Social integration practices among multi-ethnic youths

Mohd Mahzan Awang [a, *], Abdul Razaq Ahmad [a, 1], Mumpuniarti [b, 1], Abdul Aziz Abdul Rahman [a]

[a] Faculty of Education, The National University of Malaysia, Malaysia
[b] Faculty of Education, Yogyakarta State University, Indonesia

Article Info

Abstract

This study identified the level of social integration practices among multi-ethnic youth in Malaysia. Social integration in this paper refers to 20 elements of social integration that were extracted from four main constructs, namely social acceptance, compromization cultural adaptation and appreciation. This study utilized a survey research design with a questionnaire to collect data from 1,600 multi-ethnic youths aged between 19 and 29 years. They were selected using a stratified random sampling technique from four zones of Malaysia. Data collected were then analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) by focusing on the frequency ranking. The results showed that most respondents often practice social acceptance and cultural appreciation but practiced less compromization and cultural adaptation. Cultural adaptation was found to be the most challenging action among multi-ethnic youth. This informs the importance of strategic action plans for promoting unity among multi-ethnic youths.

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Introduction

Extensive past studies have highlighted the importance of social acceptance, ethnic tolerance, compromization, cultural appreciation and cultural adaptation, and the promotion of social integration within a multi-ethnic community. Cruz-Sao (2008) conceptualized social integration as a process of creating unity, inclusion, and participation at various levels of society so that every person from different backgrounds has the freedom to practice his/her belief. Social integration enables people regardless of their personal attributes such as socio-economic status, age, gender, ethnicity, cultural traits, religion, faith, and educational background to have equal opportunities, rights, and services. In a multi-ethnic country like Malaysia, awareness of the diversity in the personal attributes of people from different ethnic backgrounds is very important. Without proper planning of social integration, a chaotic situation may occur. Therefore, Malaysia has carried out various plans, policies, and activities to promote national integration. One example, the Malaysian National Economic Policies that were introduced after the ethnic conflict tragedy in 1969, in order to promote unity has been various forms of institutions. Standardization of the national school curriculum was implemented irrespective of the type of schools in Malaysia. It may be significant to state here that even though Malaysia has implemented vernacular school systems in which Chinese and Indian are allowed to use their own mother tongue in teaching and learning, all Chinese and Tamil schools in Malaysia have the same national curriculum.

Before Malaysian independence, our ancestries which came from different backgrounds cooperated in the demand for independence. The result of their unity led to Malaysia becoming a self-governing country. Among the

* Corresponding author.
  E-mail addresses: mahzan@ukm.edu.my (M.M. Awang)
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[1] Co-first authors.

main actions undertaken by the Malaysian government in ensuring harmony among the various communities is the alignment of the curriculum for all schools whether a national or national-type school. After 11 years in the national school system (6 years in primary school plus 5 years in secondary school), all students should feel a strong unity among the multi-ethnic societies. However, as many studies in the past tended to focus on school students rather than youth, there is a lack of empirical data on social integration among youth. This has led to the current study.

Aim of the Research

This study aimed to identify the level of social integration among multi-ethnic youth in Malaysia. The focus was on the most frequent social integration behavior practiced by multi-ethnic youth. Social integration behavior in this study contains 20 elements that were extracted from four constructs, namely social acceptance, compromises cultural appreciation, and cultural adaptation.

Literature Review

Social Integration Models

Extensive research has highlighted the importance of national integration to emphasize the importance of social acceptance, ethnic tolerance, compromization, cultural appreciation, and adaptation among multi ethnic societies for the promotion of social integration (Table 1). Social acceptance in this study refers to the ability to accept and to tolerate differences and diversity in other groups of people. It is an individual behavior that fits with group behavior. Ethnic tolerance is defined as an objective and permissive attitude toward other groups of people irrespective of their opinions, beliefs, practices, racial, or ethnic origins. Based on the studies that revolved around unity, tolerance could be realized through some benchmark used as a construct in this study. Rabushka (1973) emphasized social acceptance as an important channel in enhancing tolerance. According to Taib (1984), the levels of tolerance will increase when the opportunity to interact with others can be successfully achieved until there is no longer a feeling of prejudice but the readiness to recognize, appreciate, and instill the

