

**NATIONAL UNITY AT THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL: AN
EXPLORATORY STUDY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA**

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ABSTRACT

Unity has always been the main theme of Malaysia since its independence in 1957. However, the increasingly arose tensions from its fount of diversity and from the politicization of race and religion have always reminded us to rethink and assess the current scenario and situation of national unity in Malaysia. The school has always been appointed as one of the most important places where national unity may be nurtured. However, to focus only on schools, it would only be tinkering at the edges of the issue of national unity. University, a place where future leaders are being produced should as well be encouraged to play a role in nurturing national unity. Contemporary university students are the backbone of the modernization drive; they are the hope of the country's future development and their perceptions and attitudes on the issue of national unity are directly affecting the entire society and the nation. Therefore, to strengthen ethnic unity of contemporary university students is also very important. Within the framework of national unity, this research aimed at examining the efforts done and challenges in nurturing national unity at the university level. It also examined the possibility of implementing/practicing dialogue programme as a way to foster national unity at the university level. Mixed mode method has been used to study the perceptions of various university stakeholders. 420 survey form were distributed and collected from respondents. There are more than 99% of respondents aware the importance of national unity both the university level and national level, however, there are more than 80% of the respondents supported that at the same time, there are also negative issues on national unity at the university level (university students are not in favour of nurturing national unity at the university level). This indicated the efforts of promoting/nurturing national unity at the university level are still not sufficient or perhaps a new method (practice of dialogue) of nurturing national unity among the university students should

be introduced. Feedbacks from interviewees also indicated that a more interactive and proactive way of teaching during the TITAS/Ethnic Relations Courses should be encouraged so that the good policies/concepts/ideology introduced to promote national unity could be fully reflected via practices.

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ABSTRAK

Perpaduan nasional senantiasa dijadikan tema/focus utama dalam perancangan pembangunan Malaysia semenjak kemerdekaan pada tahun 1957. Namun, ketegangan akibat daripada konflik atau masalah kepelbagaian bangsa dan agama yang asyik dipolitikkan yang kian menimbul telah mengingatkan kita supaya memikir dan menilai balik scenario dan situasi perpaduan nasional di Malaysia yang ada pada hari ini. Sekolah seringkali dipilih sebagai tempat yang penting untuk memupuk perpaduan nasional. Namun, dengan hanya memupuk perpaduan nasional di peringkat sekolah sahaja tidak dapat menangani isu-isu perpaduan nasional dengan secara menyeluruhnya. University, tempat di mana pemimpin masa depan dilahirkan juga perlu memainkan peranannya dalam menggalakkan usaha memupuk perpaduan nasional. Pelajar universiti kontemporari merupakan tulang belakang pemacu pemodenan; mereka adalah harapan pembangunan masa depan negara, persepsi dan pandangan mereka terhadap isu perpaduan negara secara langsungnya akan membawakan kesan kepada masyarakat dan negara. Sehubungan itu, pengukuhan perpaduan etnik antara pelajar universiti kontemporari juga amat penting. Dalam rangka perpaduan nasional, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji usaha-usaha yang telah dilakukan dan cabaran-cabaran yang dihadapi dalam usaha memupuk perpaduan nasional di peringkat universiti. Kajian ini juga bertujuan untuk mengkaji kesesuaian menggunakan program dialog sebagai satu cara untuk memupuk perpaduan negara di peringkat universiti. Metodologi berbentuk campuran telah digunakan untuk mengkaji perspektif pelbagai pihak kepentingan universiti. Sejumlah 420 borang soal-selidik telah diedarkan dan dikumpul. Terdapat lebih daripada 99% responden bersetuju bahawa perpaduan negara bukan sahaja penting di peringkat university, malah di peringkat kebangsaan, Namun, terdapat lebih daripada 80% responden menyokong bahawa pada masa yang sama, terdapat juga isu-isu negatif

perpaduan negara di peringkat universiti iaitu pelajar universiti tidak berminat untuk melibatkan diri dalam usaha memupuk perpaduan nasional di peringkat universiti. Ini telah menunjukkan bahawa usaha-usaha memupuk semangat perpaduan nasional di peringkat universiti masih tidak memadai ataupun satu kaedah baru (amalan dialog) yang dapat memupuk perpaduan antara pelajar universiti perlu diperkenalkan. Maklumbalas sesi temubual juga menyatakan bahawa cara pengajaran yang lebih interaktif dan proaktif dalam Kursus TITAS/Hubungan Etnik perlu digalakkan supaya dasar-dasar/konsep/ideologi baik yang diperkenalkan untuk menggalakkan semangat perpaduan negara dapat dicerminkan sepenuhnya melalui pengamalan.

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DEDICATION

To my parents

Mr. Chang Ah Sam & Mdm. Ooi Sok Hong

who have supported me, and guided me
through good times and bad times.

Their understanding, endless patience and encouragement
are deeply appreciated.

It is to them that I dedicate this thesis
for without them, I would not be who I am today.

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LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

NEP	New Economic Policy
NEP	National Education Policy
NLP	National Language Policy
CPPS	Centre for Public Policy Studies
JPNIN	Department of National Unity and Integration
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia
KLIUC	Kuala Lumpur Infrastructure University College
OUM	Open University Malaysia
IKLIN	Institute of Research and National Integration Training
UniMAP	Universiti Malaysia Perlis
UMCCD	University of Malaya Centre for Civilisational Dialogue
UM	University of Malaya
RIMUP	Student's Integration Plan for Unity
NOC	National Operations Council
UMNO	United Malays National Organisation
USM	University Science Malaysia
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ACCIN	Allied Coordinating Committee of Islamic NGOs
YMCA	Young Men Christian Association
ABIM	Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia
MCCBHS	Malaysian Consultative Council for the Buddhists, Christians, Hindus and Sikhs
BITRA	Bishop's Institute of Inter-religious Affairs

ALIRAN	Malay for National Consciousness Movement
UUM	Universiti Utara Malaysia
Q&A	Question & Answer

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Chapter 1

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is often used as a prime example of society that is severely divided by ethnicity (Saad, 2012). The country is also among the few pluralistic societies that have achieved some measure of success in creating a balance between ethnic groups and enjoying political stability. The efforts of integrating national unity in the diverse group of ethnics have been, and remain in the hearts of all Malaysians that endeavours for peace (Saad, 2012). National unity has thus becomes one of the fundamental themes for nation building since the independence of Malaya followed by the formation of Malaysia on September 16, 1963 (Jayasuria, 2010). Today, the topic on ethnic dimension is commonly discussed in Malaysia. This concern, especially on how to unite the multi-ethnic society, has been a constant topic of debate among the policy makers and has become society's major priority. The efforts to promote national unity have become a critical and important focus during the designing and implementation of many public policies in Malaysia.

Malaysia, in response to the ethnic disturbances in the year 1969, introduced the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1971. The main objectives of the NEP were to reduce poverty irrespective of race, to eliminate identification of race in accordance to economic function and activities and to reduce income distribution gaps between races (Economic Planning Unit, 2012). More than three decades later, the aim to promote national unity remains important as reflected in the National Vision Policy that was introduced in 2007.¹

Datuk Seri Mohd. Najib Razak, the 6th Prime Minister of Malaysia in his speech in conjunction with the Malaysia 52nd Independence Day in 2009 stated that, the biggest challenge faced by Malaysian citizens today is strengthening linkages by demolishing the

¹ In year 1991, aspects of the policy changed and were implemented as the National Development Policy (1991 – 2000), with a further change in thrust under the National Vision Policy (2001 – 2010).

walls of segregation amongst the multi-ethnic groups. If precautions are not taken, there is a risk of losing the peace and harmony that Malaysians enjoy today. This basic idea (to promote national unity) has been passed on amongst the country's leaders who believed that the sustainability of the country's development and peace is directly influenced by the strength of unity amongst the people of Malaysia (Pandian, 2010).

This study is to examine the current perception of scenario of national unity at the university level taking University of Malaya as the case study. Besides identifying the challenges in nurturing national unity, it also explores the perspectives of university students of different ethnicity and experts on ethnic relations in the country on issues related to national unity at the university level. This study also intends to explore the possibility of promoting dialogue as one of the methods to nurture national unity at the university level. Data collection for this study utilized both qualitative and quantitative data in order to better understand the research problem (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The method of data collected is mixed in this research as it is believed that one type of method (quantitative or qualitative) is not sufficient to develop a complete picture of the current perception national unity scenario at the university level in Malaysia. An interview session was arranged with a staff from the Department of National Unity and Integration (JPNIN) to gain a better understanding of what has been done by the government especially JPNIN to promote national unity at the university level, and to identify the factors that led to the abandonment of national unity activities in the university milieu. In the second phase, quantitative and qualitative approaches were used. Survey forms were distributed to university students and an open-ended interview with an expert on ethnic relations in the country was carried out. A total of 420 sets of survey form were collected from University of Malaya undergraduate students, intake session of 2011/2012, concurrently, an interview with an expert on ethnic relations in the country

was conducted. The purpose of using a quantitative method was to be able to “measure” the perceptions of students on issues related to national unity at the university level. Meanwhile, the interview with ethnic relations expert was to seek his views on national unity issues, especially on the challenges of promoting national unity at the university level.

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic society which is made up of different races, religions and languages amongst its 28 million people (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2010). Given its strategic geographical location at the crossroad of trading routes in the Malay Archipelago between China and India, Malaysia is home to a population that is ethnically, religiously, culturally and linguistically diverse with three major ethnic groups — Malay, Chinese, and Indian — and several other indigenous tribes.

Historically, for centuries, Malacca — located on the West Coast of the peninsula — acted as an *entrepôt* for traders from India, China and other regions of the world, bringing diversity in terms of ethnicity, religion and culture to the region. Since beginning of the sixteenth century (1511 AD - 1957 AD), the country that is now Malaysia was colonized by four different powers (Portuguese, Dutch, British and Japanese), further adding to the diversity.

Ethnic and cultural diversity in Malaysia is reflected in the wide variety of languages spoken and religions practiced in the country; even within the same ethnic group, a wide variety of traditions prevail. Such intra- and inter-ethnic diversity has made the creation of a sense of national identity more complex and this is the destiny of Malaysia that must

be accepted by all the Malaysians otherwise there is a big possibility that we will face with intra-ethnicity prejudice and conflict in Malaysia.

For years Malaysians struggle to accept this, but independent brought all together. Leaders from each dominant ethnic sat together, planned and acted wisely with great abilities of negotiations and tolerance to achieve the peak of the nation struggle – the independent. A country had thus born in year 1957, Malaya and at year 1963 again, to a new country, Malaysia, comprising a huge diversity of ethnicity, religions and cultures. In retrospect, this marked new beginning for Malaysians (Cahoon, 2015).

Although Malaysia gained her right to rule the land independently, Malaysians had to deal with the clash of values, norms and interest. 59 years later, Malaysia faces increasing tensions arising from this fount of diversity, specifically, from the politicization of race and religion. Since independence, Malaysians have witnessed some ethnicity conflicts that caught the attention of citizens and the government. These tragedies are not just about the stratifying differences in socio-economic and socio-cultural interactions but are also linked to national integration and identity issue; for example the race riot on 13 May 1969. Many believe that this was an event that could have been avoided given that there were many incidences that gave the signs prior to this incident, especially conflicts between ethnic groups, particularly between the Malay and Chinese ethnic groups and in general between the indigenous and non-indigenous groups (Othman, 1982). Another incident took place, this time between Indians and Malays on March 10, 2001 due to a misunderstanding which caused the death of six (6) people and forty (40) others injured in several villages. These examples of incidences have enforced the importance of national unity in order to create a safer and more harmonious Malaysia (Suratman, Ripin, Awang, Sayed Ahmad, & Haron, 2007).

Malaysia has been free of ethnic bloodshed since 1969 and hardly experience major ethnic riots, yet, numerous government policies and laws that differentiate between ethnics in Malaysia still make some feel that they are the target of discrimination and, as such, there remains much room for Malaysians to understand one another and to see each other as equals. As a result, several policies, such as the National Education Policy (NEP) and the National Language Policy (NLP) were enacted to promote a common curriculum across the different types of schools, in order to foster national unity and a common sense of identity (David & Yee, 2009). Moreover, of late, there has also been much discussion indicating the school as an important place where national unity may be nurtured. This is because students have the opportunity to interact with others of different ethnic origins. This indeed provides ample opportunity for integration, particularly if the schools and their teachers are proactively guide integrative activities.

However, previous researches have shown that young Chinese Malaysians and their parents are considerably dissatisfied with the state of the educational system when it comes to promoting national unity. Concerning numbers of households, The Centre for Public Policy Studies (CPPS)'s Minda Muda study indicated that 64% of Chinese parents feel that the education system prepares students to be tolerant toward those of other races and religions, as opposed to 78% of Malay parents and 83% of Indian parents. The Merdeka Research Centre Education System Perceptions Survey showed that 86% of Malaysians believe that a national education convention should be created, involving all races in order to review various aspects of national education policies. The survey further indicated that 42% of Malaysian youth rejects a quota system² (The Economist, 2013) for admissions to public universities (CPPS Policy Factsheet, 2009).

² Quota System is a system where most universities in Malaysia reserve 70% or more of their places (university student admissions) for bumiputras.

As such, the evidence seems to show that just focusing on schools would only be tinkering on the edge of the issue of national unity. The 'unity training' received through the school's curricular does not prepare students to handle reality. For example, there have been reports where students who score straight A's in their examinations were denied scholarships whereas those with lesser qualifications were successful. As a result, many youths felt alienated and were forced to either study abroad, or attend private institutions for further studies. At home, parents may indulge in bitter banter with visitors about the inequalities in life for them and their kids as the minority ethnic group in the country. In the face of this and other difficult realities, whatever values of unity minority students have imbibed at school are often rapidly undone. Thus, national unity activities at the school level could be greatly consolidated through a genuine revisiting of current policies, in which students at institutions of higher learning could participate openly as well, as Malaysians of all backgrounds strive together to create a more unified and a more equitable Malaysia.

In spite of the aforementioned concerns, Malaysians are generally pleased with the progress the country has made balancing its diversity. Yet, there is still significant room for improvement to ensure that every Malaysian believes that there is a place of equal standing for each individual as citizens of this country. It is the Parliament's responsibility to chart the country's direction. Today, national unity has officially become a key factor of government policy. Therefore, in order to promote the spirit of national unity and respect for each other, the Department of National Unity and Integration (JPNIN) was established. In order for the country to formulate and implement tertiary education policies to build a cohesive and integrated society, a strong and resolute government is needed to guide the nation through the transition and ensure sustainability. Therefore, it

would be very meaningful for the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Department of National Unity and Integration (JPNIN) to develop a higher education policy that encompasses the need of all Malaysians regardless of race or religion. Such a policy would inculcate and nurture national consciousness via a common curriculum or course on national unity. This would indirectly foster national unity at the university level.

Some of the recent activities launched by JPNIN and MoE to promote national unity at the university level include the following:

1. **The Kuala Lumpur Infrastructure University College (KLIUC) Unity Run 2009 in Ikram Park, Kajang**

The inaugural KLIUC Unity Run 2009 was held on Saturday, 15th August 2009 with the support from the Department of National Unity and Integration (JPNIN) and Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (MoHE). The event was designed to cultivate unity among Malaysians in conjunction with Independence Month celebration in the year 2009 (News@KLIUC, 2010).

2. **The Lifelong Learning Programme offered by Open University Malaysia (OUM)**

A memorandum of understanding between OUM and JPNIN was signed on May 19, 2005 in Puchong, Selangor. The agreement states that the OUM will coordinate and offer programmes and special courses for the Institute of Research and National Integration Training (IKLIN), an institute under the purview of JPNIN. The Programme and the courses are designed around the concept of lifelong learning. They focus on unity and national integration, and are offered to target groups like the Unity Service Officer Group, Instructor and Assistant

Instructor Teaching Service for Unity *Tabika* Group and the Group of Neighbourhood / Community Association Leaders (OUM Today, 2010).

3. **Inter Higher Education Institution 2010 National Unity and Integration Debate Championship**

In 2010, the competition was held at Universiti Malaysia Perlis (UniMAP) from 16 to 20 October 2010. A total of 22 institutions, comprising of 18 public institutions and 4 private institutions of higher learning, participated. Among the objectives of this programme are: 1) to provide opportunities to undergraduate students to be involved in activities related to national unity and integration; 2) to raise awareness among the students about their roles in assisting the Government in cultivating and fortifying the spirit of national unity and integration; 3) to encourage partnership between the Government and the private sector in organizing activities that nurture national unity and integration; and 4) to foster the spirit of unity, patriotism and good values among students and citizens of this country (Department of National Unity and Integration, 2010).

