

Language and Ethnic Boundary among Students of Various Ethnicities in Secondary Schools in Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Social interaction is a vital aspect in the creation of an identity, especially in a plural society like the one we have here in Malaysia. This study is carried out to identify the pattern of social interaction among students of various ethnicities in National Secondary Schools in Malaysia. The study sample consists of 720 students from form 1, 2, and 4. A questionnaire containing items of language and ethnic boundary was applied in order to obtain the data. The study finding shows that there is a significant difference in the mean score for every variable for students of various ethnicities. Students from National Chinese Type Schools who attend for National Secondary Schools are the one who use the least amount the “Bahasa Melayu” (Malay language) and students for National Tamil Type Schools are the one facing most of the stereotypes. Based on the study findings, a few recommendations were made regarding the social interaction among students of various ethnicities in National Secondary Schools in Malaysia. The success of increasing the social interaction pattern among students of various ethnicities depends on the policies and programs that were introduced by various agencies of the government. If it is not carried out successfully, “Satu Negara Satu Bangsa” (One State One Nation) will only remain as a slogan without any true meaning.

Key words: Students, “Bahasa Melayu” (Malay language), ethnic boundary, various ethnicities, and national integration in Malaysia.

INTRODUCTION

A creation of a nation that consists of various ethnics needs a union and co-operation in terms of politics, economics, and social that is stable and integrative. Unity among different ethnics could only be achieved through social interaction. The tighter the social interaction pattern that is formed among the ethnics, the more stable the unity, and understanding among the citizens of the country. Social interaction among the people will determine the stability politic, economy, and social as well as the welfare of the people. Social interaction is a vital aspect in the creation of an identity, especially in a plural society like the one we have here in Malaysia.

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Countries like the United States, England, Switzerland, Netherlands, India, Indonesia, Australia, and Malaysia, which comprises of ethnics of variety, faces various challenges and problems in their effort to integrate their people. The situation will become even more worse and complicated if each and every one of the ethnic wants to retain their own identity and in the same time repels a national identity that could create unity among the various ethnics.

Socialization problems becomes even harder if the members of the society which consists of multiple ethnics do not know each other due to the separation among them caused by differences in basic characteristics or primordial which are religion, language, culture, economic, politics, region, and historical experience. The difference in characteristics is the main barrier in the process of creating a pattern of social integration among people of various ethnicities. This statement is made clear by A. Rabunsha (1972:21) who stated that in a society with multiple ethnicities and differences in language, religion, and culture usually will obstruct the social integration and unity will be difficult to achieve.

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND OBJECTIVE, ISSUE, AND METHODOLOGICAL STUDY

Formal education is a basic need that is supplied by the ruler of a country in order to meet the needs of the society. According to J.S. Coleman (1963:3), there was once when education is considered as conservative and functions to retain a culture, but education is now perceived as the main motivator in all aspects of change. The word of “change” within the statement encompasses matters of politic, social, and economy. A change in politic, social, and economy could only be achieved if the unity of the people is strong. Unity could be achieved through planned activities which are designed to create social interaction pattern among various ethnics in schools. At schools, there are various curriculum and co-curriculum activities and programs (uniformed bodies, sports, games, and learning visits) to cultivate socialization among school pupils of various ethnicities.

R. Pratte (1980) stated that when students are in an equal school environment, there will be space so that these students could share together their experiences and this in turn will cultivate the feeling of respect between one another. When students of various ethnicities like Malay, Chinese, and Indian are in an equal school environment culture, it helps the student to have a chance to interact and communicate with each other in a broad and free range.

The objectives of this study are: (1) to identify the difference in socialization within the same ethnic or across different ethnics among students of National Secondary Schools; (2) to identify the variables of language and ethnic boundary which become the motivator as well as barrier to socialization among students of National Secondary Schools.

This study tries also to answer the question of whether the environment within National Secondary Schools is able to create socialization among students of various ethnicities. Therefore, the study questions are as follows: (1) Are there any differences in the causal factor to the motivator and barrier in the level of socialization among students in National Secondary Schools?; and (2) Is there any significant difference between the language and ethnic boundary factor that contributes to the level of socialization among students in National Secondary Schools?

