



Received: 2021-06-08

Accepted: 2021-07-08

Published: 2021-08-31

Original Article**ACCEPTING OTHER RELIGION AND LIVE HARMONIOUSLY:
A STUDY ON MALAYSIAN YOUTH****Ahmad Zaharuddin Sani Ahmad Sabri ^{a*}, Roziya Abu ^b, Shamshuritawati Sharif ^c & Rozira Abu ^d**^a Ahmad Zaharuddin Sani Ahmad Sabri (UUM College of Arts and Sciences, Universiti Utara Malaysia)^b Roziya Abu (Faculty of Information Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA)^c Shamshuritawati Sharif (Quantitative Sciences, UUM College of Arts and Sciences, Universiti Utara Malaysia)^d Rozira Abu (Awang Had Salleh (AHSGC Graduate School), Universiti Utara Malaysia)

* Corresponding author, email; zaharsani@uum.com

ABSTRACT

In a multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation like Malaysia, inter-ethnic harmony is seen as both an enriching society and a government obstacle. A diverse community with disparities in culture, language and religion is often viewed as difficult to control because of the many different needs, beliefs and aspirations of different communities within a multicultural society. The inter-ethnic peace and stability of Malaysia's society helping the country to prosper economically is often praised. While there is no violent confrontation between ethnic groups, as ethnic differences exist along political, socio-economic and geographical lines, a sense of national unity proves difficult to achieve. This study was conducted to analyse the involvement of Malaysian youth in the inter-ethnic unity conversation. A survey was distributed among 735 youth in Northern peninsular region of Malaysia, using indicators of social harmony index. In order to assess whether there were any variations between the three major ethnic groups on the religion acceptance. The findings showed that there were some gaps in the hunt for accepting each other believe. The discrepancies between the Malays and the Chinese were most pronounced among these activities, with the Chinese showing comparatively lower levels of acceptance compared to the Malays, and lower levels of nation unity compared to both the Malays and the Indians.

Keywords: Unity of Religion, Acceptance, Multi ethnic religious society, Malaysia, Youth, Islam.**Introduction**

There are many interpretation levels in the theological sense of the word's 'solidarity', 'inclusion' and 'diversity'. Although religions emphasis on unity and dignity, the issue of diversity is still at large. Unity does not mean uniformity when adequately interpreted, and therefore does not invite domination and closure. Unity in diversity implies harmony in varieties.

Malaysia is a nation where harmony in diversity is evident because people of many religions, races, cultures and traditions live together. Religious diversity, language differences, economic specialization, residential architecture, political direction and etc. is a symbol of the introduction of the variety of ethnic groups found in Malaysia. According to Furnivall (1948), the concept of a plural society refers to a society characterized by divisions but in a plural, society differences exist in terms of race and ethnicity that is in line with economic differences so that tensions and instability are more likely to occur. He explained that they associate but do not join with each group adhering to their religion, culture, language, ideas and way of life. According to him as individuals, they met, but only in the market while buying and selling.

The existence of religious diversity is a nature that all creatures of God's creation must accept, and this is part of the symbol of Malaysia as a country that practices society compound. According to Golam W. Choudhury (1993), the element of religion itself is not the solution to problems to the diversity of beliefs and races in a country from ignorant to more civilized. This is evidenced in the glorious history of Islamic civilization alone. According to Khoo (2007), he asserts that religion remains a factor in straining inter-ethnic relations. Therefore, religion remains an aspect of the lives of the people of Malaysia is very sensitive.

Issues of the Islamic state, hudud law, the call to prayer, the use of Allah's name in Malay-language Bible, the halal food and business premises, seizure of body converts etc. have a lasting impact on the perspective among the non-Malay community in Malaysia. Malaysian history shows the political aspects and economic issues that are the basis of the conflict between Malays and non-Malays in Malaysian society. This study conducted see religious sensitivity is a factor influencing the occurrence of competition in a society multi-racial especially in our country Malaysia.

Previous researchers have done many studies about the conflict among Malaysia ethnicity, include Halimahton, Hua and Raman (2006), Yong and Md Sidin (2010), Yang and Md Sidin (2011), Dafrizal, Fauziah Ahmad and Faridah Ibrahim (2011) and Yang and Md Sidin (2012). Who know some factors that contribute to the conflict that occurs and from the studies that past researchers have done, show religion's issue in the last ten years is very serious for discussed (Mansor, 2006). Nevertheless, faith is now the leading pioneer as a big issue about racial unity, especially in peninsular Malaysia.

