

EXPLORING EDUCATIONAL LEADERS' PERCEPTION ON THE FEASIBILITY OF OFFERING PEACE EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Afareez Abd Razak Al-Hafiz, Ahmad Zulfadhli Khairuddin ,
Asst. Prof. Dr. Faizah Idrus
(Kulliyah of Education, International Islamic University of Malaysia)

Abstract: In any countries, the word peace is essential to maintain its sovereignty and its survival. Without peace the world is in anarchy. Malaysia is a land consists of multi-racial individuals and family that live side by side in many years after her independence in 1957. Thus, it is essential for its citizen to practice peace culture and peace education that focuses on creating a sustainable environment to enable the citizens to interact with each other regardless of political background, ideologies, religious beliefs and practices. The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of educational leaders in Klang, Selangor on how peace education could be included in the school curriculum. This study has adopted a qualitative design, and semi-structured interview technique has been employed as the data collection tool. 3 out of 5 educational leaders have voluntarily participated in this study. Findings suggested that all of the respondents reported that they mutually agreed to include peace education as part of the curriculum to maintain harmony, inculcate tolerance among students, minimize conflicts and know their country's history. Obstacles and challenges in introducing peace education as a subject can be minimized pertaining to implementation of costs and teacher training. Lack of expertise and lack of interest among students are identified as another challenge to introduce peace education. Furthermore, educational leaders were found to have low levels of awareness, knowledge, and skills related with peace education.

Key words: Peace Education, Sustainability, Peace, Qualitative Research, Educational

Leaders' Perception

Introduction: In recent years, there are numerous reports on act of terrorism across the globe. Many conflicts and wars have occurred that cost billions of innocent lives around the world regardless of races, ethnicity and religious background. The word ‘peace’ seems to be a more rhetoric rather than a realistic means that can be achieved in this modern world. Peace means the absence of war. In fact peace also is the antonym of war or conflict. However to realize peace requires work that integrate many aspects of human life. UNESCO (2014) has stated that "War begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed". For that reason, United Nation has come with the concept of culture of Peace and declared in its resolution 53/243, under Article 1, on the definition of culture of peace: “It is not only is the absence of conflict, but also requires a positive, dynamic participatory process where dialogue is encouraged and conflicts are solved in a spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation” (UNESCO, 1998).

In the same resolution they develop the concept of culture of peace further and stated that it could be achieved through its crucial components such as respecting a set of values, attitudes, traditions, ending of violence and practice of non-violence through education, dialogue and cooperation (UNESCO, 1998).

In realizing this mission, Peace Education can be one of the solutions to educate younger generation about the importance of peace and how it affects ones country to maintain its stability and harmonious environment (Shamsul, 2011; Norbaiyah et al., 2014). Compared to earlier generation, the process of globalization is experienced early by youngster nowadays and it affects children’s mortality in most developing countries (Welander, Lyttkens& Nilsson, 2014). The effect of globalization on children’s welfare and well-being also proves to be significant and can contribute to the understanding of diversity among themselves (Stearns, 2014).

In other highly developed countries such as Sweden, Germany, Canada, the United States, and the Netherlands Peace Education is not a new term and it has been discussed broadly in their curriculum development (Demir, 2011). However, it is not the same case in Malaysia be it in primary, secondary or even at preschool level (Norbaiyah et al., 2014). Peace Education is almost unprecedented. Nevertheless, Malaysia is a multiracial country with diverse cultural and religious beliefs which in dire need to maintain her peace and harmony. Unfortunately, through past years, there has been a strong unhealthy development between ethnic groups happen in this country. According to Shamsul and AnisYusoff (2011) there is a worrying state of ongoing unstable relationship between ethnic groups in Malaysia. Dated back in 1969, where there was an ethnic clash that emerged from Malay and Chinese group conflict that resulted in

bloody battle (Shamsul & AnisYusoff, 2011). After this incident, many policies and monitoring body were established to monitor the tension between inter-racial groups and ethnicity in Malaysia as mentioned by Shamsul and AnisYusoff (2011):

The New Economic Policy (NEP) was introduced, in 1971, to address, in short and long-term, the intra and interethnic socio-economic differences resulting from the complex diversities in the country – ethnic, cultural, religious, regional, political orientation and economic activity. The Rukun Negara (National Charter) was created as an ideology to be embraced by Malaysians from all walks of life. A Department of National Unity was established as a bureaucratic instrument to keep watch over the state of ethnic relations in Malaysia. (p. 6)

