the job.

Possessing a positive attitude towards the diverse learning styles of students and having the ability to accommodate to these varied learning styles requires a teacher to have strong pedagogical content knowledge.

The role of a teacher also includes ensuring that every student's needs are catered to.

English teachers in the Malaysian context need to be adaptive to classroom situations with diverse students' backgrounds which can be in the form of culture, ethnicity, languages and religion.

Only by addressing these needs can we ensure that students' potential in English have been optimised. This is the ultimate aim of education that the nation aspires to and thus put in the hands of the teachers.

Raja Nor Safinas Raja Harun, PhD is an associate professor at English Language and Literature Department, Faculty of Languages and Communication at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris.

Audrey Lim Bee Yoke is head of department of Quality Assurance, English Language Teaching Centre Malaysia at Ministry of Education Malaysia.