The religious sensitivity raised in society today is of great concern to all races because conflicts or issues that touch on the sanctity of religion, especially Islam can bring quarrels between them. Article 3 of the Malaysian Constitution outlines that the official religion of Malaysia is a Muslim country. However, other religions are allowed to practice the teachings of their respective religions in prosperity and harmony. Besides, Article 11 also states that every citizen is free to profess and practice their respective religions. It should come with item 3 and item 11, conflicts between adherents of different religions will not occur in Malaysia's multiracial society. However, although it has been outlined in constitutional, inter-religious conflicts also occur in society regardless of the issues brought by non-Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

Therefore, the question of unity and inter-racial relations is an important agenda of the country in ensuring political stability is always guaranteed.

Past Study on Malaysia Youth and Unity

Rabushka (1973) looked at racial differences among the population of the metropolitan city of Kuala Lumpur and Penang, which are mostly occupied by the Chinese. In a study of social behaviour in those major cities, it was found that the Chinese can spend much time in shopping activities, sightseeing and even banquets. This phenomenon is quite different from the Malay community that is not eager to spend time at the mall or eat in restaurants.

Based on research done by Mansor Mohd. Noor and friends (2001) also discuss some problems concerning sharing a room with other ethnic friends. It was found that students of other Bumiputeras and Indians in IPT more willing to share a room in a dormitory with other ethnicities while Chinese students and significantly far more than happy to share a fellow ethnic itself. Different circumstances in IPTS, mostly Indian and Chinese students, are more interested in sharing rooms with other ethnicities than students in IPTA.

This situation is reinforced by a study by Noran Fauziah Yaakob and colleagues (1984). Based on a study of race relations, more students in an IPTA like to socialize with their ethnicity. The study results showed that more than 57% of students who have many friends who are from their race compared to other races.

Making Malaysia Unite

The principle of national unity was emphasized in its importance after the racial riots on 13 May 1969 that the government realized the importance of the unity of Malaysians who consists of various races, religions and cultures. Thus, the government made national unity as the country's primary goal to be achieved to avoid things such is not repeated.

The implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1971 was the result of efforts to address the issue of unity until its end in 1990. After that, in 1991 the former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, introduced Vision 2020 which is based on the concept of Bangsa Malaysia, a form of unity that is expected to achieve high-income developed countries by the year 2020 is based on intact racial unity. (Ahmad Zaharuddin Sani, 2014).

Another crucial national planning plan is to discuss national unity, known as the National Integrity Plan (PIN) was introduced. According to the Malaysian Institute of Integrity (IIM, 2006), The PIN is the result of the inspiration of the Fifth Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi on 23 April 2004 in line with the fourth challenge of Vision 2020 for form a society that is strong in its moral and ethical characteristics, religious values and virtues noble character.

The concept of race relations is related to the interaction among racial groups over a period of time. Schermerhorn, argues that racial integration leads to interactions and relationships between minority groups and major societies that ultimately lead to cultural integration without compromising an individual's cultural identity. (Schermerhorn, R.A., 1970).

Methodology

For this research, quantitative approach was used in order to answer the research questions. According to Creswell (2014), quantitative research is a structured way of collecting and analysing data obtained from different sources. A quantitative approach is used for testing objective theories by investigating the relationship between variables. Those variables must be the one that can be measured typically on instruments. Then, the numbered data can be determined using statistical procedures. A variable refers to a characteristic of an individual or

an organization that can be measured or observed, which can vary among the participants that are being studied (Creswell, 2014).

This study covers 4 different states in Malaysia i.e. 1) Perlis, 2) Kedah, 3) Penang and 4) Perak. The youth population ranges from 51 100 to 491 600 with an average of 320 200. Based on Krejcie & Morgan (1970), the respondent sample size is 384 respondents. By considering 60% response rate, in this research, the sample is 735 respondents. Further, focus group session were tape recorded, conducted among 10 participant who share their thoughts and experience on topics.

The propose MY Harmony questionnaire consists of the following sections;

- i. Demographic profile;
- ii. Family and Relationship;
- iii. Religion and Spirituality
- iv. Community; and
- v. Security;
- vi. Harmony;

Analytical and Finding

Descriptive analysis was used to conduct and to describe the characteristics of respondents and this study variables. Meanwhile, Multiple linear regression was used to analyse the Malaysian Youth's Social harmony level based on a set of indicators, namely: 1) Dependent variable: Harmony and 2) Independent variables: Family & Relationship, Religion & Spirituality, Community, and Security. Finding analysis shares and enlighten in this paper however, focuses on the discoveries based on religion and spiritual section of the study. This article aims to venture the religious sensitivity as factors that influencing the occurrence of competition in developing multi-racial youth social harmony a society in Malaysia.