Nowadays, issues concerning the adoption and implementation of dialogue are also an important topic in sustaining peace and harmony within the society and nation. Even the United Nations General Assembly in year 1998 announced year 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. This declaration signalled that any tension and conflict should and could be resolved through dialogue. In general, conflicts around the world happen not just because of integrity but leaders in civil society involving all sectors including economic, politic, social, religion and science and technology.

Indeed, the people of the world could not avoid themselves from the differences in biological, demographic, geographic and diversity of individuals in the society, but this kind of situation should be well-handled and managed. Serious attentions on various differences and diversity are also needed even in smaller community. Therefore, the way to close the gap between misunderstanding and mutual understanding is through dialogue as it is to be said and highlighted to be the most effective method (Chang, Baharuddin, & Muhammad, 2013).

The world has seen several incidences caused by misunderstandings or lack of communication, resulting in conflict and tension between civilizations, for example the invasion of the Babri Mosque in 1992 in Delhi – an act of hatred and extremism against the minority Muslim community by Hindu extremists who allegedly killed thousands (Muzaffar, 2003). In Indian's history, a Muslim army commander had destroyed Hindu temples even though such acts are prohibited by Islamic law. Conversely, Hindu kings acted to kill those who were of Islamic faith. Before the advent of Islam in India, the Buddhist worshippers destroyed Hindu temples and vice versa (Muzaffar, Radzi, Musa, & Marsuki, 2001). These all examples events were the results of lack of understanding among civilizations and the lack of positive interaction.

Universities around the globe are mainly focusing on academic and also the marketability of graduates. There are only a handful of universities focusing on activities designed to foster unity among students. For these universities, dialogue has yet to be used in the framework of promoting national unity. Through dialogue, opinions are formed; questions are examined and the implications of discussion are concluded. Within the framework of national unity, dialogue can be used as a tool of correction, construction and self-evaluation. It is a tool of consultation, mutual advice and cooperation in

righteousness and piety. Errors can be corrected and deficiencies can be addressed when the government welcomes dialogue and encourages society to accept criticism and revision. When this happens, dialogues will be educational and systematic; deeply enriching unity within the nation. Until then, common consensus can, at best, be achieved only indirectly between the different ethnic groups. Thus, one of the aims of the present research is also to study the possibility of systematically implementing dialogue programme as a tool for strengthening national unity.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

What are the evidences that would suggest we are moving towards national unity? Is there any evidence indicating that national unity exists? The evidence is this; in comparison to many other multi-ethnic societies in the world like Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia, Lebanon and Ireland, Malaysia has had minimal inter-communal violence. Since the independence, the government of Malaysia, particularly JPNIN, has organized various activities aimed at promoting the importance of national unity and most of the activities are especially designed for students at primary and secondary school levels. Research has shown that efforts of promoting national unity at the pre-school, primary and secondary school levels would be more impactful as compared to focusing at university level as students learn faster and easily moulded at a younger age. Nevertheless promoting national unity at university level is equally as important. However, minimal activities been organized and minimal efforts have been put into promote national unity at the university level. Similarly, dialogue as a systematic method for understanding the values of different ethnic groups making up the national populace has yet to be practiced or institutionalized. This research is therefore important to explore the different perspectives of stakeholders on the importance of national unity at university level so that more efforts and a better way of promoting national unity at the university could be implemented and practiced.

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present research aims to promote and argue for dialogue as a tool to foster national unity among students at university level in Malaysia. The objectives of the research are as follows:

1. To explore the achievements/activities aimed to promote national unity organized by the JPNIN in universities.
2. To explore the different perspectives – University of Malaya students and experts of ethnic relations in the country on issues related to national unity at university level
3. To identify the challenges of nurturing national unity at university level.
4. To examine the possibility of implementing/practicing dialogue programme as a way to foster national unity at university level.

1.4 HYPOTHESES

Unity-building activities that are publicity done are mostly focused on primary and secondary school students, yet the impacts of such efforts aimed to promote national unity when the students are at the university level is not great. While university students of all backgrounds are aware of the importance of national unity; both the university and university students still lack interest in organizing or participating in activities aimed to promote national unity at the university level as they mainly focus on the marketability of graduates and achieving a better academic performances.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Generally, this study aims to explore how dialogue can be used as a tool to nurture national unity at the university level. This study further aims to understand the different

perspectives – university students and expert of ethnic relations in the country on the issues related to national unity at the university level. Hence, it poses the following questions and considerations:

1. What are the impacts/achievements of the activities/efforts done aimed to promote national unity organized by the JPNIN at the university level?
2. What are the perspectives and standpoint of university students and expert of ethnic relations in the country on issues related to national unity at the university level?
3. What are the challenges of nurturing national unity at the university level?
4. How can dialogue programme be practiced / implemented as a way to foster national unity at the university level?

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

It is hoped that the findings of this study will be useful in determining if the current efforts done by government and university have been effective in national unity. The output (policy recommendations) will be useful for the government and society to promote the practice of dialogue as a tool for nurturing national unity at the university level.

1.6.1 POSITIVE IMPACT TO THE COUNTRY

National unity in Malaysia is the key factor for a better and harmonious life among the people in the country. National unity is important to ensure that the people unite and live in peace and harmony. This is the ultimate goal of government which should be nurtured in the people of this country, especially at all levels of education. The need for understanding and tolerance between the different ethnic groups are pre-requisites that must be practiced by the people of Malaysia, in order to establish a harmonious nation in Malaysia. National unity is the basic foundation for social harmony and stability, for only

a nation with social harmony and stability can ensure and sustain all aspects of development in the nation. National unity should be the common interest for the people of Malaysia. As such, every university student are the builders and protectors of national unity. Therefore, we must strengthen the culture of contemporary university education ideology of national unity, and actively promote national unity via practical problems solving, moving from theory to practice, objectively understanding, analysing and solving the problems, and thus ensuring long-term stability and social harmony of the country. This study is important to identify the roles the university can take in promoting national unity and to build ethnic harmony at the university level in Malaysia. The university's role and support of the government's intention to promote national unity would be the foundation of building a united multi-ethnic society that lives in harmony.

1.6.2 ADDITIONAL INPUT TO THE DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL UNITY AND INTEGRATION (JPNIN)

The Department of National Unity and Integration (JPNIN) is a department under the Prime Minister Office. The establishment of JPNIN with its major objective is to promote national unity and to ensure that harmonious relationship among the people in Malaysia is sustained. This study is expected to give additional input to the JPNIN in developing better programmes/activities that can assist in promoting national unity at the university level. It is hope that this study can assist JPNIN especially under that programmes that aim at promoting national unity at the university level.

1.6.3 SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO ENRICH THE THEORY OF NATIONAL UNITY

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic country that makes national unity a priority in its bid to build a harmonious society. The youth of today are the future of the nation. The nation's

development affects the generation of tomorrow; in fact the whole society. Therefore, the analysis of current university education system on national unity and exploring ways and means of promoting national unity in order for the country to develop definitely provide reliable theoretical basis to increase the awareness of national unity among the students at the university. Ethnic relations is one of the compulsory subjects offered with the objective to foster and strengthen the relationship between students in public higher learning institutions. This course was introduced to discuss the importance of mutual understanding and tolerance in creating a harmonious multi-ethnic society. The findings of this study will then provide new exploration and encourage in-depth research on a better way of teaching this course to effectively promote the understanding of values of different ethnic groups and as a result to promote the importance of national unity and nation building for a modern Malaysia in line with Vision 2020

1.6.4 IMPORTANCE TO HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS

Ethnic relations was introduced as a compulsory subject especially in public universities. Higher learning institutions lack experts who are the point of reference to on ethnic relations so that all the objectives outlined will be achieved, in order to build and strengthen inter-racial relationships in Malaysia. The output of this study will be important to higher learning institutions as a point of reference on promoting national unity at the university level.

1.6.5 IMPORTANCE TO CENTRE FOR CIVILISATIONAL DIALOGUE

The University of Malaya Centre for Civilisational Dialogue (UMCCD) was established in 1996, with its main focus on identifying and articulating values that may form the basis of a common platform for solving issues and problems commonly encountered across and within cultures and civilizations. Thus, this study is important to UMCCD to look at the

issues related to ethnic relations and national unity at the university level. This study also encourages UMCCD to conduct in-depth research on how civilizational dialogue could be practiced / implemented as one of the important tools / mechanisms to promote national unity and world peace.

1.7 RATIONALE BEHIND THE STUDY

This study is important because the need to move towards national unity should not be overlooked and should not only be encouraged at particular levels of education only. National unity should be promoted to each and every citizens as only when citizens are united can Malaysia see peace and harmony.

1.8 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study is conducted at the university level, which is at the University of Malaya (UM) Main Campus as the case study. UM was selected as the target university because it is the oldest (110 years old) local public university in Malaysia. It has witnessed the development of Malaysia since early independent to the current period. UM is also among the many local public universities with a population of students from different ethnicity. In addition, UM shows strong interest and experience in the field of civilisational dialogue and national unity as UM is the only university that has a Centre for Civilisational Dialogue.

The surveys were distributed only to local undergraduate students at the University of Malaya, intake session 2011/2012 data collection exercise was conducted during the second semester of the session 2011/2012 until the first semester of the session 2012/2013, which is from 13 February 2012 to 12 December 2012 (10 months) at the University of Malaya.

1.9 KEY TERM DEFINITION

1.9.1 HARMONY

The term harmony is derived from the Greek word ἁρμονία (harmonía), which means "joint, agreement, concord". The word harmony used in this study means the peaceful way of living among the citizens in Malaysia of different ethnic, language, skin color and religion.

1.9.2 INTER-ETHNIC RELATION

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic country. Its population is made up of Malays, Chinese, Indians, and the aborigines of the peninsula and East Malaysia. Inter-ethnic relation in this study means the relationship between the different ethnicities in Malaysia.

1.10 STRUCTURE OF STUDY

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter will introduce the study topic, which is national unity at the university level. It provides an introduction to the diversity in Malaysia and the importance of promoting national unity especially in a multi-ethnic society like Malaysia. In this chapter, a brief background, objectives, methodology and limitation of the study are also stated. The structure of the study and definition of terms are also explained in this chapter.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter will go into detail the study in terms of history background, definitions and further information that will provide a deeper understanding to the topic of study. Chapter 2 also reviews why national unity is important to Malaysia and how government policies have change over time yet with the constant aim to promote national unity. This chapter

also explores the role of universities in promoting national unity. Lastly, this study also examines how dialogue could be used as an effective and efficient way of promoting national unity at the university level. The literature review looks at earlier related studies with the view of justifying why the topic chosen (this study) is one that has not been given proper attention to, before this.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the various methods used in gathering important, primary and relevant data for this study in detail. This includes the use of different methods, instruments, and procedures in this study.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

Chapter 4 discusses on the various perspectives of university students and experts of ethnic relations in the country on issues related to national unity. It looks to the effectiveness of steps taken by the government in promoting national unity. This chapter also tables the general results from the survey conducted according to area of study. The survey questions are then charted out by question which will thereafter be analyzed. Analysis will be done from an overall as well as granular point of view. A comparison between the three different groups (staff from JPNIN, university students and expert on ethnic relations) will also be conducted. It also touches on reasons behind choices made and opinions formed.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This chapter concludes the study by focusing on the research objectives and offers suggestions for future areas of research based on the results obtained from this study.

1.11 CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, the efforts to promote national unity at the pre-school, primary and secondary school level would only be tinkering on the edges of the issue of national unity. Efforts to foster national unity are equally as important at the university level. This has caused the surface ‘unity training’ received during school time is set to evaporate into oblivion when graduates are confronted head-on with concrete realities on the ground. According to previous researches, the attention on the importance of national unity at the university has and continues to be neglected by most of the university stakeholders like lecturers and students. Hence, it is high time that the Malaysian government, universities and public pay attention to the need as well as the importance of looking at the issues related to national unity at the university level in Malaysia.

Chapter 2

University of Malaya

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Recently there has been much discussion on national unity and integration in the multi-lingual, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious society of Malaysia despite 50 years of independence. National unity and integration amongst the citizens is directly related to inter-ethnic relations. According to previous researches, despite the relatively long period of independence, the younger generations are still segregated by ethnicity and religion both consciously and unconsciously. In order to address this weakness, the government has developed a number of programmes to encourage the different ethnic groups in Malaysia to socialize and mix with each other. For example the government allocated RM 25.8 million for the implementation of the Student's Integration Plan for Unity (RIMUP). This programme aims to create an environment where primary and secondary students are encouraged to socialize with one another and learn about each other's cultures and customs. Moreover, a compulsory subject called "Ethnic Relations" was also introduced in all public universities in 2007 to inculcate the understanding of the different values, cultures and challenges of the various ethnic groups in Malaysia. Besides raising awareness on the concept of ethnic relations, this subject also allows students to engage in the creative learning about the experience of the multi-ethnic society. All these efforts suggest the importance of racial harmony and understanding in nation-building especially in a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural country like Malaysia.

However, it is important to examine the history of Malaysia in order to better understand the issues related to inter-ethnic relations and national unity. For example, the 13 May 1969 riots, incidents in Kampung Rawa in Penang in 1998 and in Kampung Medan and Petaling Jaya in 2001 (Jayum Anak Jawan, 2006), all indicate that ethnic is a pressing issue. The riots on 13 May 1969 were actually the turning point for ethnic relations in

Malaysia but people failed to understand the importance of good and sustainable inter-ethnic relations. Investigations later revealed that the Kampung Medan incident happened was actually an inter-ethnic confrontation due to a simple misunderstanding (Jayum Anak Jawan, 2006). This also shows that the understanding between different ethnic groups is important and in order to avoid such conflicts, the culture of practicing dialogue should be encouraged.

Of late, there has been much discussion identifying the school as the important place where national unity should be nurtured. Many efforts have been made to promote national unity in schools especially pre-schools and primary schools. As such, efforts to promote the importance of national unity should be carried out continuously and consistently throughout the whole educational system from pre-school to university level in Malaysia so that 'unity training' will remain when they graduate from university. The values and practices of civilizational dialogue such as to be explained in Chapter 4 should be promoted and implemented during the daily teaching and learning process too so that students with such skills are able to communicate/dialogue well with others that might have different background or standpoints.

In this chapter, the researcher did some reviews on the related literature especially on inter-ethnic relations and also current issues related to national unity in Malaysia. This chapter also provides basic guidelines and fundamental research on the importance of using dialogue as the best way to promote national unity and strengthen inter-ethnic relations in Malaysia.

2.1 NATIONAL UNITY/NATIONAL INTEGRATION

According to the Department of National Unity and Integration, national unity is "a situation in which all citizens from the various ethnic groups, religions, and states live in peace as one united nationality, giving full commitment to national identity based upon the Federal Constitution and the *Rukun Negara* (National Ideology)."

Baharuddin (2007) defined integration as a process that creates a national identity among a separate group in terms of cultural, social and political position. While unity can be define as processes that unite the whole community and country to create a sharing value and identity of oneness in order to love and be proud of the country.

Meanwhile, Abdullah (2010) defined unity integration as a process to unite a community under one national identity. These kind of process can be cultivated via the integration of the territory, economic, culture, social, education and political dimensions of life. In the Malaysian context, integration and unity in Malaysia do not show much on assimilation elements, but it is more to integration, accommodation and acculturation.

According to Ismail (2003), national unity is the unification of people of various races with different cultures under one form of national identity that is more specific, yet can be accepted by most of the ethnic groups in this country. The author also emphasized that in order for Malaysia to move towards national unity, besides looking at the similarities on the cultural elements that can be shared together, efforts to reduce the gap of socio-cultural among the different ethnic groups is also important. The author also felt that the process moving towards national unity is a very tough matter to achieve due to the differences in the socio-cultural among the various ethnic groups as in generally, conflicts will still occur directly or indirectly. Ideally, Ismail (2003) said that the best way to

promote national unity is to find a national symbol or ideology as the basis for the national identity that is accepted by all the ethnic groups.

