

Renewing the national curriculum

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Opinion News

Education and Culture Minister Mohammad Nuh has recently announced plans to revise the curriculum. The existing curriculum, despite its strengths, is considered out of date and unable to deal with the changing environment (Kompas, Sept. 5).

A high-quality curriculum should, at least, consist of context, goal and content. Its viability, however, is determined by how the content is arranged and how evaluation of the curriculum is prepared.

The curriculum should suit the characteristics of our students, who are considered part of the “Z generation”. They communicate through the Internet, using social networking websites. They are exposed to so much information both good and bad, appropriate with our culture and not. They live in an instant culture that prompts them to do and act fast. They are also influenced by a consumptive culture.

In a nutshell, they need a different approach and method of learning.

Students are used to tackling several problems at once. They are able to multitask with ease, talk with friends, search for information on the Internet and communicate by mobile phone. Their learning should not just be given in a linear approach, which sees subjects studied back and forth; rather they need a non-linear learning method too.

Today’s students live in a globalized world where information, whether it is good or bad, is readily available. So they still need to think critically, to enable them to choose what information is beneficial and make decisions for themselves that affect their life. The new curriculum should help students develop critical thinking and make decisions.

Since they learn from outside influences, not only from their teachers, the dynamic of the respect they give to teachers is different from that of students in the past. Today’s students are more independent than those from past generations; sometimes they don’t care about their teachers.

The new curriculum should set clear goals, so we’ll be sure what to do. It has to identify competence goals that students need to master when they finish elementary or secondary school. The goals set should be short, realistic and achievable.

According to the existing curriculum, students have to learn about 14-16 subject matters in each semester, which are too much. Due to the curriculum burden while the time is limited, students can only grasp the surface and miss the depth, preventing them from thinking critically. It is high time for the government to drop some subject matters and extend learning hours. The expected result is students will study with enthusiasm and develop their critical thinking.

Some critics say that current curriculum stresses cognitive aspects but pays less attention to character building and transfer of values. Some indicators are the rampant student clashes, cheating and juvenile delinquency. Hopefully the new curriculum will emphasize character development to balance the cognitive aspect.

There are several important questions related to the government’s plan to renew the curriculum. How will the content of the curriculum be managed? Will it be arranged systematically and in accordance with the students’ thought level and environment? How will the learning methodology be chosen to ensure that our goal will be fully accomplished? Should the learning method and strategy match the students’ culture and context?

Our nation needs young people who can live together in peace and work together with others without any discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, religion and so on.

Therefore, the curriculum should encourage pluralism and emphasize the spirit of our national and its motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Eka* (unity in diversity).

When it comes to the evaluation of students’ performance, examinations (including the national exam) are administered to accomplish the goals of the curriculum. For example, if we want the students to develop critical thinking, the national exam should measure how reasonable and reflective students are. This means the examination should challenge students to think not just memorize.

Based on the aforementioned reasons, the new curriculum should meet several criteria such as: (1) help students develop critical thinking and decision making, (2) allow students the freedom to think, (3) reduce the number of subjects, (4) allow for a pleasant learning process, (5) emphasize character education, (6) aim for clear and simple goals and (7) promote examinations that are prepared according to students’ ability and educational goals.

Last but not least, the next curriculum should encourage students to work together and live as one family — called Indonesia.

Anyway, a curriculum is just a plan. There must also be the freedom to implement and improve it.

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