Discussion 1: Demographic Profile

The descriptive statistics of respondents' demographic performed as presented in Table 1 (below), respectively. Based on Table 1, it shows that 45% and 55% of the respondents were male and female, respectively. The respondent is classified into six different age groups. The first age group (15-19 years) occupied 26%, the second age group (21-24 years) is 18%, the third age group (25-29 years) is 15%, the fourth age group (30-34 years) is 15%, the fifth age group (35-40 years) is 12% and the last age group (41-45 years) is 14%. Based on religion, majority of respondents is Muslims (61%). The second is Christian with a total of 27% and third ethnic are Hindus (6%) and Buddhist (5%), respectively. Others religion constituted only 1%, which adds up to the overall 100 percent of the 735 youth respondents in Northern region of Peninsular Malaysia.

Malaysia in general, is a predominantly Muslim country with 61.3% Sunni Muslim (Malaysian Department of Statistics, 2011), while the remaining population consist of 19.8% Buddhist; 9.2% Christian; 6.3% Hindu; 1.3% adherents of traditional Chinese religions and 0.4% other religions. Malaysia is also ethnically diverse; hence religion and ethnicity have always played an important role in politics and society.

In the meantime, the classification of respondents according to their educational level is dominated by three levels which are Diploma level (34%) and SPM level (35%). In respect to the classification of respondents according to their educational background has shown that a total number of 616 respondents (84%) gain their primary and secondary education from national public school. Respondents with Vernacular (Chinese and Tamil) School education background is both at 3% and 2%. Where else, religious private school and Methodist/convents school are respectively at 2% for both.

Table 1: Respondents' Demographic

PROFILE RESPONDENT		
		Percentage
Gender	Male	330 45%
	Female	407 55%
Aged	15 - 19 years old	187 26%
	20 - 24 years old	136 18%
	25 - 29 years old	108 15%
	30 - 34 years old	110 15%
	35 - 40 years old	87 12%
	41 - 45 years old	102 14%
Religion	Islam	448 61%
	Kristian	202 27%
	Buddha	38 5%
	Hindu	43 6%
	Lain - lain	4 1%
Educational Level	Lower than SPM	49 7%
	SPM	254 35%
	Certificate	57 8%
	Diploma	256 34%
	Degree	90 12%
	Others	28 4%
Types of School	National Public School	616 84%
	Vernacular Chinese School	39 5%
	Vernacular Tamil School	22 3%
	Convent/ Methodist	16 2%
	Private Religious School	13 2%
	International School	4 1%
	Others	25 3%

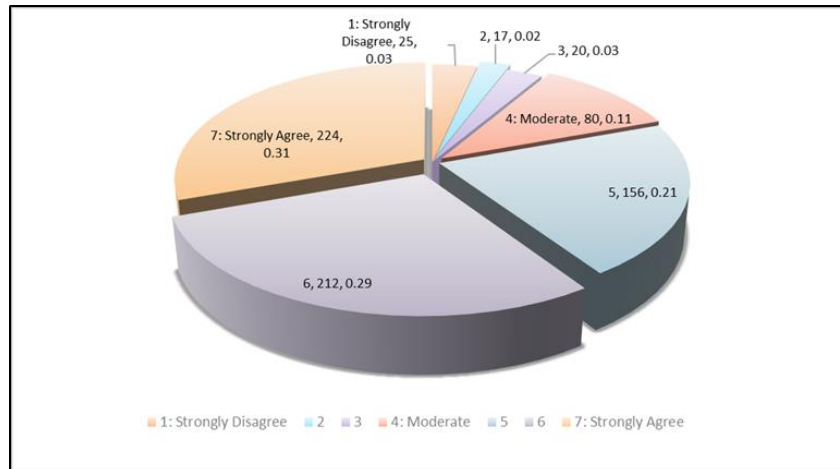
In Malaysia, currently there are still argument and debate on vernacular school as a form of segregate and divisive obstacle to national unity. It is said that the idea of schools as a reinforcing agent of values and perspective, vernacular school with its emphasis to mother tongue language as medium of instruction and ethnically preference groups were perceived to be segregates in nature as partial values of a minority group is projected and not the national aspiration (Sivapalan S., et., 2015). Nevertheless, further finding and discussion in this study has shown that the basis of education is crucial, yet it do not determine the mind set of Malaysian Youth on what it means to be unified and living harmoniously.