In Malaysia, there have been many efforts made by the government to promote national unity. *Wawasan 2020* (Vision 2020), a government policy targeting developed status for Malaysia by the year 2020, names national unity as a key component of a developed country. The “*Bangsa Malaysia*” policy emphasises "people being able to identify themselves with the country, speak *Bahasa Malaysia* (the national language of Malaysia) and accept the Constitution." Prior to *Bangsa Malaysia*, the government’s main thrust towards national unity was the National Culture Policy implemented in 1971, which identified “indigenous culture” and Islam as two important bases for national unity. The 2006 National Education Blueprint targets racial polarization in the school system, aiming to use classes and other such activities to bring students together, while at the same time promote Mandarin and Tamil classes in national schools. A committee formed by the National Operations Council (NOC) to study student development at the University of Malaya, after the 1969 racial riots recommended an ethnic quota system in the proportion of 55:45 percent for Bumiputera and Non-Bumiputera students as the basis for admission to universities. This ethnic quota system was in place till it was abolished in 2004 and replaced with the meritocracy system. The National Service programme which commenced in 2003 is designed to address racial polarizations and encourage national unity by bringing youth from various backgrounds together in one setting. The New Economic Policy (NEP) and other associated affirmative action programmes with the main objectives to reduce poverty irrespective of race and to reduce income distribution gaps between races have helped dampen Malay fears of falling behind the rest of the nation socioeconomically, but also led to concerns of government-backed discrimination amongst the non-Malay communities.

2.2 EDUCATION AS A MEDIUM FOR NURTURING NATIONAL UNITY

Given that the education system had been identified to instil national values and a sense of oneness, the government has also developed a number of programmes to encourage the different ethnic groups in Malaysia to socialize and interact with each other. For example the government allocated RM 25.8 million for the implementation of the Student's Integration Plan for Unity (RIMUP) (Bernama.com, 2007). The programme aimed to create an environment where primary and secondary students can interact freely and learn about each other's culture and customs, thus nurturing and promoting unity and racial integration among students. The RIMUP programme, mooted by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in year 1986 when he was the Education Minister, is viewed as the most suitable programme to narrow the racial gap among students of various races and mediums. RIMUP involved national and vernacular schools within the same vicinity to organize activities that encourage students of different races to interact. The RIMUP programme is another measure to strengthen the commonalities between the races. Two (2) main agencies, namely the Education Ministry and the National Unity and National Integration Department at the Prime Minister's Department, collaborated to achieve RIMUP's objective. In addition, collaborations with the Culture, Arts and Heritage Ministry, Information Ministry and several other ministries as well as elected representatives ensured that RIMUP's objectives were achieved. All these efforts suggest the importance of racial harmony and understanding in nation-building especially in a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural country like Malaysia.

Khoo (2009) in his article entitled "Education Policies and National Unity in Tertiary Institution" has basically not discussed about education policies and national unity in tertiary institution. In general, this article only illustrated the author's experience of living

in Malaysia. However, Khoo (2009) in his article mentioned that he was disappointed with the current society that is not looking serious at the research on cultural diversity. The author in his article also emphasized that it is important to study and to know the Malaysia history.

2.3 THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES IN PROMOTING NATIONAL UNITY

Universities have always been highly regarded by society as knowledge generators. John Henry Newman 1909 refers to the university as the ‘School of Universal Learning’ in which the university is a Knowledge Centre that drives scholars of every discipline from all over the world to meet. It is a place where scholars and students exchange ideas and thoughts. John Henry Newman’s definition of a university, however, is not limited to the institution itself only, but also the learning process which covers all areas of life and stresses on real situations and people as the basis to acquiring knowledge (Newman, 1909).

As of today, emphasis on the role of universities over the period of time has changed and the idea or function of a university has stretched far beyond knowledge acquisition or knowledge generator. Discussion on the role and function of a university has entailed the general public to question the contribution of a university to the society and nation.

As stressed by Wilhelm von Humboldt, the social role of university has been slowly losing its importance as the question of a university’s contribution in other domains like society and the nation picks up attention.

Cowan (2005) equates the social role of the university to the German case of strengthening national identity. This was done by teaching the same tradition to all

students to create unity with the objective of producing good citizens who could function well, be ambitious and lastly, contribute to the nation as a whole. According to the author, such traditions were based on literature in the respective language that speaks about a nation's culture. As such, a university's role was to instill such culture in each student to build a cohesive society.

Ooi, Sarjit Kaur, & Sirat (2010) mentioned that the existence of internationalization or globalization drivers have rendered universities a new role. A graduate is expected to not only serve his country by learning his national culture; he also has to learn about global and international affairs in order to be a competitive citizen.

Muzaffar (2010b) has identified the training in the higher education as a ready passport for graduate students to enter into elite society and the dramatic increase in opportunities to study in universities means a greater influx into the upper echelon of profession, commerce and industry apart from the civil service. University has thus become the benchmark for an advanced civilisation with highest community intellectual. The value of a university is measured by the impact it has on the whole community. Therefore, if this is used as a benchmark for a good university, where do Malaysian universities stand?

Education is a lifelong process; people are constantly in need of expanding, deepening and validating existing knowledge. Experiences can not only enrich and strengthen knowledge but also challenge and change existing knowledge on human. Universities should be shouldering this responsibility as they are among the best people (from the academic point) for this role.

Traditionally, universities focus on teaching and research. In their teaching activities, universities provide professional training for high-level jobs, as well as the experiences necessary for character building. However, traditional universities restrict themselves mainly to a close circle of professors and students from the upper strata of society. It produced the elite of the nation, and society had to comply with the elite. Research was the privilege of professors, determined to a large extent by personal interests and their contacts among each other.

The brilliant repertoire of these traditional universities has laid down the basis for the progress of mankind. Sadly, these universities lost contact with society until it was completely isolated and did not understand the issues of its surroundings. This, however, meant deterioration in performance: the ultimate yardstick for measuring the success of a university is the improvement in the lives of the people it serves. The full benefit from a university can be obtained only if the university and society are organically linked together. Simply said, the needs of society have to be at the center of a university's activities, and a flexible adjustment to changing needs is always necessary but lacking all over the world.

According to Betts, Ferrall, & Finnie (2007), the main role of universities is to prepare their students for a successful career in the labor market after they graduate. However, most of us know very little about how universities' educational policies influence the success of their students. It is often said that the success rate of a graduate in the labor market always determined by their field of study and their university's characteristics. Education feeds indirectly into both public and private budgets through productivity gains, earnings power and the tax base.

On July 18, 2004, the Sunday Star reported the former Education Minister, Datuk Dr. Shafie Mohd Salleh's proposal to introduce a subject tentatively called "Ethnic Relations in Malaysia" as part of the curriculum in public as well as private universities in Malaysia. The move was in line with the government's effort to overcome polarization among undergraduates in campuses. Datuk Dr. Shafie surmised that although there were co-curricular activities and the sharing of rooms among different races on campus, inter-ethnic interaction was superficial. Hence, in the quest to produce quality graduates, universities must not neglect the issue of polarization (Chapman, 2004).

However, the burning question is "After the introduction of such a course at university level, has inter-ethnic relationship strengthened and national unity promoted?" and if so, how far has it helped in promoting mutual understanding among the different ethnic groups in universities. Ethnic relations involved learning values like mutual understanding, sharing, empathy and kindness, and it is vital that these values are instilled in an individual's character from a very young age. *Melentur buluh biarlah dari rebungnya*, as the Malay idiom goes and as Socrates had emphasized,

"The beginning is the most important of any work, especially in the case of a young and tender thing, for that is the time at which the character is being formed and the desired impression is more readily taken... Anything that he receives into his mind at that age is likely to become indelible and unalterable"

(as quoted by Plato in The Republic, ca. 375 B.C.E)

University undergraduates are young adults who already have their own predispositions and set ways of thinking and doing things. To change their ways of thinking and doing things may be a formidable task, but not impossible. Since it is uncertain that by

promoting ethnic awareness and consciousness at young age is able to strengthen ethnic relations among the Malaysians, hence, the university should continue to promote healthy inter-ethnic interactions among the undergraduates, so that their understanding and acceptance of these values will be fortified.

In a micro study undertaken by Ong (2004) to look into perceptual patterns of 265 undergraduates from a local private university, it was found that:

- Interactions and choice of friends were generally based along ethnic lines. When asked to name 10 best friends, 84% of the respondents gave mono-ethnic names. When asked to name 10 friends who were of different ethnic groups from them, 40% could not complete the list.

It is therefore not a fallacy to say that prevailing patterns of social interaction in any environment – workplaces, universities or schools are strong manifestations of the value system among the people. Hence, present efforts in addressing these issues at the school level is not enough. In the efforts to promote national unity effectively, policy makers must not under-estimate the role played by the universities and their influences. Continuity and synchronization must start from early childhood level and followed through all the way to university level. Efforts to foster national integration must not be done on an ad-hoc manner but rather, they must be for the long-term, although painstaking at times.

2.4 THE DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL UNITY AND INTEGRATION (JPNIN), PRIME MINISTER'S DEPARTMENT

A multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious society has the innate ingredient for social instability. In such an environment, unity is the key factor in achieving social

stability, in order to enjoy economic growth and wealth generation. Therefore, conscious efforts in forging family, neighborhood and social values must be carried out continuously and consistently especially in multi-ethnic country like Malaysia.

The Department of National Unity and Integration (JPNIN) under the Prime Minister's Department is the main agency responsible for the challenging task of managing unity and integration in Malaysia since its establishment in 1970 following the racial riot on 13th May 1969. The 13th May 1969 incident raised awareness on the importance of tackling racial issues. On 1st July 1969, under The National Operations Council (NOC) or *Majlis Gerakan Negara* (MAGERAN), the National Unity Department (*Jabatan Perpaduan Negara*) headed by Tan Sri Mohd. Ghazali Shafie was established to handle and improve the unity among races at that time (Department of National Unity and Integration, 2006). In the same year, a specific body was also established as a secretariat to coordinate activities related to national unity and goodwill among races. That body was known as the National Goodwill Council (*Majlis Muhibah Negara*) under the governance of the National Goodwill Office (*Pejabat Muhibah Negara*).

On 23rd February 1971, the National Unity Council (*Majlis Perpaduan Negara*) was formed and gazetted under the Essential Regulations, 1971 to replace the National Goodwill Council (Abd Razid, 2014). The council was later transformed into the National Unity Advisory Council (*Majlis Penasihat dan Perpaduan Negara*) under the governance of both the National Unity Department and National Goodwill Office; chaired by the Prime Minister and made up of 51 representatives of various ethnic groups and those experienced in matters of nationhood. On 1st January 1972, the National Unity Department was merged with the National Goodwill Office and subsequently became the Ministry of National Unity. This Ministry was responsible for coordinating the duties of

Goodwill Committees (*Jawatankuasa Muhibah*) and the National Unity Advisory Council at the national level (Abd Razid, 2014).

Following the 1974 general elections, the name of the Ministry of National Unity was changed to the National Unity Board (*Lembaga Perpaduan Negara*) under the Prime Minister's Department (Suppiah, 2003). Subsequently in February 1980, the National Unity Board was merged with *Rukun Tetangga* Secretariat to form the *Rukun Tetangga* and National Unity Secretariat. In January 1983, the Secretariat was renamed as the National Unity Department under the Prime Minister's Department.

On 27th October 1990, the department was placed under the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development and on 27th March 2004, the Department of National Unity was renamed as Department of National Unity and Integration and once again placed under the Prime Minister's Department.

The vision of the National Unity and Integration Department is to be an excellent government agency in efforts to develop a united, farsighted and competent *Bangsa* Malaysia. The department's mission is to nurture tolerance and goodwill through social network and social interaction towards the formation of a united *Bangsa* Malaysia with national identity. In year 2011, the objectives for JPNIN were: 1) to nurture, strengthen and enhance social unity and national integration; 2) to instil, nurture and strengthen the spirit of patriotism and noble values amongst the community; 3) to implement unity programmes and activities and national integrity in line with the objectives of 1Malaysia Concept; and 4) to monitor and coordinate the implementation of programmes and activities under the ministry's policies to spur unity and national integrity.

With more than four decades in managing social and ethnic diversity in Malaysia, the experience gained and the result of a peaceful and harmonious Malaysian society are recognized by international communities as a successful model. The model of managing social and ethnic diversity is presented according to the phases of development covering 1970 till 2012 consisting of Confidence Building (1970 – 2007), strengthening Community Cohesion (1982 – 2004) and Conflict Management (2005 onwards) as well as outline of the issues and challenges of conflict management (Chang, Baharuddin, & Muhammad, 2013).

Phase 1: Confidence Building (1970 – 1981)

Confidence Building involved creating commonality and increasing interaction. Creating commonality is the core foundation for nation building. Historically, under British colonial rule, Malaya has a *laissez faire* language policy. While English was the language of the government administration and commerce, the government allowed the usage of the other vernacular languages for non-official purposes. Thus the Malay, Chinese and Tamil languages flourished among the different communities, reinforced by the separate school system using these vernacular languages as the medium of instruction. Malaya was a classic example of Furnival's 'plural' society³ where different people existed side by side, mingling only in the market place but living in their own separate communities and culture (Furnivall, 1980). As Malaya's independence approached in the mid-50s, the task of integrating the different races became vital, language was seen as one of the key instruments towards unity. Thus, a common language used on daily activities was essential in achieving this objective and Malay became the National Language of Malaysia. During this period, JPNIN introduced unity classes nationwide especially to

³ As defined by FURNIVAL, a plural society is comprised of two or more distinct social orders, living in parallel within one political entity, without much intermingling, and reminds the reader of the image of the "salad bowl" as it is often used to oppose the idealized notion of the American "melting pot".

Chinese and Indians in urban and rural areas to help them understand the National Language. Unity classes brought about better understanding within the Malaysian community and were able to forge cohesion between various ethnic groups.

A common ideology for all Malaysians is necessary for a young independent nation in the process of nation building. With the launch of the *Rukun Negara* in 31st August 1970, a nation that almost floundered on the rocks of racial strife was now set on a charted course to unity through a common ideology practiced by all Malaysian till today.

Instilling the virtues of *Rukun Negara* to the people and their solemn pledge to strive for the realization of a more united Malaysia that is democratic, just equitable, liberal and progressive were the main focus. Every year the pledge is repeated and in doing so, Malaysians are reminded of not only the purpose of the nation but also of the antecedents leading to the birth of the *Rukun Negara* so that they may avoid the pit falls that led to the tragic events of 1969. The focus was on the 5 principles of *Rukun Negara* – Belief in God, Loyalty to King and Country, Upholding the Constitution, Rule of Law and Good Behaviour and Morality.

The *Rukun Negara* has been practiced since its formulation and students were taught from primary level about the need for racial tolerance and understanding as well as working together. More importantly, Malaysians were taught to understand the objectives of the *Rukun Negara* to enhance unity through maintaining a democratic way of life, creating a just society, ensuring a liberal approach to the rich and diverse cultural traditions and building a progressive society oriented to modern science and technology.

The second element in confidence building is increasing interaction between various ethnic groups. This task was carried out by the Goodwill Committees of the Council of Goodwill under the National Goodwill Council through activities related to social interaction and goodwill among races to nurture, enhance and strengthen social unity (Azilawani, 2009). In addition, the Public Relations Council (*Majlis Perhubungan Awam*) established by Tun V.T. Sambanthan under the governance of Ministry of National Unity, with its numerous unit and area communities introduced in late 1974, provides opportunities for face-to-face interactions among various ethnic groups. They were activity-centred and confined to organizing social, cultural and sporting programmes (Suppiah, 2003).

Laying the foundation for nation building, confidence building was crucial during this period. Trust and goodwill were nurtured through a common platform, i.e. the National Language and having a similar ideology – *Rukun Negara* as well as greater interaction through face-to-face interactive programmes. This foundation has enabled the various ethnic groups to forge a greater understanding and tolerance necessary for social stability.

Phase 2: Strengthening Cohesion (1982 – 2004)

With rapid economic growth, rural-urban migration intensified and new townships and residential areas were mushrooming in the early 80's. Community Relations Council, with a rather loose resident and neighbourhood reference unable to foster and instil neighbourliness among the residents that they served. The residents social needs, welfare and well-being became the focal point in fostering community cohesion at the grass root level. The National Unity Board and *Rukun Tetangga* Secretariat were merged to serve the community as an active voluntary body, capable of strengthening relationships between residents in their areas.

With the inclusion of *Rukun Tetangga*, the focus was on strengthening community cohesion through Community Development approach. It basically aims to foster and strengthen the spirit of neighbourliness among the local community through the concept of lifelong education and Community Empowerment Philosophy. There were four (4) bureaus – *Jiran Wanita*, *Jiran Emas*, *Jiran Muda* and *Tunas Jiran* responsible in realizing community programmes. The *Rukun Tetangga* Committee became the focal point for community cohesion activities. They conducted various activities in accordance to local interest and needs such as education, sports and recreation, culture, health, welfare, public amenities and environment, economy, security, religion and social gathering. In addition, Unity Kindergarten and Voluntary Patrol Scheme were integrated into *Rukun Tetangga*. These activities were carried out at the micro level.

