

COHERENT STUDY IN POLICY INSTRUMENTS AND POLICY LEVERS IN COMPETITIVE SPORTS IN SCHOOLS IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

This research critically evaluates the weaknesses and obstacles faced in the implementation of sports policies in the multilingual Malaysian schools which comprise mainly of government managed schools and national type schools which are largely ethnically based. The understanding of the joint responsibility of the Federal, the local government and the school management involvement in sports is an essential ingredient in analysing sports in the school which faces enormous challenges, largely due to the ethnic divide in schools and thereby an ethnic inequality. The government policies as well as government assertion on this issue and the extent to which they are centrally controlled, leave very little space at the grass root level for greater expression in implementing sports policies. This correspondingly reduced or even eliminated the role of the local government who should have been an integral part of the policy maker. The development of competitive sports in schools had often been highlighted at the ministerial level but appears to be not sufficiently researched and so strategies and measures remain obscure. The consequence of this was that there are no known major policy concerns relating to sports curriculum in schools and hence sports among students in schools were largely individual or collective efforts. The research methodology involves primary data collection which are obtained from the responses on the questionnaires who were made up of educationist, sports organisers, and policy makers. Sampling based on academic work of other researchers in this area are scrutinised, reviewed and summarised for the purpose of a well organised analysis. This article examines and evaluates the centralising of sports policies by the government, while stressing the need for freedom of expression at the grass-roots and ascending beyond ethnic divide in achieving interculturalism in sports, in a polarised society of Malaysia.

Key words: Sports, Government, Multi-Ethnicity, Interculturalism

Introduction

This paper examines the role of the policy-making process in sports by the government in Malaysia by effecting structural change and growth in sports in National School while addressing the issues in the National Type Schools which are mostly focused on Chinese Schools and Tamil language Schools.

The government's role in transforming the economic status of the country both in the agriculture sector as well as the corporate sector nurturing the complexity in balancing the three major races was widely accepted as a country which has been remarkably – perhaps uniquely – successful in managing and containing ethnic conflict in a post-colonial context against expectations, while overcoming the inequalities that was inherited in the post era colonial period (Donald Horowitz 1989).

It in this domain that sports within the various communities that the research was conducted among the selected schools which included National Schools, National Type Schools and also the Malaysian Sports Council (MSN), with view to understanding the influencing factor in government policy affecting sports in these different category of schools. In this context, the study of the National Sports policy were also undertaken to view the extent of implementation of their policies and the outcome of these implementations¹. The state and district sports council role were also examined being parties to the development of sports in their respective parameters and their effect in schools.

¹ National Sports Council of Malaysia Act 1971

The Background to the ethnically based schools of the colonial era

The British rule in Malaya and Singapore, saw the establishment of ethnic language schools to accommodate the immigrants population distribution, language diversity, cultural traditions financial resources of the colonial era This practice was accepted as a norm to satisfy the practical reality rather than the divide and rule policy as asserted by many (Clive Whitehead 2005). In addition to these language schools, English language Schools in the British colonies like those in Malaysia, Fiji Islands, India, Sri Lanka (then known as Ceylon) and East African nations to name a few. Interestingly these schools had attracted a broad spectrum of the various races of the colonies.

The post-independence in many former British colonies was followed by the nationalistic fever which led to the fostering of national identities and foremost in the agenda was to enforce the national language of the country.) Some countries retained English as their major Lingua Franca like Singapore while in India, English was continued as an important language alongside Hindi as their official language. But many other newly independent nations witnessed a gradual downgrading or outright removal of the English Language in schools and other institutions, which was seen as legacy of the colonial past (Prasenjit Duara 2003). The result of these was diverse. That is, from an acceptable proposition to an extremely unfortunate situation like Sri Lanka a multi-racial country. Singhalese being the predominately spoken language was introduced as the National Language soon after independence and English was removed from schools and other institutions. It effectively divided the ethnic group and side-lined the and although Tamil language was made one of the national languages, the applicability has been largely confined to the Tamil speaking majority of northern region of Sri Lanka who formed about 20% of the population. The language issue, viewed by many as a contributing factor to the prolonged civil war that ended in 2009 by the victorious Sri Lankan government forces. Although in the intervening years of the civil war conflict the English language was reintroduced in some areas of administrations including private schools, the damage was already done and a fragmented society still remains in the midst of an unfinished business of reunification. (Wijedasa Rajapakshe, 2012).

In Malaysia the Malay language was enforced in all official aspect as directive of the government policy which include all National Schools being the national language of the country. The English Language National Type Schools were all converted to National Schools. Thus the English Language Schools, which were enjoyed by a broad spectrum of the society, was effectively removed while the Chinese and Tamil National Type schools were allowed to maintain their status quo.

In the ensuing years, the Chinese schools and the Tamils schools became more firmly established which had the support of ethnically based political parties as well dedicated NGO's². This was against all perceived expectation that ethnically based language schools would naturally fade way or would have minimal appeal. The Chinese schools in particular, not only continued its existence but given the size of the population and economic status, they flourished and mostly in urban areas and they were well supported by Chinese benevolent societies³. While the Tamil school were managed solely through government subsidies and notably most of these schools were rural based (Cynthia Joseph & Julie Matthews 2014).

