

NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN VISION SCHOOL: TOWARDS '1 MALAYSIA'?

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This paper reports preliminary findings of a larger study of the assessments of intercultural communication in selected Vision schools across Malaysia. The main question is to what extent does Vision Schools foster racial interaction among students of different ethnic groups? Since its establishment, there are 13 schools involved in Vision school concept, however only one Vision School in Subang Jaya, truly delivers the ideal state of having three national school/types, to agree to co-exist in one school compound. The rest of Vision school complexes around Malaysia partially involved national and national-type schools. In those cases, Chinese-type national schools were understood to be reluctant to join the Vision school concept. It is imperative given this observation that the main philosophy behind the establishment of Vision schools be revisited and evaluated by investigating whether the school becomes a platform for pupils and teachers of different ethnic groups to engage in effective intercultural communication. The mission of Vision schools is seen as on par with the current national agenda of '1 Malaysia', coined by the Prime Minister of Malaysia, which calls for the three major races in Malaysia to be united and project themselves as being one, rather than as being different. In that respect, the establishment of the Vision schools remains significant and fits with the current national agenda which is to further enhance national integration, in the hope to reach the state of '1 Malaysia' in various aspects of life, including in the educational system.

Key words: national integration, intercultural communication, multicultural education, national education policy.

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is a multiracial country with three major races namely Malays, Chinese and Indians. According to the recent figure of census of population (Department of Statistics of Malaysia, 2009) the population of Malaysia now stands at 28,306 millions. The Malays are the majority (50.8%, n = 14,379.2m) followed by Chinese (22.7%, n = 6,426.8m) and Indians (6.85%, n = 1,938.3m), while others represent about 19 per cent of the total population. This composition of population witnesses diversity in language, culture and customs, and religious beliefs.

Malaysia has gone through episodes of ups and downs in bringing these three ethnic groups to unite as one. Among the most significant challenges to national unity was the 13th May 1969 national riot which took many lives because of prejudices and racial sentiments. That incident shattered the dream of united Malaysia and became a wake-up call for the ruling government to seriously address the problem of national integration. The friction in the community at that time was mostly observed between Chinese and Malays. Derogatory terms and racial slurs were exchanged and these verbal provocations led to physical assault and in extreme cases those incidents ended in fatalities (see Minah Harun, 2007). Responses to this incident involved evaluation of the different systems and institutions in the society including education. Sometimes certain quarters in the society raised issues concerning unequal educational opportunities available to Malaysian citizens. In specific, the mainstream education is said to discriminate against the Chinese. As a response to their dissatisfaction with the educational opportunity available for Chinese in Malaysia, some Chinese parents send their children to private Chinese schools to ensure that their ethnic identity is preserved (Ya-Fang Chiu, 2000). When ethnic groups isolate themselves from interacting with other ethnic groups, as early as in primary school, eventually it is afraid that it could lead to discord among different races in Malaysia.

‘1 Malaysia’

The calls for national unity have been manifested in many slogans and campaigns such as national integration, interracial harmony, the spirit of unity, all of which stem from the same objective of uniting the three major races to embrace the spirit of oneness; the Malaysian spirit. Recently, the Prime Minister of Malaysia introduced a national slogan which imbues the same

concern and it is seen as a rebranding approach or a national campaign in a renewed and refreshed form to draw the attentions of Malaysian citizens to appreciate nationalism spirit. This campaign is '1 Malaysia'. What is interesting about '1 Malaysia' is its language simplicity, where people from all walks of life could understand the message. Behind that simple concept, lies a substantive message about national integration. '1 Malaysia' national campaign has a tagline or slogan which is, 'People First, Performance No. 1' (*Rakyat didahulukan, Pencapaian diutamakan*).