This study applies the quantitative and qualitative method in obtaining and analyzing data. A mixed model which is the *Quan-Qual Model* (Gay, 2000) was applied in the study. Discussion is focused to the quantitative and qualitative approach and study strategy. Researchers used the Cross-Sectional Design in coming up with inferences regarding the advancements in comparing individuals from groups which are different in age and form (Sabitha, 2005). This study is aimed to get the summary and relationship between dependent and independent variables. Questionnaires are used as study instruments. The ex post facto study is more reliable in order to get the relationship between the dependent and independent variables.

Two assumptions were made regarding methodology, which are: (1) interaction method is more appropriate to study the problem regarding social interaction pattern; and (2) the objective of the study is to gain an understanding regarding the interaction situation. Based on those assumptions, the approach that was chosen is the interpretive study in a natural situation. The study is in an interactive form by using qualitative approach such as interviews.

STUDY FINDINGS

This section discusses about the descriptive analyses of data regarding the background of the study sample. Following is the discussion on the findings that was obtained by answering the matters of the study. Frequency and percentage data as well as the mean score was manipulated in order to get a descriptive overview of the study. On the following section, hypothesis tests were conducted in order to answer the study questions and it was ended with a study model in a mathematical form by using the Multivariate Approach. It is hoped that the models that was built could represent the study with more precision.

On the Student's Demographic Information. As much as 240 students were selected from the respective form 1, form 2, and form 4 as samples of this study. From that total, it is found that 13.8% are from National Primary Schools; 53.3% are from National Schools; 25.4% from Chinese National Type Schools; and 7.5% are from Tamil National Type Schools for every form. Through the behavior and process approach, every mean is obtained from the respective form. The result is that the table 1 below shows the mean value for the overall language and ethnic boundary.

Table 1:
Overall Mean and Standard Deviation for the Language and Ethnic Boundary Variables

Item (Overall)		N	Mean	SD
Behavior Dimension:				
Language	Form 1	240	2.4733	0.5043
	Form 2	240	2.4933	0.4577
	Form 4	240	2.6533	0.4461
Ethnic Boundary	Form 1	240	1.8660	0.3410
	Form 2	240	1.9392	0.3447
	Form 4	240	2.0285	0.3095

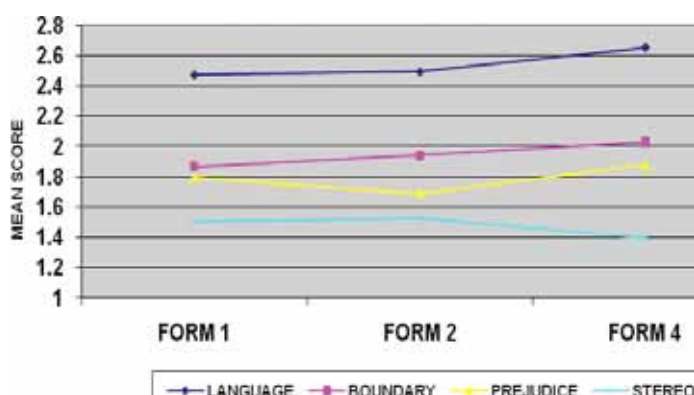


Diagram 1:

Mean Score Profile for All the Respective Form with Language and Ethnic Boundary

Diagram 1 explains also that the factor of language plays the most important role in creating the social interaction which is then followed by the ethnic boundary, prejudice, and stereotype factors. The difference is very obvious with lines which are very different from one another. Even though several of the factors are obtained, for the factors of language and ethnic boundary, the higher the form, the higher the factor of language in affecting the importance in social interaction pattern. For the factor of prejudice, the level decreases for form 2 but it increased significantly at form 4 and for the factor of stereotype, it increased at form 2 and decreased at form 4.

Following are the findings from the data processing in order to answer the provided Ho1 and Ho2.

On the First Hypothesis Testing. Ho1: There is no significant difference in the mean score for communicating in the *Bahasa Melayu* (Malay language) among students from National Schools, National Primary Schools, Chinese National Type Schools, and Tamil National Type Schools at National Secondary Schools.

In order to test the first hypothesis, a single way ANOVA test was conducted on 720 respondents and it was found out that the value of p is 0.000 which lower than the value of relevance which is 0.05. At the relevance level of 0.05, the null hypotheses is rejected. With this, it could be concluded that there is significant difference among students from different schools in communicating in the *Bahasa Melayu*. Please refer to table 2.

