

THE ISSUE OF TRAINEE TEACHERS' GUARANTEED PLACEMENT ABOLISHMENT IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

In the Tenth Malaysia Plan (10MP), the government has announced to abolish the guaranteed placement for trainee teachers who were pursuing their studies in Teacher Education Institute of Malaysia (TEIM), Public Higher Educational Institutions (PHEI) and the Private Higher Educational Institutions (PrHEI). As such, this study discusses the latest issues in education in Malaysia related to the abolishment of guaranteed placement for trainees which will be implemented starting 2011 to 2015. This study used qualitative methods, through literature review and document analysis. The research finding shows that there are six major rationales that lead the government in deciding to abolish guaranteed placement for trainee teachers which are; to dignify the teaching profession, to produce a world-class human capital, transition to open systems in teacher training, to create an excellent-teacher environment, to eradicate the community's perception regarding the marketability of students of teaching field, and emulate the example of developed countries. In conclusion, the government decided to abolish the guaranteed placement in order to improve the quality of teachers and improve the teaching profession in producing students who are competitive and high achieving thus can compete globally.

Key Words: Trainee teachers, abolishment of placement, guaranteed placement.

INTRODUCTION

Education is the most important foundation in the development of a human life. Human and education cannot be separated because education can shape an individual's identity and create human capital that is useful to religion, race and nation. Education is actually not initiated in school, but it had started from home. Although the education provided is not formal, but the transition of education has started from a baby to a child through the guidance of their parents.

The progress of a nation, in reality, depends on the development of education in the country. Implementation and restructuring of school curriculum is a step that was taken by the Ministry of Education (MOE) under the Curriculum Development Centre (CPC) in order to achieve the goal of being a developed nation. However, in achieving the status of a developed nation, human capital is very much needed as an important indicator to make changes in developing countries. Human capital that is skilled in literacy and numeracy is a challenge for educators in realizing the mission of the country.

In moving forward, issues and challenges present in education is too broad that it can be a rather difficult problem to resolve. According to Sufean (2004), the issues of education can be classified into administration, levels of education, educational technology, school organization, and teacher training. This suggests that the

issues and challenges in education include various aspects where all the related parties should play their part to strengthen the country's education system.

The latest issue of the abolishment of the guaranteed placement for trainee teachers specified in the 10MP explains that no more guaranteed placement to all trainee teachers after their graduation. This issue of abolishment of the guaranteed placement for trainee teachers is a new issue in the world of education. Not many studies conducted to discuss the situation. This is because the 10MP was just recently implemented in the year of 2011 and will last up to 2015 and it just put forward the objectives in general and simple way. Statistical proof through literature reviews are less and limited.

Overall, this indicates a paradigm shift in the education system that was never expected by the community, especially those who wants the title of an educator. Thus, this changes is a challenge that must be faced and accepted by all parties to achieve high education standards towards global.

EDUCATION, TEACHER AND TRAINEE TEACHERS

Definition of Teachers and Trainee Teachers

According to the online Institute of Language and Literature (ILL), the terms “teachers” and “trainee teachers” are two terms that mean different things. Teachers refer to individuals who teach, tutor or educator, while trainees are students in particular Teacher Training Institutions and would become a teacher soon. Based on the two meanings, it can be formulated in general that the role of the teacher is to educate people and make someone become a useful person, while trainees are candidates or potential teachers who will be the teachers in the future.

In addition, a teacher will also provide opportunities for trainee teachers to observe their teaching as a teaching model that can be emulated, review and comment in writing and sign lesson planner books of trainee teachers, lead the students in personality development, especially in terms of healthy interaction and stress the elements of self-esteem enhancement and the cultivation of teacher professionalism.

Each teacher will serve to guide trainees through clinical observation that emphasize guidance towards the process of continuous improvement, as well as record keeping and guidance documents are updated from time to time. In addition, a teacher will also inform the school management about the progress of the trainee from time to time, monitor and inform the attendance and discipline of trainee teachers to the school management and the college management immediately during the practicum period, make a written report on cases of trainee teachers to the college as soon as possible, and co-supervise with the guiding lecturer to guide students.

Based on that, it is concluded that the teachers or lecturers is a group of individuals who play a key role in forming groups of trainees who are competent and dedicated. Although it is too subjective to explain that teachers are the change agents to success and excellence of a trainee teacher but teachers are the sources of inspiration that can motivate future educators and make them useful human capital to the nation.