There are eight values in '1 Malaysia' concept, which are culture of excellence, perseverance, humility, acceptance, loyalty, meritocracy, education, and integrity. At the heart of the concept are the values of respect, sincerity and trust toward one another. The highlight of this article however is the 7th values, which is education. There are now three mainstreams in the Malaysian school system, which are National school, Chinese-type national school and Tamil-type national schools. It is crucial to bring these three school systems to find ways and opportunities to interact among themselves through, school activities. Furthermore, the curriculum should stress on values that would build upon '1 Malaysia' (pmr.penerangan.gov.my)

School and National Integration

School being the first place where a child formally placed in the society, outside the protective zone of a family, is seen as a starting point to orientate young children of the importance of national integration. It is a place where children are exposed to others who they may not have the opportunity to mingle with, in other contexts. School is also a platform to introduce the existence of other cultures, customs and religions and to enable the children to see those differences as part of life. Eventually these young minds could, with the right guidance, accept and celebrate differences, rather than seeing differences as stumbling blocks. Hence, schools can harness intercultural interaction.

The Ministry of Education of Malaysia has introduced educational reforms in various aspects of school system such as curriculum, governance, assessment and co-curricular activities. The government also introduced different concepts of schools namely 'Smart School', 'Cluster School', 'Vision School', 'Boarding School', 'Mission School', and others. The aim of these initiatives is to transform and propel the standard of education towards world-class educational system.

Background of the Vision Schools

National integration is becoming an elusive and fragile concept as people are becoming aware of their ethnicity and racial uniqueness and the need to preserve and promote their identity, which in reality is against the government aspiration to integrate differences into national unity. Even though the Education Act of 1961 reinforced the implementation of using the national language or *Bahasa Malaysia* as a medium of instruction in national schools, the minority ethnic groups are still allowed to use their mother tongue (Mandarin and Tamil) in the vernacular schools, such as Chinese and Tamil Schools. Nevertheless, the segregated schooling system may distract the government aspirations to promote national integration.

According to the Ministry of Education (2000) Vision School is a primary school complex in which two or three schools of different types (National, Chinese and Tamil national-type schools) are placed. Ideally these three school buildings are interconnected to facilitate interactions among pupils from these schools. There are four main objectives of Vision schools which are to create integration among students from different ethnic and backgrounds, to inculcate the spirit of integration among students from different school types, to produce students who have high tolerance and understandings towards one another, and to promote maximal interactions among members of the school community through the sharing of school facilities and implementation of school activities.

A recent study found that teachers at Vision Schools reported having confidence in the system to promote integration, toleration, and cooperation among different ethnic groups attending Vision Schools (Mohd Izham, 2006)

Strengthening unity and national integration are the main agendas of the Malaysian government since independence. This has been documented, emphasized and implemented in the Malaysian educational policies and programs. For example, Vision School is one of the government's strategies to enhance national integration among students in Malaysia. According to principals from different vision schools, sharing common facilities will provide the space and opportunity for different ethnic groups to interact with each other. This is supported by the findings of Malakolunthu (2006) in her study. An excerpt of the interview session with one of the principals (Mr. Sidek) is quoted below:

“Sharing of the canteen is a great idea for encouraging integration among students of different culture. I see students from Tamil, Chinese, and the Malay medium schools are given the opportunity to freely mix around and have their meals together under one roof. I think this a great opportunity to interact and have fun together”.

The aims of Vision Schools are to promote integration among children of different ethnic groups and to enhance understanding, cooperation and tolerance among them (Ministry of Education, 1995). However, Malakolunthu (2006) argues that national integrity cannot be achieved by Vision Schools merely through sharing common facilities and co-curricular activities. According to her, the concept of Vision Schools should come together with strong leadership capabilities to ensure that multiculturalism prevails in all aspects of the school system. With leaders who are ‘culturally responsive’ in Vision schools, the learning experience under their leadership will benefit the goal to further enhance national integration (Malakolunthu, 2006).