Meanwhile, table 3 shows the finding that was obtained through the Post-Hoc test with the Benferroni calculation. According to the test, there is significant difference on all the types of schools except for the comparison between CNTS or Chinese National Type Schools and TNTS or Tamil National Type Schools (p value = 0.430). The biggest mean difference is between NPS or National Primary Schools and CNTS (0.59) followed by NPS and TNTS (mean difference = 0.47).

Table 2:
ANOVA Result on School Type and Language for All Students

School	N	Mean	SD	F	Sig.
NPS	99	2.80	0.32	66.70	0.000**
NS	384	2.66	0.44		
CNTS	183	2.20	0.43		
TNTS	54	2.32	0.38		
Total	720	2.54	0.48		

Note:

1 = never, 2 = seldom, and 3 = always.

* means significant at relevance level of 0.05.

** means significant at relevance level of 0.01.

Table 3:
Post-Hoc Test on School Type and Language for All Students

School	Mean difference	SE	Sig.
NPS*NS	0.13	0.05	0.035*
NPS*CNTS	0.59	0.05	0.000**
NPS*TNTS	0.47	0.07	0.000**
NS*CNTS	0.46	0.04	0.000**
NS*TNTS	0.34	0.06	0.000**
CNTS*TNTS	-0.12	0.07	0.430

Note:

1 = never, 2 = seldom, and 3 = always.

* means significant at relevance level of 0.05.

** means significant at relevance level of 0.01.

Then, the ANOVA test was carried out on each of the 240 respondents according to their respective form. Test result shows the value of probability (p) is 0.000 for form 1, 2, and 4. This value is obviously smaller compared to the value of 0.05. Therefore, at the significance level of 0.05, it is proven that there is significant difference among students from different schools from all

forms for communicating in the *Bahasa Melayu*. However, for different forms and different school types, there is significant difference in terms of communicating in the *Bahasa Melayu* among the students.

By referring to table 4 and table 5, the finding for form students from Chinese National Type Schools (CNTS) and Tamil National Type Schools (TNTS) shows that they never/seldom communicate in the *Bahasa Melayu* (mean = 2.25 and 1.96) compared to National Primary Schools and National Schools (mean = 2.74 and 2.58). According to the Post-Hoc Test, these two type of schools are very different compared to National Primary Schools (NPS) dan National Schools (NS). The results are proven with p value for NPS*CNTS = 0.000, NPS*TNTS = 0.000, NS*CNTS = 0.000, and NS*TNTS = 0.000.

Table 4:
ANOVA Result on School Type and Language for Every Form

Form	School	N	Mean	SD	F	Sig.
Form 1	NPS	33	2.74	0.33	18.69	0.000**
	NS	128	2.58	0.51		
	CNTS	61	2.25	0.45		
	TNTS	18	1.96	0.22		
Total		240	2.47	0.50		
Form 2	NPS	33	2.81	0.37	24.71	0.000**
	NS	128	2.59	0.46		
	CNTS	61	2.15	0.32		
	TNTS	18	2.36	0.15		
Total		240	2.49	0.46		
Form 4	NPS	33	2.84	0.23	42.91	0.000**
	NS	128	2.82	0.30		
	CNTS	61	2.21	0.51		
	TNTS	18	2.66	0.34		
Total		240	2.65	0.45		

Table 5:
Post-Hoc Test on School Type and Language for Every Form

Form	School	Mean Difference	SE	Sig.
Form 1	NPS*NS	0.16	0.09	0.480
	NPS*NSC	0.49	0.10	0.000**
	NPS*NST	0.78	0.13	0.000**
	NS*CNTS	0.33	0.07	0.000**
	NS*TNTS	0.63	0.11	0.000**
	CNTS*TNTS	0.30	0.12	0.096
Form 2	NPS*NS	0.22	0.08	0.033*
	NPS*CNTS	0.66	0.09	0.000**
	NPS*TNTS	0.46	0.12	0.001**
	NS*CNTS	0.44	0.06	0.000**
	NS*TNTS	0.24	0.10	0.121
	CNTS*TNTS	-0.20	0.11	0.377

Form 4	NPS*NS	0.02	0.07	1.000
	NPS*CNTS	0.63	0.08	0.000**
	NPS*TNTS	0.18	0.11	0.533
	NS*CNTS	0.61	0.06	0.000**
	NS*TNTS	0.16	0.09	0.443
	CNTS*TNTS	-0.45	0.10	0.000**

Note:

1 = never, 2 = seldom, and 3 = always.

