

Parents: Can teachers cope with new standards?

PETALING JAYA: Stakeholders welcome the use of imported textbooks, but are sceptical about whether teachers will be able to cope with the foreign standards.

Parent Action Group for Education Malaysia chairman Datin Noor Azimah Abdul Rahim said having the "right" textbooks was vital.

"There are many English textbooks that are better than the ones published specifically for our schools," she said.

"The problem lies not with the books but the quality of teachers.

"If teachers with 'a little bit of English' are chosen, the programme will surely fail."

She added that while the nation was moving towards the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages-centric (CEFR) syllabus, which was a good move, the parents' group had reservations, noting that having these books required time and effort to ensure its benefits.

"Textbooks can change, but everything has to follow suit," she said.

Noor Azimah also said teachers needed to change their ways to adapt to the new curriculum to improve the quality of English language teaching.

"The problem will also come from designing test papers, which teachers are tasked with," she said.

Parent Choo Yen Li agreed that

the switch to imported textbooks was a good move.

However, she said it was important that any problems be identified during the roll-out and be solved immediately.

This would lessen the pressure on students, teachers and parents, she added.

"Our education system and its direction constantly changes," said the mother of two primary school pupils.

Secondary school English teacher Mohd Sirhajwan Idek said what mattered most was the approach teachers adopted in using the materials effectively.

The National Teacher Icon Award winner added that it was essential for teachers to keep improving themselves and upgrading their skills through the Continuing Professional Development programme.

Educationist Devinder Raj expressed scepticism about the foreign textbooks.

He said they were not culturally appropriate, especially for rural students who may not know what the four seasons are, or the festivals or buildings in Britain.

He suggested that the Education Ministry talk to book publishers to change items such as names and places to reflect Malaysian culture so that it would be easier for students to grasp the language concepts in the books.

Road to better English: Starting next year, preschoolers, Year One and Two pupils, and Form One and Two students will start off with the new CEFR-aligned curriculum.

Imported books will improve language skills, say experts

PETALING JAYA: Experts believe that imported English books will lead to better usage of the language among schoolchildren.

Welcoming the move, Prof Dr Zuraidah Mohd Don from Universiti Malaya's Faculty of Languages and Linguistics said the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) had become the de facto international standard for language education because it incorporated the best of current knowledge based on more than 40 years of research and had benefited from contributions from scholars all over the world.

In adopting the CEFR, the Education Ministry was providing the children with the best material available, she said.

"It's essential for all stakeholders

to support the changes being introduced to ensure that our children get the material they need to learn English effectively," Prof Dr Zuraidah added.

She said the CEFR and the associated approach to language teaching and learning were new in the country, so getting the approach right was essential.

Teachers, she added, must be given appropriate training and needed to have confidence in the new material.

"This means that the textbooks used for teaching English must be aligned with the CEFR and the knowledge it incorporates about language teaching.

"International publishers have been working on the CEFR for many years, so they have a head start.

"The challenge for local writers and publishers of English textbooks is to produce quality textbooks for use in Malaysian classroom," Prof Dr Zuraidah said.

Describing the move as significant, the faculty's senior lecturer Dr Surinderpal Kaur said it showed that the ministry was committed to improving English proficiency.

But she warned that the books were merely resource materials.

To improve proficiency levels, other factors such as the proficiency and aptitude of the teachers, their mode of delivery, continuity and sustainability of the programme, and attitude of the students themselves must come into play, she said.

"It's too early to predict with certainty, but there will be improve-

ments for sure as the new books are well written," she added.

While acknowledging that the textbooks were expensive, Dr Surinderpal pointed out that they were of good quality.

"It's a necessary short-term start for the programme as we currently do not have adequate local resource materials," she said.

"But the exchange rate and price of the books are things to be concerned about in the long term.

"In the middle and longer terms, we should push towards producing primary and supplementary learning materials locally."

Dr Surinderpal added that the nation had experts capable of producing high-quality books which meet CEFR levels, and with a Malaysian flavour and context.

It is essential for all stakeholders to support the changes being introduced to ensure that the children get the material they need to learn English effectively.

Prof Dr Zuraidah Mohd Don