The degree of inter-racial interaction and communication among students in schools is worrisome. For instance, a recent survey conducted by University Malaya researchers and reported by The Star has revealed shocking findings; only 52 per cent of the teenagers said they had a friend of a different race. Socializing and mixing with other races were not something that concerned many of the respondents. About 13 per cent felt that it was an issue, while the majority (63.9%) was more worried about contracting a disease (Kaur, 2007). These findings can be considered as a wake-up call to Malaysian, because in the long run, polarization among different races might be a threat to the national integration, security and development. It seems that, there are stumbling blocks that may prevent students from different ethnicities to conduct effective intercultural communication.

Given these scenarios, it is imperative for us to investigate further the roles of intercultural communication in enhancing interethnic relations among primary school teachers, students and principals. This study will illuminate the present state of inter-ethnic relations, in particular the problems and barriers of intercultural communication in ‘Vision School’.

The implementation of the ‘Vision School’ will not change the original features of the National-Type schools such as administration, curriculum and medium of instruction. In fact, every National-Type School (Chinese and Tamil) that participate in this ‘Vision School’ is

allowed to keep their mother tongue as a medium of instruction. Therefore, the ‘Vision School’ is a good educational concept that aims to enhance students’ interaction and national integration; students and teachers are expected to value the cultural differences through socialization in their schools. This will reinforce the fact that maintaining national unity is the most important agenda for all Malaysians.

Intercultural Communication

Samovar, Porter, and Stefani (1998) defined intercultural communication as “communication between people whose cultural perceptions and symbol systems are distinct enough to alter the communication event” (p. 48). Chen and Starosta (1998) defined intercultural communication as “the communication between people from two different cultures” (p.28). Based on these definitions, it can be said that intercultural communication takes place when both parties have distinct differences and in which those differences may affect their communication process.

The aims of intercultural communication include decreasing misunderstanding (Chen & Starosta, 1998) , tolerating cultural diversity (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984), and developing adaptive culture (Dodd, 1998).

Scholars have also suggested a number of ways to understand intercultural processes including the study of emic and etic (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984), and cultural dialogue and cultural criticism (Asante, Newmark & Blake, 1979). Our educational system should be able to support the practice of intercultural processes to ensure that the aim of intercultural communication be achieved. Intercultural communication is also encouraged to be taught in elementary school because children are argued to be more adaptive to cultural differences and they would adjust their behaviors as they mature (Asante, Newmark & Blake, 1979).

Multicultural Education

The definition of multicultural education includes educational reform to curricula to allow equality in educational opportunities (Banks, 2008, Davidman & Davidman, 1994), promotion of constructive relations and the embrace of cultural diversity in schools and among people from different cultures (Davidman & Davidman, 1994; Gollnick & Chinn, 1990; Pusch, 1979), and the empowerment of teachers, students, and parents to accept multicultural learning environment.

According to Fennes & Hapgood (1997) the condition to intercultural learning should be available to all. When students are exposed to intercultural school environment they are socialized to embrace cultural pluralism. This will meet the social ground of multicultural education which aims to promote just and good society (Browser, Jones & Young, 1995).

But the idea of multicultural education may not appeal to all society. In the case of Malaysia, if history is to be recalled, the Barnes's report suggested that a segregated school system should be abolished, if integration is to be achieved. Therefore, vernacular school system should be replaced with a National school system. This one school system was argued to be the platform to unite the three major races. Nevertheless, Chinese and Indians resisted the proposal arguing that one school system will not safeguard the sanctity of their culture and language (Sufean, 1993; Yew, 1982). The resistance was more profound among the Chinese community. In colonial Malaya, the development of Chinese education was motivated by their concern for the lack of commitment of the British colonial towards Chinese education (Yew, 1982).

