

School Leaders Unity Practices Level and Students Unity Level in Secondary School

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ABSTRACT--Malaysia education system has been designed to promote unity. In parallel to that, multi-racial citizens have to speak national language, follow the same curriculums and sit for the same examinations. Vision Schools and Student Integration Plan for Unity was also implemented. In addition, school leaders were reminded to promote unity. However, unity index kept on decreasing. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine unity practices level among secondary school leaders, to determine unity level among secondary school students and to determine the relationship of the two variables. For the methodologies, sample size are 542 students who answered questionnaires as research instrument. Research team has visited the sample school to collect data which was descriptively analyzed to obtain mean score and standard deviation and inferentially analyzed to determine *r* values. Results showed that school leaders' unity practice level and students' unity level were high (mean score of 3.60 and 3.97 respectively), and there was a significant relationship but at the moderate level between unity practices and unity level. *r* value equal to 0.480. To conclude, what has been done is still not enough to increase unity to the highest level. The implication is, what has been stated in unity model is absolutely true, therefore, courses or trainings that can increase the ability of school leaders to instill unity values among the students must be implemented. These results also implied that school leaders' effort to increase unity level is still not **enough**, therefore actions to tackle the issue is needed.

Keywords-- Education, unity model, school leaders' unity practices, students' unity level

I. INTRODUCTION

Unity is a challenge to a multi-racial country (Denison, 2010). Unity is also has been defined differently depends on the context and the situations. Some said that unity is achieved when people of different ethnic groups, culture and religious can sit together and live happily as a single Malaysian nation (Hussein & Haneza, 2015). Literature showed that education system in Malaysia has been design to foster unity among its multi-racial citizens. In parallel with that, effort has been done to ensure multiple races starting from the young been able to speak and understand Malay language besides following the same curriculums and sitting the same examinations. Malaysia Ministry of Education also introduced Vision Schools and Student Integration Plan for Unity (RIMUP) to strengthen unity. Even though hard to admit the failure of empowering National Schools as the main choice for schooling, it is worth it to say that children's in national school can speak Malay language much better than the children in vernacular schools. Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013-2025 gave a special focus towards unity

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with the expected outcome that unity among the children can be increased by increasing their ability to accept, respect and manage the differences, as stated by Steyn et al. (2007), the concept of solidarity is that the younger generation needs to be prepared to function effectively in accordance with the generally accepted rules of society.

Appreciating and respecting the differences are important foundation for balancing economic and social development and is very important for the multi-racial society in Malaysia (Zaliza & Norlin, 2009). According to National Unity and Integration Department (JPNIN, 2016), national unity is a state where citizens from multiple races, religions and territories live peacefully as one nation, giving full commitment to the national identity based on the Federal Constitution and the National Principles. Shamsul (2011) however stated that unity has yet to exist in our country, what has been achieved is social integration which people of multiple races tolerate each other for their differences. Malaysia Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) has a clear definition of unity by stating that unity is the output when teachers and students of different races have the ability to accept, respect and manage their culture, linguistic and religion practice differences. Unity Model for School Teachers and Students (2014) developed by MOE has listed 10 main values of unity, which are openness, tolerance, trust, cooperation, politeness, appreciation, care for others, fairness, trustworthiness and rationality.

