National Integration in Multicultural School Setting In Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Malaysia is a multicultural country constituting three major ethno-cultural groups, Malay and Bumiputera, Chinese and Indian. Owing to its diverse cultures attempts through a number of channels, politics, economics and social were made to bring about national integration. School is thought to be the most effective platform to bring about national integration based on the multicultural framework. This study examines the influence of both the selected school and student background variables on integration. The survey conducted on Form Four and Form Five students found that integration is not monolithic but tends to be interpreted into three frameworks or models: assimilation, multiple-identities and multiculturalism. Ethno-religious-cultural backgrounds seem to be much more influential than the school variables in determining not only the strength but also student preference for a specific integration framework or model..

Keywords: *National Integration, Multicultural Schools, Multicultural integration, Integration In Malaysia*

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia with a population of 28.3 millions (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2010) is pluralistic and multicultural. The three main ethnic groups constituting the Malays and Bumiputera (67.4%), Chinese (24.6%), Indians (7.3%) have their own unique culture and heritage, such as language, belief system, tradition and religion. The lifestyle patterns of the different groups have direct links to thedifferences in their values and expectations(Syed Serajul Islam, 2008). Since achieving independence fifty-five years ago, Malaysia has undergone economic transformation in terms of diversification of its agriculturein the 1960s to manufacturing in the 1970s-1980s, and then to technology-based development since the 1990s. These achievements came as a result of the ability of Malaysians, diverse in their culture, to tolerate, and to live and work together in realising the country's overall goals of growth and prosperity. But then as pointed out by Musa Hitam (2007), nation-building is not just about providing highways, byways and hospitals. It is also about weaving together national values for the citizenry to live by and devising greater missions to galvanize their camaraderie and spirit. Such a vision of weaving together national values is still far from the set goal.

For Malaysia up to the present day, except for the 1969 race riot between the Malays and the Chinese, and the 2001 clashes between the Malays and the Indians, race relations have been peaceful unlike what had been experienced in countries with mixed populations such as Nigeria, Rwanda, Bosnia, Thailand, Sudan, and India (Zaid, 2007).The basis for conflict between the ethnic groups stems from identity contestation in the form of language and culture (Shamsul, 2006). In the 1970s, the Malays advocated that the core of the national culture should be that of the Malay. This assimilative approach was unkindly viewed by the Chinese and the Indians. Relationships between the ethnic groups are rather complex, intricate and sensitive, especially when dealing with matters of religion, culture and language. These features are important in identity contestation, a phenomenon created by the British in the context of colonial knowledge and its investigative modalities (Shamsul, 2006). According to Shamsul, it is through the colonial practice of codifying, documenting and representing the social, cultural, economic and political state in history that modern identities in Malaysia like Malay/Malayness, Chinese/Chineseness and Indian/Indianess have emerged, consolidated and fortified. Realizing the danger of creating distrust among the ethnic groups the government had rescinded the assimilation strategy and sought the policy based on the multicultural model.

In any society, the educational system is closely related to societal needs and thus it cannot ignore the political,economic and cultural-ideological factors which influence its functions. As a result, educational systemshave environments that give them purpose andmeaning and define their functions, limitationsand conflicts. In Malaysia, since independenceone of the national objectives has been unity;henceforth, all the enacted educational policies have stated that unity is their overarchingobjective. The Razak Report of 1956 and Rahman Talib Report (Federation of Malaya, 1958, 1960) were the foundation for subsequent national policieson education. The National Language Policy declared that Malay languageis the national language and medium of instruction inthe national schools. The centralized schoolcurriculum and examination, and the inclusionof subjects like civic studies, are attempts toensure integration, tolerance, and national consciousness.

Until independence in 1957, Malaysia (Malaya, Singapore, North Borneo and Sarawak) was very much a plural society and very much a model as described by Furnivall(1949) inheriting social, economic and politicalvestiges of the colonial policy of divide andrule.Relations between ethnic groups were full of distrust. A nation would not be able to be forged in such a situation. Thus, thetask of national integration has to be seriously and immediately undertaken and indeed this is a massive challenge. The term integration hasbeen defined as a process whereby politicalactors in several distinct national settings arepersuaded to shift their loyalties, expectationsand political activities towards a new centre(HaasinSyedSerajul Islam, 2008). In brief, national integration is a process of bringing together discrete elements of a society intoa more integrated whole, or to make out ofmany small and diverse societies a closerapproximation of one nation (Wriggins in Syed Serajul Islam, 2008).

