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BAGINDA

CRITICAL THINKING

# LEARNING HOW TO LEARN

Teaching system needs revamp to encourage students to think for themselves

**E**VER wondered why creative people and companies with great innovations mainly come from the Western world?

Yes, centuries ago, the great scientific discoveries originated from the East as well as from the Middle East. Gunpowder traces its origins to China, and the Arab world was known for its medical sciences. All these were brought to the West.

While much has been written about the rise and fall of knowledge from the Eastern world, I'd like to look at the challenge of trying to learn and acquire knowledge in this part of the world, and specifically, in Malaysia.

the first place.

This is again reinforced in schools and even at tertiary levels. In other words, we do not encourage our children to ask questions or discuss the issues at hand. More often than not, voicing an opinion is not encouraged, and, in some instances, frowned upon.

This mentality is nurtured and consolidated right through the socialisation process in Malaysia.

It is my contention that graduates in this country are not bankable because of their inability to articulate themselves in a different environment.

Right from an early age until adulthood, they are not encouraged to voice an opinion. The mentality seems to be "don't ask too much and speak when you are spoken to". Surely, the fault lies with us?

Unfortunately, the advent of social media and the ubiquitous mobile phones, iPads and other gadgets does not help the situation. People today hardly communicate with each other any

be re-looked and re-examined.

We need to revolutionise our methods; we must encourage people to think and not be dependent on others to think for them. Knowledge is to be acquired and not merely received.

Students at the tertiary level are spoon-fed by lecturers and not encouraged to seek knowledge. I recall years ago, when I was teaching at a local university, I was not a popular lecturer because at the end of my lectures, I had no notes to give out.

I would start my lecture by writing down a few references on the board (yes, I am quite ancient as during my time, we still had blackboards) and informed my students that they were to read these books as references. At the end of my lecture, students would have the temerity to ask whether they could photocopy my notes.

When I was a student, the idea of getting notes from the lecturer did not even cross our minds. I remember that when I first attended a school in London at age 13, my teachers would encourage us to read. There was a subject


to seek knowledge. Because it is at our fingertips, we take things for granted. Just Google and we think we have knowledge. What you may get is information, and this is not necessarily knowledge. Information is one thing, knowledge is quite a different thing.

I sometimes describe knowledge as processed information. At a time when fake news and fake information is getting rampant, there is an urgent need for us to process information. To me the rule of thumb could be "whether the information is likely to be true or not", and this requires critical thinking and some degree of analysis.

This brings us back to the whole thrust of this article — the ability for us to exercise our brain and not to accept everything at face value. The way we educate our young does not encourage us to use our brain and exercise critical thinking.

We must acknowledge and accept not all we read are facts. Granted, it is impossible to know what is true anymore, and more often than not we will make our

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While Asians and Malaysians are great achievers in obtaining high grades, their intellect somehow does not translate into creative thinking. I believe, though not exclusively, this is really the result of how we are taught to acquire knowledge or, to be precise, how we have got it wrong.

If one observes how parents treat or teach their children in Malaysia, for instance, as compared with others in the West, the clue could be found.

When a kid does something wrong in Malaysia, the parents will punish them. In contrast, the parents in the West would explain to the kid why he is wrong in

more. When they sit at the table for a meal, each will be in their own world. This cuts across the age group — from the infant to the octogenarian.

I must admit that I, too, am guilty of this. It is quite disheartening to even see parents quite contented to give their infants iPads, with cartoons or games (some justifying that it's only learning programmes) to keep them pre-occupied. I think such parents have missed the point.

When they sit at the table for a meal, that's not the time to learn math or spelling. It's time to eat and interact with each other.

The teaching system needs to

us to speak. There was a subject, when I turned 15, called social studies, and here we had discussions about issues that societies were facing.

We were all encouraged to voice our opinions. It quickly taught me that everyone can have an opinion and no one has the monopoly on opinion or knowledge. There is never a silly question or answer. It's just silly if you don't ask when you don't know.

There is an even more urgent need for us to fundamentally change the way we teach at home, school and institutions of higher learning.

The Internet has made us lazy

often than not, we will make up our minds as to what the truth is, no matter how ludicrous they may appear to be.

We really need to revamp the way we educate ourselves. It's not just the students, but also the teachers themselves. We all need to reform ourselves and learn from our past and present for the future. It is time now for us to learn how to learn.

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