Viewpoints On:

Experiences with the Education System, Tuition Classes and Current Sentiments on the Economy

1 – 5 December 2005
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INTRODUCTION
Third in the series of surveys to be undertaken in 2005

Sponsored by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, these surveys have the following objectives:

1. Continued tracking of public opinion on salient issues affecting political and social debate
2. Increase awareness and acceptance of opinion research in public discourse
3. Increase the usage of factual research and statistics in matters of public debate
Survey Methodology

Structured sampling according to:
- ethnicity, gender and state of residence
- Telephone interviews
- Randomized selection of respondents
- Interviews conducted between: 9am – 9pm
- Total number interviews completed: 1,029 respondents, aged 20 and above
- Survey period: 1 – 5 December 2005
- Margin of error: +/- 3.10% (95% confidence interval)
ISSUES
In your opinion, what is the most important issue facing Malaysia right now? (amongst 824 respondents, Peninsular Malaysia, 24 – 27 November 2005)

Top issues of concerns

- Cost of living - inflation & price hike: 12%
- Social & moral problems: 10%
- Crime & public safety: 8%
- Pengkalan Pasir by-election: 5%
- Police abuse of Chinese nationals: 4%
- Floods: 4%
- Corruption: 3%
- Health problem: 3%
- Education in general: 3%
- Economy in general: 2%
- Ethnic inequality: 2%
- Politics in general: 2%

Public concerns over economic issues have dampened over the past months indicating that many have been able to cope with rising inflation.

At the same time we found public concerns dissipated over a number of issues which rose during the survey period such as the Pengkalan Pasir by-election, alleged police abuse of Chinese nationals and floods brought about by the monsoon season.
Generally speaking, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way things are going in the country today?

Overall, general satisfaction appear to have significantly improved over the past 4 months. We attribute this to largely due to the government’s action to stem rising fuel costs which have had dampening effect on prices of consumer goods and services.
PERCEPTIONS ON THE EDUCATION SYSTEM
Generally speaking, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the education system in the country today?

Overall, a vast majority of Malaysians (76%) are satisfied with the education system. While this view is pervasive, it is more of a general reflection of the advances made in the access to and quality of education offered. Nevertheless, there are qualms about more specific aspects but they do not detract from the overall impression that we have made considerable progress in this field.
Do you think that our education system for primary and secondary schools today is better, the same or worse as compared to before on the following matters?

Overall, most people agree that great progress has been made in the provision of facilities in Malaysian schools today. Nevertheless the improvements made in the area of physical facilities, methods used as well as content have not been followed by the perceived quality of dedication in the teaching staff.
Do you think our education system is preparing our children with skills and knowledge to be…

(Among all respondents)

Responses across the board appear to indicate the same overall satisfaction with the education system. The survey did not find any marked difference between the views of parents and non-parents.

However parents who had received tertiary education were less likely to feel that the current education system is conducive enough to lead children to be able to think and speak for themselves.

Perhaps more critical are the views of ethnic Chinese parents who are more inclined to feel that there are large gaps in the quality of skills and values being imparted by the system. These findings are provided overleaf.
Do you think our education system is preparing our children with skills and knowledge to be…

(Among parents who answered ‘yes’)

Perceived quality of values and skills imparted
(Among parents across major ethnic groups)

Perhaps more critical are the views of ethnic Chinese parents who are more inclined to feel that there are large gaps in the quality of skills and values being imparted by the national education system.

The survey also found that a vast majority of Chinese parents remain inclined to send their children to vernacular schools rather than national schools for a variety of reasons, many of which appear to be related to issues of quality and competitiveness in terms of imparting work ethics. Also high on the rationale is the desire to inculcate learning on Chinese language and culture.
Some people have described the Malaysian education system are being too exam-oriented while others say that it is fairly balanced. Which of these two views do you subscribe to? (Views among 479 respondents with school going children)

The views of parents and the general public on this matter is generally alike – that a small majority feel that it is too examination oriented. Such views are more accentuated among ethnic Chinese parents while those from other ethnic groups appear to be split either way.
Do you think that the homework given to children in schools these days are too much, too little or just enough?

There is a significant difference in the views across ethnic groups – Chinese respondents tend to feel that their children (a vast majority of which are attending national type schools) are given too much homework. It is likely that this added burden is also one of the reasons why Chinese parents are more inclined to send their children to national type schools – the perception that additional work sharpens the mind and improves overall academic competence.

In marked contrast, respondents from other groups tend to feel more satisfied with the level of additional work given to children.
Which one of the two methods of learning do you think are prevalent in schools these days – rote or interactive learning?

Again we found marked contrast between the views offered by Chinese respondents and that of other ethnic groups. Chinese respondents are more likely to say that schools continue to emphasize rote learning while a majority of Malay respondents feel that learning methods are more interactive.
There are many more students getting straight As in examinations now as compared to before. In your view, what is the reason?