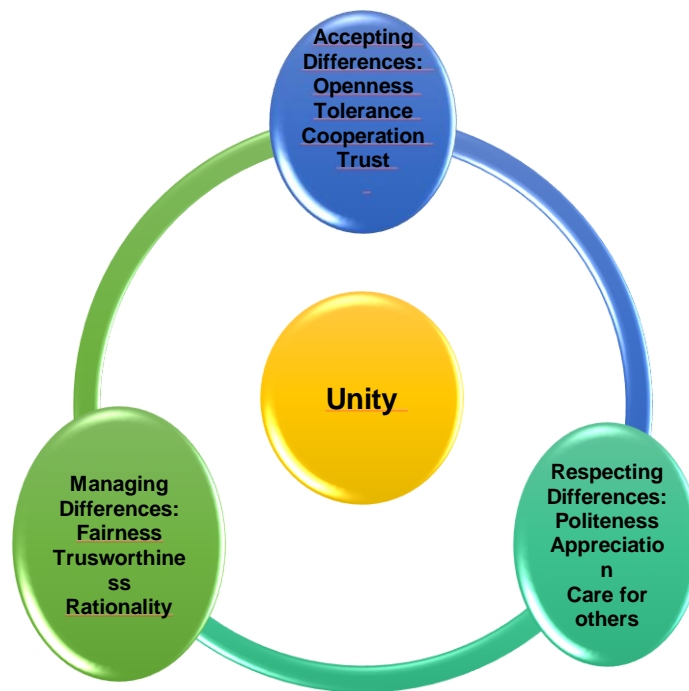


Figure 1: Unity Among School Teachers and Students Model, MOE 2014

The effort to promote unity through education has been done as early as before independent. The strategy during that time was more to ensure that the right of every ethnic group was fulfilled and they can live happily without any conflict. As time goes by, Malaysian government realize that focus should be given to the strategy to increase the ability of different group to accept, respect and manage ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic differences in order to strengthen unity (Malaysia Ministry of Education, MOE 2017). A lot of effort has been done towards that, and in 2011, while planning for the Malaysia Education Blueprint for the duration of 13 years

(2013-2025), one of the education system aspiration is unity. The aim of unity initiative is to strengthen unity by increasing students' ability to accept, respect and manage their race, religion, culture and linguistic differences. The initiatives have listed a few strategies, which include empowering the role of the Student Integration Plan for Unity (Sport, Art and Co-curricular, MOE 2018), producing Unity Practice Guideline for School (School Management Division 2018) and conducting a course to instill unity value among school leaders (Aminuddin Baki Institute, MOE 2017). For the last two strategies, the expectation is that, school leaders can play their role effectively to promote unity in school. After nine years of the blueprint implementation, there is a question whether the goal for unity has been achieved or not? To what extent school leaders been able to play their role in promoting unity? Study by MOE (2014, 2016, 2018) showed that students' unity index has decreased (Educational Planning and Research Division, Malaysian Ministry of Education) year by year. In 2014, the index is 6.9/10.0, in 2016, the index is 6.2/10.0, while in 2018, the index is 5.9/10.0. Why the index keeps on decreasing? Is there anything related to the role of the school leaders? Therefore, it is the purpose of this study to get the answers for all those questions.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This one-year survey study uses quantitative method to collect data from 542 sample, that is secondary school students from all over Malaysia. The sampling method that has been used was combination of cluster, stratified and purposive. Cluster sampling method was used to group sample school into the northern zone, the central zone, the south zone, the east zone, the Sabah/Wilayah Persekutuan Labuan zone and the Sarawak zone. The stratified sampling method was used to choose sample school that is by location whereas at school, purposive sampling method was applied to select thirty 16 years old students that are balanced of race and gender. The instrument is questionnaire, which was developed by research team based on Malaysia Ministry of Education unity model. The instrument contains three main part which is Part A, part B, and Part C. Part A is to collect demography data of the respondent including zone, school location, race, gender, total income, and service experience. Part B contains items to collect data that can be analyzed to determine school leaders' unity practices level, while Part C contains items that can be analyzed to determine unity level of secondary school students. Three main constructs for the part B are the practices of the school leaders to increase students' ability to accept differences, the practices of the school leaders to increase students' ability to respect differences, and the practices of the school leaders to increase students' ability to manage differences. The sub-constructs are the school leaders' practices to instill unity values among the students that are openness, tolerance, trust, cooperation, politeness, appreciation, care for others, fairness, trustworthiness and rationality. The main constructs for Part C are the ability of students to accept differences, the ability of students to respect differences and the ability of students to manage differences. The sub-constructs are the unity values of the students that are openness, tolerance, trust, cooperation, politeness, appreciation, care for others, fairness, trustworthiness and rationality. For the data collection procedure, researchers visited sample school and administered questionnaires themselves which lead to 100 percent return rate. This study used Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 software to analyze the quantitative data. The purpose of doing descriptive analysis is to determine mean score and standard deviation of the variables, the constructs, and the sub-constructs, while inferential analysis was used to determine relationship of the variables. The interpretation of the mean score was based on Feldman and Sanger (2007), i.e. to determine unity practices