Discussion 2: Freedom of Religion and cultural practices

Upon being ask whether they know that they have the rights and freedom to practice religion and culture in Malaysia, a total number of 592 respondents agree that they do have the freedom. Out of the 592 respondents, 224 responds (30%) with strongly agreement with the statement and respectively 212 respondents (29%) and 156 respondents (21%) agree that they have the rights and freedom to practice religion and culture, without interruption despite living in groups that speak different languages, practice different religions and have different value systems. Despite of a big percentage of agreement to the statement, there are still 9% of respondents who disagree with this account.

This finding is in line with current Malaysian federal constitutions. The Federal Constitution of Malaysia protects the right to freedom of religion or belief, including religious manifestation by way of professing, practicing and propagating one's religious beliefs. The concept of freedom of religion in Malaysia is rather different from what have been practised in other Western Countries and Nation. Article 3(1) of the Constitution, and appreciate its origins as envisioned by Malaysia's forefathers, states that Islam shall be the religion of the Federation, but other religions may be practised in peace and harmony in the Federation (Thomas, 2006).

Chart 1: Freedom of Religion and Cultural Practices

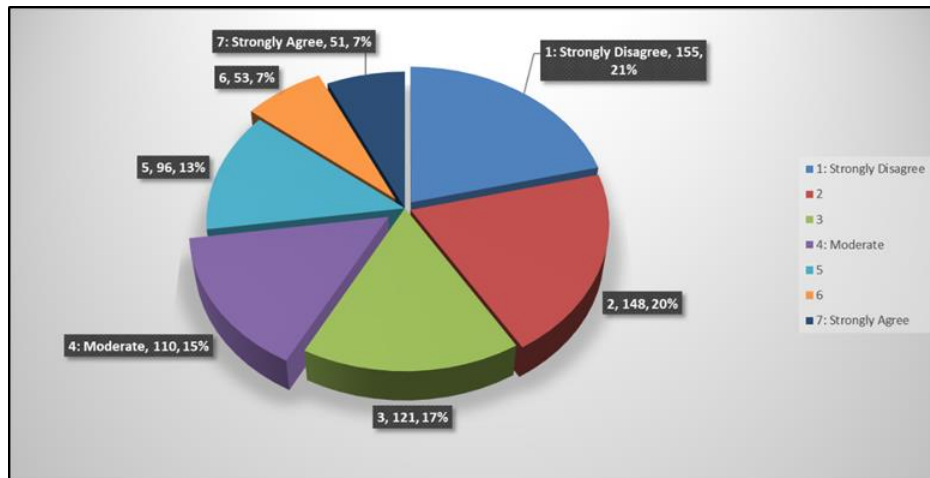


The Malaysian Youth Council President, Jufri Johan has recommended that a special subject be introduced in schools and universities for students to learn about other religions to further enhance and strengthen inter-faith understanding and harmony. He states further that this recommendation will “foster unity and promote religious sensitivity for cultures different from our own” (BERNAMA, 2019).

Discussion 3: Getting Along with other Religion

The hardest part of human is to admit to our personal discomfort towards other choices of lifestyle, tradition and custom's. In this section, respondents were asked to reveal their views of their personal difficulties to get along with people of all religion.

Chart 2: Getting Along with other Religion



Upon answering the question of ‘I find it difficult to get along with people of all religion’, a total number of 58% respondents disagree with this statement. Whilst, 27% agree that they have difficulties. It is often said that one must always respect others’ beliefs. It is important to accept that some people place a lot of importance on religion aspect of their lives, and to respect their right to believe whatever they want, even if you don’t agree with them. Apparently, for Malaysian youth, your education background and your level of education does not dictate you from being respectful and humble to other religion. This finding are clearly positions in the next discussion.