In the context of Vision schools in Malaysia, Chinese national type schools are reluctant to join this school system. In all of the Vision school complexes, only one in Subang Jaya fulfilled the ideal existence of having three school systems in one school compound. The rest of the Vision school complexes is participated by National school and Tamil-Type National schools. Therefore, it could be concluded here that the Chinese community is still sentimental about integrating and embracing the idea of vision school.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The primary purpose of this study is to assess the state of intercultural communication and its impact in enhancing national integration in Malaysian Vision schools. Sustaining intercultural communication in an educational environment is vital in the context of a diverse society that we are living in now. Samovar , Porter & Stefani (1998) recognized the importance of intercultural knowledge in the educational environment where they emphasized that efforts should be taken to appreciate diversity, but at the same time finding ways to get groups of differing backgrounds to find a common ground. In a number of intercultural books this is what they called the 'third culture'. Thus, a process of adapting to a multicultural environment is essential to ensure that

different groups could work together. Dodd (1998, p. 10) terms this stage as ‘adaptive culture’. Dodd describes adaptive culture as follows:

An adaptive culture, culture C, is invented by each participant A and B whereby they put aside their A and B culture in order to emphasize common ground.....They do not necessarily merge their identities from A into B or B into A, but create an arena of commonality at least for the time they need to communicate. In this way, each can maintain identity with A or B but operate in C as demands dictate.”

This study also examines and analyzes some of the mechanisms (administration, activities, structures, etc) necessary to be addressed in a multi-ethnic educational system as well as the challenges these mechanisms face, with special reference to the Malaysian Vision Schools (*Sekolah Wawasan*). The findings regarding the problems of intercultural communication in this study are argued to be useful for the Ministry of Education to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum, structures and administration of Vision Schools. Huge investment commitment by the government merits continuous assessment from different perspectives, including an evaluation of intercultural communication and its impacts on the effectiveness of Vision Schools as well as national integration policies. Without effective intercultural communication the Vision school project might fail.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs qualitative and quantitative approaches in collecting and analyzing the data. Data are collected using one-on-one interviews, focus group interviews, observations and survey questionnaires. In short, this study is about evaluating intercultural communication among different races in Vision School, nationwide. The main objective of the study is to assess the state of intercultural communication in the context of national integration, in Vision schools. The methods used enable the investigation to be carried out in greater depth. However, this paper will report preliminary findings of the questionnaire-based research, conducted on students.

Research Question:

The main research question is proposed to investigate the state of intercultural interactions in Vision Schools.

1. To what extent does Vision Schools foster racial interaction among students of different ethnic groups?

This question is proposed to explore the state of intercultural communication among different ethnic groups in Vision Schools. In the survey, participants were asked to respond to a battery of 58 items, measured on a five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), which covered various areas pertaining to intercultural communication, in the context of Vision School.

Population of the Study

Samples were drawn from 13 Vision Schools around Peninsular Malaysia in the state of Negeri Sembilan, Selangor, Perak, Penang and Kedah. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to 887 students attending Standard 6 classes. The questionnaires were administered in classes with the presence of the researchers to ensure higher response rate. The distributions of the participants are as follows: Malays (46 %; n= 410), Indians (37%; n= 329) and Chinese (16.7% n= 148). About 58 per cent (n =511) of the respondents are male, while the rest (42%) are female respondents. Most of the respondents reported that their father worked in private sectors (57.9%). About half (50.4%) of the respondents reported their family monthly earning fell in the range of RM3001 to RM4000, while the second most frequently reported family income range was RM 5001 to RM10,000 (19%).

FINDINGS

This study is exploratory in nature with the aim to assess the state of intercultural communication at Vision Schools. Therefore many aspects about intercultural experiences of students in Vision Schools are measured, including their perceptions about Malaysia, other races, the school, state of national integration, and the practice of intercultural interaction in school and non-school contexts.

The statements were phrased in a way that respondents answered the items on the first person level or third person level. Therefore, there are questions that directly require respondents to report about their own practices, perceptions, and social environment. To balance the questions, respondents were also asked to reflect on what they observe in the society pertaining

to national integration, intercultural interaction among different ethnic groups, and efforts put in by their schools to enhance national integration.