Studies on integration in schools have shown the tendency that student attitudes are polarized. A research report on Practicess Towards Unity in Six Schools by the Planning and Research Unit of the Ministry of Education (1995) shows that these schools have yet to achieve their objectives of shared values and practices towards unity. Instructional methods such as group discussions, student presentations, shared assignments and many other modes of shared and cooperative learning may activate inter ethnic participation. However, this is not the case for Malaysian students in general are taught to sit, listen, and recite memorized information. Interactions among students of different ethnic origins in both co-curricular activities and during recess were found to be at the minimum level. The scenario at the tertiary level is much the same as in schools. According to Sagawa (2007) current campuses are in danger of breeding intolerance, ethnocentrism and segregated communities. In Malaysia, nation building and forging of national unity amongst the various ethnic groups rank very high in the educational and political agendas. In fact, national unity and integration is the cornerstone of the education policy.

Social scientists have studied the process of national integration from three universal theoretical perspectives. First, the general systems theory analyzes whether there is a regular and continuing inter-connectedness in the subsets or elements of a system. Inter-connectedness is the main ingredient in the formation of value congruence in a system. Von Bertalanffy (1972)noted that the formation of value congruence is why all ongoing social systems actually show a tendency toward a general system of common cultural orientation. Second, the transactional or communication salience theory of Deutsch (1964), Jacob and Toscano (1964) and others has also been used to explain both the degree to which people are connected and the way changes in the direction of communication affect the direction of integration. Deutsch explains that when a community experiences many transactions the people who have experienced these transactions will like them. If these transactions were rewarded, the image of community may be strongly positive. He says the perception of a sense of community allowed diverse groups to exchange norms, values and expressive symbols unconsciously. Third, the spatial perspective sees integration as a function of the geographic distribution of people. According to Mabogunje (1981), the movement of mass populations into different regions of a country is a significant way of achieving integration between a people and its territory, and also between different groups within the population.

These theories help to identify the main areas for the proposed strategy. Within this context, analyses of the construct usually begin with the question: Do the people of a social system possess common ideals and believe these ideals are important? This question is foremost because, as Abernethy (1969) has noted, when people believe they belong to a terminal community, whose values and institutions they consider worth preserving, they become less likely to permit conflicts that could threaten the existence of the community. The renowned African political scientist Ali Mazrui (1972) identifies five interrelated aspects of national integration and one of these is the fusion of norms and cultures (including the sharing of values, mode of expression,lifestyles and a common language). This can be achieved through linkages which facilitate connections between disparate communities and consequently encourage interaction between groups, and facilitate national identification and integrative tendencies.

Heidmets (1981), examining society in the context of Estonia, proposed to look at integration through four different possible strategies or models. These four models are assimilation, integration, separation and confrontation. However, in reviewing literature on integration faced by many of the pluralistic society three basic models to achieve

a solution to the problem of national integration seemed to bemuch more realistic. These three models are cultural assimilation, multiple identities and muticulturalism. First, those countries that have chosen the cultural assimilation model have sought to integrate the cultures the ethnic minorities into a centralized national culture or central political ideology of a dominant ethnic group. Second, the multiple identities approach sought to cultivate the sense of political unity among diverse ethnic groups, while at the same time upholding and maintaining the social structures and cultural norms that make the groups disparate. Proponents assume that the acceptance of common political institutions is sufficient to make cohesive the disparate groups. Third, multiculturalism which is understoodas a system of beliefs and behaviors that recognizes and respects the presence of all diverse groups in an organization or society, acknowledges and values their socio-cultural differences, and encourages and enables their continued contribution within an inclusive cultural context which empowers all within the organization or society.

