The Abolishment of UPSR and PT3: The Impacts to Our Education System

The **COVID-19** pandemic served as an inflection point for countless societal systems, and Malaysia's education sector was no exception. Amidst the unprecedented disruption wrought by the health crisis, the government made the momentous decision to cancel two cornerstone assessments—the **Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR)** and **Pentaksiran Tingkatan 3 (PT3)**, back in 2021. ***"Furthermore, the outbreak of Covid-19 in the country is not fully contained yet,"*** a statement by the **Former** **Senior Minister Education, Datuk Dr. Mohd Radzi Jidin**, which reflected to the abolishment of the two major school examinations.[[1]](#footnote-1) Originally conceived as an exigent measure to mitigate the spread of the virus, the abolishment has now been rendered permanent, a development that has precipitated polarizing discourse among educators, policymakers, and parents.

For decades, UPSR and PT3 stood as bastions of Malaysia’s standardized education framework. UPSR, administered at the culmination of primary school, functioned as a definitive gauge of students’ foundational competencies, determining their placement in secondary institutions. PT3, on the other hand, served as a critical mid-point appraisal of students' academic aptitude and readiness to embark on the rigors of upper secondary education. The absence of these examinations has raised profound questions about the future trajectory of Malaysia’s academic ecosystem. While UPSR and PT3 have historically played important roles in Malaysia’s education system, their relevance has diminished in light of changing educational priorities. The move away from these exams marks a shift towards a more inclusive, dynamic, and holistic approach to student assessment, better suited to preparing students for the demands of a rapidly changing world. **Education Minister Fadhlina Sidek** stated that the PT3 and the UPSR are no longer applicable in evaluating students' academic performance.[[2]](#footnote-2) ***“Instead, we are giving the time and space for School Based Assessment (PBS) to function effectively because everything that happens in education must reflect the National Education Philosophy,”*** she said when winding up the debate on the 2025 supply bill at the **Policy Stage** for **Ministry Of Education** at the **Dewan Rakyat** last month.[[3]](#footnote-3) The **Education Ministry** will also introduce seven domains—personal development, communication, responsibility, digital fluency, diverse literacy, thinking skills, and lifelong learning—in the **2027 School Curriculum** to promote a balanced lifestyle.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Modern education emphasizes holistic student development, focusing not just on academic performance but also on critical thinking, creativity, and emotional intelligence. UPSR and PT3, as standardized tests, primarily evaluated rote memorization and did not adequately assess these broader skills. According to **Prof. Mohd Fadzil Abdul Rahman** of **Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas)**, the PT3and the UPSRfor Year Six students only focus on the **“Three Rs: Reception, Retention, and Recollection.”**[[5]](#footnote-5) They do not assist students in developing their critical thinking and communication abilities. ***“The downside of this is that students do not learn to understand, but resort to memorisation to get good marks.”*** he added.[[6]](#footnote-6) Proponents of this seismic shift argue that it heralds the dawn of a more progressive and holistic approach to student evaluation, aligning with global pedagogical trends that emphasize critical thinking, creativity, and collaborative problem-solving over rote learning. **The Ministry of Education (MOE)** has assured stakeholders that a robust framework of classroom-based assessments will supplant the traditional examinations, purporting to capture a more nuanced portrait of student capabilities. **Radzi** also clarified that the ministry's primary goal at the moment is to improve the **Special School Admission Assessment (PKSK)**.[[7]](#footnote-7) ***"Admission into the boarding schools for Form 1 (2022) will also be made via PKSK."*** he stated.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Yet, this assurance has done little to placate skeptics who foresee an erosion of educational rigor and equity. Detractors posit that the removal of these pivotal assessments risks engendering disparities in academic standards, particularly in rural and underprivileged schools where infrastructural deficiencies and teaching quality are perennial concerns. The absence of a uniform metric, they argue, may undermine the objectivity and fairness integral to Malaysia’s educational meritocracy. The elimination of PT3 was the appropriate decision, according to **Aminuddin Awang**, the **President of the National Union of the Teaching Profession of Malaysia (NUTP)**, since otherwise, schools would only concentrate on the teaching system to prepare students to respond to test questions.[[9]](#footnote-9) However, he noted that many parents have also expressed worries about the methods or assessments that would be employed to determine students' academic proficiency following the ban.