National Schools, National Type schools Sports schools and identity in sports

It is in this circumstances that sports and the philosophy of sport which was resonated as a unifying factor based on all aspects of human rights ideals connecting people and transcending social, cultural, ethnic, and religious divide, were now lost in translation. With the diversities of schools in Malaysia, the opportunities to experience sporting activities between inter-ethnicity schools, which should have been a first initiative towards community building, was absent. Except for National Schools, most school children would be interacting within their own community in sports as a norm, oblivious of the segregation that has been created among the various ethnic group in Malaysia.

The result of this is a pattern of a remarkable development in the sports show piece in Malaysia. The Chinese based schools appears to be in forefront in some sports like Badminton, Table tennis and Basketball. This is reflected in their representations in national and international competitions⁴. It was observed that Chinese schools were well endowed with sports facilities especially indoor badminton courts and basketball courts which is seen lacking in most National Schools as well as National Type Tamil schools⁵ which appears to have limited facilities as compared to other schools. While in other sports appears to be dominated by Sports Academies in Malaysia which are discussed as follows.

Due to the lack of sporting activities at competitive level by students of National Schools, the government endeavoured to resolve these short-comings by establishing Sports Academies under the auspices of the National Sports Council in important cities and towns⁶. In accordance with the agenda, students who excel in sports from any of the schools were eligible to apply for

² The ethnic based schools has it is roots in the British colonial era largely to minimize cultural shock as well ethnic based requirements of the working class Tamils brought by them from Southern India to wok in the plantations and the Chinese many found their way to work in the tin mines.

³ United Chinese School Committees' Association of Malaysia, also known as "Dong Zong

⁴ The recently concluded commonwealth in Glasgow 2014 is an example of the pattern of representations.

⁵ The school surveyed are mostly in the Klang valley.

⁶ The two major sports academy in Malaysia are Malaysia's two Sports Schools - in Bukit Jalil Kuala Lumpur and Bandar Penawar - Kota Tinggi, Johor

admission to these Sports Academies in order to further their sporting excellence which will run parallel with their regular studies. The intention is to nurture and shape outstanding sportsmen and women for national and international competitions.

But herein lies the problem. The admission to these Sports Academies appear to be faced by lack of applicants from the Tamil and the Chinese ethnic background, who are mostly enrolled in their respective language schools, largely because they seems to be more contented to be in their own vernacular school environment.

In the case of aspiring potentials of sports from the National Schools, they are faced with a different impasse. Since admission to Sports Academies are procedural, they face the imposing task of applying in an unfriendly circumstance. These aspirants' needs are often immediate and they will surely fail the test of the procedures of the academy even before applying. It simply means that these academies are too imposing, too remote and too cut off from reality of their comfort zone. It is a fact that the sports academies have fulfilled their quota for admission on a regular basis but is asserted that many potential talents would have missed the bus.

The dual policy in sports and the local sports council

The political policy and aspirations for sport, on an equal platform seems to have not been achieved and particularly interesting is that it led to rise of dual concepts in development of sports in schools. The government sports policy and the singular policy of private schools. The presumption can be drawn from the fact that Malaysian government has facilitated an approach to sports policy which allowed the governments regulatory and political policy interests in sport to co-exist which had inevitably resulted in this situation.

Although this approach seems to strike a plausible balance among the various concerned parties, nevertheless the divide is perceived to become more serious and may in the long term breed discontent among the National schools, Chinese language schools the Sports Academies while the Tamils schools may get the feeling of been left out of the equation simply because of solely relying on government funding unlike the Chinese schools which have the backing of an economically vibrant Chinese community in Malaysia (Marie Price 2008).

In another well intended policy of the government, was the establishment of state sport councils and district sports council. But in practicality the management and implementation of the sport events under these portfolio does not seems to be effective and progressive monitoring of their activities are either non-existent or there is no transparency in its planning and execution.

Conclusion and outlook

In considering the Socio –cultural and economic values and the local government, sports must be given its due as an intermediary that promotes inter-ethnic relations especially in a society that is polarised in a multi-cultural setting. In addressing this problem it is important to consider the socio- culture makeup of the society the historical root and complex manifestation in the present environment. In order for sport philosophy is to be practised on a level playground, it must first understand the social, cultural, ethnic, and religious boundaries and the demography in order to preach social values of respect to each other (Gasser and Levinsen, 2004)

An appropriate regime of policy making and implementation is required, characterised by political determination, stability, high attention to growth with equity, experimentation, and an ability to learn through implementation—both at home and from the experience of others which also go towards nation building as a collateral development (Joseph E. Stiglitz 2013)

Apart from the various schools sport activities carried out within the boundaries of their parameter, the local government has an important role in organising sport tournaments and inter-cultural festival in their towns as a first initiative towards fostering team spirit, in cooperation with the local schools. Sports could be organised at intercommunity level and for children at various age range for all the concerned parties.

The Municipal government such as the town board or town council should engage the local communities to market the event towards their respective ethnic group. This should be extended to engage the local schools and the teachers, and community workers to conduct and supervise the events. This would augur well among the various communities without having the fear of losing their social and communal identities.

The policy should extend beyond the mere enhancing of sports towards developing of positive policies in dealing with sports activities that would allow the government political policy objectives to co-exist sports policy framework and contribute towards dismantling of the socio-psychological barriers of the Malaysian society.

A clear vision of a separate territory in sports which is to be outside the parameter of the affirmative policy as practiced in Malaysia would be a remarkable achievement.

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