HISTORY OF TEACHER EDUCATION INSTITUTE OF MALAYSIA (IPGM)

The history of teacher education in this country began with the establishment of teacher education institution which started its operation in Singapore which opened in 1878 and known as The Malay High School. Then in 1922, teacher education institutions, Sultan Idris Training College located in Tanjung Malim was established and now known as Sultan Idris University of Education (UPSI). Since then, from 1935 until 1955, the teacher education institutions increased during the years such as Women Teachers' Training College Melaka, Malayan Teachers' Training College Kirkby, Liverpool, England, and Malaysian Teacher Training College (MTT), Brinsford Lodge, Wolverhampton, England.

Establishment of teacher education institutes increased at that point of time due to the public awareness of the importance of education in the family. Thus, major changes can be seen increased greatly after 1980's. In 2004, a total of 27 colleges and 1 English Teaching Centre were upgraded. The upgrade is an important factor to transform teacher education towards greater professionalism. It was, in 2005, the congregation of Ministers approved 27 teacher training colleges for Teacher Education Institutes (IPG) in which the TEI can award a Bachelor Degree in Teaching or B. Ed. which came into force on 13 July 2005.

In 2006, the declaration of upgrading the teacher training college to TEI is a major change in its history because it initiated the Graduate Teachers Program in the institutes such as the Graduate Program for Primary School Teachers (GPPST). In addition, TEI also began conducting pre-service that can give recognition to the Bachelor degree of primary school teachers through the Post-MCE (Malaysian Certificate of Education) Graduate Teacher Training Course such as Bachelor Degree in Teaching and B. Ed. TESL.

Amendment of Education Act 1996 which allowed colleges to be upgraded to TEIM was approved on 25 August 2008 by the House of Representatives. In the same year, the Senate approved amendments to the Education Act 1996, Chapter 9, Section 42 to 49 on 4 December 2008. The Most Honourable Minister of Education, Dato' Hishammuddin Tun Hussein declared officially that all the Teacher Training Institutes in Malaysia should be known as Teacher Education Institute of Malaysia (TEIM) and TEI in Terengganu has been named to Dato' Razali TEIM effective on 16 January 2009. The purpose was to commemorate the former Deputy Minister of Education, Dato' Razali Ismail, who had died on 28 November 2008.

Table 1: Chronology of Teacher Education Institutions in Malaysia

Year	Institu the Teacher Education
1878	The Malay High School, Singapore.
1922	Sultan Idris Training College, Tanjung Pilot and now known as Sultan Idris University of Education (SIUE)
1935	Women Teachers' Training College, Melaka
1951	Malayan Teachers' Training College, Kirkby, Liverpool, England.
1955	Malaysian Teacher Training College (MTT), Brinsford Lodge, Wolverhampton, England.
1980's	Establishment of TEI in every state.
2004	27 colleges and 1 English Language Teaching upgraded to TEI.
2005	TEI can award a Bachelor Degree in Teaching or B. Ed.
2006	Initiation of Teacher Graduate Program
2008	Amendment of Education Act 1996 allowed colleges to be upgraded to TEIM
2008	The Senate approved amendments to the Education Act 1996, Chapter 9, Section 42 to 49
2009	The Most Honourable Minister of Education, Dato' Hishammuddin Tun Hussein declared officially that all the Teacher Training Institutes in Malaysia should be known as Teacher Education Institute of Malaysia (TEIM)

Source: Ministry of Education Malaysia

THE ISSUE OF TRAINEE TEACHERS' GUARANTEED PLACEMENT ABOLISHMENT

This issue of abolishment of the guaranteed placement for trainee teachers is a new issue in the world of education. This is expected to take place within the 10MP duration from the year of 2011 and will last up to 2015. Previously, the trainees were guaranteed their position as future teachers regardless of their achievement and performance but in this special plan duration, it will be abolished. This situation explains that a teacher being successfully appointed depends on their performance. The following statement describes the appointment of the teacher:

"With this, only the trainee teachers that achieved the best performance and qualified will be offered the position. The abolishment if guaranteed placement is to set minimum quality requirements for new teachers"

Tenth Malaysia Plan (10MP)

Based on the above statement, only a prospective educator who is able to reach a certain level of qualification and obtain the best performance will be offered a position as a teacher while the trainees who do not meet the standards, the potential to be offered the post of a teacher is low. This point shows that the government is committed to maintain the quality of the teaching profession by setting certain conditions so that prospective educators successfully produced are of better quality and globally competitive.