* means significant at relevance level of 0.05.

** means significant at relevance level of 0.01.

Results for form 2 students shows that students from Chinese National Type Schools (CNTS) and Tamil National Types Schools (TNTS) never / seldom communicate in the *Bahasa Melayu* (mean = 2.15 and 2.36) compared with National Primary Schools and National Schools (mean = 2.81 and 2.59). According to Post-Hoc Test, National Primary Schools (NPS) are very different from the other three types of schools and National Schools (NS) are different from the other two school types which are National Primary Schools ($p = 0.033$) and Chinese National Type Schools ($p = 0.000$). The result proves that communicating in the *Bahasa Melayu* mostly occurs among form 2 students who come from National Primary Schools.

Result for form 4, however, shows that students from Chinese National Type Schools are still yet to / seldom communicate in the *Bahasa Melayu* (mean = 2.2). According to the Post-Hoc Test, students from National Schools, National Primary Schools, and Tamil National Type Schools are very different compared to students from Chinese National Type Schools. Results also shows that the usage of the *Bahasa Melayu* increases among the students from form 1 to form 4.

On the Second Hypothesis Testing. Ho2: There is no significant difference in mean score for ethnic boundary among students from National Schools, National Primary Schools, Chinese National Type Schools, and Tamil National Type Schools in Secondary Schools.

By using the one way ANOVA test on 720 students, result shows that the value of p is 0.000 which is smaller compared to the value of 0.05. Therefore at the significance level of 0.05 the second null hypothesis is rejected. Conclusively, there is significant difference among students from different school types with the ethnic boundary factor. Please refer to table 6.

According to table 7, which is through the Post-Hoc Test by using the Benferroni calculation, indicates also that for the total of 720 students, two relationships have no difference at all which are NPS with NS and CNTS with TNTS ($p = 1.000$). The same result applies for students from NS with TNTS, whereby there is no significant difference among them ($p = 0.051$). On the other hand, there is significant difference among students from NPS and CNTS ($p = 0.000$, mean difference = 0.19), NS with CNTS ($p = 0.000$, mean difference = 0.17) and NPS with TNTS ($p = 0.000$, mean difference = 0.15).

Table 6:
ANOVA Result on School Type and Ethnic Boundary for All Students

School	N	Mean	SD	F	Sig.
NPS	99	1.87	0.24	13.30	0.000**
NS	384	1.90	0.31		
CNTS	183	2.06	0.39		
TNTS	54	2.02	0.34		
Total	720	1.94	0.34		

Note:

1 = never, 2 = seldom, and 3 = always.

* means significant at relevance level of 0.05.

** means significant at relevance level of 0.01.

Table 7:
Post-Hoc Testing on School Type and Ethnic Boundary for All Students

School	Mean difference	SE	Sig.
NPS*NS	- 0.03	0.04	1.000
NPS*CNTS	- 0.19	0.04	0.000**
NPS*TNTS	- 0.15	0.06	0.035*
NS*CNTS	- 0.17	0.03	0.000**
NS*TNTS	- 0.13	0.05	0.051
CNTS*TNTS	- 0.04	0.05	1.000

Note:

1 = never, 2 = seldom, and 3 = always.

* means significant at relevance level of 0.05.

** means significant at relevance level of 0.01.

Then, the analysis result according to the respective forms is as shown in table 8 indicates that the value of probability for form 1 is 0.768. This value is bigger than 0.05. Therefore, at the relevance level of 0.05, there is no proof to say that there is significant difference among students from NS (National Schools), NPS (National Primary Schools), CNTS (Chinese National Type Schools), and TNTS (Tamil National Type Schools) for ethnic boundary for form 1. For form 2 and form 4, the values of p is 0.000 respectively. The result shows that there is significant difference among students from NS, NPS, CNTS, and TNTS for ethnic boundary for form 2 and form 4.

Table 9 shows also that for form 1 students, there is no difference in school type for that factor. For form 2 students, result shows that National Schools (mean = 1.85) and National Primary Schools (mean = 1.93) are the ones with most difference in terms of ethnic boundary compared to Chinese National Type Schools (mean = 2.12). Ethnic boundary usually occurs on students from Chinese National Type Schools compared to National Schools dan National Primary Schools (p = 0.000 and 0.040).