Frictions often occurred at the community level due to various factors. These frictions need to be monitored and immediate remedial actions are required to prevent it from turning into racial conflict. A monitoring system called Social Relation Management System was implemented following the racial riot in Kg. Medan in 2001. This monitoring system gathered information related to social issues at the community level. It acts as an early warning system in making predictions and strategizing conflict management at the department level.

At the macro level, integration was carried out through integration visit and orientation courses. JPNIN conducts orientation courses for federal officers in Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak since 1992 to enhance the understanding of the local communities' way of life and basic knowledge of local administration system so that they are sensitive to the people they serve.

Laying the foundation and enhancing the mechanism in managing social and ethnic diversity were the main activities during this period. The important mechanism was the *Rukun Tetangga* which enabled the community themselves to lead and conduct programmes within their own neighbourhood. The basic tenet is a harmonious community creates a harmonious nation.

Phase 3: Conflict Management (2005 onwards)

Constant stability of the social capital must be nurtured and well-managed. Social capital, although is intangible, is crucial for multiracial society. The critical elements of social capital are trust, friendship and reciprocity between various ethnic groups to bond them together to attain a harmonious and a united society.

In view of the importance of social capital, the first 5-year National Unity and Integration Action Plan was drawn up and launched on 10th May 2007. Under this action plan the Department of National Unity and Integration, as the lead agency plays the role of coordinating between various government agencies, the private sector and non-government organization in enhancing unity.

The 5-year Action Plan consists of programmes that can be classified into four (4) inter-related and inter-connected activities – promotion, intervention, recovery and prevention to manage conflicts.

a) Promotion

This is the core component of the 5-year Action Plan. Its aim is to create awareness, to enhance and maintain unity. The promotional activities mostly target children, teenagers and youth. Some of these programmes are:

- Unity camp
- Community games
- *Rukun Negara* Club
- Patriotism programmes
- Seminars and Conferences
- Celebrating Festivals
- Social gatherings
- Publications

Promotional activities enhance the understanding of various ethnic cultures through intensive interaction among the target group. It is through these interactions that mutual trust is cultivated, friendships are fostered and reciprocity is encouraged among the young. Our own childhood experience showed us that the young needs to connect with their peers and form friendships, which in turn teach them social skills. They learn to share, understand each other's culture and accept that people can have shared interests despite different backgrounds. The key features in the promotional activities are mainly tolerance, understanding, sharing, sensitive to each other and working together as a team.

b) Intervention

The department set up a computerized monitoring system called e-SEPAKAT to detect and identify frictions, conflicts and issues that required to be addressed. Weekly analysis and report are submitted to the top management for decision on the level of intervention.

In addition reports on frictions, conflicts and issues were also submitted to the Cabinet and National Security Council on a regular basis. The issues identified were also tabled and discussed at the National Unity Advisory Panel for their views and suggestions on appropriate measures to be taken.

The role of the National Unity Advisory Panel, consisting of distinguished members appointed by the Prime Minister of Malaysia, in conflict management is of great importance. The members advise the Government on issues of race and racial conflict, function as a safety valve in a cauldron when tensions caused by the collision of minds, cultures, races and the rapid pace of change and recommend promotional, recovery and preventive measures. They also monitor and assess the perceptions and emotional climate of different ethnic groups.

Community mediation was introduced as an immediate approach to diffuse frictions. *Rukun Tetangga* Committee members were trained to be community mediator to mediate frictions in their area. The officers of JPNIN were also trained in mediation and also involved in managing mediation. The department is current working closely with the police to enable the mediators to perform their tasks effectively.

c) Recovery

The department undertakes and organizes dialogues as the tool for recovery. This is an effective tool for aggravated parties to voice their concerns and also views. Dialogues enable a complete perspective of the issues involved to be presented to the parties involved. The focus is on correcting the perception and achieving consensus on issues and activities that can promote trust, friendship and reciprocity. A series of religious and

community dialogues lead by the Minister in the Prime Minister's Department have been carried out.

A major step in recovery is the role of *Rukun Tetangga* within the community. Community programmes organized by the *Rukun Tetangga* enable the residents within the area to meet, engage and interact with each other. These activities organized by the residents contribute greatly to harmonising the situation, encouraging cooperation and bonding within the community.

d) Prevention

Activities aimed to prevent/avoid conflict form a major part of the department's annual programme. The department strongly believes that prevention is better than cure because conflict can be very costly, destructive and time consuming. The emotional and psychological impact on each individual tends to be long lasting and may be damaging.

Two major areas – training and research are the focal point in prevention activities. Institute of Research and National Integration Training (IKLIN) was set up in late 2004 to undertake training for *Rukun Tetangga* members, unity kindergarten teachers and the department's staff to enhance their knowledge and skills. Examples of training programmes carried out are as follows:

- Leadership and Management Course for *Rukun Tetangga*
- Diploma in Teaching for Kindergarten Teachers in Collaboration with Ministry of Education Malaysia
- Information Technology Skill Training
- Emotional Quotient Skills Protocol and Social Etiquette
- Workshop for Youth Bureau – Mediation

Researches on the department's programmes, social and ethnic issues enable the department to continuously seek for ways to enhance the approach in managing a complex and plural society. Research grants in areas of concerns were given out annually by the department to universities and individual on competitive basis. The findings and recommendations from the researches were analysed and selected for implementation as corrective and preventive measures in managing social and ethnic diversity.

The conflict management approach currently has been a very important and comprehensive approach for managing social and ethnic diversity which involve 4 interrelated components consisting of promotion, intervention, recovery and prevention. This approach provides a framework for identification, analysis, planning, diagnostic, remedial and prevention to manage the complexity of plural society.

2.5 NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS AND NATIONAL UNITY – SOME REFLECTIONS

What role does the theme of national unity play in the national development plans? Is it an integral part? Is it a major thrust? Or is national unity just a 'catch phrase'? To answer this, a quick view through the nine Malaysia plans was done.

In this study, the researcher decided to focus on only two development plans. The first is the 2nd Malaysia plan (1971 – 1975) where there is a very strong emphasis on national unity and the 9th Malaysia plan (2006 – 2010) where there is very weak emphasis.

2.5.1 NATIONAL UNITY THE CORNER STONE OF THE 2ND MALAYSIA PLAN

The 2nd Malaysia Plan, tabled by Tun Abdul Razak on 25 June 1971, was after the May 13 racial riots. In the foreword Tun Razak states, “The objectives, priorities and strategies of the plan have all been shaped by the overriding need to promote national unity”.

He went on further to state that the Government “will spare no efforts to promote national unity and develop a just and progressive Malaysian society in a rapidly expanding economy so that no one will experience any loss or feel any sense of deprivation of his rights, privileges, income, job or opportunity”.

Chapter 1 of the 2nd Malaysia Plan is entitled the New Development Strategy. The opening paragraph states “National unity is the overriding objective of the country”. The chapter goes on to describe Government’s extension of services with the key phrase “irrespective of race”.

Furthermore, the *Rukun Negara* is referred to as the guiding principle which was “evolved from close consultation and deliberations in the National Consultative Council”.

In reading Tun Razak’s foreword and the opening chapter, one notes that national unity was the overarching framework for greater equity and balance among Malaysia’s social and economic groups. It was also held that national unity could not be fostered if a vast section remain poor and therefore the socio-economic agenda was set to undo the socio-economic imbalance.

2.5.2 9TH MALAYSIAN PLAN'S DILUTION OF NATIONAL UNITY AGENDA

Ninth Malaysia Plan's documents encompass the strategies, programmes and required allocation to realise the National Mission and make Malaysia a country that is more advanced, fair and united. Glance through the 9MP will show that the theme of national unity is mentioned in passing. The Prime Minister's foreword mentions 'to strengthen national unity' but does not indicate the dynamic thrust that is to be expected.

Besides, in defining the national mission, national unity does not surface in any of the five major thrusts for the next 15 years on the path towards Vision 2020. There is only a simple reference related to national unity in page 3 paragraph 3 and page 4 paragraph 7 which stated "...improve national integration and reduce tendencies towards racial polarization". This shows that there is a very weak emphasis on national unity in 9MP.

2.6 ETHNIC RELATIONS AND NATIONAL UNITY/NATIONAL INTEGRATION: DEVELOPMENTS AND PROBLEMS IN MALAYSIA

Historically, Malaysia is a country that is governed via the Malay Polity System or Malay Nationalism System (Suntharalingam & Ismail, 1985). The Malay Nationalism System begins with the word "Malay" or "The Land of the Malays" itself, which means also the territories and islands in the region. The names – Malay and The Land of the Malays, are also well known in the China, India and even the West. This is evident in Melayu (I-Tsing), Malaiur (Marco Polo), Malaiyur (inscription Tanjore-Sanskrit in India), Ma-Li-Yu-R (Yuan Shih/Chinese), Mailiur (Siam) and Malayo (Albuquerque/ Portuguese).

According to Muzaffar (2005), Malaysia is a country that is governed by the Malay Nationalism System. The non-Malays who obtained their citizenship were because of the Malays' decision to accommodate and provide open citizenship to those who are entitled

regardless of their background. As a result, over one million non-Malays, mostly immigrants, had been automatically granted their citizenship. With just stroke of the pen, the demographic of the country changed immediately – nearly 40 percent of its citizens were non-Malay. A mono-racial society had become a multi-racial society. The formation of such multi-racial society in Malaysia has never happened in the world history. For example, Filipino and Vietnamese Nationalism produced Philippine and Vietnam yet the Malay Nationalism who fought long do not create a Malay Nation, instead it produced a multi-racial society.

Muzaffar (2010a), in chapter one has identified three areas – ‘special position’, political equality and the language and education policy – which have been the fundamental controversies in inter-ethnic relations in Malaysia. The author said that he would still argue that the ‘special position’ is necessary and again, it has to be seen from a historical perspective. Since 1948, the accommodation of the non-indigenous population especially as equal citizens meant that the Malay Nationalism was no longer possible. Unfortunately, the Malay society perceived itself and was perceived by other communities as an economically weak group. Thus, for that reason, the Malay society felt that the ‘special position’ should be continued as they felt that they had to be ‘compensated’. Besides that, the economic divide between the Malays and non-Malays had also complicated the challenge of overcoming ethnic relations in Malaysia. From the author’s analysis, the major cause of ethnic antagonism is the group in power itself and it is also the men at the helm that is the doctor for the disease in Malaysia.

In Chapter Two (2), Muzaffar (2010a) mentioned that the relationship between the New Economic Policy (NEP) and national unity reveals a number of significant causes of and remedies for what is generally accepted as a situation where Malaysia has yet to be

successfully moving toward national unity. Government leaders feel that poverty is the main factor causing disunity in Malaysia. The author also points out that the government sees poverty, especially poverty among the Malay masses, the paucity of Malay participation in urban jobs and the absence of Malay within the entrepreneurial and commercial elite as the major causes of a lack of unity. Besides that, of the government's three dimensions – poverty, urbanization and entrepreneurial elite, Muzaffar felt that it is perhaps the endeavour to eliminate poverty that has the greatest relevance to national unity.

Abdullah (2010) mentioned that the integration and unity among races in Malaysia is a complex matter to be solved. These are due to the facts that the political socialization agents process i.e. history, education, social, economy and politic, are race oriented. In his study, it shows that the political socialization agents contribute to the high level of polarization. Integration and unity among races are only a hope but in reality, racial sentiment still a major challenges in this country (Abdullah, 2006).

According to Ting (1987), the process of achieving integration within the society is not an easy job. Integration is a very complex process. As a researcher, what has been said by Ting is definitely not wrong at all. As we can see nowadays, each ethnic discusses their history, education, social, politic, economic etc. separately. This has been happening even before Malaysia's independence.

Ahmad (2009) mentioned that in order to understand national unity, we need to focus on the nine (9) elements, 1) Shared Vision – we need to have the same vision, 2) Shared Value – we need to hold the shared values, 3) Shared Mission – we need to have the same mission, 4) Mutual Elements – we need to help each other and interact with each other,

5) Tolerance – we should accept the differences of each ethnic and religion, 6) Mutual Understanding – we should try to understand each other, 7) Harmony – we have the responsibility to sustain the harmony, 8) Stability – we need to maintain stability around us and 9) Patriotism – we must love the country and be ready to sacrifice for country and the spirit of patriotism should be cultivated since young. Ahmad also identified four (4) factors that are the current issues for national unity – religion, ethnicity, poverty and political party.

Similarly, Muzaffar (2009) also identified two (2) major challenges that is holding Malaysia back from fully achieving national unity: religion and language. According to Muzaffar, while we may have national unity, yet polarization still exists. Thus, he has suggested three (3) approaches to ensure successful unity. One at the level of consciousness and two at the level of concrete policies. Firstly, all of us should seize what could be described as reactive communal approaches. Before we look at others, we should look at ourselves first and look at how our own communal attitudes impact others. In Malaysia, we have a phenomenon called “closet communalism”.⁴ We can only fight closet communalism if we are prepared to be critical of ourselves first. Secondly, it is very important to direct the nation towards the constitution, *Rukun Negara* and *Wawasan 2020*. Lastly, religion should be the source that brings all ethnic groups together. The final approach is the effort we have to make to show that we care and understand others. As Muzaffar suggested, it is very important to promote the idea of a multi-ethnic civil service and the ability to reach out to others. We need to have empathy and understanding towards each other.

⁴ According to Muzaffar (2009), closet communalism mean when we are in the presence of the other, we are very nice and say nice things but when we are with our own kind, we say all the terrible things about other community.

Chua (2009) mentioned political structure as the grassroots factor that is hindering Malaysia from national unity. Ethno-centric inclinations also tend to grow stronger and have become more pronounced since then. However, the author is positive towards the future as there is an improvement among the youth in appreciating one and other. The author has also identified three (3) major issues that the country needs to look at first – religion, education and language.

According to Ibrahim (2009), one of the issues of national unity is ethnocentrism where we look at the world from our own cultures' view. In other words, Malaysians tend to think mono-culturally rather than multi-culturally. The author claimed that we cannot just depend on *Rukun Negara* and our national cultural policies. What happen on the ground in everyday social reality are important indicators of how the young generation meet and interact. The interaction and bonding formed between different ethnic groups are the basis of unity. There is not much understanding of each other's culture among the young generation. However, they seem to be more nomadic and restless in their ethnic cocoons and are therefore curious about the other cultures. Hence the education system plays a role in facilitating the movement of students from one culture to the other. Cross cultural experiences are very important as different ethnic groups will get to know each other, and form bonds and thus bring about understanding.

In a research done by Yew (1973 & 1982) and Suryadinata (1989) on the Chinese community's education, it was noted that there are differences, in terms of perspective, between Chinese students that studied in Chinese schools and those who studied in national schools (Suryadinata, 1989). Results showed that, Chinese students from national schools were able to mix easily with other ethnics as opposed to Chinese students from Chinese school (Yew, 1982). According to Funston, politics has mainly been

articulated in communal terms. Most political parties were established along ethnic lines, and have sought to maximize political power and economic benefits its respective ethnic group, in areas such as language, education and culture. Conflicting demands have been mediated by leaders of the multi-ethnic governing coalition. These also indirectly mean that, for national integration to happen in the country is said to have a very long way to go.

National integration is paramount to any multi-cultural society. With focus set upon Malaysia, Alatas made a valiant attempt towards shedding light on obstacles that needed to be removed or tackled to achieve national integration (Alatas, 2007). Part of the problem, Alatas opined, is the non-existence of functioning intellectual groups in Malaysia despite the presence of scattered individual intellectuals. This absence takes place because the opinions of experts in the various fields have all be sought after except for those whose opinions really matter, i.e. sociologists, anthropologists and social psychologists. Alatas also held the view that Malaysia has no communal organization (groups with consciousness to protect their own interest and well-being) but does have scattered individual communalists that, on their own, pose no threat. According to him, clashes that occurred in Malaysian history are more politically motivated rather than internally bred communal tension. The author then suggested two factors that would lead to a more successful national integration: (1) the contributions of a strong intellectual group in making socio-political analysis, and (2) a more enlightened public that is equipped with the wisdom to select its leaders scrupulously. In other parts of the article, Alatas brilliantly listed several factors that contributed to the outbreak of riots in urban states. Of all these factors, the most significant within the Malaysian configuration, is the factor of political leadership. Singapore has been spared from strife and conflict due to the presence of well-trained and organized law-enforcement machineries. However,

contributions from intellectuals are still needed to tackle looming problems that may be brought about by the presence of some of the factors mentioned by Alatas. Widening income gap, rapid social change, stereotypes and prejudices, the tendency to find scapegoats for problems faced, and factors from historical and cultural background still need to be contained and even rectified with speed to prevent escalation of discontentment that may sabotage Singapore's efforts towards national integration. In his article, Alatas identified Malaysia's national integration goal as "to develop a sense of nationhood, a sense of common destiny and solidarity embracing the entire population of Malaysia". Yet, this statement must be verified with actual assessments across various societies: how many multicultural countries have similar goals and how many have actually succeeded after decades or even hundreds of years? Achieving everlasting 'solidarity' in the real sense of the word amongst people of different backgrounds, different ethnic groups, different religion and different culture is perhaps too idealistic a goal. Achievement levels are at best passable with compromises made along the way.