In general writers in the field of national integration are in agreement on the meaning of the concept of national integration. Henry Binder (1964) for example, writes that the achievement of integration involved the evolution of a cultural-ideological consensus of a very high degree of comprehensiveness. For Coleman and Rosberg (1964) integration is the progressive lessening of ethnic, cultural and regional tensions and discontinuities in the process of creating a homogenous political community. Smock and Bentsi-Enchil (1976) describe national integration as the development of identification with the national community that supersedes in certain situations more parochial loyalties. Many governments over the world, for example the Estonian government, also take this position in the integration strategy.

Together, these definitions suggest that for national integration to occur in a nation, a significant number of citizens must develop identification with the nation that supersede identification with ethnic, cultural or religious group, acquire political awareness, share common norms and values and develop attitudes favorable to the display of integrative behavior among people of different groups. However, Heidmets (1981) an Estonian sociologist, warned that this concept of integration often implies a one-sided process, where the only active partners in his study arethe non-Estonians. For him integration must be a two-sided process where Estonians, and the Estonian state, also need to take active measures in order to promote the process of integration and receive non-Estonians as full-fledged members of society.

From the perspective of the Inter-group contact theory it was believed thatcontinuous interactions among members of the majority and the minority groupswouldlead to improvement in relationships among them. According to Allport (1958), this expectation will have a positive result if certain conditions prevail. He hasformalized the theory, stating that inter-group contact would lead to reduced intergroupprejudice if the contact situation embodies four conditions: 1) equal statusbetween the groups in the situation; 2) common goals; 3) no competition betweenthe groups; and 4) authority sanction for the contact. Allport emphasizes that cooperative interracial interaction aimed at attaining shared goals must bepromoted to ensure positive inter-group relations.One way to achieve these goals is to provide an opportunity for students of different ethnic groups to interact with each other. In essence, the argument holds that bringing all ethnic groups together will lead to cross-racial contact, which will lead to better understanding of other races or ethnic groups and would promote greater social tolerance and interaction. This belief which has guided much of the educational promoting school desegregation especially in the USA influenced the advocacy of promoting inter-ethnic interaction in schools.

Convinced of the contact policy in recent years the Malaysian Government has implemented a number of reforms such as establishing of vision schools in 1997, strengthening of national schools by providing adequate teaching-learningfacilities, making history and music compulsory subjects in schools, in addition to encouraging the teaching of traditions and customs of other main ethnic groups in Malaysia. It was reported that in 2006, 80% of the secondary schools established art clubs involving mixed ethnic groups, while in most schools music clubs of mixed ethnic groups involving in *kompang, caklempong*, choir, brass and string bands were alsoestablished. The Government also encouraged all students regardless of their ethnic origins to take Chinese and Tamil languages as school subjects, to interact in the teaching-learning process, to actively participate in the newly introducedintercultural art and crafts in co-curricular activities, and to mix during recess time and during extra-curricular activities. In the past efforts towards integration were limited and this time it is hoped that all these new initiatives will encourage integration within the framework of multiculturalism (Ministry of Education, 2006).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding on social interactions amongst students of various ethnic groups in secondary schools in Malaysia. To do this the following objectives are proposed:

1. To determine the status of the three strategic integration models as observed in the context of social interaction in secondary schools.

2. To determine the differences among the students based on three strategic integration models.

3. To determine selected socio-cultural and school factors which influence the three strategic integration models.

METHOD

A survey was conducted on a random sample of 1,720 students of mixed ethnic groups in form four and five in 34 secondary schools in 5 selected states in Malaysia. Of the 1,720 students, 964 were females and 756 were males. Of these students 682 of them were Malays, 434 were Chinese, 332 were Indians and 192 were Bumiputra of Sabah and Sarawak. The five-point Likert scale questionnaire was designed based on the School integration index (UKM, 1996).The questionnaire consisting of 36 itemsmeasuring three constructs attempts to depict the three strategic integration models namely assimilation, multiple identity and multiculturalism. Items of which thethree models were formulated were verified through factor analysis which yielded four factors with eigen values of greater than 1, and this accounted for approximately 69.391 percents of the total variance related to the construct. The adequacy of using factor analysis is shown by Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin of 0.895 and adding to that is the Bartlett Test of Sphericity yielding the reading of 18734.516. The scree plot it shows that all the four factors had factor loading of more than 0.30 or greater. Thus what all these analyses suggested was that the questionnaire demonstrated the capability to assess the integration in the context of the three integration frameworks as proposed. The reliability of the instrument was 0.905.