General Impressions about Malaysia

A number of items in the survey asked respondents to give their personal opinion about the state of their feelings about Malaysia, independence (*Merdeka*), ethnic relations, and stereotypes towards other races. Item 1 in the survey asked how proud are they to be Malaysian. In specific, Item 1 stated: “I am proud to be Malaysian”. About 42 per cent of the respondents reported that they are proud to be Malaysian, however the mean score for this item was not leaning towards agreement with the statement, rather positioned in the undecided category ($M = 3.19$; $SD = 1.55$). This item was also found to be significantly correlated with race ($r = .083$; $p < 0.05$), school location ($r = .227$; $p < 0.001$), language spoken at home ($r = .095$; $p < 0.05$), occupation of father ($r = -.071$; $p < .05$), occupation of mother ($r = -.102$; $p < .05$), and family income ($r = -.082$; $p < 0.05$). Based on the above zero-order analyses, school location appeared to have relatively higher r value compared to other factors. It could be inferred that those who reported that their schools are located in rural areas have more tendencies to report that they are proud to be Malaysian, compared to those who reported attending schools in urban areas.

More positive finding was documented for Item 26: ‘I love Malaysia’, with a large majority (63.8%) of the respondents reported that they love Malaysia ($M = 3.65$; $SD = 1.32$). This item correlated significantly with seven out of nine socio-demographic factors and they were race ($r = .131$; $p < 0.001$), school location ($r = -.108$; $p < 0.001$), language spoken at home ($r = .142$; $p < 0.001$), father’s occupation ($r = -.110$; $p < 0.05$), family income ($r = .117$; $p < 0.001$), father’s education ($r = .093$; $p < 0.05$), and mother’s education ($r = .078$; $p < 0.05$).

On the statement (Item 3) whether they agree that the state of the relationship among different ethnic groups in Malaysia is currently good, again the mean score emerged to be at the undecided category ($M = 2.91$). About 24 per cent of the respondents agreed with this statement, while about half (49.1%) of the respondents disagreed.

But when the statement was phrased on a first person basis, ‘My relationship with people of other races in school is good’ (Item 3), the general responses were more pronounced ($M = 3.51$). For that item, about 58 per cent of the respondents reported agreeing with the statement.

However, at this point our concern is not to assess whether the difference between first person and third person effects is significant.

Stereotypes Toward other Ethnic Groups

In a multicultural educational context, different races or ethnic groups coexist and high degree of tolerance and understanding are expected of them. It is important to investigate whether negative perceptions in the form of stereotypes prevail among school children at Vision Schools. Therefore, three questions were included in the survey and they were phrased in a provocative way to instigate respondents' reflections of themselves as to whether they hold stereotypes against other races in Malaysia. The statements and the mean scores are shown below:

Item 7: Malays are generally lazy ($M = 2.78$)

Item 15: Chinese are known to be greedy ($M = 2.89$)

Item 19: Indians are liars ($M = 2.40$)

In general, respondents disagreed with the three statements on stereotypes of Malays, Chinese, and Indians. Somewhat similar to the above items was Item 29 which stated, 'I think other races are prejudice of my race' ($M = 2.22$). About 65 per cent of the respondents reported disagreeing with this statement. It is clear from the finding that general respondents did not feel other races held prejudices against them.

Race and Perceptual Variables

A number of socio-demographic factors correlated significantly with the perceptual variables but race was amongst the most frequently observed factors in the tested relationships. It is expected in the context of this study to find race as a significant factor to the perceptual variables' tested. Race was found to be a significant factor in 31 out of 58 tested relationships. Some of the highlights of the findings are described in the following paragraphs.