Research by Jayum Anak Jawan (2006) indicated that children of the post-independence era simply do not mix as well as their parents or grandparents did or do. The former also understands or cares enough to understand each other as compared to their parents or grandparents. It can be concluded that, ethnic relations are deteriorating instead of improving despite the many measures to improve ethnic relations by each successive government since the late 1960s.

Chan (2004) in his study on undergraduates in the public universities, concluded that hostel roommate preferences on the basis of ethnicity and religion among undergraduates in University Science Malaysia (USM) were statistically correlated with the type of primary schools attended.

Most of the researches showed that Malaysia has not been successful in moving towards national unity due to the lack of understanding among the different ethnic groups and the widening economic gap among its citizens. It also emphasised the importance of instilling the concept of national unity since childhood, especially through education. However, there is also a need to start strengthening the concept of national unity not only at the grassroots level – primary school but also at the higher level – tertiary education.

2.7 THE MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITY IN THE CONTEXT OF PROMOTING NATIONAL UNITY

The increasing Malay representation is most obvious in the recruitment for higher education. Looking at only the enrolment in local universities and colleges, the Malay proportion has increased from 49.7% in 1970 to 65.1% in 1975 while the percentage for all the other communities had dropped substantially (Third Malaysia Plan, 1976 – 1980).

What really highlights non-Malay disenchantment with the National Education Policy (NEP) in a more obvious fashion is the recruitment of students into institutions of higher learning. As we have mentioned there has been a steady decline in recruitment since 1970. Statistics show that in 1970, 42.7% of the intake was Chinese compared to 31.1% in 1975 and in the case of the Indians it was 5.1% in 1970 and 3.3% in 1975. In just five local universities in particular the Chinese percentage had dropped from 49.2% in 1970 to 36.6% in 1975 and with the Indians from 7.3% in 1970 to 5.2% in 1975. By way of comparison the Malay percentage had increased from 39.7% to 57.2% in 1975 (Third Malaysia Plan, 1976 – 1980).

Malaysia, in fact, has been successfully achieved democracy of higher education and contributed graduates that meet the manpower and expertise needed for Malaysia's economic growth over the last three decades. As a knowledge centre in Malaysia, universities provide a significant contribution to the national socio-economic and human development. At this point, the public and private universities have been growing rapidly with the increasing number of students and programmes.

2.8 INTER-CULTURAL/INTER-CIVILISATIONAL DIALOGUE

The acknowledgment of clash of civilization or the increasing widespread of plurality forms the basis for dialogue. How effective a dialogue is depends on the willingness of the dialogue parties to listen to other, openness to learn about the other's cultures, beliefs, and acceptance of the differences in the other. Dialogue requires self-criticism, recognition that no one individual possesses all of the answers, that no individual has ever been deemed perfect throughout history, and that all individual have something to learn from each other (Swidler, 1989).

In a global perspective, the essence of dialogue has been researched upon by many scholars, the most famous Leonard Swidler. In Swidler (1990) explained about the scenarios that are on the ground which, especially after the 2nd world war, eventually led to the decision and option available to mankind being either Dialogue or Death. The third millennium is seen as the curtain raiser and the dawn of the age of dialogue which marks the end of the monologue era and this process was helped and propelled by the paradigm shift that was happening due to the aftermath of the development of technology led by rapid globalization. Swidler has built the ethics of Dialogue Decalogue: Ground Rules for Interreligious, Inter-ideological Dialogue.

According to Baharuddin (2008), the culture of dialogue in Malaysia is still in its early stage and has yet to gain a strong foothold in the society as its emergence is still in its infancy especially regarding the topic of inter-religious dialogue. Having said that, civilisational dialogue is a concept that is fundamental in the context of building a Malaysian civilization that will act as a platform and be a driver to the basic principles of the creation and building of a Malaysian civilization. Global and local factors have joined forces in producing a new form of pressure and need for a culture of dialogue to take hold among the Malaysian society notwithstanding the supposedly late entry of the concept in the local scenario. We need to focus on the need to hold dialogues and why dialogue needs to be given priority today. The research on dialogue can be seen from both perspectives, i.e. the global and local. Undoubtedly, the culture of dialogue in the national context must be further strengthened to bring about a new sense of importance and rejuvenation towards the efforts of enhancing national unity, tolerance and acceptance.

Swidler in his work, *Dialogue in Malaysia and the Global Scenario* argued that dialogue can also be understood as a discussion on a topic or any other matters that involves two or more people which have different views, stands or ideologies with the main purpose or common objective to learn from one another, to change and to lead the way towards a better path agreed by all (Swidler, 2003).

For a country that is pluralistic in nature, where many races, religions, ethnicities and cultures co-exist amongst each other, harmony is vital in ensuring the advancement of such a diversified nation. Hence, dialogue plays an important role in fostering understanding and tolerance within a diversified community. For example in Malaysia, several non-governmental organizations have initiated several sessions of dialogue which mainly focuses on interfaith dialogues.

In 1969, the Roman Catholic Church, in collaboration with ALIRAN, established The Bishop's Institute of Inter-religious Affairs (BITRA). Later in 1983, the Malaysian Consultative Council for the Buddhists, Christians, Hindus and Sikhs – MCCBHS was established. The council was made up of devotees of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism. However, Islam was not included in this alliance. Instead, the Allied Coordinating Committee of Islamic NGOs (ACCIN) which aims to unify several Islamic NGOs was established in 2006 (Baharuddin, Abdullah, & Chang, 2010).

Before ACCIN came into existence, there were already several Islamic NGOs such as the Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM) which have been actively involved in dialogues. In October 1998, ABIM armed with the theme "Partners of People of Other Faiths" participated in a series of dialogues and seminars organized by the Young Men Christian Association (YMCA) (Baharuddin et al., 2010).

Although the dialogue activity per say has not find a significant place in the life of the society, civilizational dialogues have reached its peak as an Intellectual Agenda in the Malaysia. This can be seen clearly and further verified through the conception and establishment of the Centre for Civilisational Dialogue, UM in Malaysia (Wani, Abdullah, & Chang, 2015). The Centre was established in 1996 and has come to prove that dialogue is not only a charitable affair, which could only be organized by the NGOs; yet, it is also a societal agenda that can be promoted through the academic approach in the university.

2.9 PREVIOUS RELATED RESEARCH DONE

There are several research projects done on the topic related to national unity at the institution of higher learning in Malaysia. The relevant ones are captured below:

The Challenges of Malaysia and The Reality of Youth's Involvement with the Unity Campaign on Television, a research done by Dahalan, Ahmad, Hassan, Muda, Othman, & Abdullah. (2011) from Institute for Social Science Studies, University Putra Malaysia & University Technology MARA, Malaysia. The findings of this research show that Malaysia's youth understand and embrace the unity campaign being aired but lack in performing the behaviour that could spurt unity's growth.

Kajian Hubungan Kaum di Kalangan Pelajar Sekolah Pembangunan Sosial, Universiti Utara Malaysia, a research done by Rusimah Sayuti, Abdullah, & Ishak from Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) in 2004 (Rusimah Sayuti, Abdullah, & Ishak, 2004). The research was intended 1) To identify the atmosphere/climate of inter-ethnics interactions among students in UUM, 2) To identify the level of comfort of UUM's students in the context of building inter-ethnics relationship on campus, 3) To examine the tendency of students' perceptions towards building inter-ethnics relations on campus, and 4) To explore the relationship between the above mentioned objectives. The research showed that the students of UUM are positive towards inter-ethnics relation and welcome programmes or activities that could produce a better atmosphere for inter-ethnics interactions within the university.

In "Inter-ethnic Relation on Campus: Can't We All Get Along" by Mack, Tucker, Archuleta, DeGroot, Hernandez, & Cha published in 1997 by the Journal of Multicultural Counselling and Development, data indicated that White and Latino students were the most comfortable interacting with other ethnic groups, whereas Asian students were the least comfortable in interactions with other ethnic groups (Mack, Tucker, Archuleta, DeGroot, Hernandez, & Cha, 1997).

Patriotisme di kalangan mahasiswa/i di institusi pengajian tinggi awam di Malaysia, a research done by Ab. Ghani, Sayuti, Mukhtaruddin, Mohamad Naim, & Abdul Aziz in 2003, this research discusses the level of patriotism among the students at the institutions of higher learning in Malaysia. It also explore the relationship between the students' demographic characteristics (gender, race & hometown) associated with their level of patriotism. The study showed that the level of patriotism among students is high. Results also showed that female students are portrayed as more patriotic than male students, while those from rural areas are more patriotic than students from the city (Ab. Ghani, Sayuti, Mukhtaruddin, Mohamad Naim, & Abdul Aziz, 2003).

In *Kajian Persepsi Pelajar Universiti Terhadap Perpaduan Negara*, a research done by Abu Samah, Hassan & Daud Silong (2005), a total of 1,818 university students were surveyed and the results showed that university students are proud to be Malaysian and they think that living in peace with all races is very important. However, results showed that the university students were not prepared to participate in activities/programmes related to patriotism. There is interaction between students of various races, but at the same time, there is also racial polarization. The results also showed that inter-ethnics interaction could be improved through sports, games and community services, cultural, academic assignments, outdoor and association activities (Abu Samah, Hassan, & Daud Silong, 2005).

2.10 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in order for Malaysia to sustain its peace and unity, in depth understanding among the different ethnicities is very important. Previous researches have shown that Malaysian university students were not prepared to participate in activities related to

patriotism and racial polarization among the students holds them back from participating in activities related to promoting national unity. To date, there is no research done in Malaysia to promote university as the medium for nurturing national unity. There have been researches focused on national unity, but most of the researches focus on primary and secondary school level. There are also researches on promoting national unity at pre-school level, but not at the university level. Relevant researches at university level mostly cover on inter-ethnic relations and patriotism. There is a research on university students' perspective towards national unity, but it only covers the students' perspective on national unity and recommended that activities like sports, games and community service, cultural, academic assignments, outdoor and association activities could help in promoting national unity. Therefore, this research is filling the gap in that it also studies the perspectives of experts on national unity as well as the possibility of implementing dialogue programme in local public universities as a way to build nation unity by understanding the needs of each different ethnics group, resolve conflicts, and foster national unity among students at the university level.

Chapter 3

University of Malaya

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the research design and research methodology used in this study. The geographical area where this study was conducted, the study design and the targeted population and sample are described. The instrument used to collect the data, including methods implemented to maintain the validity and reliability of the instrument are described in this chapter as well.

3.1 RESEARCH APPROACH AND DESIGN

In this study, the researcher began the research activity with library-based research at the University of Malaya library. Relevant published materials or articles in the library were reviewed to explore and to gain a better understanding on the study before the design of research methodology and in-depth research activities were conducted. It was only then that the researcher decided to collect both quantitative data (i.e. quantifiable data) as well as qualitative data (i.e. experience/opinions of experts). The core argument for a mixed methods design is that the combination of both forms of data provides a better understanding of a research problem compared to a quantitative or qualitative data by itself. The researcher utilized both qualitative and quantitative data for data collection activities in order to better understand the research problem (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). This mixed method consists of merging, integrating, linking and embedding two different methods. Simply said, the collected data is mixed in this research since it is believed that one type of method (quantitative or qualitative) is not sufficient to develop a complete picture of the current national unity scenario at the university level in Malaysia.

Mixed methods designs are procedures for collecting, analysing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or in a series of studies. In this process,

the researcher emphasizes on the priority data, then, the data are collected concurrently or simultaneously using both the quantitative and qualitative methods during the study. Lastly, the researcher compared the results from quantitative and qualitative analyses using the triangulation mixed methods study to determine if the two database yielded similar or dissimilar results.

The strength of this design is that it combines the strengths of each form of data that is, quantitative data provides the general background, whereas qualitative data offers information about the context or setting. This design enables the researcher to gather information that uses the best features of both quantitative and qualitative data collection. In order to prevent inconsistency of results, the researcher collected additional data to do a counter check or revisit the collected databases to reconcile the differences.

3.1.1 FIRST PHASE: QUALITATIVE APPROACH

In the first phase of the research activities, qualitative approach was followed. Creswell (2008) defined qualitative research as a type of research in which the researcher relies on the views of participants; asking broad and general questions; collecting data consisting largely of words (or text) from participants; describing and analysing these words for the themes; and conducting the inquiries in a subjective, biased manner. Qualitative research method focuses on discovering and understanding the experiences, perspectives, and thoughts of participants — that is, qualitative research explores meaning, purpose, or reality (Hiatt, 1986).

Interview sessions were conducted both in the first and second phase of the research activities in order to identify and explore the different perspectives / viewpoints of experts on issues related to national unity at the university level in Malaysia. The interview

sessions with experts were also aimed at examining the possibility of implementing/using dialogue programme as a way to build national unity by understanding the needs of each ethnics group, resolving conflicts, and fostering national unity among students at the university level. In the first phase of the data collection process, the researcher interviewed the national unity expert whom is also one of the Division Director of the Department of National Integration. The national unity expert was interviewed to gain a better understanding of what has been done by the government (Department of National Unity and Integration) to promote unity among university students, and to identity challenges/factors that have led to the current neglect of national unity activities in the university milieu.

3.1.2 SECOND PHASE: QUANTITATIVE & QUALITATIVE APPROACH

In the second phase of the research activities, the researcher utilized both the quantitative and qualitative approaches, concurrently collecting surveys from university students and engaging in an open-ended interview with an expert on ethnic relations in the country. Burns and Grove (1993) defined quantitative research as a formal, objective and systematic process to describe and test relationships and examine cause and effect interactions among variables. Creswell (2008) defined quantitative research as a type of research in which the researcher decides what to study; by asking specific, narrow question; collecting quantifiable data from participants, analysing these numbers using statistics, and conducting the inquiry in an unbiased, objective manner. Surveys may be used for descriptive and exploratory researches.

A descriptive survey design was used in this study. A descriptive survey was selected because it provides an accurate portrayal or account of the characteristics, for example behaviour, opinions, abilities, beliefs and knowledge of a particular individual, situation

or group. This design was chosen to meet the objectives of the study, namely to explore the perceptions and views of university students on the issues related to national unity at the university level (Burns & Grove, 1993). A survey is used to collect original data for describing a population too large to observe directly (Mouton, 1996). A survey obtains information from a sample of people by means of self-report, that is, the people respond to a series of questions posed by the investigator (Polit & Hungler, 1993). In this study, the information was collected through self-administered questionnaires distributed personally to the participants by the researcher.

The quantitative research method used in this research is in the form of a questionnaire. According to Konting (2004), questionnaire is one of the measuring methods used in educational research. It is used to obtain accurate information on facts, beliefs, perceptions, and so on. The questionnaires are often used to measure the concepts related to attitude, perception and opinion (Abdul Ghafar, 2003). Key features of many quantitative studies are the use of instruments such as tests or surveys to collect data, and reliance on probability theory to test statistical hypotheses that correspond to research questions of interest (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)

Questionnaires were distributed in order to investigate university students' concept of unity brought about by university-level programs designed to enhance national unity. It is also designed to identify students' perspective on the possible obstacles/challenges of promoting national unity at the university level and also to examine the students' acceptance and inclination towards the implementation/use of dialogue as a way to build nation unity by understanding the needs of each different ethnics group, resolving conflicts, and fostering national unity among students at the university level.

The researcher designed a set of questions for the questionnaire in the form of close and open ended questions. The researcher opines that questionnaire is more suitable, practical and effective to be used in large populations.

A set of questions was designed based on the following:

- a) To identify the current perceptions of university student on national unity
- b) To identify the challenges of promoting national unity at the university level
- c) To explore the possibility of using dialogue as one of the tools/methods to promote national unity

A pilot testing of the survey questions was done on 50 students pursuing Bachelor degree in University of Malaya, i.e. students from intake 2011/2012, before the actual quantitative approach was taken.