Reason for many straight A students

- **Students are more capable**: 52% (Tertiary educated) - 66% (All responses)
- **Examinations are getting easier**: 11% (Tertiary educated) - 20% (All responses)
- **Better teaching facilities-tuition, additional classes**: 5% (Tertiary educated) - 4% (All responses)
- **Lower passing requirement**: 3% (Tertiary educated) - 2% (All responses)
- **Better teaching aids-internet, references**: 4% (Tertiary educated) - 2% (All responses)
- **Dedicated teachers**: 1% (Tertiary educated) - 1% (All responses)
- **Parental support and guidance**: 1% (Tertiary educated) - 1% (All responses)

There is a general consensus that students are becoming more capable – hence the increasing number of those who excel in examinations.

However, the survey finds that higher educated respondents were also slightly more apt to say that lax standards to be a part of the reason.
Thinking further about schools and the education system, what is the most important issue facing Malaysian education system right now? In what specific way, are you concerned about the issue?

Concerns expressed over the education system

- No particular concern: 26%
- Teachers attitude (Not committed, not interested): 7%
- Policies that are constantly changed: 5%
- Lack of teachers (experiences, skills): 4%
- Disciplinary issues (gangsterism, truancy, violence): 4%
- Increase the usage of English: 3%
- Quota system: 3%
- Teaching of Science & Maths in English: 2%
- Students not motivated and pressured to perform: 2%
- Too exam-oriented, memory work involved: 2%
- System has become politicised: 2%

Reflecting the overall satisfaction over the education system, the survey finds that one out of every four felt no particular concern.

However nearly half of those interviewed offered their views which range from the dedication of teachers to the view that that education has become too politicized.

These are but the top 10 concerns raised, other views that are less dominant are listed in the crosstabulation tables.
I am going to read some statements regarding the education system. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the statements.

Underpinning views on the education system: Continuity and Political Meddling

A majority of respondents agree with the view that the education system has continuity issues in that changes are made too frequently with the coming and going of ministers.

The view of political meddling in the education system also attracts a slight majority of the popular opinion.
I am going to read some statements regarding the education system. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the statements.

Views on the education system: Continuity and Political Meddling
(Among those in agreement)

- Malay
- Chinese
- Indian

- There is no continuity in our education system because each time a new minister is appointed, he or she tends to carry out new measures and abolish old ones:
  - Malay: 59%
  - Chinese: 63%
  - Indian: 68%

- Some of our education policies are made based on political reasons rather than from an educational point of view:
  - Malay: 50%
  - Chinese: 56%
  - Indian: 49%
I am going to read some statements regarding the education system. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the statements.

Underpinning views on the education system: Lack of detailed analysis and Time for review

- There are occasions when a new educational measure was made without any detailed study. Teaching Mathematics and Science in English is one such measure. 59% agree, 30% disagree.
- The time has come for a national education convention involving all races in this country to review the various aspects of the education policy. 86% agree, 6% disagree.
I am going to read some statements regarding the education system. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the statements.

Views on the education system: Lack of detailed analysis and Time for review
(Among those in agreement)

- There are occasions when a new educational measure was made without any detailed study.
- Teaching Mathematics and Science in English is one such measure.
- The time has come for a national education convention involving all races in this country to review the various aspects of the education policy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Malay</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Indian</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of detailed analysis</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>47%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time for review</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>88%</td>
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There has been a lot of public discussion on the increasing number of jobless graduates these days. In your opinion, what is the main reason?

Top 10 reasons for the jobless graduates situation

- Poor state of the economy: 25%
- The poor command of English: 18%
- Lack of professional skills: 14%
- Lack of communication skills: 12%
- Poor motivation (negative personal attitude): 11%
- ICT skills: 3%
- Multiple reasons: 2%
- Poor command of English & communication skills: 2%
- Skills mismatched to market needs: 1%
- Professional skills, communication skills: 1%

Despite the marginally improved economic sentiment, the idea that the large number of jobless grads is due to their own lack of motivation is losing traction among the public.

There appears to be a large segment (one quarter) who feel that it is largely due to the stagnant state of the economy. Many other respondents however continue to attribute the phenomenon due to the lack of suitable skills or qualification.
ADDITIONAL TUITION CLASSES
Many parents currently send their children to tuition centers on top of the time spent in schools. Why do you think this is the case?

Top 10 reasons why parents send their children for additional tuition

- Increase knowledge, "be smarter" 25%
- Getting good exam results 15%
- Better understanding of the subjects 11%
- Teachers at school not giving enough attention 8%
- Be more competitive 7%
- Parents do not have the time to teach their children 6%
- Don't want children wasting time on TV, social ills 3%
- Children are unable to follow the lessons in school 3%
- Subjects taught in schools are not comprehensive enough 3%
- Realisation of the importance of education 3%

One quarter of parents say it is to let their children “become smarter” by being more knowledgeable than others in their classes.