Race amongst others correlated significantly with these items, in the questionnaires:

Item 22: School is where I learn and discover the cultures of other races ($r = .121$; $p < 0.001$)

Item 27: My school has successfully foster interracial harmony ($r = .161$; $p < 0.001$)

Item 40: I learn a lot about intercultural relationships from the mass media ($r = .141$; $p < 0.001$)

For Item 22, it could be inferred that one's race correlated significantly with whether they perceive that school is a platform for them to get to know the cultures of other races. Analysis of

differences on race revealed that there was a significant difference in the responses reported by the three races ($F[2, 886] = 6.741$; $p < 0.001$), in which Chinese were found to show higher likelihood to report that they agree that the school is an avenue for them to discover and become aware of the cultures of other races, compared to Indians and Malays.

When ANOVA was performed on Item 1 ('I am proud to be Malaysian'), the differences of responses among the three races were significant ($F[2,886] = 4.551$, $p < 0.01$), with Indians were found to appear more patriotic, compared to the other two races. In fact, Indian respondents showed greater tendencies to reflect being nationalistic judging from their responses to many items, when ANOVA was performed on many of the tested relationships on race. For example, on the statement of, "My family waves the national flag on National Day" (Q21), the mean scores for the three races were significantly different ($F[2,886] = 85.6$, $p < 0.001$), with Indians scored relatively higher mean ($M = 3.30$) compared to Chinese ($M=1.73$) and Malays ($M=2.19$).

Another race-related factor that frequently yielded significant result was language spoken at home, in which 34 out of 58 of the tested relationships appeared significant. Among the highlights are:

Item 25: Independence (Merdeka) means a lot to me ($r = .103$; $p < 0.005$)

Item 17: I would like to learn more about the cultures of other races ($r = .106$; $p < 0.005$)

Item 14: If I play sports, I prefer my teammates to be a mixture of different races ($r = .081$; $p < 0.05$)

A number of items concerning Vision School correlated significantly with race such as:

Item 28: I am very satisfied with the effort put in by the teachers to foster national integration among all the students in my school ($r = .087$; $p < 0.05$)

Item 30: Sekolah Wawasan (Vision School) is very special as it integrates all the different races in one school compound ($r = .099$; $p < 0.05$)

Item 33: The teachers have explained the rational of Sekolah Wawasan's establishment ($r = .091$; $p < 0.05$)

It is imperative at this juncture to further analyze the responses of the three races to identify whether Malay, Chinese and Indian respondents differ significantly in their responses. When ANOVA was carried out, it was found that most of the items' tested were significantly different. The responses for the three races were significantly different at 40 out of 58 tested

relationships. Chinese respondents showed higher sense of love towards Malaysia ($M = 3.86$) followed by Indians ($M = 3.78$) and Malays ($M = 3.46$) and their responses to that statement were significantly different ($F[2,886] = 5.684$; $p < 0.05$). In general, about 64 per cent of the respondents agreed with that statement. There was also a significant difference in the responses of the three races concerning whether they find their school to be special in uniting different races under one school compound ($F[2,886] = 10.04$; $p < 0.001$) with Indian respondents scoring higher mean ($M = 3.25$) compared to Chinese ($M = 3.02$) and Malays ($M = 2.78$). The responses of Indian respondents to the statement asking whether they are satisfied with the effort put in by the teachers to foster integration among all races in the school were significantly different compared to other races ($F[2,886] = 12.22$; $p < 0.001$). The mean score for this item for the Indian respondents was significantly higher ($M = 3.50$) when compared to Chinese ($M = 3.11$) and Malays ($M = 2.93$).

