

Ethnic Boundary among Multi-Ethnic Primary School Pupils in Malaysia: Role of Teachers and Administrators

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Abstract

This paper is a study of ethnic boundary among primary pupils in Penang Malaysia. It discussed the roles of teachers and school administrators in narrowing the visual circle of socio-ethnic gaps. The study investigates whether the differences between mono-ethnic and multi-ethnic schools environment would have an impact on the roles of teachers and administrators in narrowing the socio-ethnic boundary among school pupils. The research study was carried out in Penang involving 12 primary schools. The sample size of pupils for the study was 600. Structured questionnaire is used to collect the responses. The result of the study showed that teachers and administrators play an important role in narrowing the ethnic boundary among multi-ethnic pupils. The narrowing of ethnic boundaries (differences) is vital tool for social integration. It is considered as a pre-requisite for peaceful coexistence which is an integral part of socio-ethnic and National development in a pluralistic society such as Malaysia.

Keywords: Role of teachers; role of administrators; ethnic boundary; multi-ethnic schools; mono-ethnic schools; ethnic relations.

1. Introduction

The current education system is still retaining school system which features are dominantly ethnical, a system of educational operation which certain group of ethnic inclination for example, National Schools (NS), National Chinese-Type Schools (NCTS) and National Tamil-Type Schools (NTTS) are dominant in attendance. This ethnic segregation has undesirably affected the social and functional roles of education system, as an institution which is aimed to nurture socio-ethnic integration in supporting human and development of a Nation state (Sua, 2010). Ethnic segregation through education has also caused the interaction among pupils of different ethnic groups to be very limited and seldom (Dawi, 2004; Yusof, 2006). Apart from that, the ethnic boundary within every pupil will limit the social interaction among pupils of different ethnicity (Noor, 2008; Yusof, 2006).

Based on these facts, teachers are seen to as tools for social integration and they play an integral part in organizing the activities inside and outside of the classroom to ensure that pupils of different ethnicity participate in line with the national effort of unity among peers at the early levels of school (Berita Harian, 2010). Therefore this study focuses more on the role of teachers and administrators in closing the ethnical gaps between pupils of multiple ethnicities from the four types of schools which are National Schools comprising of multiple ethnics (NSME), National Schools comprising of only Malay pupils (NSOM), National Chinese-Type Schools (NCTS), and National Tamil-Type Schools (NTTS).

1.1 Study objectives

This research was carried out based on the following objective:

- i) Identifying the role of teachers and administrators in promoting ethnic relations among National School comprising of multiple ethnics (NSME), National Schools comprising of only Malay pupils, National Chinese-Types Schools (NCTS) and National Tamil-Type Schools (NTTS).

1.2 Study hypotheses

Hypotheses are expressed in the form of null hypothesis as follows:

H₀₁: There is no significant mean difference in the role of teachers in promoting ethnic relations among pupils from National Schools comprising of multiple ethnics (NSME), National Schools comprising of only Malay pupils, National Chinese-Types Schools (NCTS) and National Tamil-Type Schools (NTTS).

H₀₂: There is no significant mean difference in the role of administrators in promoting ethnic relations among pupils from National Schools comprising of multiple ethnics (NSME), National Schools comprising of only Malay pupils, National Chinese-Types Schools (NCTS) and National Tamil-Type Schools (NTTS).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Ethnic boundary

Ethnic is the pattern of social interaction which could increase and later on strengthens self identification from outsiders other the group of members as an identification towards the distance among ethnic groups (Sanders, 2002). Studies relating to ethnic boundaries have been drawing attention of scholars; this is due to the risen resultant factors of human social existence which are primarily as a result of various manifestations of ethnocentrism in societies of the world. Every ethnic group has their own stated boundary in order to identify their ethnic characteristics. The statement of ethnic boundary is shown through the interaction pattern between the ethnic group and another ethnic group, this perhaps can be recognize as social identified abstract limitations which must be inbuilt in every particular culture and be nurtured by generation for value preservation (Sanders, 2002; Baerveldt et al., 2004; Baerveldt, 2007; Bash, 2005).