The rationales behind the abolishment of guaranteed placement for trainee teachers were to dignify the teaching profession as a main field of choice, to produce a world-class human capital, transition to "open systems" in teacher training, to produce an excellent group of future teachers by choosing only the best individuals, to eradicate the community's assumptions and perceptions regarding the easy employment teaching field, and emulate the example of developed countries. These six rationales are indicators that can be used as guidance in creating future teachers who are visionary and able to support the national goal of achieving developed nation status by the year 2020.

RATIONALES BEHIND ABOLISHMENT OF GUARANTEED PLACEMENT FOR TRAINEE TEACHERS

Establishing Teaching Profession as a Main Field of Choice

Uplifting the teaching profession is not an easy thing to do, especially in making this field as a field of choice. However, it is not impossible to achieve what is required by the ministry. According to statistics obtained from the Ministry of Education, there were more than 175,000 applications submitted for admission into this field. This number explains that the teaching profession is one of the areas of choice among young people who want to be educators. However, from this mount of applications acquired, only 7% of applicants obtained 7As and above in MCE, while for admission to Post-Graduate Teaching Course (PGTC), only 3% had the average grade point of 3.5 and above (MOE 2010).

Referring to that statistic, majority of the outstanding students have no tendency to make teaching as their profession. Most of them are more interested in the critical and professional positions such as doctors, lawyers, engineers or accountants (Norfadilah & Halimah, 2010). Those who excel are usually offered a scholarship to study in the country or abroad. It is said that the government does need experts in these fields to achieve the target to create a more professional local labour force. However, it implies that this field is still not the preferred choice of students who excel in spite of the government's plan to abolish the placement assurance to prospective teachers who do not achieve the standard and qualified.

The efforts of the government to implement the abolishment of guaranteed placement is not meant to punish them or not giving them a chance at all, but it is more aimed at getting them to be prepared and more responsible in improving their performance and their achievements so that this field will be comparable with the professional status of the medical profession, to legal or engineering. Accordingly, the Ministry of Education in the planned period of 2011 to 2015 will implement the high-profile campaigns to dignify this field as a main field, while increasing the awareness about the teaching profession as a profession with prestige. Four important points to be emphasized in the empowerment of the profession is:

1) Financial Rewards

Offer higher starting salaries to attract more outstanding students to apply for the teaching profession. According Scalfani (2010), the financial rewards given aims at improving productivity, performance and quality of education. This means that financial reward is one of the motivating factors that encourage more excellent students to choose this profession as a career.

2) Career Development & Prestige

Give new offer to teachers. Career prospects will be more interesting because there are a lot more professional development opportunities and also quicker promotion opportunities for excellent teachers.

As an elite career, the teaching profession will use a rigorous selection criteria and evaluation process. Only outstanding candidates will be accepted in the profession. The purpose of this is to make the profession at par with other areas.

3) Nation Development

The teaching profession is responsible in establishing future leaders and in making Malaysia a nation of high-income. This is because the teachers are one of those who will shape the students to become functioning individuals in particular to the country and nation.

Produce World-Class Human Capital

Development of human resources, also known as human capital is one of the agenda given attention by the government since the 8MP until now. Investment in human capital is given greater emphasis in the 10MP to increase the resilience and boost the economic growth and also to build a community that has exemplary values.

According to the 10MP (2011-2015) report, the goal will be achieved through the cooperation between the government, private sectors and communities. In this 10MP, greater concentration is focused on developing world-class human capital, equipped with the knowledge, skills and strong ethics. For this purpose, the comprehensive improvement are being done through reshuffling of the education system to improve student performances significantly, enhance the skills of Malaysians to increase their employability, and restructure the labor market to make Malaysia a high-income country.

Reshuffling the education system meant to make the education provided more integrated and holistic. Among the issues addressed in this reshuffle is the abolishment of guaranteed placement of trainee teacher. As already known, the abolishment of guaranteed placement of trainee teacher is a new matter in the country's education system. Significantly through this implementation is to achieve the goal of producing both mentally and spiritually balanced human capital, and be able to cope with the various challenges in the era of globalization.

Prospective teachers who are studying in educational institutions at this time will receive more challenges than trainees who have completed their studies. Those who obtained the best results have the "tickets" for successful appointment as a teacher while those who obtained only satisfactory results have a "ticket" to be sent back to their villages. However, the MOE is not only evaluating the best performance and achievements, although these are the fundamental values to determine the success of human capital, but the purpose of the abolishment of guaranteed placement of trainee teacher is to awaken them, to prepare them to face challenges and aware of their roles and responsibilities towards their students. If they fail during teacher training, how could they be trusted to educate the young generation of Malaysia in the future.