Interestingly aside from views that express the desire to get ahead, a not insignificant 11% say that their children are not getting enough attention from teachers at school due to the teachers’ workload and large size of classes, or that the coverage of subjects in their schools are not comprehensive enough.
Do you currently send your children for tuition classes? (Among 479 respondents with school going children)
What subjects do you send them for additional tuition classes?

**Additional tuition subjects**

(Among tuition going children, n = 307)

- Mathematics, Science, English: 23%
- Mathematics, Science, English, Bahasa: 21%
- Mathematics, English, Bahasa: 12%
- "All subjects": 9%
- Mathematics, English: 8%
- English: 6%
- English, Bahasa: 5%
- Mathematics, Science: 4%
- Mathematics, Science, Bahasa: 4%
- Mathematics, Science, English, Bahasa, Chinese: 3%

**Most popular additional tuition subjects**

- English: 81%
- Maths: 74%
- Sciences: 54%
- Bahasa Melayu: 25%

Nearly all of the parents who report sending their children for additional tuition classes are making them attend instructions for more than one subject.

Over 80% tuition going children are attending additional English classes. Three fourths are attending classes in Mathematics and over half are attending science classes.
How many hours do they spend for tuition per week?

Hours spent on additional tuition per week

- 2 - 4 hours: 18%
- 4 - 6 hours: 14%
- 6 - 8 hours: 14%
- 10 - 12 hours: 6%
- 8 - 10 hours: 5%
- 12 - 14 hours: 2%
- 2 hours or less: 2%
- 14 - 16 hours: 1%
- 20 hours and more: 1%
How much do you spend for their tuition fees on average per month?

A majority of parents are paying less than RM100 per child to attend tuition but a not insignificant number of 35% are paying RM100 upwards per child each month. This makes childrens’ education costs one of the more significant element in the family’s budgeting consideration.
PERCEPTIONS ON THE ECONOMY
How would you rate the overall performance of the government in managing the national economy at present?

Government performance in managing national economy

Overall performance of the government in managing the national economy

Satisfied

Dissatisfied

Aug-05

Dec-05

Total

Malay

Chinese

Indian
Worries over their ability to handle rising costs eased a little as compared to August 2005. The halt in the price of fuel and its ensuing effects on the prices of other goods and services have improved consumer capacity slightly.

Compared to August, the number of low income households reporting problems in coping with rising costs dropped from 64% to 60%. While a slight majority of those with household incomes of between RM1500 to RM3000 say they are able to cope.

Despite this improving picture, we need to point out close of half (48%) of the respondents remain negative on the issue. Indicating that price increases over the year had made a noticeable dent on the disposable incomes of working families.
How would you rate the current condition with respect to job opportunities for the average person right now?

Reflecting a slightly improved situation, the survey notes a slight increase in optimism with respect to employment opportunities.
How would you rate the current condition with respect to business growth right now?

The slight improvement in economic sentiment has also been seen in the way consumers look at business growth and opportunities. The survey finds a slight increase in optimism of 3% as compared to August 2005.

But at current levels, the overall sentiment remains significantly lower than in April which was 71%. It should be noted that the increased in optimism comes largely from low income households and that in higher income households optimism is lower than in August 2005.

Perceived current conditions with respect to business growth and opportunities: 

- For income level <RM1500, 65% are favourable, 28% are unfavourable.
- For income level RM1501-3000, 50% are favourable, 42% are unfavourable.
- For income level RM3001-5000, 50% are favourable, 38% are unfavourable.
- For income level >RM5000, 47% are favourable, 46% are unfavourable.

Business growth and opportunities:

- For income level <RM1500, 51% are favourable, 49% are unfavourable.
- For income level RM1501-3000, 54% are favourable, 46% are unfavourable.
- For income level RM3001-5000, 41% are favourable, 37% are unfavourable.
We are told that the country’s economy continues to perform well. Do you agree or disagree that this economic growth has increased the income for ordinary Malaysians like you and your family?

A marked dichotomy along ethnic lines. More than half of the Chinese say that they do not feel the impact of national economic growth but more than two-thirds of Malays and Indians say they do.
How would you rate your own personal financial situation?
How would you rate your own personal financial situation?

**Personal financial situation**

- 67% I have more than I need to make ends meet
- 7% I can make ends meet
- 2% I struggle occasionally to make ends meet
- 23% Making ends meet is a constant struggle

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**Personal financial security figures appear stable and slightly improved since August.**

Indicating that levels have remained above criticality despite rise in prices.