Questionnaires were then distributed together with consent forms informing the randomly selected students that the collected data is for research proposes and will be published in a thesis. Questionnaires were distributed during the 2nd Semester, Session 2011/2012 and 1st Semester, Session 2012/2013 at the University of Malaya for a period of ten (10) months, between 13 February 2012 and 12 December 2012. The collected data were then analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) 13.0 for Windows software in order to get the frequency, percentage and min of data to be presented in the form table.

Within this target population, the researcher initially planned a total of 500 samples for the study, however in order to meet the dateline for data collection, the researcher only managed to collect a total of 420 samples out of the target population (3165 samples).

The sample size of 420 local undergraduate students were the total number of respondents who met the sampling criteria and consented to participate in the survey during the 10-month period of data collection starting from 13 February 2012 until 12 December 2012 at the University of Malaya.

The researcher divided the target population based on 12 faculties and 2 academies in the university. Purposive sampling followed by Snowball sampling was then used to collect a total of 420 samples from each sub-group of the target population. Undergraduate students was asked to identify others to become members of the sample with the requirement that the recommended local undergraduate students must with the intake session of 2011/2012. By using purposive and snowball sampling, it assisted in eliminating the possibility of identifying individuals who would not return the survey and the possibility of collecting data from the non-target population.

The purpose of the surveys was to understand perceptions on national unity held by students upon entering the university. Meanwhile, the interview with the expert on ethnic relations explored his perceptions on national unity issues, concentrating on challenges of promoting national unity at the university level. The researcher further enquired his recommendations for achieving national unity.

3.2 RESEARCH SETTING

This study was conducted at the University of Malaya Kuala Lumpur Main Campus. University of Malaya, or UM, Malaysia's oldest university. UM is situated on a 750 acre (309 hectare) campus southwest of Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia. It was established in April 1949 in Singapore with the merger of the King Edward VII College of Medicine (founded in 1905) and Raffles College (founded in 1928). The University of

Malaya derived its name from the term 'Malaya' referring to the country as it was then known. The Carr-Saunders Commission, which recommended the setting up of the university, noted in its report in 1948: "The University of Malaya would provide, for the first time, a common centre where varieties of race, religion and economic interest could mingle in joint endeavour ... For the University of Malaya must inevitably realize that it is a university for Malaya." The growth of the university was very rapid during its first decade of operations and this resulted in the setting up of two autonomous divisions in 1959, one located in Singapore and the other in Kuala Lumpur. In 1960, the government of the two territories indicated their desire to change the status of the divisions into that of a national university. Legislation was passed in 1961 and the University of Malaya was established on 1st January 1962. To date (January, 8, 2016), the University of Malaya with its Vision – to be an internationally renowned institution of higher learning in research, innovation, publication and teaching and its Mission – To advance knowledge and learning through quality research and education for the nation and for humanity; have about 7,257 local undergraduate students pursuing their Bachelor degree at the University of Malaya (Sources from the University of Malaya Website).

The quantitative data was collected from local undergraduate students from intake session 2011/2012, chosen from 12 faculties and 2 academies in the university respectively.

3.3 THE STUDY POPULATION AND SAMPLE

In quantitative research, a population is a group of individuals who have the same characteristics while a target population or sampling frame refers to a group of individuals with some common defining characteristics that meet the sample criteria for inclusion in a study which can be identified and studied by the researcher (Creswell, 2008). The target population in this study consisted of all the local undergraduate students from intake

session 2011/2012 at the University of Malaya. The total number of the local undergraduate students of the University of Malaya for intake session 2011/2012 is 3165, consisting of 1167 male students and 1998 female students. (Sources from Admission & Records Section of University of Malaya)

A sample is a sub-group of the target population that the researcher plans to study for the purpose of generalizing the target population (Creswell, 2008). In order to determine the sample size, Krejcie & Morgan have produced a table based on the “Small Sample Techniques”. As refer to the table adapted from Krejcie & Morgan (1970), the sample size needed for a population size of 3000 – 3500 is about 341 – 346. According to Creswell (2008) also, samples size of at least 10% of the total of target population is considered to be significantly representable. Within this target population, the researcher initially planned to select a total of 500 samples for study, however due to time constraint, the researcher only managed to collect a total of 420 samples for this study which makes up about 13 per cent of the total of target population and the sample size is considered to be significantly represented its population. The sample size of 420 local undergraduate students were the total of subjects who met the sampling criteria and consented to participate during the 10-month period of data collection starting from 13 February 2012 until 12 December 2012 at the University of Malaya.

The researcher divided the target population based on 12 faculties and 2 academies in the university. Purposive sampling followed by snowball sampling was then used to collect a total of 420 samples from each sub-group of the target population by asking participants to identify others who met the requirement, i.e. local undergraduate students must be from the intake session of 2011/2012. By using purposive and snowball sampling, it assists in

eliminating the possibility of participants did not return the survey and the possibility of collecting data from the non-target population.

In qualitative research, one of the personnel from JPNIN and an expert on ethnic relations were selected based on their experiences and expertise. The personnel from JPNIN is currently a Division Director in the JPNIN. Besides working in JPNIN, she is also conducting a research on national unity at the same time. The researcher selected the expert on ethnic relations in the country after his curriculum vitae (CV) was reviewed and discussed with the researcher's supervisor.

3.3.1 THE SAMPLING CRITERIA

In quantitative research, subjects included in the sample were selected to meet specific criteria. In order to be included in the sample, the local undergraduate students had to meet the following criteria:

- Student must be a Malaysian
- Student must be an undergraduate student at the University of Malaya
- Student must be from intake session of 2011/2012
- Willing to participate
- Of either sex or any race

The researcher also requested all local undergraduate students to present their student matric card before participating in the survey. This reduces the possibility of collecting data from non-target population.

In qualitative research, the target personnel from JPNIN had to meet the following criteria:

- Staff must be a Malaysian

- A staff that is currently working at JPNIN
- A staff holding a managerial position in JPNIN
- A staff that has direct involvement in planning and participating in activities/efforts promoting national unity at the university level
- Willing to participate
- Of either sex or any race

While the expert on ethnic relations had to meet the following criteria:

- Expert must be a Malaysian
- A PhD holder in the field of sociology
- An expert with knowledge on Malaysian history, Malaysian studies, Southeast Asian studies, multiculturalism, civilizational dialogue and related knowledge on sociology
- Willing to participate
- Of either sex or any race

3.4 DATA COLLECTION

3.4.1 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

In quantitative research, a questionnaire was chosen as data collection instrument. A questionnaire is a printed self-report form designed to elicit information that can be obtained through the written responses of the subjects. The information obtained through a questionnaire is similar to that obtained through an interview, but the questions tend to have less depth (Burns & Grove, 1993).

Data was collected with the aid of questionnaire to explore and investigate the perceptions and views of university students on issues related to national unity. Questionnaires were decided upon because of the following:

- They ensured a high response rate as the questionnaires were distributed to respondents to complete and were personally collected back by the researcher on the same day
- They required less time and energy to administer
- They offered the possibility of anonymity because subjects' names will not be disclose to anyone
- There was less opportunity for biasness as they were presented in a consistent manner
- Most of the items in the questionnaires were closed, which made it easier to compare the responses to each item

Apart from the advantages that have been listed above, questionnaires have their weaknesses; for example, there is the question of validity and accuracy (Burns & Grove, 1993). The subjects might not reflect their true opinions but might answer what they think will please the researcher, and valuable information may be lost as answers are usually brief.

Only one questionnaire was used to collect the data which were distributed only to local undergraduate students from the intake session of 2011/12 of University of Malaya. The questionnaire consisted mostly of close-ended questions and a few open-ended questions, as these provide more diverse responses. In the open-ended questions, respondents were required to respond in writing, whereas close-ended questions had options which were determined by the researcher (Burns & Grove, 1993). Open-ended questions were

included because they allow subjects to respond to questions in their own words and provide more detail. Close-ended questions were included because they are easier to administer and to analyse especially with the assistance of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) for Windows software. They are also more efficient in the sense that a respondent is able to complete more close-ended items than open-ended items in a given period of time (Polit & Hungler, 1993).

The questionnaire was in both the English and Malay languages to enable those who did not understand one to complete them in the other language. Instruction guidelines were attached to the questionnaire to guide the subjects as to whether to tick the chosen response or to fill in the number according to priority of the chosen responses. They were also given the assurance that the answers would not be linked back to them during data analysis, therefore ensuring anonymity. The questionnaires consisted of 5 sections: section A, section B, section C, section D and section E.

Section A aims at gaining demographic data such as race and gender. This information could assist the researcher when interpreting the results, for example, cross analysis will allow the researcher to explore whether university students' perceptions vary from different race and gender. Section B aims at exploring the students' perception of friends from different ethnic groups and to investigate their understanding and standpoint on national unity. Questions assessing knowledge about national unity, importance of national unity, unity at the university level and issues related to national unity were included. Section C aims to investigate the involvement of students in activities or efforts of promoting national unity at the university level. Section D assisted the researcher to identify the challenges in promoting national unity at the university level based on

students' perceptions. And lastly, Section E aims at understanding the students' views on dialogue and the possibility of promoting national unity using dialogue.

In qualitative research, both interview sessions with the personnel from JPNIN and expert on ethnic relations in the country were conducted in a meeting room at the Centre for Civilisational Dialogue, University of Malaya. A list of questions for the interview was given to the interviewees before the session started. The interview sessions were conducted within one (1) hour and were recorded using an audio recorder.

3.4.2 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

In the quantitative research, the questionnaire was personally distributed by the researcher to university students to be completed. The data was collected over a period of ten (10) months from 13 February 2012 until 12 December 2012 at the University of Malaya. The researcher approached the university students in the class, cafeteria and walk side of the 12 faculties and 2 academies in the University of Malaya. The researcher also asked some of the undergraduate students to identify others that are from the intake session of 2011/2012 to participate. The researcher started the data collection activity by introducing himself and giving some introduction on this study, followed by asking the willingness of the student to participate in the questionnaire related to this study. Students that were willing to participate in the questionnaire were requested to show their student card before proceeding to fill in the questionnaire. This procedure – verification of students' intake session assists in eliminating the possibility of collecting data from the non-target population.

In qualitative research, the researcher contacted the target interviewees to obtain their consent and willingness to participate in the interview sessions. A brief introduction and

purpose of conducting the interview sessions were explained to the interviewees. After the consents were given and the interviewees agreed to participate in the interview sessions, the researcher emailed a brief proposal of this study and a list of interview questions to the interviewees. Appointments for date and venue of the interview sessions were made between the researcher and interviewees.

A meeting room equipped with air-conditioner was prepared for the interview sessions. Pen, paper and the list of interview questions were prepared for both the researcher and interviewees. A high performance audio recorder was placed on the interview table in order to record the conversation during the interview sessions.

Before the interview sessions started, the researcher welcomed and greeted the interviewees. A brief introduction and purpose of conducting the interview sessions were explained to the interviewees for the second time. The researcher conducted the interview sessions following the prepared list of interview questions. During the interview sessions, permissions was obtained from the interviewees to allow the researcher to ask extra questions which were not listed in the prepared list of interview questions in order to gain better understanding on the comments/feedbacks given by the interviewees. The researcher had also written down the important notes throughout the interview sessions. Lastly, the researcher ended the interview sessions with greetings after all the listed interview questions have been asked and answered.

3.5 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

3.5.1 RELIABILITY

In quantitative research, Polit & Hungler (1993) referred to reliability as the degree of consistency in which an instrument measures the attribute it is designed to measure. The

questionnaire which was answered by university students revealed consistency in responses. Reliability can also be ensured by minimizing sources of measurement error like data collector's biasness. Data collector's biasness was minimized by the researcher being the only one to administer the questionnaire and standardizing conditions such as respondents' similar personal attributes. The physical and psychological environment where data was collected was made comfortable by ensuring privacy, confidentiality and general physical comfort. The subjects were offered a sit to answer the questionnaire while the researcher remained beside the participants. Respondents were assured that their name and personal details will not be disclosed to anyone.

3.5.2 VALIDITY

In quantitative research, the validity of an instrument is the degree to which an instrument measures what it is intended to measure (Polit & Hungler, 1993). Content validity refers to the extent to which an instrument represents the factors under study. To achieve content validity, the questionnaire included a variety of questions on national unity and issues related to national unity (Polit & Hungler, 1993).

Questions were based on information gathered during the literature review to ensure that they were represented what students should know about national unity and issues related to national unity. Content validity was further ensured by consistency in administering the questionnaire. For validation purposes, the questionnaires were submitted to the researcher's supervisor at University of Malaya. As a result, more questions were added to ensure higher representation. Some questions were rephrased to ensure easy understanding and more appropriate alternative response choices were added to the close-ended questions to provide meaningful data analysis (Burns & Grove, 1993)

All questionnaires were distributed to the respondents by the researcher personally. A brief introduction on this study and the purpose of distributing the questionnaire were explained to the respondents first. The questions were formulated in simple language for clarity and ease of understanding and clear instructions were given to the respondents. All the respondents completed the questionnaires in the presence of the researcher. This was done to prevent the respondents from passing the questionnaire to other people to complete on their behalf and also to eliminate the possibility of respondents not returning the questionnaire.

External validity was also ensured. Burns and Grove (1993) referred to external validity as the extent to which study findings can be generalized beyond the sample used. All respondents approached to participate in this study completed the questionnaires. Not one single person who was approached refused to participate. Generalizing the findings to all members of the target population is therefore justified.

Seeking respondents who are willing to participate in a study can be difficult, particularly if the study requires extensive amounts of time and other types of investment or the respondents are not interested with the study. If the number of the respondents approached to participate in a study declines, generalizing the findings to all members of a target population would not be easy to justify. The study needs to be planned such that investment demand on the respondents is limited in order to increase participation.

It is the researcher's responsibility to disclose the number of respondents who were approached and refused to participate in the study, should it occur, so that threats to external validity can be determined. As the percentage of those who decline to participate in the study increases, external validity decreases (Burns & Grove, 1993).

3.6 PRE-TESTING THE QUESTIONNAIRE

In quantitative research, a pre-test refers to a trial administration of an instrument to identify flaws. When a questionnaire is used as a data gathering instrument, it is necessary to determine whether questions and instructions clearly outlined to the respondents so that they understand what is required from them. This process is referred to as the pre-testing of a questionnaire. (Polit & Hungler, 1995)

The researcher pre-tested the questionnaire on fifty (50) respondents meeting the set criteria in the Faculty of Science, University of Malaya. Students were given the questionnaire to fill in and then the researcher asked them to mark any problems on the survey, such as poorly worded questions, responses that do not make sense or if it takes an excessive amount of time to complete the questionnaire. Based on their feedback, the researcher then revised the questionnaire before sending it out to the study sample. Some of the amendments done were,

- a) Reducing from 35 questions to less than 30 questions (27 questions)
- b) Putting in new questions to explore the current scenario of national unity among university students.

3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In quantitative research, conducting such a research requires not only expertise and diligence, but also honesty and integrity. This is so to recognize and protect the rights to the respondents. For this study's ethics, the rights to self-determination, anonymity, confidentiality and informed consent were observed.

Respondents' consent was obtained before they completed the questionnaire. Burns and Grove (1993) defined informed consent as the prospective respondent's agreement to participate voluntarily in a study, which is obtained after assimilation of essential information about the study. The respondents were informed of their rights to voluntarily consent or decline to participate, that that is their right to withdraw participation at any time without penalty.

The respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, the procedures that would be used to collect the data and assured that there were no potential risks or costs involved.

Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the study. Burns and Grove (1993) defined anonymity as the condition where respondents cannot be linked, even by the researcher, with his or her individual responses. In this study, anonymity was ensured by not disclosing the student's name and other personal details on the questionnaire and research reports and detaching the written consent from the questionnaire.

When respondents are promised confidentiality, it means that the information they provided will not be publicly reported in a way which identifies them (Polit & Hungler, 1995). In this study, confidentiality was maintained by keeping the collected data confidential and not revealing the respondents' identities when reporting or publishing the study (Burns & Grove, 1993). No identifying information was entered onto the questionnaires and the questionnaires were only numbered after data was collected (Polit & Hungler, 1995).

The ethical principle of self-determination was also maintained. Subjects were treated as autonomous agents by informing them about the study and allowing them to voluntarily

choose to participate. Lastly, information was provided about the researcher in the event of further questions or complaints.

Scientific honesty is regarded as a very important ethical responsibility when conducting research. Dishonest conduct includes manipulation of design and methods, and retention or manipulation of data (Brink, 1996). The researcher avoided any form of dishonesty by recording the answers of those respondents as is into the SPSS for Windows software. The open-ended questions which were analysed by the researcher were also checked by the supervisor for confirmation of credibility.