Ethnic boundary is always associated with the elements of tradition and geography (Espiritu, 1992; Alba, 1992; Nagel, 1994; Sanders, 2002). The element of tradition is always linked to the social construct within the ethnic group which shows the difference in terms of tradition and faith practices. The element of geography on the other hand is always associated with a country's border and the origin of a certain group of ethnic. As an example, the generation of immigrants within a country in some occasion is still identified as foreigners by the majority within a country (Sanders, 2002). However, based on the context of this study, only the element of tradition will be focused on. The social space where interactions among ethnic groups occur shows the social gaps among those groups. When the interaction among the different ethnic groups is limited due to the effect of segregation that has been implemented such as different types of schools which is only attended by a certain group of ethnic, the ethnic boundary will be more obvious which soon will lead to stereotypical acts among the ethnic groups (Sanders, 2002). On whether ethnic boundary becomes more or less relevant depends on the contexts of school, income, age of the pupil, social interaction and the economic condition within a big community. The division and differences between "them" and "us" i.e. in group and out group (Schaefer, 2004) could change when the old-timers and new-timers compete against one another. Conflicts will cause ethnic boundary to become even thicker and it could also strengthen the unity within a certain given group (Olsen, 1997). By implication conflict with the outer groups is functional to the in group member as it re-strengthen their act of unity against others.

A study which was carried out by Baerveldt (2007) regarding ethnic boundary shows that pupils from the majority ethnic usually will make friends from amongst their own ethnic, whereby the pupils from the minority ethnic will make friends from other ethnics as compared to friends from their own ethnic.

Research indicated that relationship among pupils within classes which consist of multiple ethnic groups and found out that the ethnic boundary among the pupils became thicker (Schofield, 1991). On whether an ethnic boundary becomes thicker or thinner, this is affected by the ethnic identity and social gap among the different group of ethnics (Yusof, 2006). Ethnic boundary is also determined by the element of tradition (Yusof, 2006). If the ethnic boundary is thick, the social interaction pattern will be less frequent and if the

ethnic boundary becomes thinner, the social interaction pattern will be better among different groups of ethnic (Light, 1994; Sanders, 2000; Noor, 2001, Yusof, 2006; Baerveldt, 2007).

The Malaysian environment consisting of multiple ethnic groups and it need a good social interaction pattern so that the ethnic boundary could be thinner and this could only be carried out in a multi-ethnic environment (Light, 1994; Sanders, 2000; Gold, 2000; Yusof, 2006). However, at the lower level of education, the pupils will be educated in a mono-ethnic environment; therefore the ethnic boundary between them will be thicker (Light, 1994; Sanders, 2000, Gold, 2000; Jamil, 2002; Yusof, 2006). Based on the context of this study the ethnic boundary will be studied on will involve the Malay, Chinese, and Indian pupils from the primary level which studies in the mono-ethnic and multi-ethnic school environment.

2.2 Role of teachers

Teachers play an integral role in promoting productive ethnic relations among the pupils (Banks, 2006). Each and every pupil that attends the school will carry with them a set of tradition, lifestyle and identity of their own ethnic characteristics. It is influenced and shaped by the social background of the pupil, tradition, family, surrounding community and the beliefs of their religion and home know as cultural capital (Banks, 2006). Children rightfully should be educated and thought since the early stages about their life within the community which has different cultures and traditions. Understanding, respect, tolerance, among different ethnic should be promoted within the pupils in order to have a harmonious social interaction (Jamil, 2002).

The challenge in educating pupils from different ethnic background is not limited to the country or the society. Educators generally would have to face different forms of issues which are difficult (Walker & Dimmock, 2005). As an example, the education system in Singapore has undergone a restructuring program in order to lessen the racial element and has upgraded the education system in order to provide education opportunity for pupils of Indian, Chinese, Malay, and Eurasian ethnicity. Countries like Australia, America, Britain, and New Zealand through its education system has also handled the racial issues which normally would be apparent among the majority and minority especially in the field of education (Walker & Dimmock, 2005).