Table 1
Social integration model

Social acceptance	Cultural adaptation
• Tolerate • Visit others • Sensitivity • Openness • Positive thinking	• Practicing some aspect of other cultures • Attending ceremony • Language • Traditional attire • Other ethnic performance
Compromization	Cultural appreciation
• Compromise • Permission • Honesty • Negotiation • Positive views	• Appreciate • Proud • Volunteerism • Medium of communication • Sense of belongings

Source: Extracted from Rabushka (1973), Taib (1984) and Awang, Kutty, and Ahmad (2014)

national identity beyond their own ethnic identity. The attitude of tolerance between people becomes an important indicator of cohesion success because tolerance creates a rational consideration toward a relationship involving these constructs (Saripudin & Komalasari, 2015).

Cultural appreciation is conceptualized in this paper to be a process of learning about another culture with respect and courtesy. It also refers to a person's behavior that involves taking something with cultural significance from another culture for their own. Cultural adaptation refers to the process of a person integrating into a new culture and feeling comfortable within it. A person in this position may encounter a wide array of emotions that the theory describes in four different stages. Compromization is a settlement of differences by mutual concessions and an agreement reached by adjustment of conflicting or opposing claims, principles, and by reciprocal modification of demands. Saad (1980) argued that mutual respect between ethnics and the willingness to compromise could develop the desire to form a nation that had a national identity. There was also a view which stated that culture and traditions adaptation factors had become an important marker in tolerance behavior itself (Komalasari & Saripudin, 2015). An individual with a strong attitude regarding ethnicity will be prioritized. In contrast, the lack of ethnicity spirit will prioritize the structure based on non-ethnicities that enable them to interact with different ethnics. Group analysis of the past studies indicates that students who prioritize social development toward the goal approach of social demonstration were reported to have less disappointment and to face less stressful situations compared to students who achieve both aspects. In a social setting like this, the spirit of tolerance will be more prominent which leads to the formation of a united and harmonious society (Awang et al., 2014). Therefore, the current study utilized these following four important elements—social acceptance, ethnic tolerance, compromising, cultural appreciation, and adaptation—to measure the level of these constructs among multi-ethnic youth in Malaysia.

Methods

Population and Samples

The current study used a survey research design. The population of the study involved four zones in Malaysia, namely the northern zone, Penang (N = 1,680,100), the eastern zone, Pahang (N = 1,649,400), the central zone, Selangor (N = 5,946,700), and the southern zone, Johor (N = 3,592.0) (Economic Planning Unit, 2013). A questionnaire was used to collect data from 1,600 multi-ethnic youth from these four zones: the northern zone (Penang) (n = 400), the eastern zone (Pahang) (n = 400), the central zone (Selangor) (n = 400), and the (southern zone) Johor (n = 400). Stratified random sampling was used based on Krejcie and Morgan (1970).

Data Collection

The questionnaire was developed and modified from the model and studies carried out by Awang et al. (2014),

Bachora (2014), Baharuddin (2007), Doganay (2009), Rabushka (1973), Seman (2011), and Taib (1984) and a pilot test was carried out prior to data collection in order to check its reliability. The results from the pilot test indicated that the Cronbach alpha values for the entire construct were between 0.81 and 0.95 meaning that it had a high-reliability level.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using statistical software, for descriptive analysis based on the mean and standard deviation. The mean score interpretation of the mean score was divided into two sections—Less Practice (the mean score less than 4.00) and Very Often Practice (mean score beyond 5.00). The results from this study were then compared to the social integration model used in this study.

Results and Discussion

Demographic analysis revealed that 844 of the respondents were Malay (27.8%), 508 were Chinese (24.9%), and 248 were Indian (15.5%). The gender representation of respondents was equal with 800 (50.0%) males and 800 (50.0%) women. Similarly for location where half of the respondents were from rural areas and the other half were from urban areas.

