

'Find root cause of problems affecting present education system, not just symptoms'

KUCHING: The focus on quantitative output instead of qualitative outcomes of the present national education system has encouraged ad-hoc solutions that only address symptoms instead of the root cause of problems affecting the system.

This, as well as inherent weaknesses in planning and execution has significantly undermined the intended impact of national education policies which otherwise have much to praise for, says director of Centre for Technology Transfer (CTTC) at Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas), Professor Dr Lau Seng.

Lau, the current chairman of Malaysian Institute of Chemistry (Sarawak), spoke on the strengths and weaknesses of the education system at the KTS Education Forum here yesterday. He said that the National Education Blueprint 2001-2010, 2013-2025 and National Strategic Plan for Higher Education were impressive documents in terms of planning because they provided clear direction and had noble intentions. However, the way how the curriculum was designed could not produce holistic individuals because of the emphasis on quantitative-based evaluation instead of qualitative-based indicators to measure students' performance.

"This has created situations where students' excellence was judged based on the number of 'As' they scored in exams and teachers were rewarded based on students' grades. Thus, it is not surprising that studying has been diluted into doing past years' exam questions while teachers are blinkered into concentrating on how to teach students to answer exam questions."

When met afterwards, Lau said that the current exam-focused education system had also inadvertently contributed to a gender imbalance in tertiary education whereby a significant majority of tertiary students were female.

"We are very much focused on exam results. Males in school are normally not so studious, and they do not do well in exams but females do very well. So this system favours the ladies, so more of them end up having better results, so they can get into universities and institutes of higher education.

"The way how we teach in school doesn't suit boys who find it boring as they prefer activities. So the outcome of our system only favours one gender style of learning," he said, adding that a more effective education system should take into account the different learning styles and preferences of individuals.

Lau said that studies into the psychology of learning of the different genders should be carried out so that the gender inequality in tertiary education could be addressed.

"Quotas shouldn't be the approach. To me, if you impose quota, you are addressing the symptom instead of addressing the disease. We know what the disease is; the disease is the way we teach. So we should address the way we teach instead of imposing quotas," he said.

He said that entry standards into universities should not be lowered. Instead, he proposed that more resources be concentrated into enabling students to rise up to meet those standards, resulting in better quality students, instead of just quantity. "We should help them to qualify. Don't change the playing field. Help them to move up rather than lower the bar," he said.