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(the main text is as follows)

Tamil Educational Research and Development Foundation (Tamil Foundation) has consistently emphasized the importance of teaching Math and Science in the pupil's first language during their formative years at the primary level.

Pupils should begin their schooling in their first language, their mother tongue, as they understand it best, and experience the least amount of break between the home and school. This is particularly so for Math and Science, which are complex, yet important, subjects.

This is not a mere assertion. It is also not borne out of political expediency or narrow ethnic considerations. It is an educational issue in the best interest of our children's future. There is so much educational research evidence to show that pupils better grasp concepts in Math and Science if taught in their own mother-tongue. For example, UNESCO's 2003 position paper states unequivocally that "mother tongue instruction is essential for initial instruction and literacy and should 'be extended to as late a stage in education as possible'." In addition, mother tongue education provides cultural identity, dignity and pride in young children and aids their cognitive development.

English is an alien language for most Malaysian children, especially for those from poor or rural communities. By teaching complex subjects to these children in an alien language, their educational future could be jeopardised. For these children from poor communities, education remains the main avenue for upward mobility.

Within the Indian Malaysian community, Tamil school children from poor communities are affected by the government policy to teach Math and Science in English. We frequently hear complaints from Tamil school PTAs that the policy has hit the poorest pupils the hardest.

The complaints again support Unesco's findings that "In a situation where the parents are illiterate ... if the medium of instruction in school is a language that is not spoken at home, the problems of learning in an environment characterised by poverty are compounded, and the chances of drop-out increase correspondingly".

We believe the government's policy to teach Math and Science in English was haphazardly conceived. There is an urgent need to survey the effectiveness of the policy introduced three years ago. We need well researched and fact based policies if we are to achieve our aspirations to be a developed nation by 2020.

In this context, we should be embracing the global education trend of multiculturalism. We should also be emulating the sound education policies of developed countries like Britain and Canada which have opted to teach Math and Science in the mother tongues of ethnic minorities in elementary schools.

The Tamil Foundation also recognizes the importance of mastering the English language in world that is fast globalizing. The correct way to increase English fluency among Malaysians is to strengthen the teaching of the language per se. And these methods must meet proven educational theory and practices.

Overall, our education policies should be geared towards wholesome child development. And all serious studies emphasize the use of mother tongue as the medium of instruction in teaching Math and Science to young children until they have acquired proficiency in other languages.