

# ‘Students were crying pleading’

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*Ibrahim (centre) talking to counsel Shireen (right) and Siti Nafirah (left) outside of the courtroom.*

**KOTA KINABALU:** The absenteeism of the teacher to enter class to teach the English subject eight years ago, affected not only students but also other teachers, said a witness. The 14th witness, a teacher involved in the FullBright English Teaching Assistant (ETA) programme, Ibrahim Jadoon, who was from United States, because of the ‘Guru ponteng’ Mohd Jainal Jamrin (JJ), he (Ibrahim) faced the following:

“First it caused a moral dilemma when students pleaded for teachers but as an ETA, I was under contract not to teach alone.

“Second, ‘guru ponteng’ neglected the purpose of the ETA contract whereby two governments had spent large sums to send ETAs to improve English language but the cause of poor English at my school was due to the absence of Malaysian Education Ministry (KPM) English teachers.

“The problem also caused ‘murid ponteng’ where classrooms without teachers saw kids roam the school disturbing other classes such as mine,” he said. Ibrahim said he reported the problem to the State Education Department (JPN) officer, one Muarifin during a meeting because he took it as his moral responsibility when the students were crying and pleading for an English teacher.

“As educators, we have a duty to report such abuse/neglect. Next, my ETA mentor informed the principal Suid Hanapi who took no action against JJ up until the meeting on Apr 28, 2015. “Next, the culture of fear at SMK Taun Gusi as both students and teachers were preventing report the scandal to higher officers, and as an ETA I uniquely had a direct channel to JPN. “Second, why did I report to Muarifin? I had known Muarifin well since 2014 and we had a good rapport. Muarifin was the most senior JPN officer I knew and as the senior JPN officer, he would know the next step,” he said.

According to Ibrahim, he did not plan to report the problem to JPN as it was quite a spontaneous decision where he had a physical meeting, adding that Muarifin thanked him for reporting about the crying students and the culture of fear at SMK Taun Gusi. He added that Muarifin then told him that he or the JPN would send an observer to SMK Taun Gusi. In describing about SMK Taun Gusi, Ibrahim said after his two years in the school, the school was seen to have significant academic problems and significant instances of teacher absenteeism and noted that many students desperately wanted a good education to escape the poverty cycle. “SMK Taun Gusi is one of the oldest schools in Sabah with many well-known principals, including Datuk Jame Alip, Amin Senin and Said Andong. The Kota Belud district is one of the poorest districts in Malaysia. “It was because of these students, I returned for a second year. I felt grateful for my wonderful experience in teaching students and learning about Kota Belud and Sabah. During Hari Raya, I went to more than 10 houses and I even started an English newspaper at school,” he said.

The witness testified before High Court Judge Datuk Ismail Brahim, hearing the suit filed by plaintiff Siti Nafirah Siman, 23, against JJ, SMK Taun Gusi Principal Suid (in his capacity as Principal of SMK Taun Gusi), SMK Taun Gusi, Kota Belud District Education Officer, Sabah Education Director, Director General of Education Malaysia, Minister of Education Malaysia and Government of Malaysia, as the first, second, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh and eight defendants. The plaintiff is seeking among others a declaration that the eight defendants are in breach of their statutory duty under the Education Act by failing to ensure that she is taught the English language during the period of February 2015 to Oct 2015 and prepared her for examinations as prescribed under the Education Act.

Ibrahim further testified that JJ was not only often “ponteng” to teach his students without remorse but also would humiliate students over English subject. “JJ had no sense of responsibility to his students as he was often absent to teach his students and rarely planned a co-teach lesson plan. “The co-teach lesson plan should be prepared by the KPM teacher while ETAs would contribute a smaller portion because we are not trained teachers. “JJ would frequently ‘ponteng’ and frequently ask me to enter alone. Even though I repeatedly informed him this breached the ETA regulations. “JJ was also known for his frequent temper,” said Ibrahim who worked closely with JJ in 2014 for the ETA programe.

Ibrahim informed the court that there were two significant memories while co-teaching with JJ and during the incident he confronted JJ on why he did not teach his assigned classes. “JJ claimed he doesn’t like some of those students. Secondly, in 2014 the ETA liaison conducted an observation of JJ and I because SMK Taun Gusi was a new school in the programme. Notably, JJ had prepared no lesson plan with

me. JJ told me to judge student presentations, after each presentation the students held an open Q&A period where they did quite fluently. “Then the KPM ETA liaison one Rezwan Ahmad asked a simple question to the students. The students could not understand the word ‘favourite’. Rezwan was frustrated why they could answer previously but not to him, to my shock Rezwan asked JJ did he plan ahead of time those questions. JJ turned red in embarrassment bowed his head in acknowledgement,” said Ibrahim.

He further testified that under the ETA programme, there were 10 classes he needed to teach but due to the teacher absenteeism, he was only assigned to teach six classes in 2015. Ibrahim further said at SMK Taun Gusi, the absenteeism of teacher to enter class started since 2014 but Suid did not take action. According to Ibrahim, he revealed the absenteeism in a WhatsApp group because the problem was getting worse and he wanted the officers to know about the scandal in the school. He further testified that he wanted to learn more about JJ’s absenteeism in the school because he knew Siti Nafirah in 2014 and knew she would be forthright (honest) about the school’s problems.

“I met her in the in April 2015 and asked her where she knew about the seriousness of guru ponteng such as the case of JJ’s absenteeism for two years in another class. She said yes it was a big problem at SMK Taun Gusi. I asked do you have any ‘guru ponteng’? She said yes my English teacher and mentioned JJ who was the same teacher teaching 5Geo class. “I was shocked that JJ was absent in multiple classes and told her that I would inform the ETA mentor who was the English Subject head. “Siti Nafirah then asked me for a new English teacher, whether me or replaced by someone else,” he said.

Ibrahim further said he told his ETA mentor about the problem and the teacher said it was an open secret at SMK Taun Gusi for a long time already. “She said that there was a culture of fear in discussing the sensitive topic due to JJ’s frequent temper that I had also seen and Suid was not taking any action, thus protecting the scandal,” said Ibrahim. Counsel Shireen Sikayun defended Siti Nafirah while Senior Federal Counsel Jesseca Daimis and Federal Counsel Mohd Fazriel Fardiansyah Abdul Kadir acted for the defendants.  
Trial continues.