However, until this day there is not much improvement on the relationship between inter-racial groups especially between three dominant races namely Malay, Chinese and Indian society. Recently, Azly (2015) reported that a potentially explosive racial conflict is going to take into place as Malaysia approach the 14th general election if there is not much efforts being done in restoring peace, resolving racial conflicts and not provoking sensitive issues by those who are irrational. To make things worst, there was a threat to burn down one of the headquarters of the Chinese political party (Azly, 2015). These are the instances that really can be worrying in a multi-racial country. On the other hand, the development of this unhealthy issue had led to another extent where one dominant and superior race calling other race as '*pendatang*' or immigrant to stay in Malaysia (Azly, 2015). Thus, it sparked hatred and distressed among other citizens as if they were not meant to live in Malaysia due to the origin of their forefathers who came during or before Independence Day. Furthermore, according to Azly (2015) issues such as *Kalimah* of Allah, Dog-touching controversial event and Oktoberfest issues are the unhealthy trends that are constantly happened which portray clashes between values, principles, biases, prejudice and beliefs systems among major ethnic in Malaysia. This is contemporaneous with another argument by Syed Akbar (2016) where he argued that Malaysian especially Malay Muslims has face the effects of cocooning themselves where they had put some kind of fence or barriers between themselves and their neighbours in many act and practices concerning multi-ethnic issues such as separating elevators for halal foods, trolleys in supermarkets and sometimes Muslim businesses have objected to non Muslim festival sales being held in their areas (Syed Akbar, 2016).

Background: Education is to provide human being the ability to find the truth in order to establish meaning in life. It is also one of the most important aspects in the development of the nation. In fact, one of the aims in education is to produce a balance person. According to Dzulkifli (2015), a well-balanced person is the one who possesses intelligence in all four

dimensions namely physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual. All these four dimensions are encompassed within National Education Philosophy in Malaysia. However, through the National Education Philosophy that was introduced in post-independence period, its effectiveness is not witnessed in producing a person who has the four dimensions. With recent development of many issues pertaining to disharmony and conflicts between inter-racial groups, minorities and religious sectarianism Malaysia has diverted far away from her initial vision which is to provide a harmonious land to be shared among its citizens (Azly, 2015; Dzulkifli, 2015; Norbaiyah, et al., 2014; Shamsul & Anis, 2015).

Objectives: The objectives of the study are to:

1. Explore school educational leaders' perception on how Peace Education could be included in the curriculum;
2. Examine the needs for introducing Peace Education in school setting;
3. Describe the challenges that will be faced by the educational leaders in introducing the curriculum at school level.

Methodology: In this study the respondents were selected from five different schools in Selangor. Due to the limitation of time and minimizing the cost, three respondents were selected based on convenience sampling method. All the respondents volunteered themselves to be included in this study. All the respondents have some criteria which are crucial for them to be included in this study. Among them are; have long-period of time serving in teaching, have influence in school's policy and decision making, have involved actively in school activities that address the needs for the students' development and have influential credibility with policy makers. Due to these reasons, the respondents volunteered were at least 30 years of age and above. All three were Malay males. Educational leaders are defined as operator or any person who are involved directly with planning, monitoring, maintaining and establishing a school institution. Data gathered from the interview are transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis. In this research, the researcher chose qualitative design over the quantitative. This is because by using a qualitative design, it offers exploration of the problem or issues that need to be studied (Creswell, 2007). Besides that, by employing a qualitative design, it also provides a complex, detailed understanding of an issue. In fact, qualitative design also help us to study a group or population, identify variables that can be measured, or hear silenced voices. These are among good explanation to explore a problem rather than to use predetermined information from the literature or results from other research (Creswell, 2007).

Moreover, semi-structured interview technique has been employed in order to obtain interview data. This technique involves open ended questions being asked to the interviewee in the school compound in order for the interviewee to respond in the most convenient way. According to Flick (1998) the focus of this type of interview is on gaining an understanding based on textual information obtained. The nature of questioning involves flexibility but has a set of questions that is prepared earlier by the interviewer prior from the process of the sessions.