On the statement of whether they agree that all co-curricular activities in Vision Schools involve students of all races, Indian respondents scored a mean score of 3.4 compared to Chinese ($M = 3.2$) and Malays ($M = 2.8$). The responses were significantly different ($F [2,886] = 12.158$; $p < 0.001$). Indian respondents ($M = 3.31$) also showed greater likelihood to report that the aim of Vision School's establishment has been successfully achieved, compared to Malays ($M = 2.63$) and Chinese ($M = 2.73$), and the differences of their responses were significant at .001 level ($F[2,886] = 17.167$; $p < 0.001$). When asked whether the level of national integration in their school is still low, the three races generally disagreed with that statement. However, Indian respondents were found to be showing higher degree of disagreement ($M = 2.29$) and the differences of their responses to that statement were significant ($F[2,886] = 8.694$; $p < 0.001$). Again Indian respondents were found to give significantly different responses ($F [2, 886] = 20.83$) on the statement about whether they think teachers and support staff at Vision Schools treat them equally regardless of their race with a mean score of 3.7 compared to 3.05 for Chinese and 2.85 for Malay respondents.

School Location and Perceptual Variables

Location of the school has also been found to yield many significant relationships with the perceptual factors, in which 27 out of 58 tested relationships emerged to be significant. In the survey, respondents were asked to indicate whether the location of their school is either at urban

or rural area. Those who reported attending schools in rural areas have greater tendencies to be proud of being Malaysian ($r = .227$; $p < 0.001$), perceive inter-ethnic relationships to be good ($r = .154$; $p < 0.001$), and reported that their parents influence the way they perceive about other ethnic groups. But at the same time, they also showed propensity to report having many friends of their own race ($r = .181$, $p < 0.001$) and that it is easier to befriend a person of the same race because they have many things in common ($r = .289$; $p < 0.001$). Those who reported attending schools in rural areas also have the tendency to disagree that they love Malaysia ($r = -.108$; $p < 0.001$), hold the perception that other races have prejudices against their own race ($r = .261$; $p < 0.0001$), prefer the school to have students from similar ethnic group ($r = .077$; $p < 0.05$), and if they are given the choice they would prefer not to attend Vision school ($r = .137$; $p < 0.001$).

Perceptions on Vision Schools

There were also statements that asked respondents to reflect on Vision School's contexts including its facilities, infrastructure, social environment, and administration. Some of the highlights of the analysis are described below:

Item 22 in the questionnaire states, "School is where I learn and discover the cultures of other races". This item correlated significantly with race ($r = .121$; $p < 0.001$), language spoken at home ($r = .130$; $p < 0.001$), family income ($r = .086$; $p < 0.05$), and mother's education ($r = .068$; $p < 0.05$).

Item 24 asked respondents to indicate whether they agree that there are many programs organized by Vision Schools to foster national integration. This perceptual variable correlated significantly with gender ($r = .082$; $p < 0.05$), location of the school ($r = .100$; $p < 0.05$) and language spoken at home ($r = .085$; $p < 0.05$).

On the statement asking the opinion of respondents on whether Vision Schools have successfully foster interracial harmony, four factors emerged significant and they were race ($r = .161$; $p < 0.001$), location of the school ($r = .107$; $p < 0.001$), language spoken at home ($r = .194$; $p < 0.001$), and father's occupation ($r = -.110$; $p < 0.001$). Based on the above findings, we could argue that race and language spoken at home have significant roles in the way respondents perceive about the success of interracial harmony at Vision Schools.

Item 28 concerned with the issue of whether respondents are satisfied with the efforts put in by teachers to foster national integration. Five factors correlated significantly with this

variable and they were gender ($r = .101$; $p < 0.05$), race ($r = .087$; $p < 0.5$), location of the school ($r = .086$; $p < 0.05$), language spoken at home ($r = .123$; $p < 0.001$), and mother's occupation ($r = -.094$; $p < 0.05$). Female respondents showed more inclination to agree with the above statement ($M = 3.36$; $SD = 1.57$) compared to male respondents ($M = 3.04$; $SD = 1.60$). While, in terms of language spoken at home, those who reported using Tamil ($M = 3.53$; $SD = 1.08$) at home showed greater tendencies to be satisfied with the efforts of teachers at Vision Schools to foster the spirit of integration, compared to those who reported using other languages at home. Furthermore, analysis of variance (ANOVA) further revealed that responses of these different groups were significant ($F [2,886] = 8.750$; $p < 0.001$).