Hence, a balanced development of human capital as required in the national education philosophy which is physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual should exist and must be cultivated in each individual who has the right mind especially those who are called prospective educators. Trainee teachers must equip themselves with as much knowledge as they can which will serve as a bonus and advantage in their generic capabilities. Accordingly, prospective teachers who are produced will be more meaningful if they are able to achieve the national goal, show a healthy competitive to gain higher achievements and able to respond to the government's call to develop world-class human capital. Thus, the rate of failure in gaining an entry into the profession is low because they have a variety of skills, availability, credibility and potential to develop human capital in the future.

Transition to "Open System" In Teacher Training

Previously, teacher training existed only TEI in every state, and then expanded up to the public institutions such as SIUE, PUM, USM, UTM, NUM and SUM, but today, teacher training is provided even in private institutions such as UNISEL (www.unisel.edu.my). This measure intends to liberalize *the* system of teacher training and switch to the "open system" to add more trained teachers.

Liberalizing the teaching system is not new in the country's education system (Nik Aziz et al., 2008). This step is to open up more opportunities for youths to make the teaching profession as a career field of their choice. Nevertheless, the implementation of the "open system" in teacher training will make future teachers more competitive with each other for no recruitment of future teachers who managed only satisfactory performance longer exists.

According to the findings of a national survey (2009), 69% of respondents suggested that the government improve the quality of teachers in their services, while 30% of respondents suggested increasing student outcomes at the primary education level. The propriety of this study is to reach a state where the population is literate. This being the case, it summons a change of mind among all parties to achieve that goal. Implementation of an open system is a first step to improve services for teachers especially in the early stages. Accordingly, the transition to open systems in teacher training is a method of liberalization of global oriented higher education. Prospective teachers will be trained by learning modules set by the grant so that each prospective teacher has better understanding of their roles and responsibilities in the future.

Accordingly, the abolishment of guaranteed placement of trainee teacher should not be a big issue especially among future teachers. This is because an open training system will create more opportunities among individuals who fail to position themselves in the teacher training institutes or universities. This open system allows individuals who did not make it into any TEI the opportunity to apply for admission in those private colleges that offer a degree in Education. However, a career placement after graduation is not guaranteed. Only the ones with the highest standards and qualification will have the opportunity to be offered the position as a teacher.

The transition to open systems will create more healthy competition. In addition, it will also get them to continually work hard to achieve excellent results and thus qualify them to gain ground as a permanent teacher. If, the previous systems are not revamped, the attitude of some trainee teachers who always have the assumption that even with poor results they could still get the placement will become a culture among them.

Forming a Group of Outstanding Prospective Teachers: Choosing the Best

Developing a group of potential future teachers to become excellent teachers in the eyes of the nation will take real effort by all parties. The role of government, non-governmental organizations, schools, communities and educators are important in the formation of excellent teachers in the school. A way to express this is to improve the teacher selection system. Although the teacher selection system is not the main factor in determining the excellence of a prospective teacher but it can be used as a yardstick to assess at the initial stage that the teacher candidates are able to succeed in his/her career in the future.

The increase in the number of applications for the position of teacher or the degree level teaching program and post-graduate diploma shows that young adolescents are very keen to take on positions as educators. However, majority of the applicants obtained only satisfactory results. For example, in 2005, of 62 thousand candidates who applied for the Post-Graduate Course (PGC), only 7,800 were selected. This shows that the strict selection criterion is the first step to form a group of the best trainee teachers.