Tables 2 and 3 show the ranking of social integration practices among multi ethnic youth in Malaysia. Overall, the mean score for all items were moderately high.

Table 2 shows a clear pattern of youth social integration behavior. It is clear that most multi-ethnic youth often tried to use the national language in communication with others irrespective of ethnic background (mean = 5.17, SD = 1.40).

Table 2
Most common practices of social integration behavior

No.	Social integration practice	Mean	Standard deviation
1	Trying to use the national language while talking to other groups of people from different ethnic backgrounds	5.17	1.40
2	Able to accept points of view from other ethnic groups	5.16	1.37
3	Willing to compromise with other ethnic groups in solving problems together	5.15	1.41
4	Being able to practice religious tolerance	5.13	1.48
5	Appreciate other ethnics' contribution in country's development	5.08	1.37
6	Taking care of other ethnics' sensitivities	5.07	1.45
7	Feeling proud of other ethnics' success in developing the country	5.07	1.48
8	Displaying a sense of pride towards the success of other ethnics who represent the country in various fields	5.05	1.36
9	Giving positive view about the history of the formation of Malaysia	5.04	1.41
10	Open mindedness to discuss issue with a person from different ethnic background	5.02	1.19

Table 3
Least common practices of social integration behavior

No.	Social integration practice	Mean	Standard deviation
1	Wearing other ethnic traditional attire	4.46	1.71
2	Engage in other ethnics' music and arts performances	4.66	1.60
3	Visiting cultural activities of other ethnicities	4.72	1.48
4	Use polite name and proper the title based on the culture of other ethnic groups in discussion	4.78	1.50
5	Able to discuss various issues with other ethnic groups openly	4.81	1.49
6	Desire to organize a ceremony by taking into account various ethnic values	4.83	1.51
7	Eat a variety of ethnic foods together	4.90	1.54
8	Practicing negotiation when there is a conflict and the issue of racism	4.91	1.50
9	Actively participate in service activities irrespective of ethnic backgrounds	4.96	1.42
10	Giving permission for other religious to practice their faith and cultural activities	4.98	1.47

They were also willing to compromise with other ethnic groups in solving problems together (mean = 5.15, SD = 1.41) and they were able to practice religious tolerance (mean = 5.13, SD = 1.48). The results also indicated that the majority appreciated other ethnic's contribution in the country's development (mean = 5.08, SD = 1.37). Most of them reported that they were taking care of other ethnics' sensitivities (mean = 5.07, SD = 1.45). They were also proud of other ethnics' achievements and always were open minded in discussing issue with a person from a different ethnic background. These results were consistent with past research by Banshchikova, Solomonov, and Fomina (2015) who reported a multicultural society feels the need for a new vision aimed at cultural integration and a nation for continued convergence and spiritual enrichment. The actualization of this material is a goal of multicultural education which is the formation of human culture and a creative personality capable of living an active and productive in a multicultural environment (Saripudin & Komalasari, 2015).

Table 3 shows that practicing with other ethnic groups was among the least common forms of behavior exhibited by multi-ethnic youth. The results indicated that wearing other ethnics' traditional attire (mean = 4.46), engaging in other ethnics' music and arts performance (mean = 4.66), and visiting other ethnics' cultural activities (mean = 4.72) were not the common practice. The use of the polite name and social titles were also among the least common practices. Greetings and good wishes to the adherents of other religions in certain celebrations demand an explanation regarding religious tolerance (Khambali & Haled, 2008). Every religious celebration is celebrated as a symbol of respect to all Malaysians. Based on the research by Noor, Azizi, and Lee (2006), the level or degree of an individual's ethnicity will determine whether or not his/her behavior is influenced by ethnical arrangement. Individuals having a high ethnic spirit will prioritize the ethnic

Table 4
Social integration behavior practices

Social acceptance	Cultural adaptation
Often: 4	Often: 0
Less: 1	Less: 5
• Tolerate — often	• Practicing some aspect of other's culture — less
• Visit others — often	• Attending ceremony — less
• Sensitivity — often	• Language — less
• Openness — less	• Other ethnic performance — less
• Positive thinking — often	• Traditional attire — less
Compromization	Cultural appreciation
Often: 2	Often: 4
Less: 3	Less: 1
• Compromise — less	• Appreciate — often
• Permission — less	• Proud — often
• Honesty — often	• Volunteerism — often
• Negotiation — less	• Medium of communication — less
• Positive views — often	• Sense of belonging — often

perspective in their behavior contrary to individuals with a lack of ethnic spirit.

