

Better grades for two key subjects

Improved SPM results for English and BM attributed to systemic changes

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PETALING JAYA: The Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) results for English saw the biggest improvement for core subjects in 2023, while Bahasa Melayu (BM) recorded the best performance in terms of average grade.

The average grade for English improved by 0.29 in 2023 compared to 2021, the year that the Standard Secondary School Curriculum (KSSM) assessment format underwent revision.

KSSM was introduced in 2017, replacing the Integrated Secondary School Curriculum (KBSM), which was adopted from 2014 to 2016.

During the adoption of KSSM from 2017 to 2020, English was the toughest core subject for SPM students, with the average grade ranging from 5.81 to 5.98 between 2017 and 2020.

In the revised syllabus starting in 2021, English recorded a lower grade of 5.23, with the results further improving to 5.13 in 2022 and 4.94 in 2023.

A lower number denotes a better score.

The number of candidates who scored As (A+, A, A-) for English grew by 4.9 percentage points, from 22.3% in 2021 to 27.2% in 2023. The pass rate (A+ to E-) for the subject was 88.8%, the highest since 2017.

Meanwhile, BM was the best-performing core subject in the 2023 SPM, recording an average grade of 3.86.

The result had improved from 4.11 in 2021 and 3.95 in 2022.

Prior to the KSSM revision between 2017 and 2020, the yearly average grade for BM was above 4.0.

Taylor's University School of Education's Prof Dr Moses Stephens Gunams Samuel said the better English scores could be due to the many systemic changes that happened between 2017 and 2022.

"For instance, we saw the introduction of the KSSM syllabus, the alignment of SPM English with



Sample test: A student flipping through an English Language model paper workbook for SPM. — AZHAR MAHFOF/The Star



the Common European Framework (CEFR) for assessment, and the training of teachers for the systemic changes in the curriculum and assessment," he said, adding that these changes may have affected student performance.

However, Prof Moses Stephens, who is also a senior research fellow at the university, said increases in test scores (grades) are not comparable across subjects.

"The criteria for the award of marks for each subject are subject-specific and applicable to that subject alone.

"So, depending on the rubric in English and what was tested in the English exams, we can't say that students were better in the subject than, say, in History, based on test scores alone," he added.

On the same note, he said SPM scores cannot be compared with Malaysia's performance in the Programme for International Student Assessment (Pisa) 2022.

"Students taking the reading test for Pisa could opt to take the reading test in English or BM.

"So, the drop in Pisa performance may not reflect English reading performance," he said.

Prof Moses Stephens said lan-

guage proficiency can be further improved if learners have language-rich or language-saturated environments to grow in.

While there are already several programmes in national schools, such as the Highly Immersive Programme (HIP) and the Reading in Schools Programme, he said the key to their success lies in the implementation of the programmes and whether teachers have the know-how, capacity and time to put these initiatives into practice.

Agreeing with Prof Moses Stephens, Parent Action Group for Education Malaysia (PAGE) chairman Datin Noor Azimah Abdul Rahim said she believes benchmarking against CEFR has helped school students better master the language.

This, she added, had led to their scores improving over the years.

Prof Dr Muhammad Kamarul Kabilan Abdullah from the Universiti Sains Malaysia School of Educational Studies said English proficiency may have improved as teenagers now spend a lot of time on social media, a platform where English is among the main languages for interaction, communication, content creation and sharing, as well as engagement.