Table 8:
ANOVA Result on School Type and Ethnic Boundary for Every Form

Form	School	N	Mean	SD	F	Sig.
Form 1	NPS	33	1.82	0.16	0.38	0.768
	NS	128	1.87	0.30		
	CNTS	61	1.89	0.49		
	TNTS	18	1.82	0.23		
Total		240	1.87	0.34		
Form 2	NPS	33	1.93	0.33	9.68	0.000**
	NS	128	1.85	0.30		
	CNTS	61	2.12	0.34		
	TNTS	18	1.96	0.42		
Total		240	1.94	0.34		
Form 4	NPS	33	1.85	0.17	16.36	0.000**
	NS	128	1.97	0.33		
	CNTS	61	2.17	0.25		
	TNTS	18	2.28	0.13		
Total		240	2.03	0.31		

Note:

1 = never, 2 = seldom, and 3 = always.

* means significant at relevance level of 0.05.

** means significant at relevance level of 0.01.

Table 9:
Post-Hoc Test on School Type and Ethnic Boundary for Every Form

Form	School	Mean Difference	SE	Sig.
Form 1	NPS*NS	-0.05	0.07	1.000
	NPS*CNTS	-0.07	0.07	1.000
	NPS*TNTS	0.00	0.10	1.000
	NS*CNTS	-0.02	0.05	1.000
	NS*TNTS	0.05	0.09	1.000
	CNTS*TNTS	0.07	0.09	1.000
Form 2	NPS*NS	0.08	0.06	1.000
	NPS*CNTS	-0.19	0.07	0.040*
	NPS*TNTS	-0.03	0.10	1.000
	NS*CNTS	-0.27	0.05	0.000**
	NS*SRJKT	-0.11	0.08	1.000
	CNTS*TNTS	0.16	0.09	0.419
Form 4	NPS*NS	-0.12	0.06	0.207
	NPS*CNTS	-0.32	0.06	0.000**
	NPS*TNTS	-0.43	0.08	0.000**
	NS*CNTS	-0.20	0.04	0.000**
	NS*TNTS	-0.31	0.07	0.000**
	CNTS*TNTS	-0.11	0.08	0.905

Note:

1 = never, 2 = seldom, and 3 = always.

* means significant at relevance level of 0.05.

** means significant at relevance level of 0.01.

Findings for form 4 shows that ethnic boundary always occurs on students of Chinese National Type Schools (mean = 2.17) and Tamil National Type Schools (mean = 2.28) compared to National Schools (mean = 1.97) and National Primary Schools (mean = 1.85). According to Post-Hoc Test, students from these two schools are very different compared to students from Chinese and Tamil National Type Schools. Result shows that there is a thick ethnic boundary among students as the student moves from form 1 to form 4, especially for students from Chinese and Tamil National Type Schools.

Result shows that communicating in the *Bahasa Melayu* at schools is as much as 2.54 which fall into the classification of “always”. Majority of the students is at the opinion that communicating in the *Bahasa Melayu* plays a very important role in creating social interaction among students of National Secondary Schools. For ethnic boundary, the mean that was obtained was 1.94 which is close to 2.00 which carries the classification of “seldom”.

FINDINGS FROM FOCUSED INTERVIEWS ON STUDENTS

Student Focus Group consists of: Form 1: NS or *National Schools* (3), NPS or *National Primary Schools* (3), CNTS or *Chinese National Type Schools* (3), TNTS or *Tamil National Type Schools* (2) – 10; Form 2: NS (3), NPS (3), CNTS (3), TNTS (2) – 10; and Form 4: NS (3), NPS (3), CNTS (3), TNTS (2) – 10.

There were 30 Student Focus Groups that was interviewed. The interview session was for 2 hours. Every group consisted of 6/8 students. For Primary Schools, there are 1 group of Malay students, 1 group of Chinese students, and 1 group of Indian students for every form. Only significant answers for the students are taken note and included in this chapter to be discussed.

On the Language. Interview result shows that social interaction among students of various ethnicities is influenced by the language that is used for communication. The interview result proves that the *Bahasa Melayu* (Malay language) is the barrier for interaction among the students from different ethnics.

