

[COLUMNIST] Bridging the gap: Traditional knowledge for a modern world

Dr Abdul Mutalib Embong, Noor Azida Abdul Wahab
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Such integration of wisdom with modern pedagogy will play a critical role in fabricating well-rounded, perceptive learners. -Filepix/ Bernama

ANCIENT wisdom or traditional knowledge is an open-ended way to refer to tradition-based literary, and tradition-based innovations resulting from reflective activity in a group or society.

The teaching of traditional knowledge is typically passed down through generations by the elders and those who came earlier through storytelling, myth-making, or via ritual and symbolic art.

In this context, the elders are respected and referred to for advice and guidance. The oral tradition is multifaceted, diverse, and invariably extensive and exclusive.

For such group, it is not only to educate and explain but also to entertain, remember, and record. This tradition is mainly a set of do's and don'ts to ensure the desired social behavior among the members.

It is like an encyclopedia of knowledge and information necessary for utilisation of the natural resources.

This knowledge is integral to a cultural complex that encompasses language, systems of classification, resource use practices, social interactions, ritual and spirituality.

These unique ways of knowing are important feature of the cultural diversity, and render a foundation for locally-appropriate sustainable development.



UNESCO has established its lists of Intangible Cultural Heritage with the aim of ensuring better protection of important impalpable traditional knowledge worldwide and the awareness of their significance.

In Malaysia, researchers at tertiary level work closely with UNESCO preserving cultural heritage consists of monuments, buildings, and sites like historic Straits of Malacca and the Archaeological Lenggong Valley.

Studies on some heritage and provide recognition to communities' traditions like Pantun, Silat and Dondang Sayang for example aim to draw attention to the importance of the Malays' safeguarding knowledge, which UNESCO has identified as an essential component and as a repository of cultural diversity and of creative expression.



The Malays also are well known with the traditional knowledge especially in medicine, in which their communities are situated where the vast majority of the plant genetic resources are found.

Many of them have cultivated and used biological diversity in a sustainable way for years. These Malay healing offer a holistic, varied and ecological solution to a multitude of illnesses and ailments which can be scientifically explained.

Somehow, the traditional knowledge is not limited to the Malays. For the Orang Asli or the Indigenous in Malaysia, they are still carrying out their traditional lifestyle, such as hunting and gathering jungle products as most of them stay in the jungle and far from the development.



Over many generations, they have formed a holistic ancestral traditional knowledge of their lands, natural resources and environment, which plays an crucial role in their livelihood and well-being.

The mix of voluntary of Chinese and Indian immigration into Malay land from the mid- to late-19 century had also contributed to the ancient knowledge in the later .

Nevertheless to say, the narrative of Chinese and Indian civilizations can be derived as an unbroken thread many thousands of years into the past, making it one of the cradles of civilization in the world history.

Due to these ethno-cultural groups, their traditional wisdom transcends mere intellectual knowledge; which can be fostered among the young learners in our country.

We know that education continues to evolve, and such integration of wisdom with modern pedagogy will play a critical role in fabricating well-rounded, perceptive learners.



Learning then should be inter-disciplinary with art, music, theatre, integral parts of traditional knowledge and can be well-integrated into the learning domains of languages, math, and sciences.

It is a fun way if the rich tapestry of these traditional skills can be parked in the co-curricular uniformed bodies - boy scouts, girl guides or red crescent to name a few.

By encouraging the young learners to perceive the traditional knowledge through a lens of interconnections, they can learn that their actions have a significant ripple effect not only on them but to others as well.

Apart, it is to ensure the this ancient wisdom can be passed down to the next generations through the years and indulge the spirit of the unity, tolerance and mutual understanding among the collective culture.

To Malaysians as whole, embracing the wisdom of traditions and the groundbreaking research of contemporary science, can be one of the ways to foster a greater sense of balance and harmony within ourselves and the communities.

Noor Azida Abdul Wahab and Dr Abdul Mutalib Embong are lecturers at the English Learning Centre, Centre for Foundation and Continuing Education, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu.

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