

Give input on policy, parents urged

Should the Education Ministry continue with the teaching of Mathematics and Science in English? A concerned group wants parents to respond whether they are for or against the policy, writes Elizabeth John



Scientific English must be learnt at the very beginning to form a strong foundation for Mathematics and Science.

IT'S your child's future. Speak up now!

This is the call from a group

140 replies with just 20 saying they wanted the policy reversed.

This is the call from a group of concerned mothers and fathers who want the parents of every school-going child in the country to weigh in on whether Mathematics and Science should continue to be taught in English.

A decision to keep or reject the policy, launched in 2003, is likely to be made in December after the Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah exam results are announced.

So, the Parents Action Group for Education (Page) is calling on parents — whether for or against the policy — to make their views known to the Education Ministry.

“This is too important an issue for us to just send one letter here or there.

“Whether they support it or not, parents need to speak out,” said Noor Azimah Abdul Rahim, a founding member of Page.

She said parents should take the opportunity and write to the minister and to their wakil rakyat before the end of the month to tell them how they feel.

The group, which wants Mathematics and Science in English to continue, sent letters to 3,000 parent-teacher associations three weeks ago, seeking parents’ views on the issue.

Parents were asked to state if they were for or against the policy, and why, said Noor Azimah who is also the vice-chairman of SK Bukit Damansara PTA.

“We wanted to be as neutral as possible and we also wanted to know if it was just us. Was it just the SK Bukit Damansara parents who felt this way?”

So far, Page has received

versed.

Page, which has the support of over 100 schools nationwide with 13 in Rawang alone, is hoping more parents will respond to their letters.

The group is preparing a comprehensive report, which it will submit to the Education Ministry next month.

Many of the parents in Page say they don’t want their children to relive their struggles when they switch to Mathematics or Science in English at the tertiary level.

Benjamin Choo, whose sons attend SK Taman Megah in Petaling Jaya, recalls suffering through a year of matriculation in English.

“It was a horrible time. I think I only finally understood Physics in English in my first year of university in Australia.

“Even then, it was very intimidating to be in a class where the other guys had all the terms at their fingertips and there I was, busy pretending to understand. I don’t want my children to go through that.”

Choo, a businessman, said if nothing else, parents should think economics when making their decision.

As Malaysia moved from low- to high-skill manufacturing base, he said language would play a significant role and Malaysia would struggle if it wasn’t prepared.

“When considering the matter, let’s also be certain what we’re objecting to — is it the policy or the implementation?”

“If it’s poor implementation, then let us fix that problem.”

One such problem might be the lack of support for rural schools, said Sulaiman Mahran, a father of three

school-going children.

He questioned whether these schools were given good teachers, sufficient resources and the extra help they would have needed when the policy was first put in place.

This, he said, could be the reason behind the general feeling that rural students had suffered because of the policy.

Sulaiman pointed to the Project to Improve English in Rural Schools in Negri Sembilan, under which teachers received specialised coaching to teach the two subjects to students in rural areas who were weak in English.

He wondered why other states hadn’t followed suit.

Sulaiman also believed that the crucial economic reasons behind the move to teach Mathematics and Science in English hadn’t been explained to children and parents in rural schools.

“Ask the parents where their children will be in a few years? Will they be able to get jobs? Can the government support and provide jobs for all those who don’t get one?”

Parents who want their children to continue learning Mathematics and Science in English are also worried about what may happen if the policy is reversed.

Seth Yahya said most wouldn’t have the option of sending their children to private schools because of the prohibitive fees and even those who could, would face a lengthy waiting list.

Returning to the country in 2003 after years of living in Hong Kong and Singapore, Seth had heaved a sigh of relief to hear that the two subjects

would be taught in English.

He wouldn’t be forced to put his youngest son in a private school or see him struggle to cope in his new environment.

“We were really hoping that someone will come out and say that the issue shouldn’t be politicised.

“There are pros and cons to every move but let us look at this issue as an educational and economic one, not a political one.”

Mohamed Saufi Shafie, who has two school-going daughters, said politicians often made a lot of noise about the policy threatening the status of the national language.

But he added that these politicians did not have any good answers when it came to solving employment problems.

“When you ask politicians how they would solve the problem of graduates not having good English or the problem of so many unemployed Malay graduates, they have no answer,” said Saufi, president of the 13-strong Coalition of Rawang Zone Parent-Teacher Associations.

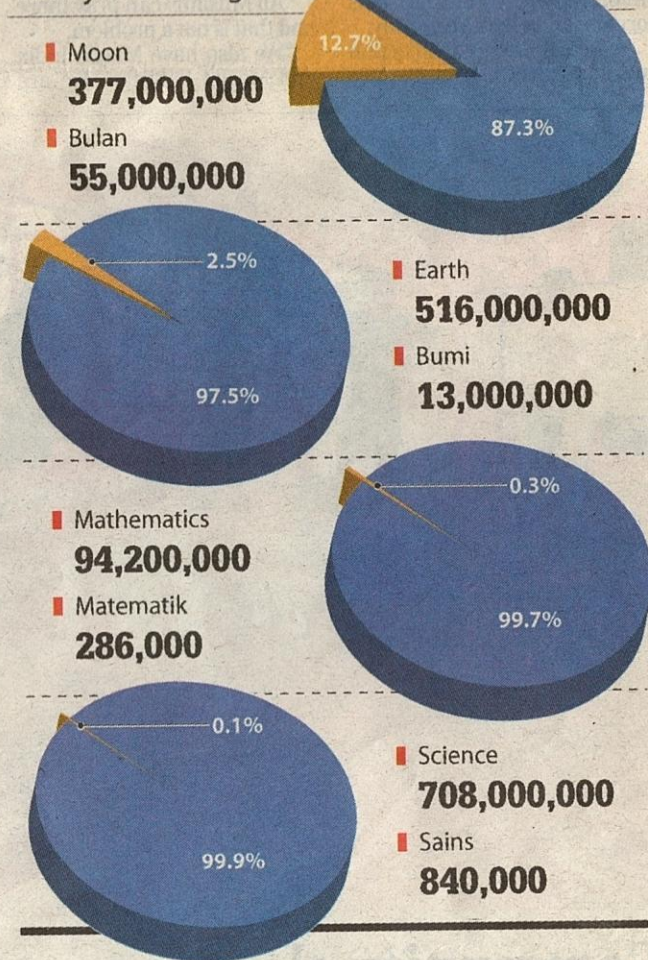
“All they can say is: we must defend the national language! They aren’t looking at the job market and answering the questions.”

Saufi, who also heads the PTA at SMK Rawang, said he had never heard a student in the school complain about having to learn the two subjects in English.

In fact, teachers told him that they paid more attention in class now.

Former students who passed through the full-national language system have

Google searches in Bahasa Malaysia and English



The illustration shows the number of Google hits in English as opposed to Bahasa Malaysia (encompasses the language spoken in Indonesia).

told Saufi that their English dictionaries were *hancur* from the constant checking they did to keep up in matriculation

class or university.

“It’s not that students can’t learn. We just have to improve the system.”