P: Like to speak the *Bahasa Melayu*?

Pj: Don't like.

P: Why?

Pj: It's hard, I'm from a Chinese school. I speak Chinese, easy. My friends are all Chinese (PLC/CNTS/T1/B).

P: Do you have problem to talk in the *Bahasa Melayu*?

Pj: Not that good. Not very smooth because when I talk, it sounds like Chinese. It's hard to talk to the Malays and Indians (PPC/CNTS/T2).

P: Do you speak the *Bahasa Melayu* often?

Pj: Seldom. I seldom talk in the *Bahasa Melayu*. I'm from a Tamil School. If I'm talking to Malay or Chinese student, I'll speak Malay a little (PLI/TNTS/T1).

The finding from interview indicates that language is the barrier in social interaction pattern, especially to the Chinese students. Chinese students use their own language when communicating and this influences the Chinese students to make friends from the same ethnicity.

Students from National Primary Schools show that the *Bahasa Melayu* is not a barrier for social interaction pattern.

P: When do you speak the *Bahasa Melayu*?

Pj: Often, with friends. I speak the *Bahasa Melayu* with my Malay and Indian friends (PLC/NPS/T1).

P: Can you talk in the *Bahasa Melayu*?

Pj: Yes.

P: Do you often talk in the *Bahasa Melayu*?

Pj: Yes, because most of my time is at school. So I always talk in the *Bahasa Melayu*.

P: Where do you speak the *Bahasa Melayu*?

Pj: Mostly at the school or outside of school, but not at home.

P: Why do you speak in the *Bahasa Melayu*?

Pj: Because I have a lot of Malay and Chinese friends. Apart from that, I feel proud for being able to learn another language (PLI/NPS/T2).

Even though students from CNTPS (Chinese National Type Primary Schools) and TNTPS (Tamil National Type Primary Schools) are in their form 4 in NSS (National Secondary Schools), there is still proof of low usage of the *Bahasa Melayu* in their communication.

P: Four years in a National Secondary School, how well can you converse in the *Bahasa Melayu*?

Pj: I seldom use the *Bahasa Melayu*. Only when talking to the teachers and friends from other ethnicities. I like to speak in English to my Malay and Chinese friends. I always talk in Tamil and English. Sometimes, my pronunciation is not good in the *Bahasa Melayu*.

On the Ethnic Boundary. Interview result on student focused groups shows that ethnic boundary is high /thick among students from mono-ethnic schools.

P: Do you like the food and outfit of other ethnics?

Pj: I like to see the Chinese and Indian dances, I'm not interested in their outfit. Their foods are not *halal*.

P: What if their food is *halal*?

Pj: I'm not very keen (PPM/NS/T2/SE).

The same question being asked to a student from a National Primary Schools (NPS) and the answer is:

Pj: I love the Punjabi outfit and the Chinese and Indian food, everything that is *halal*. I'm used to going to my friend's house who is from another ethnicity. My dad used to bring me (PPM/NS/T1/SE).

P: Do you like other ethnics' foods?

Pj: I don't like. I only eat Malay bread. The Malay rice is so spicy. I don't eat Indian food at all (PLC/SRJKC/T2/SE).

Pj: I like to eat Malay and Chinese rice. My dad always brings me to Malay houses during *Hari Raya* and to Chinese houses during Chinese New Year. I have friends from all the races (PLI/NPST/T4/SE).

Eventhough that student lives in a neighbourhood with Malays, Chinese, and Indian, they seldom go to the houses of different ethnicity.

P: What is the ethnicity of your neighbour?

Pj: My near neighbour is a Chinese. I have Malay and Indian neighbours, but their houses are quite far. I've never been to their houses.

P: Why?

Pj: Not important. Don't know (PLC/SRJKC/T2/SE).

Some students seldom mix around with other races because their parents' friends are from the same race.

P: Do your parents make friends with the other races?

Pj: They don't make friends with the other races (PLC/SRJKC/T1/SE).

P: Have you been to a house of a person from another race?

Pj: Seldom. I don't have many friends of different ethnicity (PLI/SRJKT/T2/SE).

P: Have you been to the house of your friend of a different ethnicity?

Pj: I have many Malay friends (PLM/NS/T4/SE).

P: How about the festivities of other ethnics?