For the first two objectives means and standard deviations are calculated to demonstrate the scores on the three integration models. Median scores are used to indicate high or low scores for each of the means. ANOVA is used only to examine the significance of the mean differencesfor the integration models and the differences based on the three models. When the differences of the means are found ANOVA is table is displayed. Otherwise the report of the findings will only mention the f-values of the mean differences. For the third objective, multiple-regression analysis was conducted to determine the influence of the selected socio-cultural and school factors on integration.

RESULTS

In this study integration is defined in terms of three integration models: cultural assimilation, multiple identities and multiculturalism. Therefore the results of this study are examined in the context of these three frameworks.

Table 1. Meanandstandarddeviation of scores on threemodels of integration (N=1720)

	Means	Standarddeviations
Assimilation	2.93	0.32
Multipleidentities	3.10	0.41
Multiculturalism	2.01	0.14

Table 1 shows means and standard deviations on the three integration models. The highest mean is the multiple identity model followed by the assimilation model, and the multiculturalism model. In the context of the medians, for assimilation the median is 2.65, for multiple identities the median is 2.71 and for multiculturalism the median is 2.32. The results suggest that integration among the students within the school context is polarized into two extremes, assimilation and multiple identities. The means for both models are much higher than each of their respective medians. ANOVA was conducted to assess the significant differences among the means. As shown in Table 2, it is found that the mean differences are highly significant.

Table 2.ANOVA of Students' ResponseBased on Three Integration Models

Source of Variation	SS	DF	MS	F	p
BetweenGroups	4601.07	2	2300.535	32.031	.000
WithinGroup	12723.02	1717	71.882		
Total	17324.09	1719			

* Significant at level*p* < .05

In examining the selected variables related to schools namely school environment, interaction with peers in schools, involvement in co-curricular activities and teachers' deliberation on values the means on each of three integration models were found to be varied but for each of those variables the differences were not significant. For example, the means on theassimilation model of integration for those actively involved in co-curricular activities and those who are not actively involved, for example are 3.12 and 2.86 (p>.05) respectively; for multiple identities the mean for those actively involved in co-curricular activities is 3.11and those who are not actively involved is 3.03 (p>.05) and for the multiculturalism model of integration the mean for those actively involved in co-curricular activities and those who are not actively involvedare 2.84 and 2.75 (p >.05).

For the non-school variables in this study namely, ethnic origins　　　, religions, family education, gender and residential locations, the means on each of the integration models are varied. However, except for gender the mean differences for other non-school variables are found to be significant. Table 3 for example, explores the mean differences on the three models based on student ethnic origins. For the assimilation model the mean for the Malay/Bumiputra students (Malay) is the highest while for the Chinese and Indians the mean scores are much lower than the median which is 2.82. On the other hand, for the multiple identities model the mean score for the Chinese is the highest and this is followed by the mean for the Indian students. For the Malay students the mean score is below the median which is 2.72. Multiculturalism is shown to be the least chosen model for all the ethnic groups. The mean scores for the Malay and Indian students are barely above the median which is 2.3. For the Chinese students the mean is much lower than the median. In looking at the results it is clear that the responses among the students are clearly demarcated according to ethnic origin. The Malay students are shown to prefer the assimilation model and the Chinese and the Indian students are for the multi-identities model. Although some students from all the ethnic origins do choose multiculturalism, the preference for this model is low.

Table 3. MeansandStandardDeviations on Three Models of Integration byEthnicOrigins (N=1720)

MeansStandarddeviations		
Assimilation		
Malay	4.24	0.17
Chinese	1.14	0.22
Indians	2.71	0.22
Multipleidentities		
Malay	2.13	0.11
Chinese	4.73	0.17
Indians	3.17	0.22
Multiculturalism		
Malay	2.04	0.47

Chinese	1.98	0.36
Indians	2.24	0.53

ANOVA was conducted to ascertain the significance of the mean differences among the variables in the models based on the ethnic origins of the students. As shown in Table 4 the mean differences of the responses are highly significant. This evidence can be taken as proof for the preference of a particular ethnic group to a specific model vi-a-vis Malays and Bumiputras for assimilation and Chinese and Indians for multiple identities. Multiculturalism is of low preference for all the ethnic groups.