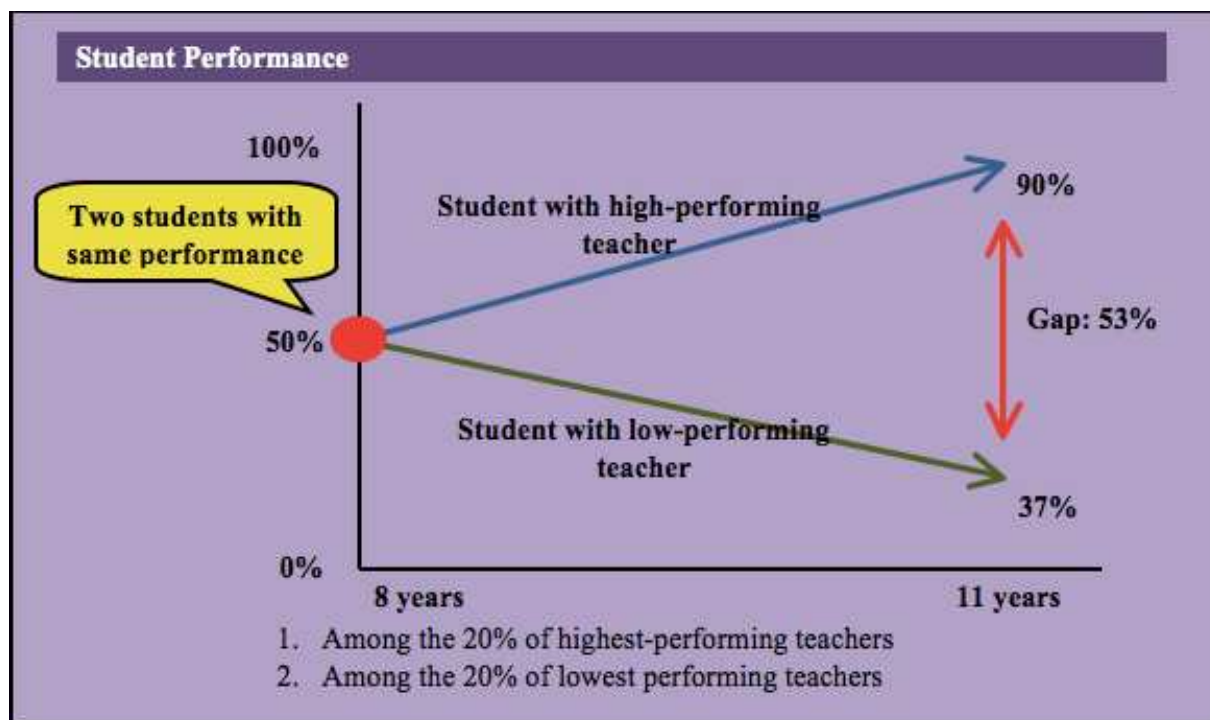


Figure 1: Quality of Teacher as Determinant of Student Performance

Figure 1 above shows the quality of the teachers determines the performances of students. Based on a study conducted by Sander and Rivers (1996), excellent teachers more likely to produce excellent students than teachers who fail to master their lessons. It is explained that a teacher plays an important role to enhance the interest and inclination of students towards knowledge. Through the interest and inclination, the desires of students to correct their deficiencies and improve their abilities in their classes are easier to do than students who simply do not have the interest to learn.

As implications of this research, in producing an outstanding group of students, it actually begins with forming an outstanding group of future teachers. This can be achieved through the strengthening of teacher training. Each of the trainees must undergo practical training as a first step to provide them with real exposures on their roles and responsibilities. However, practicum conducted in our country is in fact too short compared to the trainee teachers in Finland and New Zealand (Davies et al., 2009). According to the Ministry of Education (2010), the practicum module implemented at this time will be increased for the benefit of the trainees themselves. If in the previous module, the practicum was a short span of two months up to 6 months but in 10MP, the module will be implemented over long practicum duration of a year until a year and a half.

These efforts of government should be received positively. Results and benefits are for the long-term interests. If the government is not determined or nonchalant, the education system would be lagging far behind other countries that are already ahead. So, all the trainee teachers should strive harder to be labelled as prospective excellent teachers. This being the case, the implementation of this abolishment has its own goals and mission for the benefit of all parties.

Eradicate the Community's Assumptions and Perceptions Regarding the Easy Employment in the Education (Teaching) Field

In general, many Malaysians think education majors can get a job easily upon graduation especially in a teaching institution. This statement is far from what is real. This is because each individual who applied to become a trainee teacher in a certain teaching institutions have to go through a lengthy screening process

before they managed to get a place. This occurs because many MSHC, MHRC and Diploma students select teaching majors as their choice to further their education to the highest level without thinking about their interests and career prospects in the future.

Those who have filled in application form to the university via online especially those who applied for teaching course have to wait for a call to sit for special test Malaysia Educators Scholastic Inventory (MEdsi). The purpose of this test is to identify the real personality and suitability of the candidates to venture into the teaching profession based on four ideas which are personality, career interests, values of integrity and emotional intelligence. The candidates who pass the Medsi test will be called for an interview before they were absorbed by tertiary education in the public and specific teacher training institutes. The purpose of this screening is to form a group of quality educators in addition to reducing the problems of misconduct, to form teachers who are motivated, brilliant and charismatic.

