

Public policy assignment



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Introduction Public policy, in general, refers to a broad ranging issue which may deal with a wide variety of substantive areas such as education, health, housing and others. Harold Dwight Lasswell, an American political scientist, has made a great contribution to the study of policy-making, declaring policy as a process ??? “ a set of phenomena organised in time and led by a number of specific and self-induced mechanisms” (1951).

The key emphasis of public policy has been set on the part played by policy institutions and structures of government and on the processes associated with policy-making. This essay will discuss about the role of various institutions in policy-making process with reference to Brunei Darussalam’s education policy: the National Education System for 21st Century, also known as Sistem Pendidikan Negara Abad 21 or in short, SPN21.

SPN21 as an Education Policy in Brunei Darussalam The Ministry of Education in Brunei Darussalam is obligated in providing an educational system designed to diversify and broaden the provision of education as a package from primary to higher education to incorporating technical & vocational education, ensure a promising future for the country and prepare the younger generation for future roles as resourceful, competent and intellectual citizens.

Hence, the education policy of SPN21 was implemented in 2008 mainly due to the rising expectations and global challenges of the 21st century whereby students would be equipped with relevant knowledge and skills to meet the changing needs of a forward looking economy. Other than that, Brunei

Darussalam also aims to transform its education landscape as a rationale for change with the overview of Brunei Vision 2035 (Wawasan Brunei 2035).

The SPN21 brings about several major changes to the education system. In terms of structure, the SPN21 gives highly capable students the opportunity to complete their secondary education in a shorter period of time which will definitely benefit the nation in its effort to improve its human resource development. For instance, students will complete either 4 year or 5 year programme before sitting for the Brunei Cambridge General Certificate of Education ‘ O’ level examination.

In terms of curriculum and assessment, there are specific areas being highlighted as significant and this includes core subjects Languages, Mathematics and Science, and compulsory subjects such as Malay Islamic Monarchy (Melayu Islam Beraja). These subject combinations can provide essential skills such as communication, physical and problem-solving skills and develop principle values and attitudes. There are also changes in technical education where students may be able to gain qualifications namely National Skill Certificate (NSC), Diploma and a four-year sandwich Degree.

The SPN21 is regarded as one of the most fundamental education policies being implemented in Brunei Darussalam. The preparation process of the policy is systematic and thorough, whereby there are several institutions involved during the process in order to successfully enhance the education system with implementing the policy. The Policy-making Process As

previously stated, according to Harold Dwight Lasswell, policy is seen as a process and this can be explained using the process model he helped build.

The process model is a complex and interactive process that leads to the making of policy, often described using these stages: 1) Problem Identification, 2) Agenda-Setting, 3) Formulation, 4) Decision-Making, 5) Implementation and 6) Evaluation. Hence, the process model will be applied to explain in detail the role of institutions, particularly stakeholders, in the policy-making of SPN21 in Brunei Darussalam. Role of Institutions in Reference to the Process Model The first stage concerns with problem identification.

This stage is necessary simply because it is undeniable that policies are developed in response to the existence of a perceived problem or an opportunity. Therefore, problem identification involves publicizing social problems and expressing demands for government action. In the case of SPN21, there has been several issues being addressed mainly by the policy advocates who are the demand side of policy. They include policy community, interest group, international system, mass media and also the society.

The main issues before SPN21 were centered on the academic performance on public examination, the rising expectations and global challenges of the 21st century and also Brunei Vision 2035. For instance, the international system played a role in the problem identification stage. In 2007, consultants from Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) were engaged to

conduct a “ National Study of Student Competency in Mathematics and English” where they witnessed low

English language proficiency and poor performance in subjects specifically Science and Mathematics of Bruneian students. This hence affected the society as there were urgings to come up with a solution for this problem. Mass media, particularly, the leading English newspapers in Brunei namely The Borneo Bulletin and The Brunei Times had also contributed in addressing this issue, seeing key subjects such as Science, Mathematics and Languages being fundamental in the development of scientific and technical literacy to economic and industrial development of the country.

This was supported by a report by the Special Working Committee on Human Resources ??? Brunei Darussalam National Human Resource Development Policy and Plan (extract from Draft 5, 4th January 2005) stating that the previous education system did not provide enough skills required by school leavers in preparation to meet the 21st century globalisation and economy. Once problems have been identified, the next stage is to resolve what issues will be decided & what problems will be addressed by government. This is called Agenda-setting. It basically involves translating an issue into a policy proposal.

Stakeholders involved can be both from policy advocates (the demand side) and policy makers (the supply side). A committee was established comprising of various stakeholders to develop the National Education Plan covering the period 2007 to 2011. It aimed to align and synchronize the relationship between the Ministry of Education’s vision, mission and

objectives. In relation to SPN21, the Ministry of Education became aware of the identified problems and decided to take actions due to the parts played by policy advocates primarily the mass media which are crucial links between the state and society.