level among school leaders and unity level among students (as shown in Table 1). The unity practices level among principals and unity level among students are interpreted as very low with the mean score of 1.00 to 1,80, low with the mean score of 1.81 to 2.60, moderate with the mean score of 2.61 to 3.40, high with the mean score of 3.41 to 4.20 and very high with the mean score of 4.21 to 5.00.

Table 1: Mean score Interpretation

Mean Score	Interpretation Level
1.00 – 1.80	Very Low
1.81 – 2.60	Low
2.61 – 3.40	Moderate
3.41 – 4.20	High
4.21 – 5.00	Very High

Source: Feldman and Sanger (2007)

The interpretation of relationship between variables is as shown in Table 2. The value of 0.01 to 0.09 showed that the relationship is very weak, 0.10 to 0.29 means the relationship is weak, 0.30 to 0.49 means the relationship is moderate, 0.50 to 0.69 means the relationship is strong, while value of 0.70 to 1.00 means the relationship is very strong (Ghazali and Sufean, 2016).

Table 2: The interpretation of correlation value

Correlation value (r)	Interpretation Level
0.01 – 0.09	Very weak
0.10 – 0.29	Weak
0.30 – 0.49	Moderate
0.50 – 0.69	Strong
0.70 – 0.99	Very strong
1.00	Perfect

Source: Ghazali and Sufean, 2016

III. RESULTS

Result for the first research question, “What is the unity practices level of secondary school leaders according to students’ perception?” is shown by the Table 3.

Table 3: Principals’ Unity Practices Level

Construct	Mean	S. D	Unity Practice Level
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Practice to Increase Ability			
to Accept Differences	3.66	0.71	High
Practice to instill openness			
Practice to instill tolerance	3.32	0.87	Moderate
Practice to instill cooperation			
Practice to instill trust	3.54	0.73	High
	3.86	0.90	High
	3.90	0.83	High
Practice to Increase Ability			
to Respect Differences	3.68	0.68	High
Practice to instill politeness			
Practice to instill appreciation			
Practice to instill care for others	3.62	0.87	High
	3.61	0.87	High
	3.82	0.85	High
Practice to Increase Ability			
to Manage Differences	3.59	0.85	High
Practice to instill fairness			
Practices to instill trustworthiness	3.60	0.93	High
Practices to increase rationality	3.65	0.93	High
	3.52	0.89	High
Overall	3.60	0.74	High

*N=542 S.D = standard deviation

The table shows that in overall, unity practices among principals is high with the mean score equal to 3.60, standard deviation equal to 0.74. Among the main constructs, “practice to increase ability to respect the differences” is the highest with the mean score equal to 3.68, standard deviation equal to 0.68, followed by the “practice to increase ability to accept differences” with the mean score equal to 3.66, standard deviation equal to 0.71, and the “practice to increase ability to manage differences” with the mean score equal to 3.59, standard deviation equal to 0.85. Meanwhile for the practice to instill unity value, the highest level is the “practice to instill trust” with the mean score equal to 3.90 and the standard deviation equal to 0.83. Result also showed that the lowest level was the “practice to instill openness” with the mean score equal to 3.32 and standard deviation equal

to 0.87. It means that training to school leaders regarding unity must focus more on giving knowledges and skills that make it possible for the school leaders to play their role effectively and efficiently in instilling “openness” to the students. The unity level of the students might be affected by the unity practice level of the school leaders. To increase students’ ability to accept and to manage differences, school leaders must inculcate value of “openness”, “tolerance”, “cooperation”, “politeness”, “appreciation”, “fairness”, “trustworthiness”, and “rationality” among the students. These results are parallel with the findings of Malaysia Ministry of Education research team while they measure unity level of the school secondary students for the year of 2014, 2016, and 2018.