Teachers should set the main goals in order for them to play their role as an effective one while teaching pupils which consists of multiple backgrounds of tradition and ethnic (Banks, 2006). Among the goals is that teachers should help the pupils in describing their own ethnic identity as well as to use it effectively when they are within their own ethnic group. These school pupils should be clear with their own ethnic and identity before they could then positively interact with individuals from the other ethnic groups. The teachers should also educate the pupils about self-acceptance and to decrease the urge of racism. Pupils from the minority group should be able to function in both kinds of environments, within the minority group, as well as the majority group. Based on figure 1.1 below, the circle labeled A to F represents some of the minority ethnic community and based on this particular study; the context would include the Chinese and Indians. The circle labeled as G represents the majority ethnic, the Malays.

Based on figure 1.1, teachers should help pupils from the minority ethnic which are the Chinese and Indian pupils to learn to interact as well as they could within their own community and also within the majority ethnic community, which are the Malays. With teachers playing their roles in order to help the pupil to have a good ethnic relation, this in turn will help the minority ethnic group to act in the best manner when interacting with other ethnic groups (Banks, 2006).

2.3 The role of school administrators

Administrators play an integral part in promoting ethnic relations among school pupils (Henze et al., 2002). Administrators could form a positive change within the ethnic relations in their own respective schools (Henze, 2001). Studies relating to school administrators' role in forming a positive environment in ethnic relations was carried out at 21 schools across the United States whereby the administrators has taken proactive actions in order to increase the contact between pupils of different ethnic at each of the respective schools (Henze et al., 2002).

Schools normally would only focus on verifying the ethnic identity among school pupils and in the same time they would normally fail to build the structure in order to build a community which consists of pupils of different ethnicity and later on the pupils would form their own group based on certain ethnic. However, by changing the opportunity in verifying ethnic identity as shown in the forming of an ethnic, school

administrators should integrate all 3 processes as mentioned in order to create an environment for learning and a positive ethnic relations at their own respective schools (Tamin, 2001).

Based on the context of this study, the researchers would study the roles of the administrators in promoting relations between the pupils of different ethnicity at their own respective schools. The role of the administrators in promoting ethnic relations among school pupils in the environment of mono-ethnic as well as multi-ethnic which will be studied on in terms of activities and programs held in order to increase the relationship between pupils of different ethnic even though in a school with mono-ethnic environment. Based on the context of this study, the researchers will study the roles of administrators in promoting the relationship between pupils of multiple ethnic at their own respective schools.

3. Methodology

3.1 Quantitative method

This study used the quantitative method. This method is chosen for this study since it involves large sample. Through this method the reliability of the data is higher and it took a short time and is also enable data collection for a big number of samples (Gay et al., 2009). In this study, the questionnaires were distributed to the schools so that it would be disseminated to the class teachers for standard 5 students to all the chosen schools so that it could be filled up by the pupils.

3.2 Study sample

The total number of standard 5 students in Penang is 9,306 pupils, consisting of Malay, Chinese, Indian as well as the other races. According to Gay et al. (2009), when the level of population reaches 5000 (N=5000), the population size is no longer relevant and a sample size of 400 would be sufficient, but it would be more convincing with a larger number of samples, and in this case, 500. Classified random sampling was used in order to choose the study sample. Classified random sampling is used when the population could be divided into sub-populations which do not overlap (Gay et al., 2009). Whereby the researchers have divided the population of standard 5 pupils in Penang according to ethnic based on schools, which are National Schools consisting of multiple ethnic (NSME), National Schools consisting of only Malay pupils (NSMP), National Chinese Type Schools (NCTS) and National Tamil Type Schools (NTTS). The main reason that the researchers choose classified random sampling is that this method is capable to decrease sampling errors (Gay et al., 2009).

This study sample involves three ethnic groups which include Malay, Chinese and Indian. Moreover schools have been divided into 4 types of schools which include National Schools comprising of multiple ethnic (NSME), National Schools which only consists of Malay pupil (NSMP), National Chinese Type Schools (NCTS) and National Tamil Type Schools (NTTS). Total 600 pupils participated in this study each group making up a total number of 200 pupils.

The number of sample at NSMP (Malay, Chinese, and Indian) was 100 pupils for each of the three categories. Moreover, the sample at NSME (Malay only) is 100 pupils. The number of samples from NCTS, consisting of only Chinese pupils is also 100. Samples taken from NTTS are also the same, 100 Indian pupils. The division of samples among the ethnics and schools was made evenly for the purpose of comparison. Total 12 schools have been chosen to conduct this study.