Combining these results into the social integration model shows a clear pattern of social integration behavior practiced by multi-ethnic youth (Table 4).

Overall, Table 4 shows that cultural appreciation and social acceptance were the most often practices behavior among multi-ethnic groups since the rankings of these two practices were the highest compared with the other practices. They were followed by compromization practices and lastly cultural adaptation. Thus, the results explained that cultural adaptation and compromization were still not practiced frequently. This was in-line with the study carried out by Seman, Ahmad, Aziz, and Ayudin (2011) where the result revealed that ethnic compromising was low. The current results highlight the importance of cross-cultural knowledge as it was found to be a prerequisite for social integration and unity (Berggren & Nilsson, 2016). The results from the current study support the study carried out by Rabushka (1973) who found that social acceptance was as an important channel in establishing tolerant behavior. There is also a view which states that cultural adaptation and tradition factors are an important indicator in expressing the tolerant behavior itself. These current findings are in line with the study of Saad (1980) who stated that mutual respect between ethnics and the willingness to compromise can develop the aspiration to form a single nation with a national identity. The tolerance levels will increase when the interaction opportunities can be accomplished which can lead to a total elimination of prejudices between ethnic groups (Komalasari & Saripudin, 2015). As such, they will be ready to acknowledge, appreciate, and prioritize the national identity beyond any ethnic identity (Taib, 1984).

Conclusion and Recommendation

These findings have implications for public policy makers with regard to patriotism, tolerance, and unity because the results showed that the level of these three aspects is still at an unsatisfactory level. Despite various efforts and programs carried out as a result of these policies, there are many other elements that are associated with patriotism, tolerance, and unity that need to be improved. In the context of education in Malaysia, effort in nurturing patriotism, and unity as well as tolerance has been applied through a special curriculum for History and Civic Education. There is a more practical framework and based on empirical studies this should be the basis of the curriculum. This program also includes the Student Integration Program for Unity. These findings also have implications for the policy of national integration and unity, which also focuses on fostering patriotism through the National Service Training Program (NSTP). Thus, the results of this study should be examined as part of the guidelines for National Service improvement and also the school and university curricula so that they can have a major impact on improving patriotism and racial tolerance among youth of different ethnic groups in Malaysia.

This study was conducted using a questionnaire survey as the instrument. It involved only respondents in Peninsular Malaysia. Accordingly, this qualitative research was done involving interviews and observation to obtain more detailed information in the constructs studied and to collect the variety of information, especially about patriotism and racial tolerance among the youth of different ethnic groups in Malaysia. Studies should also be done involving young people from Sabah and Sarawak to allow for generalizations across the board in the aspects studied. Experimental research needs to be implemented to build a module to enhance patriotism and racial tolerance among the youth of different ethnic groups in Malaysia. Any modules constructed must be tested using an informal approach in the community whether in the form of a special program or specific courses to ensure that the program module or course modules implemented do meet the requirements of multi-ethnic youth in improving patriotism and racial tolerance.

The current study has highlighted the social integration behavior that is commonly practiced by multi-ethnic youth. It was clear that the levels of social integration are still a work-in-progress as most of the respondents reported that they appreciate other ethnic cultures and accept other socio-cultural but they seemed to have a lack of compromization and cultural adaptation. It might be important for us to reevaluate current practice at a school level, especially with regard to the social integration process as most youths are school leavers. Detailed analysis of on-the-ground practices is required to achieve an in-depth understanding.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgments

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