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS

In quantitative research, after the data was collected, it was organized and analysed. For the analysis of close-ended questions, SPSS for Windows software was used. Data was analysed by using descriptive statistics. The open-ended questions were analysed through quantitative content analysis by the researcher with the aim of quantifying emerging characteristics and concepts. Concept analysis is the process of analysing verbal or written communications in a systematic way to measure variables quantitatively (Polit & Hungler, 1995)

In qualitative research, the interviews were recorded and transcribed into Question & Answer (Q&A) format by the researcher. The responses collected from the interview sessions were then further analysed by the researcher in order to understand the experts' viewpoints on the issues related to national unity at the university level in Malaysia. Data collected from both the quantitative and qualitative analyses will be compared using the triangulation mixed methods study to determine if the two database (quantitative and qualitative approaches) yielded similar results. Questionnaire and interview methods

were used in order to assess the effectiveness of current programmes aimed at strengthening national unity. Findings will be presented or proposed to be the considered as inputs for policy makers to consider when designing new educational policies to assist in promoting national unity among university students in Malaysia.

3.9 CONCLUSION

The researcher used a quantitative, descriptive survey design. A questionnaire was administered by the researcher himself to collect the data from a sample of 420 respondents. The questionnaire had both close and open-ended questions. The sample requirements included Malaysian undergraduate students at the University of Malaya within the intake session of 2011/2012 that were willing to participate.

Consent was obtained from the respondents themselves. Anonymity, self-determination and confidentiality were ensured during the administration of the questionnaire and report writing. Questionnaires were distributed to respondents to ensure validity. Reliability and validity were further strengthened by pre-testing the questionnaire.

This chapter described the research methodology, including the population, sample, data collection instruments as well as strategies used to ensure the ethical standards, reliability and validity of the study.

Chapter 4

University of Malaya

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the findings obtained from both quantitative and qualitative methods which were used by the researcher. In this research study, the researcher managed to reach out to a total of 420 respondents for this study which consisted about 13 per cent of the total of target population (3,165 respondents). The sample size of 420 local undergraduate students were the total number of respondents who were willing to participate in the research and who met the sampling criteria during the 10-month period of data collection from 13 February 2012 until 12 December 2012 at the University of Malaya. The researcher also conducted the interview sessions in two phases. In the first phase of the data collection process, the researcher interviewed a national unity expert. The expert is also one of the Division Director of the Department of National Integration. The expert was interviewed to gain a better understanding of what had been done by the Department of National Unity and Integration to promote unity among university students, and to identify the challenges and factors that have led to the current neglect of national unity activities in the university milieu. While in the second phase of the research activity, the researcher engaged in an open-ended interview with an expert on ethnic relations in the country. The interview with the ethnic relations expert discussed the current issues regarding national unity at the university level and how to overcome it.

4.1 UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' INTERPRETATION OF NATIONAL UNITY AT THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL

The researchers divided the target population based on 12 faculties and 2 academies in the university and purposive sampling followed by snowball sampling was then used to collect a total of 420 samples from each sub-group of the target population by asking

undergraduate students to identify others to participate as long as the student is a local undergraduate within the intake session of 2011/2012.

4.1.1 COMPOSITION OF RESPONDENTS OF QUESTIONNAIRE

The gender of the respondents is shown below in Table 4.0. More than half of the respondents (66.7%) are female. This is mostly due to the fact that the majority of the students who pursue their Bachelor Degree within the intake session of 2011/2012 are female [Total = 3165 students consisting of 1,167 male students (37%) and 1,998 female students (63%)]. (Sources from Admission & Records Section of University of Malaya).

Gender	Number of Respondents
Male	140
Female	280
Total	420

Table 4.0: Gender of respondents

The race of the respondents is shown below in Table 4.1. 65.7 per cent of respondents were Malay and 25.7 per cent of respondents were Chinese. The remaining respondents were Indians (1.9%) and Indigenous People (*Bumiputra*) (6.7%). The cross analysis of gender and race of respondents is also shown in Figure 4.0 next page.

Race	Number of Respondents
Malay	276
Chinese	108
Indian	8
Indigenous People (<i>Bumiputra</i>)	28
Total	420

Table 4.1: Race of respondents

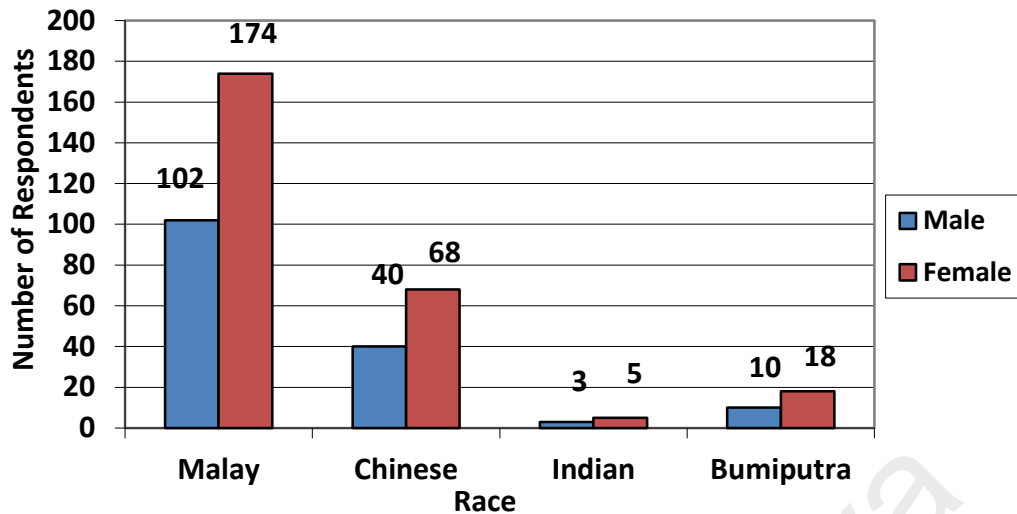


Figure 4.0: Gender & race of respondents

The perceptions of students towards friends of different races were also investigated in Section A of the questionnaire. Data showed that all of the respondents (100%) have friends of different races. A total of 33.3% of respondents have a less than 10 friends of different races while the majority of respondents have more than 10 but not more than 20 friends of different races. Only 30.5% of respondents have more than 20 friends of different races. A cross analysis comparing total of friends of different races with race are shown in Table 4.2 below.

	Malay	Chinese	Indian	<i>Bumiputra</i>	Total
Less than 10	112	16	-	12	140
10 but not more than 20	96	40	8	8	152
More than 20	68	52	-	8	128
Total					420

Table 4.2: Cross comparison of race versus total of friends of different races

The researcher notes that majority of the respondents (95.2%) do not feel uncomfortable to have their daily meals together with friends of different races while 83.8% of this group feel comfortable visiting friends of different races. The response of eating with and visiting friends of different races are shown below in Figure 4.1.

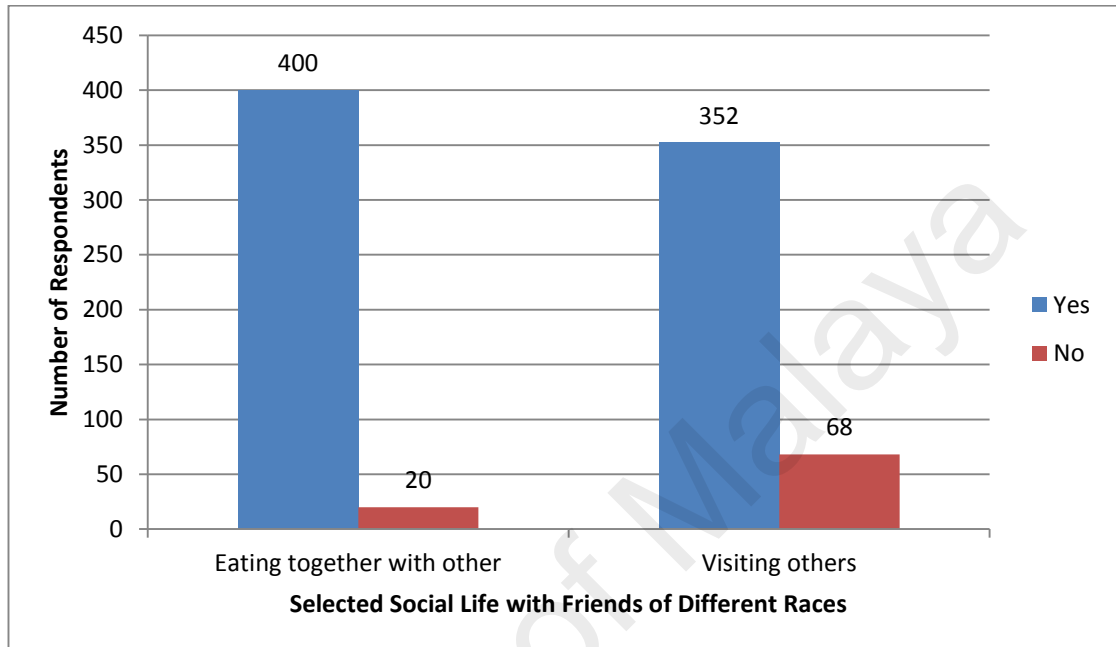


Figure 4.1: Comfortable eating with and visiting friends of different races

According to the data, only 41% of the respondents feel uncomfortable to live with friends of different races. Conversely, majority of the respondents (88.6%) feel more comfortable to live with friends of the same races compared to friends of the different races. Figure 4.2 next page summarises the number of respondents who feel comfortable living with friends of different races.

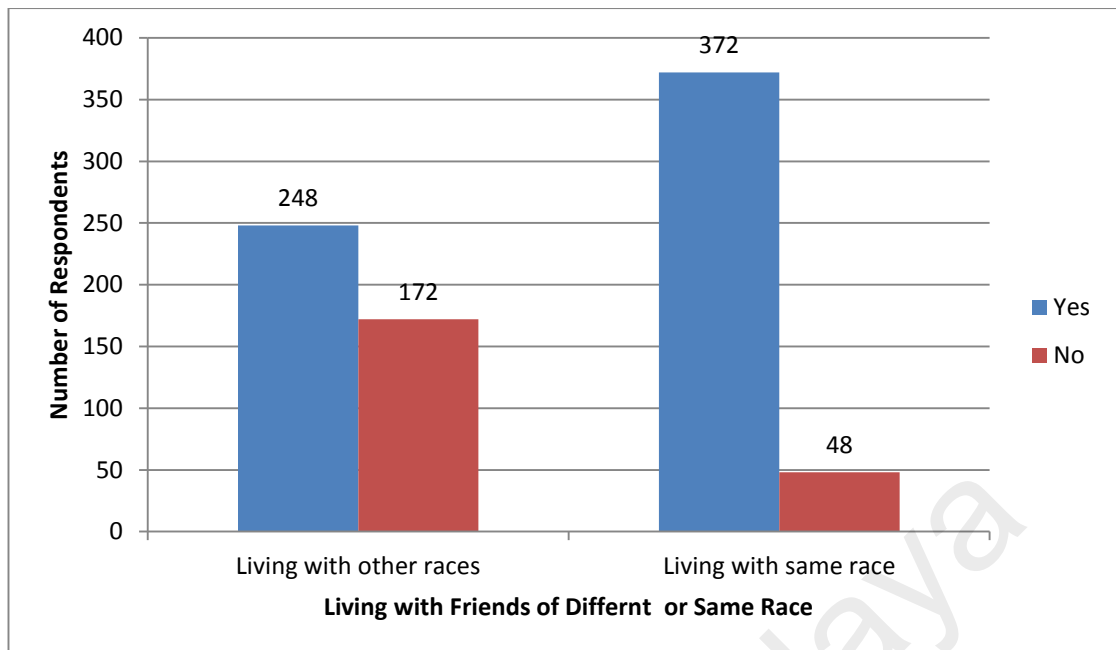


Figure 4.2: Summary of respondents who feel comfortable living with friends of different races

The above profiling check shows that university (UM) students have no problem carrying out their daily activities with friends of other races. However, they prefer to live together with friends of the same race. This is mostly due to people who belong to the same group may have positive and favourable evaluations and attributions of themselves as members of the in-group and conversely, less favourable evaluations and attributions of the out-group. Students may feel more at ease to speak the same language and do the same things that are common among the same race. For example, Malay students prefer to live with other Malay students as they would not have to worry that their prayer times might cause discomfort to their roommates of different races. While for Chinese students, living with fellow Chinese students allows them to partake of their non-kosher or non-halal food which would likely bring discomfort to their Malay friends.

The investigation results of perceptions of students towards friends of different races in the Section A of the questionnaire allowed the researcher to conclude that students of different races need to first understand their identity/culture well and at the same time try

to understand the culture of other races. This could avoid us from dialogue with other before knowing ourselves well and as well not to judge other without trying to understand the culture of other races. Besides, although most of the students are aware of the basic characteristics or sensitive aspects of other races, a balance of tolerance is still needed when they live together or do their daily activities together so that we do not and will not unconsciously offend others. Tolerance is supposed to be a two way street. The differences and traditions must not divide us but rather enrich our diversity and respect for one another.

4.2 PROMOTING NATIONAL UNITY – EFFORTS & ACHIEVEMENTS

Post May 13, 1969, the National Unity Council was established in 1971 where the members were appointed by the Prime Minister. A special provision was made in the Emergency (Essential powers) Ordinance, 1969 which was gazetted on June 28, 1971. The main objective was to discuss matters pertaining to national unity. The Council had the power to establish various working committees including an advisory panel. Members of the advisory panel were tasked to undertake research and studies on specific aspects and advise the Prime Minister on the appropriate steps to take.

The Ordinance was amended to make a distinction between Council and Advisory panel by remaining them as the National Unity Advisory Council and the Research Advisory Panel on National Unity.

What is very significant in the post May 13 period is the legislative and institutional support extended to ensure that national unity is really strengthened in Malaysia. Tun Haji Abdul Razak as Director of Operations ensured that national unity had a priority in the government's agenda for nation building.

In 1972, the Ministry for National Unity was established but was converted into a department and placed under the Prime Minister's Department in 1974. The Council for National Unity was then renamed the National Unity Board and by 1983 the Board was renamed National Unity Advisory Panel.

The panel's name and role remained the same. The department became the Ministry for National Unity and Social Development in 1990, later placed under the Ministry of Culture, Art and Heritage but subsequently became a department again in the Prime Minister's Department in 2009. With the appointment of Tan Sri Dr. Koh Tsu Koon as Minister in-charge for national unity in 2009, the focus of the National Unity Department shifted and theme of national unity became one aspect of the broader thrust of government intensions.

In the interview session with the national unity expert, the expert defined national unity as a social situation wherein the citizens consisting of diverse ethnic groups and religious beliefs co-exist peacefully as one united Malaysian Nation in accordance with our *Rukun Negara* and Federal Constitution. To date, there have been many activities or efforts that have been carried out by various parties aiming at promoting national unity at the different levels. Most of the activities/programmes co-organized by JPNIN & MoHE aims at promoting national unity are mostly based on the philosophy behind (strengthening, knowledge, understanding & practice) the *Rukun Negara*. The efforts of promoting the philosophy behind the *Rukun Negara* are usually done at the university level through the Secretariat of *Rukun Negara* (SRN).

Until December 2011, a total of 129 Higher Education Institutions (122 Public Higher Education Institutions and 7 Private Higher Education Institutions) have established the SRN. Various programmes have been planned and organized to instil the spirit of a loving country and to foster the understanding of the *Rukun Negara*. In each of the programmes, various approaches have been taken to explain the principles/philosophy behind the *Rukun Negara* in order to provide a clearer understanding to the participants involved. Since the establishment of the Public Higher Education Institutions' SRN, a total of 35 activities have been carried out with the aim of strengthening national unity and integration among university students of different races.

Based on the feedback/evaluation of the implemented programmes from the students, results showed that 80% of the organized programmes achieved the objective that is to strengthen national unity among the participants. One of the most critical challenges in implementing the programmes is to get the involvement of various ethnic groups, especially the non-Malay students. In order to ensure the participation of students of various races, JPNIN has to set a condition in which there must be multi-ethnic participation such as in the Unity Debate Competition among the Higher Education Institutions (HEI). However, according to the national unity expert, to date, JPNIN has never organized any such activities/programmes in University of Malaya before.