The successful candidates will be absorbed as trainee teachers in universities and teacher training institutes. They would spend four years to pursue the teaching course based their fields of choice. In these four years, they have to take various courses and passed with excellent marks so that their opportunity to be absorbed into service will be higher. This is because after their graduation from universities particularly students who pursued education majors, they need to fill an online teacher vacancy form at the MOE website. After that, they will be called for an interview for the post of Trained Backup Teachers. The successful trainee teachers will be called for second interview and have to sit for a special test. The interview results will be released within the next two to three months. Those who are successful will be absorbed into service as teachers. However, within a year of confirmation in their position, they will be called once again for an interview and induction before they are confirmed as a teacher.

Based on the circumstances, the assumptions and perceptions of the society about the easy employment are not accurate at all. This is because trainees undergo many screening processes before they are eligible to be labelled as a qualified teacher. The situation becomes even more challenging in the 10MP through the new plan by the government to abolish the guaranteed placement. If before this, the society had inaccurate assumptions, then in the foreseeable future that impression will change.

Emulate the Examples of Developed Countries

Developing a country is not a simple matter; therefore a newly developing country should have its own national idol or role model. Emulating the developed countries will inspire the leaders to develop the country in the interest of the people. Emulating in the field of education is one of the most important elements in order to achieve the desired progress. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2008) which is operating under UNESCO, Finland is one of the most advanced countries in the field of education. Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) Test conducted found that Finland students top the Science literacy achievement and Mathematics understanding with a score of 543 in reading, 536 for Mathematics and 548 for Science, which is actually ahead of other developed nation.

What makes them so brilliant? What are the key factors that their students are wise and clever in their studies? According to OECD, the most important factor of success of their students is dedicated and committed teachers. It was reported that a teacher in Finland received the best teacher training in the world. They have the autonomy in teaching where they can use their expertise to modify lessons according to students' ability in the classroom or school. Test is reduced, while the weaker students will be guided more than those who are more efficient. In addition, students are also encouraged to explore and implement their own work because through this method of learning it will be more relaxed and casual-natured. There are no special programs for students who are smart, all students get the same guidance but according to each student's ability.

This explains that the expertise and commitment of teachers make teaching and learning more effective and encourage students to excel in each of their subjects. Based on that, the step to abolish guaranteed placement carries certain rationale such as ensuring that future teachers will be able to produce something out for the interest of students, schools and country. If a trainee teacher is not able to master the field of teaching, how is

he/she expected to share the knowledge and expertise with the students? Not only that, if a trainee teacher's performance does not bode well, how can the trainee teacher be regarded highly by the community?

Therefore, knowledge is the most important need particularly in shaping the diversity of skills and expertise among teachers. They need to explore and learn about various kinds of knowledge during their study period as a requirement in the future. It does not end there; the diversity of knowledge is an advantage that can be used by trainees to become outstanding future educators. If this is cultivated among trainee teachers in Malaysia, the failure rate in securing a placement will be low. Besides, if they did not use these opportunities, particularly in strengthening their knowledge, they will face problem related to their skills in teaching when it comes to real situation, thus lowering their chances of becoming excellent teachers just like the teachers in Finland and New Zealand.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of guaranteed placement abolishment that was carried out since the year of 2011 to 2015 as explained in the Tenth Malaysia Plan (10MP) is more of a trial to observe whether this step will bring positive or negative effects. Although the planning just started in the year of 2011 but the rational that can be taken through the implementation is the positive encouragement to prospective teachers to improve their achievements. This is because teachers are the individuals who will play a role in shaping the personality of students. Through this, the success and effectiveness in guiding the students will have a positive impact on the school system. When this occurs, the country's education system can be lifted on par with the best education systems abroad.

Thus, excellent trainee teachers are the fundamental to excellence of teachers in the future. Prospective competent educators are the important connector between the development of human capital and developed country status. Trainee teachers, who are properly educated, equipped with knowledge and skills as well as strong characters, will be "human capital" that achieves the national mission to become a high-income developed country. Thus, outstanding trainees are formed as a combination of existing positive criteria in themselves, supplemented by training and professional pre-service and in-service courses. Therefore, the prospective teachers must always be ready to face the challenges and not make the abolishment of guaranteed placement as a main reason of early failure in becoming successful.

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