Table 4. ANOVA of Students' Responses_____

Source of Variation	SS	DF	MS*F*		*p*
BetweenGroups	689.55	8	86.193	11.699	.000
WithinGroup	12604.65	1711	7.367		
Total	13294.10	1719			

* Significance at level*p* < .05

The mean for Muslim students is 3.38 for assimilation as opposed to other non Muslim students: Christians, Hindus and Buddhists who show high means in multiple identities which are 3.22, 3.25 and 3.64 ($p<.05$)respectively. The means on multiculturalism despite being significant are low for all religions ranging from 2.04 to 2.23.

For family educational background it is found that the means for those families with parents attending colleges and universities and those parents without college and university education on assimilation are 3.78 and 3.69 respectively($p<.05$), 4.34 and 4.01($p<.05$) for multiple identity model and 2.34 and 2.51 ($p<.05$) on themulticultural model. Finally in terms of residential locations it is again found that the means for multiculturalism for those in rural locations and those in semi-urban and urban areas are low that is 2.52 and 2.37 ($p<.05$)respectively. For multipleidentities the means for those in rural locations and those in semi-urban and urban areas are 3.84 and 4.01 (p <.05)respectively; and for assimilation it is 4.11 for those in rural location and 3.86 ($p < .05$) for those in semi-urban and urban areas.

The third objective of the study examines the influences of the selected factors on integration (an aggregation of assimilation, multiple identities and multiculturalism). Table 5 shows that ethnic origins and religious affiliations of the students account for more than 59 per cents of the integration variance. Surprisingly enough two of the school variables which are of some significance account for only 3.4 per cents of the integration variance. The other two school variables in the equation are not significant ($p> .05$). The results seem to suggest that schools do not have much influence in promoting integration among the students.

Table 5. Regression Analysis Using Integration as a DependentVariable

X	B	βf-values		Sig.	R^2
Ethnic origins	1.569	0.515	12.414	.000	41.2
Religions	0.335	0.283	7.281	.000	17.9
Family education	9.760	0.186	4.981	.000	3.8
Gender	- 9.178	-0.133	- 3.788	.000	2.3
School environment	6.313	0.125	3.430	.000	1.9
Residentiallocations	5.611	0.102	3.131	.002	1.8
Interaction with peers	5.228	0.098	2.493	.010	1.5
Involvement in co-curricular activities	3.111	0.009	0.728	0.145	0.1
Teachers'deliberation on values	2.002	0.004	0.627	0.331	0.0

DISCUSSION

This study clearly shows that integration is not monolithic in that three interpretations or beliefs defined as assimilation, multipleidentities and multiculturalism exist. Despite the last being the model which almost every country tries to emulate (Heidmets, 1997; Vetik, 2007), in this study, it is found to be the least preferred model. In the main the responses are found to be polarized into two opposing models, assimilation and multiple identities. Malay and Bumiputra students seem to prefer the assimilation model. This model fits in with their belief that Malay and Bumiputera culture is the dominant culture which other cultures should respect and should not compete; at best the country can accept those cultures as secondary to the dominant Malay and Bumiputera culture. This idea is abominable to the non Malay students as the identity of their cultures is going to be eroded. Consequently the multipleidentity model is very attractive to the non Malay and non Bumiputera students. This is a predicament in which if the status quo is maintained the basis for integration can be very fragile. Therefore, in the long run there is a need to identify a formula which can put in place a policy and a strategy to bring about integration on the multicultural framework in which the elements of all cultural identities of both the majority and the minorities are respectfully compromised and accommodated.