Result for the second research question, “What is the unity level of secondary school students?” is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Students’ Unity Level

Construct	Mean	S. D	Unity Practice Level
Accepting Differences	3.92	0.64	High
Openness	4.02	0.72	High
Tolerance	4.02	0.65	High
Cooperation	3.80	0.78	High
Trust	3.66	0.84	High
Respecting Differences	4.03	0.63	High
Politeness	4.22	0.67	Very High
Appreciation	4.06	0.76	High
Care for others	3.81	0.76	High
Managing Differences	3.94	0.65	High
Fairness	3.82	0.77	High
Trustworthiness	4.04	0.65	High
Rationality	3.97	0.70	High
Overall	3.97	0.60	High

*N=542 S.D = standard deviation

The table shows that, in overall unity level among students is high with the mean score equal to 3.97, standard deviation equal to 0.60. Among the main constructs, the highest is the students’ ability to respect differences with the mean score equal to 4.03 and standard deviation equal to 0.63, followed by the ability to manage differences with the mean score equal to 3.94 and standard deviation equal to 0.65, and the ability to accept differences with the mean score equal to 3.92, standard deviation equal to 0.64. For the unity values, the highest is “politeness” with the mean score equal to 4.22, standard deviation equal to 0.67, while the lowest is “trust” with the mean score equal to 3.66, standard deviation equal to 0.84. These research results are parallel to the unity level results measured by Malaysia Ministry of Education (MOE) in the year of 2014. 2016 and 2018 that secondary school students’ unity level is yet to achieve the highest level. To be specific, the lowest mean score achieved by students is “trust” with the mean score equal to 3.66, standard deviation equal to 0.84. Therefore, it is recommended that action must be taken to instill “trust” among the students by giving more opportunities to them to interact and mix with each

other especially in the implementation of curriculum and co-curricular activities whether in school or outside of school.

For the third research question, “Is there a significant relationship between the unity practices level of principals and the unity level of secondary school students?” is shown by Table 5.

Table 5: The relationship between principals’ unity practice level and students’ unity level

Variable	Value (r)	p(sig)	The level of relationship strength
Unity value practice	0.480	.001	Moderate

p < .01 (2-tailed)

The alternative hypothesis (Ha) has been determined for the third research question, that is “there is a significant relationship between principals’ unity practice level and students’ unity level”. Analysis of data using Pearson correlation test showed that there is a significant relationship between principals’ unity practice level and students’ unity level but only at a moderate level with the value of r equal to 0.480. This result also means that the alternative hypothesis (Ha) is fail to be rejected. To further interpret, this result means that if principals increase their practice to foster unity, it will lead to a slightly increase in students’ unity level. This results also confirmed that decisions and actions done by MOE to promote unity by increasing the role of school leaders is right. Therefore, it is appropriate and advisable to consistently remind school leaders to refer to School Unity Practice Guideline (School Management Division, 2018) in implementing school activities and making it compulsory for school leaders to attend Headmaster Unity Value Course (Aminuddin Baki Institute 2017) to increase their ability to promote unity not only among students but also among all school communities.