Pj: I feel happy because it's holiday (PLISRJKT/T1/SE).

P: How about the festivities of other ethnics?

Pj: I will visit them and celebrate it together (PLC/NPS/T4/SE).

P: How do you feel about the festivities of other ethnics?

Pj: Happy because it's holiday. I seldom visit them at house during the festivities (PLM/NS/T4/SE).

P: How do you feel about the festivities of other ethnics?

Pj: I go and visit their houses. It's fun! I only eat the foods that are *halal* (PPM/NPS/T2/SE).

On the Language Factor Discussion. Language is the main condition for ethnic unity here in Malaysia. Conflicts that have arisen in Switzerland and Belgium were caused by language. In Switzerland, there are three languages which are French, German, and Italian. Residents with conflict will move to new territory named Canton in order to avoid further conflict.

Findings from survey and interviews show that language as a tool of communication affects the social interaction pattern among students of various ethnicities in NSS (National Secondary Schools). Based on quantitative data,

the *Bahasa Melayu* (Malay language) has always been used for conversing among students from different ethnicities within the classroom, co-curriculum activities, and it becomes the medium language in National Secondary Schools. Based on the interviews, students from CNTS (Chinese National Type Schools) and TNTS (Tamil National Type Schools) seldom talk in the *Bahasa Melayu* in National Secondary Schools compared to students from NS (National Schools) and NPS (National Primary Schools). Eventhough students from CNTS and TNTS are in their form 4 in National Secondary Schools, they still seldom talk in the *Bahasa Melayu*.

The result from interview indicates that the Chinese and Indian students from CNTS and TNTS are more interested to talk in their own mother tongue. Many Chinese and Indian students said that they are afraid of being teased at in the case of using the *Bahasa Melayu* wrongly since they have been using their own language for the past six years in a mono-ethnic primary school. This factor is a barrier for the Chinese and Indian students to communicate with students of different ethnicity.

In the Malaysian situation, the *Bahasa Melayu* is not an ancestral language which has symbolic and communicative values. According to Edwards, a language is able to become a symbol to represent the feelings of a group (cited by Philips, 1993). In the context of this study, students from CNTS and TNTS have been in an environment of mono-ethnic for the past six years. In that kind of situation, the mother tongue will take over as the communicative language. One question remains: "Where is the place for the *Bahasa Melayu*?"

The *Bahasa Melayu* is not a communication tool for the students. According to G. De Vos (1975), if the language has no rights as a symbol, its value as a tool of integration does not exist. In this study, the *Bahasa Melayu* is seldom being used in the daily conversation even in a National Secondary School. According to J.H. Jacob and S.K. Beer (1986:1), language is the tool to be used to carry the idea, value, behavior, skill, and aspiration among human; and therefore tightens the bond among humans.

Based on qualitative analysis, the *Bahasa Melayu* is seldom used as a tool as mentioned since its usage is not very wide. Students still use their own language to carry the idea, value, behavior, skill, and aspiration among their own ethnic. The development of idea and behavior does not happen satisfactorily even after being at a National Secondary School after 4 years.

Based on the Social Interaction Theory, one medium language could help in creating a national identity leading to national unity (Valk, 2003). From this study, it is shown that eventhough the *Bahasa Melayu* is made as the medium language, its usage is still not wide enough. The *Bahasa Melayu* has not been showcased as a symbol of unification. When students are more interested to speak in their own language, they are not able to share the basic elements and lack in the creation of an equal mind and soul. Therefore, the slogan of *Bahasa Jiwa Bangsa* (Language is Soul of Nation) and *Cintailah Bahasa Kita* (Loving Our Language, Please) could only be applied to the student's mother tongue. This

students could only express themselves through their own language rather than using the *Bahasa Melayu*. The condition of truly appreciating the *Bahasa Melayu* has not developed well because the social interaction pattern is only among the same ethnics. Communicating in the *Bahasa Melayu* is only on the basis of being asked to do so and it is not voluntary.

According to G. De Vos (1975), a student needs 5 years to be able to master a language other than their own language. In the study that was carried out, the students are in an environment of mono-ethnic whereby the medium language is their own language (CNTS and TNTS students). Eventhough a student gets an “A” for the *Bahasa Melayu* in the *Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah* (Primary School Examination), this does not mean that the student could speak the *Bahasa Melayu* very well. While in NSS, the tendency to make friends with the same ethnic restricts the usage of the *Bahasa Melayu*. The five years that is needed is not present. Students are not exposed to a situation whereby they are given the true opportunity to be able to master the *Bahasa Melayu* as a means of communication.