In the meantime, 45-year-old secondary school teacher **Morni Wong Abdullah @ Wong Kheng Hing** of **Semporna, Sabah**, voiced his concern that students would not have anything to be proud of after finishing school other than depending solely on the **Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM)** exam results to continue their academic endeavours.[[10]](#footnote-10) With the removal of the PT3 exam and the prior abolition of the UPSR centralized examination, concerns arise that students may grow too comfortable. This shift leaves SPM as the sole major public examination, potentially causing students to place less importance on regular assessments like monthly tests. Moreover, the implications for students’ discipline and motivation have been a focal point of contention. In the absence of interim milestones like UPSR and PT3, will students retain the same level of dedication to their studies, or will the singular emphasis on the **Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM)** examination create undue pressure at the final juncture of their academic journey?

1. Nor Ain Mohamed Radi, “PT3 2021 cancelled, UPSR abolished” New Strait Times, (April 28, 2021) <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2021/04/686114/updated-pt3-2021-cancelled-upsr-abolished> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. BERNAMA reporters, “UPSR, PT3 no longer relevant, MOE to continue strengthening PBS system – Fadhlina” BERNAMA, (November 11, 2024), https://www.bernama.com/en/news.php?id=2362062#:~:text=She%20said%20that%20was%20why,assessment%20(PBS)%20system%20instead. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. BERNAMA reporters, “UPSR, PT3 no longer relevant, MOE to continue strengthening PBS system – Fadhlina” BERNAMA, (November 11, 2024), https://www.bernama.com/en/news.php?id=2362062#:~:text=She%20said%20that%20was%20why,assessment%20(PBS)%20system%20instead. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Fuad Nizam, “Seven learning domains planned for 2027 school curriculum“, New Strait Times (December 6, 2023) <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2023/12/987206/seven-learning-domains-planned-2027-school-curriculum> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Nur Hasliza Mohd Salleh, “Academic say UPSR, PT3 exams no longer needed to gauge students” Malaysia Now (January 6, 2021) <https://www.malaysianow.com/news/2021/01/06/academics-say-upsr-pt3-exams-no-longer-needed-to-gauge-students> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Nur Hasliza Mohd Salleh, “Academic say UPSR, PT3 exams no longer needed to gauge students” Malaysia Now (January 6, 2021) <https://www.malaysianow.com/news/2021/01/06/academics-say-upsr-pt3-exams-no-longer-needed-to-gauge-students> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Awani International reporters, “UPSR fully abolished, PT3 2021 cancelled” Awani International (April 28, 2021) <https://international.astroawani.com/malaysia-news/upsr-fully-abolished-pt3-2021-cancelled-radzi-jidin-295487> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Nor Ain Mohamed Radi, “PT3 2021 cancelled, UPSR abolished” New Strait Times, (April 28, 2021) <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2021/04/686114/updated-pt3-2021-cancelled-upsr-abolished> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. # Malay Mail reporters, “NUTP: Empowerment of school-based assessment can allay parents’ concerns over PT3 abolishment” Malay Mail (June 3, 2022) <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2022/06/03/nutp-empowerment-of-school-based-assessment-can-allay-parents-concerns-over-pt3-abolishment/10518>

   [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Malay Mail reporters, “NUTP: Empowerment of school-based assessment can allay parents’ concerns over PT3 abolishment” Malay Mail (June 3, 2022) <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2022/06/03/nutp-empowerment-of-school-based-assessment-can-allay-parents-concerns-over-pt3-abolishment/10518> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)