IV. DISCUSSION

The real fact is, not many researches have been done to measure unity level of the students and unity practices level of school leaders. Therefore, it is quite difficult for the research team to have literature review on unity measurement, especially to find literature review on past studies. However, unity model of Malaysia Ministry of Education (MOE, 2014) has become a main reference for this study. It stated that unity is a result once teachers and students of a different racial are able to accept, respect, and manage their culture, religion and linguistic differences whether they are in school compound or outside of school compound. In addition, MOE unity model also stated that teachers and students must have unity values in order to be united. The unity values which has been tested for their reliability and validity are openness, tolerance, cooperation, trust, politeness, appreciation, care for others, fairness, trustworthiness and rationality. As analysis was done, results of this study support the content of the model as it demonstrates unity among students will improve as school leaders improve their practices to enhance students’ ability to accept, respect and manage differences. Findings also showed that unity among students will increase as school leaders increase the instillation of unity values among students. Despite of the results, this study found that effort to increase ability to accept differences are still low compare to ability to respect

and manage differences. This finding is rather interesting and raises questions about the possibility of skepticism or cautious behavior of school leaders in dealing with matters related to school unity.

The result of this study also showed that secondary school students achieve a lower level of ability to accept differences compare to their ability to respect and to manage differences. These results are also in line with the findings of MOE for their unity measurement in the year of 2014, 2016, and 2018. Again, this finding is quite weird and raises question about the possibility of being not confident to mix with other races. This results also showed that students can control their attitude while interact with other races even though in their heart it is quite difficult to trust and being open to the differences. The lowest mean scores achieved by values of “openness”, “tolerance”, “cooperation” and “trust” are also in line with the findings of MOE for their study in 2014, 2016 and 2018. These findings again confirm what has been stated in the unity model developed by MOE and at the same time showed the similarity of the results of past studies and the results of this study. Action must be planned and implemented to increase the ability to accept differences which means to increase openness, tolerance, cooperation and trust to others.

V. CONCLUSION

This study answered the research question by showing the results that the practice of secondary school leaders to foster unity among secondary school students have achieved a high level even though not at the highest level. The results also showed that secondary school students achieved a high level as well but again not at the highest level. The conclusion that can be drawn from the results are Malaysia Ministry of Education (MOE) need to plan and implement more programs or activities to promote unity. School leaders have not yet fully played their role to strengthen unity among students. Therefore, school leaders training must consider to upgrade their ability to the fullest. Though not at a strong level, this study also concludes that if MOE has a goal to increase unity level among students, school leaders therefore must increase their practice to increase students’ ability to accept, respect and manage differences among them. This is due to results that showed principals’ unity practices are related to unity level of the school students. Besides, this study concludes that school leaders must increase their practices to instill unity values among the students. The unity values that need to be increased are cooperation, trust and care to others. This is due to results that showed school leaders has yet to achieve the highest level to instill the values to the students. Therefore, course and training for school leaders must also focus on increasing those values. School leaders must also play their role as unity model and continue their effort to increase unity by involving all members of the school. In addition to that, school leaders need to review unity programs that has been implemented. They need to implement more activities that can give opportunities for the multiple races student to interact. The uniqueness of this findings is, even though school leaders’ practices are not at the highest level, the unity level among students are still high. Mean score for students’ ability to accept, respect and manage differences are also higher compare to mean score for the unity practices of school leaders. Among the ten values, which are openness, tolerance, trust, cooperation, care for others, politeness, appreciation, fairness, trustworthiness, and rationality, only “politeness” achieved a very high level. This imply that interaction among the students themselves has affected the unity level among the students. School environment that give students opportunity to know each other can bring to a high level of unity among the students. This study also showed that exposure to diversity and

understand other races mother tongue, culture and religious practice can increase students' ability to work together, and may be to trust each other better. In the future, scope of the study must focus on the state with the low level of unity to see the possibilities of school leaders to increase the level. The study must also identify issues or factors that affect unity among students. This study is very important to show that Malaysian government is very serious in promoting unity among the citizens. This is due to the fact that unity can lead to a harmonious country and at the same time will lead to a higher confident level of foreigners to come and invest in Malaysia. This fact not only can contribute to higher income for the country but also to the further development of the country.

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