The media's role in agenda-setting is thus particularly significant (Spitzer, 1993; Pritchard, 1992). However, the strength of media in other countries is more transparent in contrast to Brunei Darussalam where it is more restricted. In the policy formulation stage, which is marked by discussion and debate on how best to address issues, both policy makers and advocates are involved. Several briefings were held for the Ministry of Education's internal and external stakeholders to inform them about SPN21 reforms.

The internal stakeholders included education directors, private and public school principals, head teachers, University of Brunei Darussalam's staff mainly from SHBIE and education officers meanwhile the external stakeholder included officers from the Department of Labour, Civil Service Department, Brunei Economic Development Board, officers from the Department of Islamic Studies, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports and also from Yayasan Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah School.

During this formulation process, the education structure was assessed and revised, taking into account strengths and weaknesses of the system. His Majesty, Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah, and the Ministry of Education were involved in the SPN21 decision-making stage which refers to actions taken within governmental settings to formulate,

adopt, implement, evaluate or change policies. The Ministry of Education works with all departments to ensure that decision-making and planning processes are aligned and consistent with the strategic objectives then reports it to the executive branch.

Therefore, decision-making is principally being handled by the State: the executive and legislative bodies. The executive body in Brunei is headed by His Majesty and cabinets who implement laws and then it proceeds to the legislative policy that makes and approves laws. However, as Brunei Darussalam is an absolute constitutional monarchy, the legislative is considered to be a part of the executive body due to the fact that His Majesty is both the head of state and the chief minister of the country in comparison to other countries such as the United States where there is a separation of power.

The most vital stage in the policy-making process is implementation. It includes process of putting into effect or carrying out an authoritative decision of government. Hence, policy makers are the chief institution contributing at this stage. The implementation of SPN21 can be explored in stages: 1) Provisional stage in 2008 for Year 7 – PSR 2007 cohort, 2) Implementation at primary level in 2009 for Year 1 and Year 4 and 3) Full implementation at primary level in 2011. In Brunei Darussalam, the Ministry of Education is responsible for the organization, implementation and assessment of education.

As a member of the Council of Cabinet Ministers, it is also responsible for formulating educational policies, outlining expectations for translating

policies into developments, and coordinating their implementation. The final stage is evaluation which determines how a public policy has actually performed in action and to see whether the policy has been successful in achieving its objectives. In addition, the main purpose of the evaluation stage is to report outputs of government programs, impacts of policies and propose changes and reforms. Both policy makers and policy advocates are involved during this stage.

The effectiveness of the policy needs to be assessed after a certain period of time, and steps must be taken to ensure that there are resources and means to maintain a successful policy. In the case of SPN21, there were a number of issues being put forward after its implementation. This included over-emphasis on examinations, assessment of vocational and technical skills subjects and changes to teacher education courses at the University of Brunei Darussalam. Facing Problems and Challenges As stated in the evaluation stage, there were several issues addressed concerning the implementation of the SPN21 education policy.

Firstly, over-emphasis on examinations refers to the view that the increase in the number and types of continuous assessment under the SPN21 implies dominance of tests and examinations in schools that may continue unabated. Examinations are used to make very important selection decisions which affect individual lives and legitimize the selections made.

Unfortunately examinations are never perfect instruments and the reliability and validity of selections based on single external assessments is questionable (Gipps, 1994; Ellerton & Clement, 1996).

Secondly, assessment of vocational and technical skills subjects is also an issue because although vocational and technical subjects such as Agriculture could provide students with essential skills, they may appear to be accorded a low status in Brunei because: 1) they are not being compulsory or core subjects, 2) the slightly lower number of teaching hours allocated to them, 2) training and appointment of fewer instructors and 3) having fewer teaching and learning resources in regular schools.

And lastly, another issue concerns the teacher education courses at the University of Brunei Darussalam where the Ministry of Education decided to raise the qualifications of teachers and in order to improve the overall quality of education in the nation. Conclusion: Recommendations for Improvement
In conclusion, the Ministry of Education aims to keep up with the fast changing world, to meet the social and economic challenges of the 21st century.

Hence, it considers the SPN21 as a common platform to realize its strategic plan, vision of “ Quality Education towards a Developed, Peaceful and Prosperous Nation” as well as its mission “ To Provide Holistic Education to achieve Fullest Potential for All”. Nevertheless, there are some recommendations in areas for improvement. For instance, teamwork and cooperation from all sections and parties concerned are essential and required.

There should be effective teacher training and leadership programmes upon the implementation of the SPN21. Moreover, resources such as sufficient budget and technological necessities should also be provided in every school

institutions in order to ensure the success of the policy as a result.

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