However, accomplishing integration based on the multicultural model seems to be a long way to come and many hurdles have to be overcome. One of these hurdles is the ineffectiveness of schools, in the forms of their policy, their curriculum and their co-curriculum. Establishing of vision schools in 1997, strengthening of national schools by providing adequate teaching-learning facilities; making history and music compulsory subjects in schools, proposing all students regardless of their ethnic origins to take Chinese and Tamil languages as school subjects, encouraging students to interact in the teaching-learning process, and encouraging the teaching of traditions and customs of all ethnic groups in Malaysia, introducing of art and music clubs involving mixed ethnic groups, encouraging active participation in the newly introduced intercultural art and crafts in co-curricular activities, and mixing during recess time are some of the activities which have so far failed to create informed multicultural student community.

Perhaps these efforts towards multicultural integration in the past were limited and it is hoped that these renewed initiatives will encourage integration within the framework of multiculturalism. Contrary to the initiatives undertaken the question that can be raised now is how much schools can overcome the cultural influence of homes and even peers at school particularly if the schools happened to be dominated by one particular ethnic group and teachers are non-committal to integration in the form multiculturalism. In many studies on social and cultural capitals teachers may be a dominant force in bringing about social and cultural change (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1978; Coleman, 1988). However as indicated by Canning (1995) and Najimah (2007) as actors in the classroom teachers themselves are deeply entrenched in their respective ethnic cultures that their pervasive beliefs, attitudes and aspirations are found difficult to embrace multiculturalism. For multiculturalism to be accepted teachersshould be less hesitant about being open, and this hopefully would be reciprocatedin which the students will be more open interpersonally with

other students of different diverse cultural origins.

The Ministry of Education in its effort to bring about integration on the multicultural model has put in place a policy encouraging students to take up Tamil or Chinese. This may be a right step to take but it also begs an answer to a question why despite learning Malay, Chinese and Indian students are still strongly attracted to multipleidentities. Perhaps teachers also need to be able to communicate in the languages of their students. This would probably command the respect of the students who then would understand better that multiculturalism is respectful and tolerant of the diverse culture of its populace.

At present many of the school daily activities are supposed to be multicultural. As shown in this study school activities both in the classroom and outside are not contributing towards multiculturalism. However, if they were to enjoy success apart from ensuring them to be on going, they are required to be carefully planned incorporating the principles of appreciation of the differences and diversity, avoidance of stereotypes and multicultural moments or pseudo-multiculturalism (Miller, 1997).

CONCLUSION

Malaysia like most contemporary societies is multicultural in which her cultural heterogeneity provides both social and political strength and problems. For society to function in a coherent manner we need a common and acceptable language and culture insociety. This means that the interests of majority and minority groups have to converge. However, due the different historic relationship of the minority groups to the country, their different cultural traditions as well as different aspirations, compromising on a common culture, language and aspiration vis-à-vis a single national identity appears to be problematic. This problem seems insoluble and will continue to haunt nation building as the beliefs, the attitudes, and the aspirations of the citizens of the different ethnic, religious and cultural groups particularly those young ones in schools dwelled on the different models of integration.

Although multiculturalism appears in the main to be a preferred model for many countries, for Malaysia two other models, namely multiple identities and assimilation, appear to be much more appealing even for the students in Form Four and Five. Cultural differentiations owing to differences in ethnic and religious backgrounds appear to be strongly entrenched among the students that the school factors do not have much influence on integration for the multicultural model.Despite efforts taken by the Ministry of Education such as making history a compulsory school subject, and encouraging students of various cultural groups to actively participating in co-curricular activities in orderto strengthen integration based on themulticultural model the effect on students' views seemed minimal. This means that the Ministry of Education has to reevaluate its efforts in bringing about integration on the multicultural model by examining a number of factors such as the existing policy of allowing the existence of different types of primary schools, and even secondary schools; concentrations of students of specific ethnic origins in specific schools; the roles of hidden and co-curriculum in inculcating a different set of views and attitudes on multiculturalism, and the roles of teachers as actors in classrooms in the promotion of multiculturalism in their teaching. If the goal of national integration is to create an internally coherent entity within society in order to be ready to face the global challenges of 21st century, a complete blending of the cultural elements of all groups is a sound option. This may call for a compromise so that both the majority and the minorities of the population would psychologically feel safe being a part of society and thus be able as a nation to face the mega challenges of the future.

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