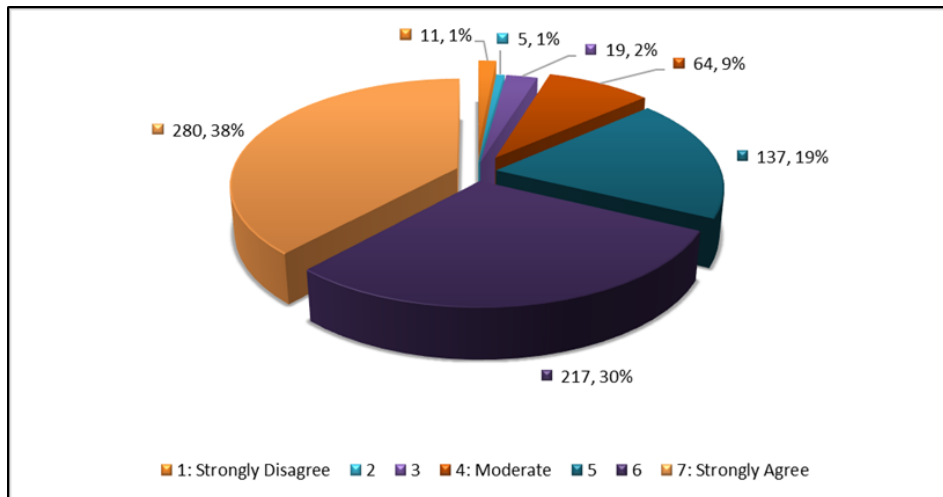
We believe, the key to outstanding religious tolerance is to give and have respect for every believer and establishing a good relationship in everyday life with all ethnic groups and recognizing the fundamental beliefs of other religions so that religious harmony can be maintained.

Discussion 4: Being Respectful

Upon being ask whether they (Malaysian Youth) are respectful towards the followers of other religions for practicing their beliefs, an alarming 86% (634 respondents) agrees to the statement. While, 5% disagree and 9% being moderate to the statement respectively. This analysis shows that most respondents, irrespective of race, still have a high degree of respect. Furthermore, they also respect other races’ beliefs and taboos and seek to learn other races’ fundamentals.

Professor Dr Ashgar Ali Ali Mohamed, from International Islamic University Malaysia affirm that one of the important components in the principle of good behaviour, encompasses the duty to be considerate of others, and not to make fun of others’ religious beliefs and cultural practices (NST, 2017).

Chart 3: Being Respectful



Malaysia, being a country with multireligious and multi-ethnic communities, tolerance is important. It is a tool for inviting Malaysian of different beliefs, ethnicities, races and nationalities to coexist and work together for the betterment of the country, hence to the prosperity of the nation. Although, religious and cultural beliefs, are the source of moral and ethical fundamentals in any society, one must be duly respected through mutual tolerance. For tolerance to work and to bring about coexistence in society, there needs to be a mutual effort

Conclusion

In Malaysia, the multi-ethnic school atmosphere is similar to that of National School and National Secondary School. Students from a variety of ethnic groups, including Malay, Chinese, Indian, and other minority ethnic groups, usually attend this form of school. Students from multiple ethnic groups attend the school, which allows them to form friendships with peers from other ethnic groups, as opposed to schools with only one ethnic group, where students do not associate with peers from other ethnic groups. In the classroom, exposure to diversity and cross-ethnic friendship will contribute to potential social benefits. Individuals should have the ability to communicate with their peers from other ethnic groups in their everyday encounters, according to the theory of intergroup communication. In the sense of macro variables like diversity, several academics have addressed the significance of having the ability to have a partnership. Schools that are less ethnically diverse, on the other hand, only allow students to associate with students of the same or different race, but not both at the same time. In addition, teachers should assist students in understanding that not only do ethnic groups differ and are diverse, but individuals within the same ethnic group differ as well. Simultaneously, students should be encouraged to recognise similarities among peers from various ethnic groups. All students should learn about racial and cultural diversity. In order to encourage students to engage with one another, there will be no divide or division between ethnic minority and majority students.

Based on the above discussion, this article emphasizes that unity of race can be overcome by practising moderation values widely in all aspects of life. The principles of national unity as in the context of sports, education, culture and so on will not succeed in making Malaysians united. Instead, the value of simplicity should be placed ahead of extremist activities or exceeding human or religious boundaries.

Therefore, cultivating the spirit of unity among Malaysians must start from the grassroots, including students at the university who are candidates for the elite who will be the heirs to the country's leaders in the future. Therefore, a preliminary survey needs to be done so that an accurate picture can be obtained to formulate appropriate strategies in the development of the Malaysian nation.

Through increasing the level of tolerance between religions, conflicts between these different faiths can be reduced. The cause of the lack of religious tolerance, however, needs to be identified first. Religious tolerance is a frequently discussed subject, and much remains to be addressed to bring world peace. If searched through local and other country academic journals, there are so many studies on religious tolerance and the discussion of interrelationships. Studies on ethnic relationships and their connection with religious tolerance, however, are lacking. Their significance is very close, but not much is done with empirical evidence. Future researchers are encouraged to conduct a preliminary review of the relationship between ethnic relationships and religious tolerance on this basis.

Acknowledgement

The paper is a published work of the Socio - Harmony Index Instrument project funded by the Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS) awarded by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE). The fund was very instrumental to the success of the project conducted.

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