On the Ethnic Boundary Discussion. Findings from the quantitative analysis, it shows that ethnic boundary among form 2 and form 4 students are significant and “seldom” occurs almost every time (1.94). When it is “seldom”, therefore the ethnic boundary is thick. According to B. Light (1994), M. Gold (2000), and M. Sanders (2000), the ethnic boundary for a student who has been in an environment of mono-ethnic might be thick.

Based on the study that was carried out, the statement made by B. Light (1994), M. Gold (2000), and M. Sanders (2000), could be objected since the ethnic boundary on students of form 2 and form 4 is thick compared to students from form 1. Form 2 and form 4 students have been in an environment of multi-ethnic for 2 or 4 years, but the ethnic boundary is still very thick, especially the students from CNTS (Chinese National Type Schools) and TNTS (Tamil National Type Schools). The students understand the difference in language, culture, and religion among the different ethnics and avoids from knowing further.

Based on the Cross-Cultural Awareness, students in NSS (National Secondary Schools) should have been in level II to IV (Clark & Goodman, 1974). Based on the study, students of NSS are at level II, which means that they are aware of the difference in culture compared to their own culture but the connotation is not rational. If the Cross-Cultural Awareness reaches the level II and IV, the students will have a thin ethnic boundary. At this level, a student from a different ethnic will try to learn another’s culture. If the ethnic boundary is thick among the students, the country’s aspiration to achieve racial unity through the Malaysian Education Policy might be difficult.

According to K.B. Clark and M.E. Goodman (1974), the strengthening of the ethnic behavior occurs also between the ages of 8-10 years old. At this level, students from NS, CNTS, and TNTS are in the environment of mono-ethnic. Pre-assumptions regarding ethnic behavior have thickened in these students even before they enter NSS. According to K.B. Clark and M.E. Goodman

(1974), ethnic awareness develops earlier for children within the minority group. Chinese and Indian students are the minority group in the studied NSS; therefore, the finding that shows ethnic boundary among students of CNTS and TNTS are higher.

According to the Ethnic Behavior Development Module, students from a mono-ethnic environment at the early stage in NSS would not notice the difference (Sanusi Osman, 1988). After noticing the difference, early behavior will develop. While in form 2, the early behavior would be negative because the ethnic boundary is thick and when the students proceeds to form 4, there is still no change. Based on the study, it could be concluded that eventhough the NSS has a multi-ethnic environments, it is not successful in handling the ethnic boundary for students of various ethnicities, especially those who came from NS, CNTS, and TNTS.

CONCLUSION

A great unity is still being searched for and the formation of a Malaysian nation is still among the main agenda of the country. The idea of Mahathir Mohamad (former Prime Minister of Malaysia) to realize the concept “Nation-State” has yet to be achieved based on the findings of the study. Among the nine strategic challenges that was included in “Vision 2020”, the formation of the Malaysian nation is considered to be the most complicated. National integration generally could be achieved through education integration via an education system that is national in nature in order to create citizens with knowledge and virtue.

Apart from that, the social interaction pattern among individuals of different ethnicities will only take place if those individuals are in an environment of multi-ethnic like the one in NSS (National Secondary Schools). Could all the Malays, Chinese, Indians, Dayak, Kadazan, Melanau, and the other ethnics be brought into a similar physical area using various policies and programs of unity? If there is any one of the ethnic being left behind, the social interaction pattern is only relevant in cultivating unity for the ethnics that could have made it successfully. The one being left behind will have less opportunity to socially interact with the other ethnics.

Based on the study, it is proven that students from NPS (National Primary Schools) could interact very well with other ethnics as compared to students from NS (National Schools), CNTS (Chinese National Type Schools), and TNTS (Tamil National Type Schools). In order to counter this problem, the inculcation of an education of various cultures needs to be implemented as the one being discussed earlier.

The success of increasing the social interaction pattern among students of various ethnicities depends on the policies and programs that were introduced by various agencies of the government. If it is not carried out successfully, *Satu Negara Satu Bangsa* (One State One Nation) will only remain as a slogan without any true meaning.

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