3.3 Research instrument

The research instrument was adopted from Verma (1994). The role of teachers and administrators questionnaire is according to the situation at school (Yusof, 2006). If the pupil takes "often" as an answer frequently, therefore the answer will reflect that the teacher and administrators have played their role in narrowing the ethnic boundary and promoting social interaction among pupils at their own respective schools.

3.4. Data analysis

For the data analysis SPSS 19.0 software was used. Descriptive statistics is applied in order to get the frequency, percentage, and mean for each of the questions within the questionnaires and all the dependant variables (Gay et al., 2009). One way ANOVA test is used to test the hypotheses.

4. Study results & discussion

4.1 The difference of teachers' role in promoting ethnic relations among pupils from NSMP, NSME, NCTS and NTTTS

The study shows that there is no significant difference between the role of the teachers among the four categories of schools which are NSMP, NSME, NCTS and NTTTS which is $[F(3,596) = 0.89, .44 > .05]$. However, the result of difference in the role of teachers among the 6 ethnic categories of which are significant in overall $[F(5,594) = 4.68, .00 < .05]$. In overall, there is a difference in the role of teachers from the 6 ethnic categories which are M1, C1, I1, M2, C2 and I2 which were involved in this study among pupils from NSMP, NSME, NCTS and NTTTS.

The result of the comparing partner *Post-Hoc Tukey HSD* shows a mean value for teachers role for the I1 and M1 ethnic category (mean difference =2.52, $.00 < .05$) which is significant. Based on the *Post-Hoc Tukey HSD* analysis, the overall difference is due to the difference among these 2 ethnic categories. Based on the mean value for I1 (min=23.94) which is higher and this shows that I1 which is the Indian pupil at NSMP stating that the teachers play a vital role in promoting ethnic relations which later could close the ethnic boundary among M1 pupils (mean=21.42) referring to Malay pupils at NSMP which states that the teachers are not really playing their role in promoting ethnic relations which in time will close the ethnic boundary between the pupils.

Based on the result of the analysis of the teachers role, the researchers report that within the primary school pupil population, although from the same environment, pupils from the I1 referring to the Indian pupils at NSMP stated that the teachers have really played their role and later on could close the ethnic boundary as compared to pupils from the M1 category, referring to the Malay pupils from NSMP who stated that the teachers did not really played their role in promoting ethnic relations among the pupils. However, there is no significant difference in the role of the teachers for the other categories, which are C1, M2, C2, and I2.

However, based on the one way ANOVA test result on the role of teachers based on the school category, the result is insignificant, meaning that there is no significant difference in terms of the role of teachers based on the type of school. The one way ANOVA test on the role of teachers based on ethnic category on the other hand is significant for ethnic categories I1 and M1 referring to pupils from the same school, NSMP. According to Banks (2006) teachers play an integral part in promoting ethnic relations among the pupils. According to Jamil (2002) children should be educated from the early stages about their lives in the community which is multiracial. Understanding, respect, tolerance, should be formed from the childhood stage itself in order to create a harmonious social interaction. With the teachers playing their role in helping the pupils to learn and have good ethnic relations, this will help the minority ethnic to act in the best way in interacting with the other ethnics (Banks, 2006).

4.2 The difference in the role of administrators in promoting ethnic relations among pupils from NSMP, NSME, NCTS and NTTTS

Study result shows that there is no significant difference between the role of the administrators in the four types of schools which are NSMP, NSME, NCTS and NTTTS which is $[F(3,596) = 0.89, .08 > .05]$. Based on the above table, the one way ANOVA test shows that there is a difference in the role of the administrators among the six categories of ethnics which is significant in overall $[F(5,594) = 9.81, .00 < .05]$. In overall, there is difference between the role administrators between the six categories of ethnics which are the M1, C1, I1, M2, C2 and I2 which are involved in this study among the pupils from NSMP, NSME, NCTS and NTTTS.