Item 30 addressed the issue of whether the respondents view that Vision School as special. The specific statement was: "Sekolah Wawasan is very special because it integrates all the different races in one school compound". This item significantly correlated with gender ($r = .099$; $p < 0.05$), race ($r = .099$; $p < 0.05$), location of the school ($r = .124$; $p < 0.01$), language spoken at home ($r = .129$; $p < 0.001$), father's occupation ($r = -.084$; $p < 0.05$), mother's occupation ($r = -.092$; $p < 0.05$), and father's education ($r = .079$; $p < 0.05$).

Another item that specifically addressed Vision school was Question 37 which stated: "The school administration provides sufficient infrastructure (e.g. canteen, hall, playing field, etc.) to foster quality intercultural communication". Four factors correlated significantly with this variable and they were gender ($r = .091$; $p < 0.05$), race ($r = .193$; $p < 0.001$), location of the school ($r = .179$; $p < 0.001$), language spoken at home ($r = .272$; $p < 0.001$), mother's occupation ($r = -.144$; $p < 0.01$), family income ($r = -.081$; $p < 0.05$) and father's education ($r = .101$; $p < 0.05$).

It could be inferred that female respondents and those who reported attending school at rural areas tended to agree that the school facilities in Vision Schools could enhance better intercultural communication. But those who reported earning higher family income seemed to have the likelihood to disagree that the facilities have substantive impact on facilitating intercultural communication.

Preliminary findings of this study have been described in the above paragraphs and some patterns emerged to illuminate us about the state of intercultural communication in Vision Schools.

CONCLUSION

It is a great challenge to any nation to unite different ethnic and races, especially when different quarters in the society continuously questioning the inequalities that exist in the society. In the context of Malaysia, the British colonial had done enough damage to introduce a segregated educational system based on ethnicity. Even though it was argued that each ethnic group needed educational system that safeguard and protect the sanctity of each ethnic group, that kind of educational system further creates gap and isolation among these groups. Vision school was established to bring back the three school types, to be in the mainstream, while retaining each school's unique feature in terms of the medium of instruction. But to sustain its viability and relevance, it needs much more than sharing school facilities and infrastructure.

In the research we found that young children in Vision Schools generally liked the idea of integration such as getting to know the cultures of other ethnic groups. Interestingly, we found that Indian respondents consistently reported that they liked the idea of Vision schools and satisfied with the facilities, infrastructure, and activities organized in Vision schools to foster national integration among different ethnic groups. However, Malay respondents in this study did not seem to have strong opinions about Vision schools, patriotism, and national integration. At this point of time, it is rather premature to offer any conclusive interpretation of the findings. However, this finding should be studied in greater details to understand why Malay respondents did not show enthusiasm with the school concept and intercultural interaction.

Race and language spoken at home often emerged significant in most of the tested relationships. Location of the school also emerged as frequent factor that correlated significantly with the perceptual variables. Those who reported attending school in rural areas have shown less interest to have friends from different races and to attend Vision schools, if they have the choice. They also have greater tendencies to perceive that other races have prejudice against them and that they would prefer if the school that they attend have students of similar ethnic group. It is evident that those students from rural areas have many reservations about interacting with people of different races. Perhaps, there are not many people of different races in their social environment, which limits the opportunity for them to have intercultural interaction.

To achieve the vision of '1 Malaysia' Vision Schools need to be reviewed so that both its teaching and learning environment support racial integration. Evidently, different races held significantly different perceptions on many of the issues measured in the study. The question is, why these ethnic groups held different social perceptions about the state of national integration and intercultural interaction in Vision schools?

Even though the destiny of vision school is still uncertain, it is acknowledged that the establishment of the Vision school is motivated by the need to address national integration.

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