Furthermore, during the process of interview, the interviewer has used various probing strategy in order to get more details from their answers. Sometimes, the interviewees were asked to expand more about their statements and answers for the researcher to get the actual meaning and detail or any additional perspectives that can be told from their perspectives.

In this research convenience sampling method has been used and three out of five participants from three different schools have participated voluntarily. Among the participants, one of them is 5th grade teacher who is also head teacher, one of them is 3rd grade teacher and one of them is special education officer that is in charge of creating and supervising the curriculum for the special needs pupils. Another participant works as a school leader who is also responsible in teaching for his classroom.

Findings: Based on the analysis of the feedback of interviews, the researcher identified some emergent themes namely;(1) Challenges and obstacles of introducing peace education as a new curriculum to the school leaders as well as for teachers (2)Definitions regarding the concept of peace education (3) The needs for implementing peace education (4) The importance of peace education and benefits of introducing peace education in schools institution. Themes emerged after the analyses of the definitions provided by the participants are presented below in a frequency based sequence. Participating teachers defined the concept of *peace* in relation with the following words; character building, preserving peace, stability, knowing history, peace appreciation, peace keeping and patriotism.

Feedback from the interview sessions gave the impression of the need to introduce peace education in school both at primary and secondary level. Findings shows that all school leaders' shared a common belief that it was important to know, maintain and preserve what was peace and peace education. Furthermore, they all understood the need for advocating this kind of program or subject within the Malaysian and educational systems since there have been a lot of issues regarding disharmony, disrespects among Malaysian students.

However, although they all agreed that there was a need for introducing peace education in the curriculum it was also challenging for them in order to implement it at the school level.

This means, they perceived and predicted as teachers, they needed to perform various tasks and undergo special kind of training regarding peace education before they can teach to the students although all of them portrayed their willingness to go for such an experience in order to bring a better education to the generation. Finally, they brought up the issues again about the importance of peace education and its benefits to introduce in school both in primary and secondary levels.

Conclusion: In the present study, it was intended to explore what were the needs and perception of educational leaders' perception on the feasibility of offering Peace Education as a subject in schools. This study was designed to understand what were the crucial components that should be inculcated in the curriculum so that Peace Education could be seen as a relevant subject to be taught in schools. By having the results from the interview with the school leaders, it can be concluded that there is a need in introducing Peace

Education as a subject in the schools' curriculum. However, the implementation on how it should be introduced is what policy makers and other stakeholders should put into consideration before making it as national curriculum. This is crucial before any kind of policy being introduced in the national school system where it will involve a lot of students' capacity to understand and apply their understanding of the subject in their life.

Output: It is suggested for future studies to include a new paradigm when intending to widen this topic. For instance researchers can expand this topic by investigating what elements of Peace Education that really matter to the pupils and school society as a whole. Can Peace Education be accepted into any culture and can it be shaped and be appropriate for the Malaysian society? What are the pre-cursor of Peace Education that makes it so important? And how can school administrators use Peace Education to minimize gap (if any) in the school community which consists of multi-racial individuals in one organization. Most importantly, Peace Education is a new topic that relatively fresh in developing countries, thus studying it and further researching it is crucial so that our society will not be left behind and can benefit from it. Teachers are essential components in educational sector and providing them with tacit knowledge about Peace Education can bring betterment to the schools' climate.

Future Plan of the research: In education, every policies and new curriculum should be crucially scrutinized and studied thoroughly before making any decision to include it in the system. This is because in education, it is not like a factory where we can throw away the broken products or whatever mistakes or wrong doings that we commit along the processes. In education, it deals with the future of the children, the nation's hope for a better country that will make history and advances. Therefore, to introduce any policy changes in the system requires a careful, analytical and systematic ways of analysing the new policy that is intended to be introduced before implementing it in the state or national level. As a result, the present study is crucial for researchers, policy makers and other stakeholders to use it as a tool before deciding to introduce Peace Education in the system. Furthermore, this study has helped us to examine more and get a clearer picture on what are the challenges that will be faced by teachers if Peace Education is to be introduced. It also helps us to discover if there really is a need for this new curriculum to be included in the system. Lastly, it helps us to avoid any future mistakes that students will not benefit from the new curriculum like the PPSMI outcomes in the past.

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