Based on the result of the partner comparison *Post-Hoc Tukey HSD* test, the mean value of the administrator role for the ethnic categories I1 and M1 (mean difference =2.80, $.00 < .05$) is significant. Based on the *Post-Hoc Tukey HSD* analyses, the difference in overall is due to the difference in two ethnic categories. The value of mean for I1 (min=21.77) is higher, indicating that the I1 pupils, referring to the Indian pupils at NSMP stated that they feel the administrators played a vital role in promoting ethnic relations which in turn will close the ethnic boundary as compared to M1, referring to the Malay pupils at NSMP (mean=18.97) which indicates that the administrators are not really playing their part in promoting ethnic relations and closing the ethnic boundary between the pupils.

Based on the result of the analysis of the administrators' role as discussed earlier, the researchers report that within the population of primary school pupils, pupils from the I1 category at NSMP stated that the

administrators has been playing their role in promoting ethnic relations and in time could close the ethnic boundary as compared to pupils from the M1 category, referring to the Malay pupils from NSMP which stated that the administrators are not really playing their role in promoting ethnic relations among pupils. However, there is no significant difference in the roles of administrators for the other categories of ethnics C1, M2, C2, and I2.

However, based on the one way ANOVA test result on the role of administrators based on the school category, the result is insignificant which means that there is no significant difference in the role of the administrators among the pupils based on the category of school. According to Henze (2001) administrators play a vital role in promoting ethnic relations among pupils in a certain school. The administrators could mould a positive change in the ethnic relations at their own respective schools (Henze, 2001). This study is also in line with the study that was carried out by Henze et al. (2002) and Walker and Dimmock (2005) regarding school administrators in forming a positive environment regarding ethnic relations whereby the administrators at the school has taken a proactive approach in promoting ethnic relations among pupils of different ethnicity at their own respective schools.

4.3. Implication of Study

In overall, there is no difference of role between teachers and administrators in promoting ethnic relation among the pupils at NSMP, NSME, NCTS and NTTS that were within the scope of the study. However, based on the results of the study that was evaluated based on the ethnic category, the I1 category, referring to the Indian pupils at NSMP stated that the teachers and administrators played an integral part in promoting ethnic relations among themselves as compared to the M1 category which is referring to the Malay pupils at NSMP who stated that the teachers and administrators did not really played their part in promoting ethnic relations. Therefore, teachers and administrators are not really the determining factor which is significant in promoting ethnic relations and in time closing the ethnic boundary between pupils in NSMP, NSME, NCTS and NTTS.

Conclusion

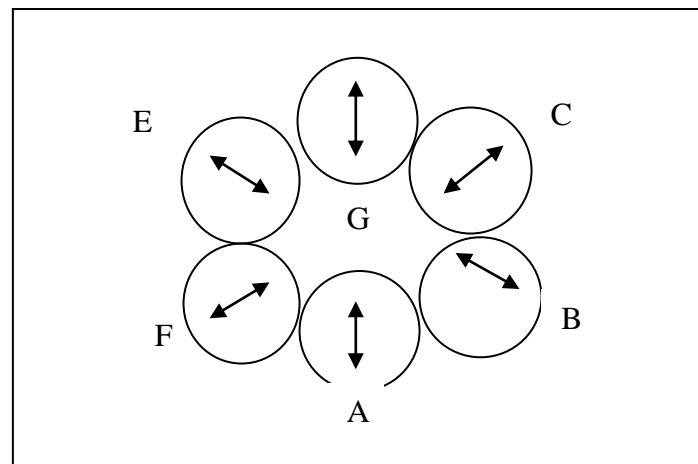
This study explains the in depth role of teachers and administrators in promoting ethnic relations among pupils from NSMP, NSME, NCTS and NTTS. Teachers and administrators should play their part in closing the ethnic boundary and in the same time they should also handle events and activities that could promote ethnic relations. Results from the study showed that the teachers and administrators of mono-ethnic schools especially NSME do not really have any activities that could encourage ethnic relations among the pupils. The results also showed that the mono-ethnic school environment is a barrier for the teachers and administrators to create a space and opportunity in handling events and activities which could expose the pupils to socially interact with the other pupils from different ethnics. Therefore the Malaysian Education Ministry should create programs which are more effective that could be applied by the teachers and administrators in creating more opportunities for pupils from multiple ethnicities whether they are from a mono-ethnic school or multi-ethnic school, so that they could socially interact with each other and later in time they could also close the ethnic boundary.

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Figure 1: Socio-culture environment



Source : Banks (2006)