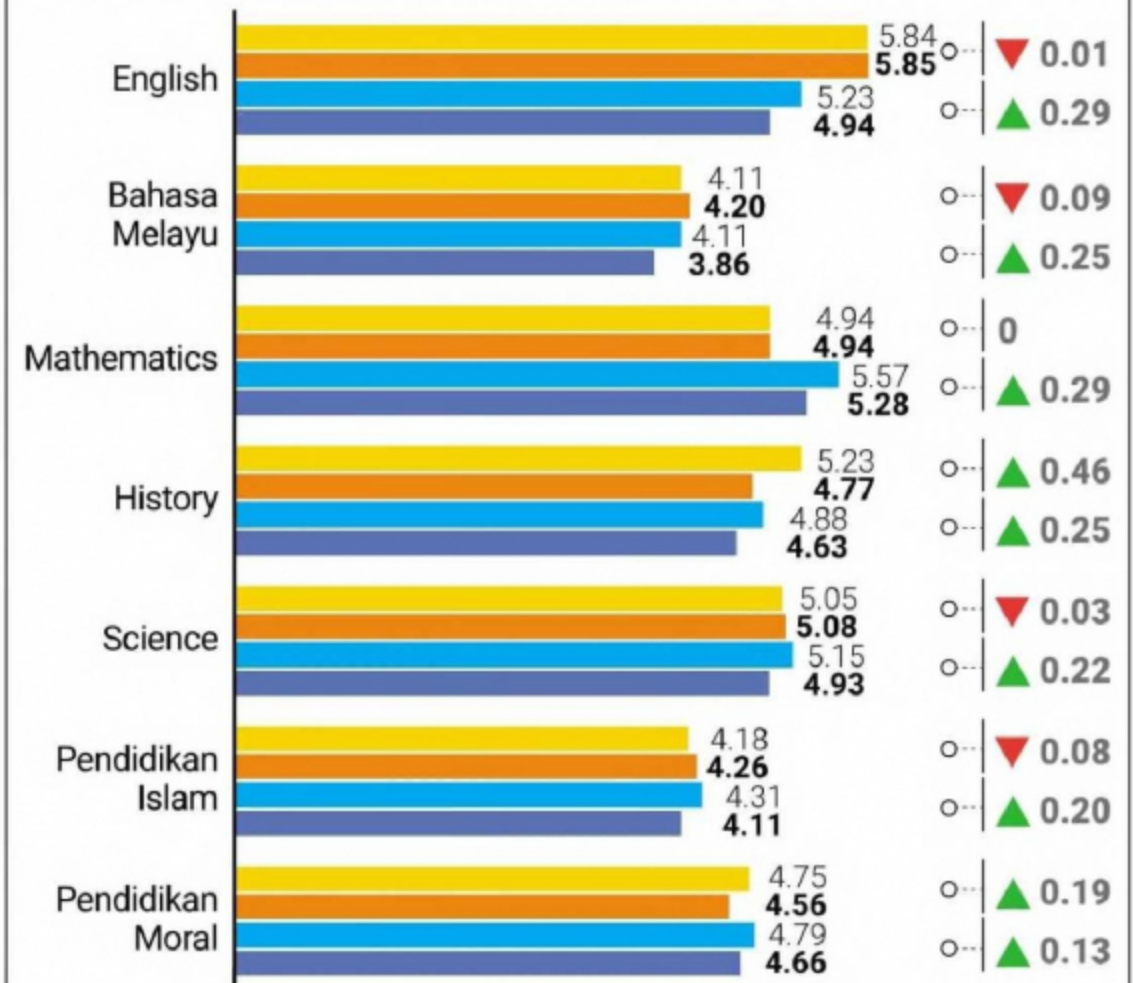
"Indirectly, the increased use of social media means that the students are able to use the language in a 'real-world setting' in that



The performance of core subjects over the years

2017 2020 2021 2023

A lower index value shows better achievement.



Source: Education Ministry

TheStargraphics

they are able to communicate with others from different countries synchronously and instantly," he added.

Universiti Malaya Malay Studies Academy Professional Bahasa Melayu Programme coordinator Dr Akhmad Mansur said the more interactive teaching and learning (PdP) methods used by teachers had contributed to the improvement in BM scores.

"PdP methods in the form of gamification and interactive online applications are able to attract students' interest in learning a subject.

"This can help students better understand and master the formulas and syllabus taught by the teachers," he said, adding that these methods are very appealing to today's digital-native students.

"Good understanding leads to favorable results," he said.

Universiti Putra Malaysia Faculty of Educational Studies

educational measurement senior lecturer Dr Siti Salina Mustakim said teachers using the rubric provided by the Malaysia Examinations Council and the Malaysia Examinations Board as their main resource is another reason why students performed better in the national language.

"The assessment rubric provided is complete and comprehensive, consistent, objective and of high standard, and thus makes it easier for teachers to coordinate teaching with the needs of the curriculum that needs to be measured.

"This makes PdP more effective in the classroom while ensuring that the special topics planned can achieve encouraging results," she said.

FOR MORE STORIES See page 6