Section B of the questionnaire is designed to investigate their understanding and standpoint on national unity. Results from quantitative data showed that majority of the respondents (82.9%) understood the meaning of national unity. It is noted that 7.6% and 9.5% of respondents do not understand or are oblivious of the meaning of national unity, respectively. Understanding of National Unity among the respondents is shown next page in Figure 4.3.

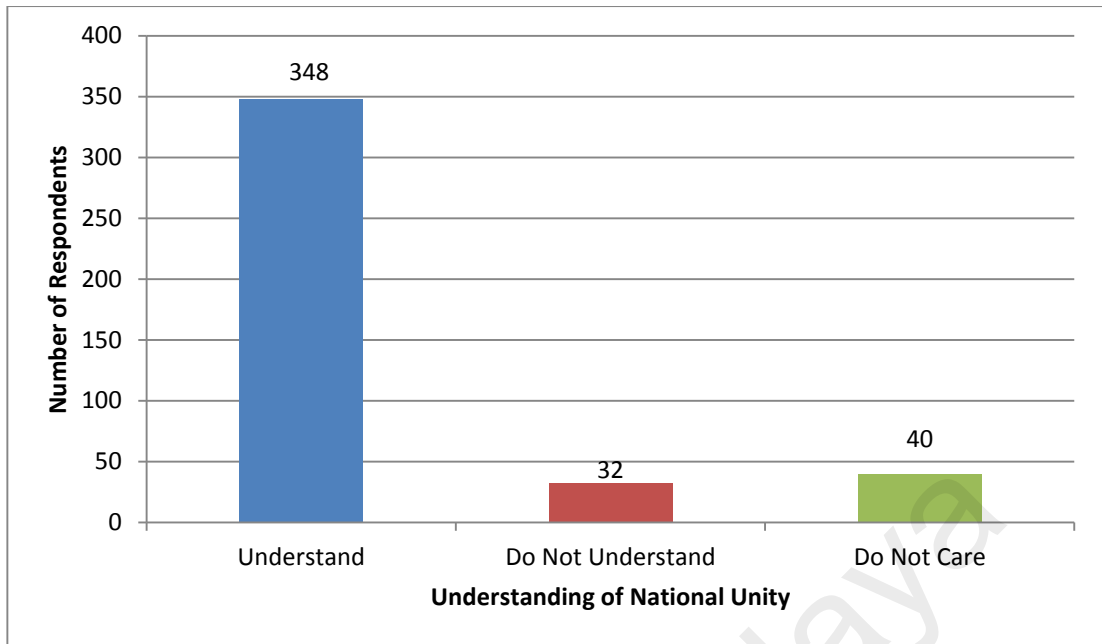


Figure 4.3: Understanding of National Unity among the respondents

Almost all of the respondents (99%) are aware that national unity plays an important role at the national level in Malaysia. Only four (4) university students do not care about national unity (1%). Meanwhile, 97.2% of the total respondents agreed that national unity is important at the university level. The respondents' view on the importance of National Unity at the national level and university level are shown below in Figure 4.4.

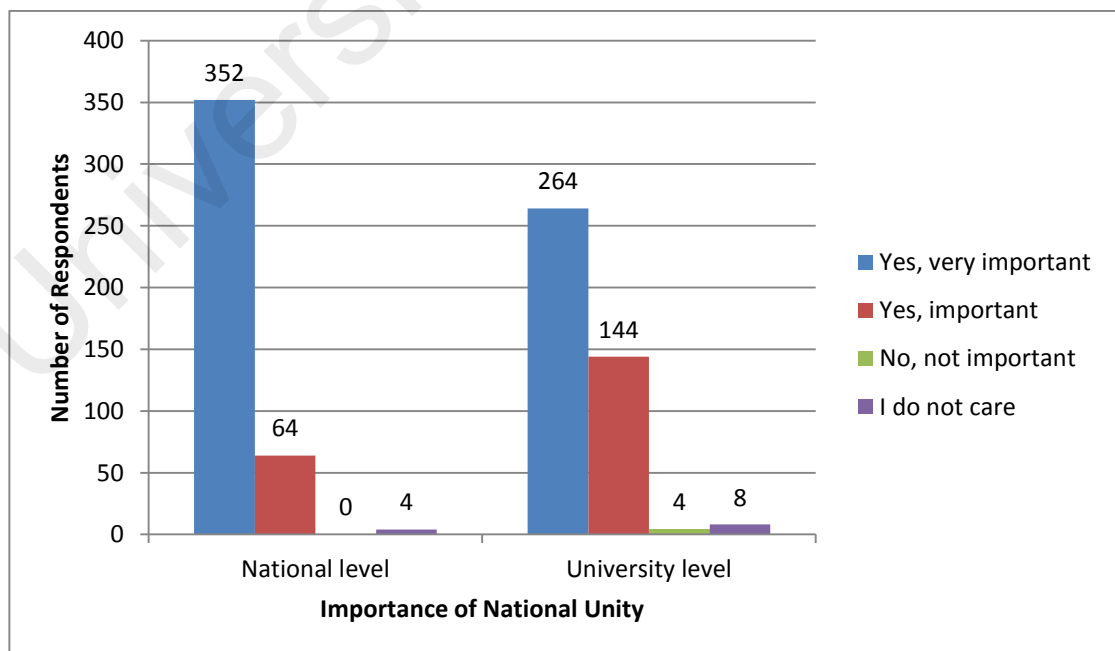


Figure 4.4: The importance of National Unity at national level and university level

More than 86% of the total respondents agreed that they learned about national unity during primary and secondary school level. Awareness was further strengthened via mass media especially from advertisements on television. University has been ranked as the 3rd source of awareness which indicates that government's efforts to promote national unity are mostly via education and mass media. Meanwhile, other sources such as family and friends, neighbours, religion and the internet have been rated lower. This indicates that efforts to promote national unity are mostly done at the government level and it seems that national unity has not been an interest of Malaysians in their daily lives. The main sources that create awareness on national unity in order of ranking are shown below in Figure 4.5.

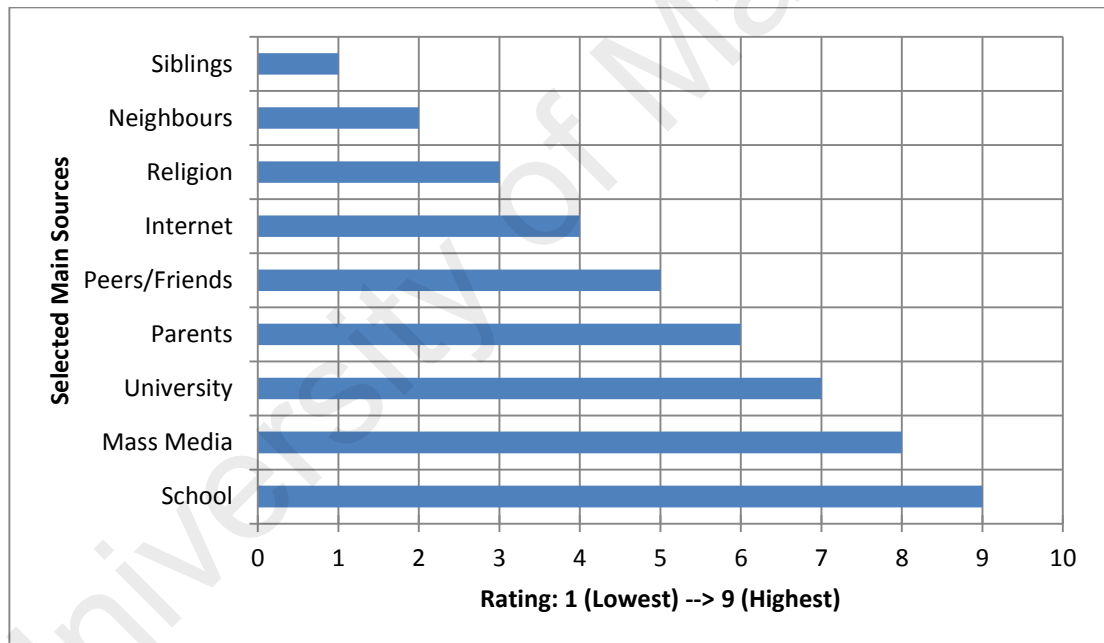


Figure 4.5: The main sources that create awareness on national unity according to ranking

When respondents were requested to rate which is the most important key player or area where national unity should be nurtured, the data showed that most of the respondents agreed that national unity should first be nurtured in the heart of each and every one before one tries to promote the importance of national unity at the societal level. The spirit of national unity should be cultivated among all deep in the heart as earlier as possible in

their childhood education as the initial practice to nurture national unity then only one could have such passion to promote the importance of national unity. Respondents have also rated the government/government sectors as the next platform where the awareness of national unity should be nurtured followed by the education system. Universities have been rated as the least important key player to promote national unity. Respondents agreed that since the day they entered the university, they are mature enough to think and make decision on most of the matters. Thus, they are less likely to be influenced or attracted by activities aimed to promote the importance of national unity as many of them spend most of their time trying to achieve better academic results. The ratings of the important & necessity of national unity awareness at the different levels are shown below in Figure 4.6.

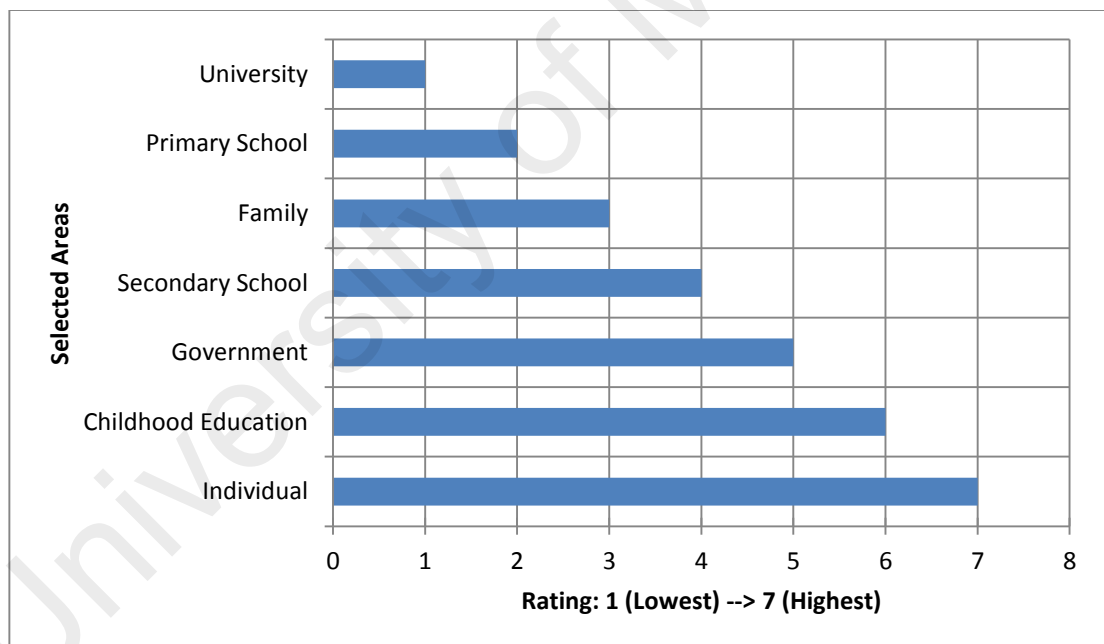


Figure 4.6: Ratings of the important & necessity of national unity awareness at the different levels

However, majority of the respondents (91.4%) agreed that the spirit of national unity exists among students at the university level. Figure 4.7 next page shows the respondents' view on the existence of national unity among the students in the university.

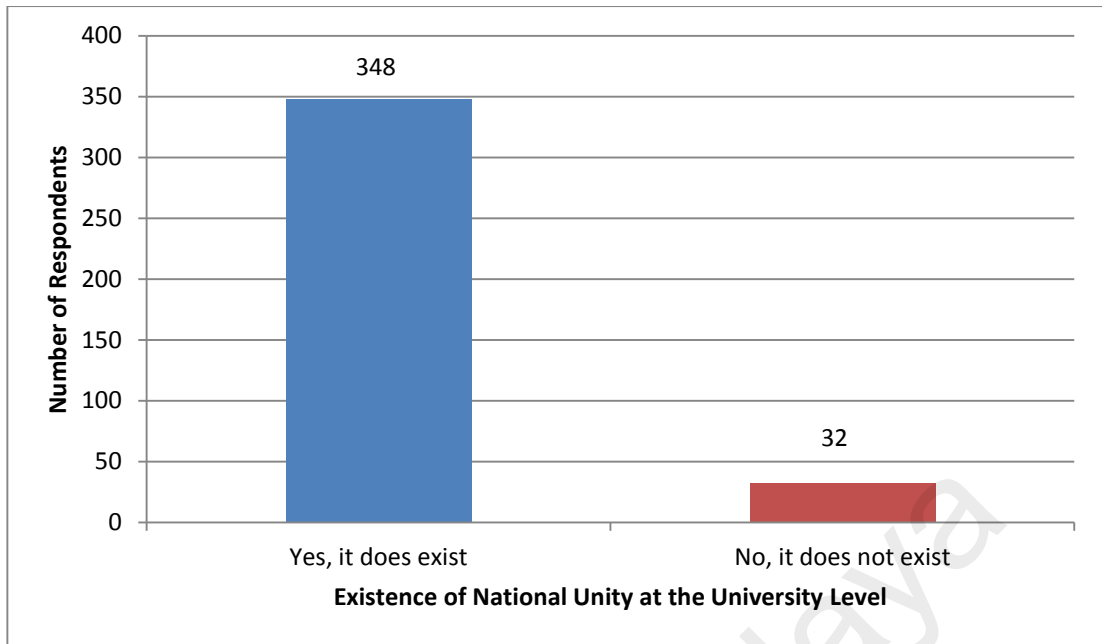


Figure 4.7: Respondents' view on the existence of national unity among the students in the university

The collected data which showed that more than 55% of respondents are not involved/do not care or have never heard about activities that are aimed at promoting national unity within the university also proven that many of the university students spend most of their time trying to achieve better academic results. Figure 4.8 below shows the respondents' response towards activities related to national unity in the university

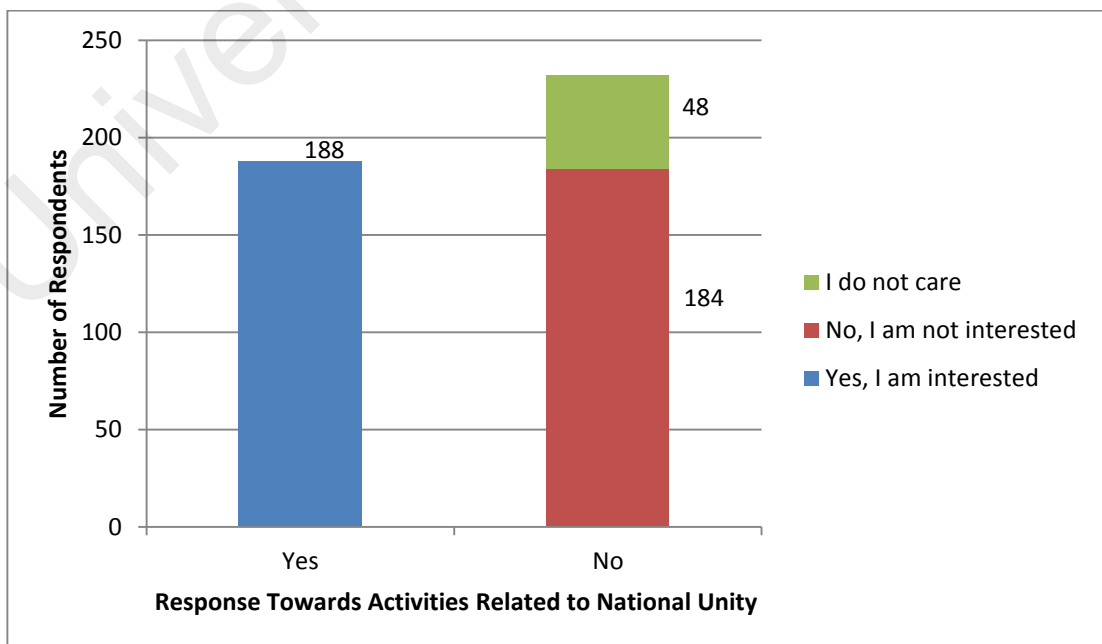


Figure 4.8: Respondents' response towards activities related to national unity in the university

Respondents were also required to rate the impact of activities/programme/teaching and learning in promoting national unity at the university level in the questionnaire. Based on the results, students felt that efforts of promoting national unity via activities/programmes have more impact on them compared to teaching and learning. This indicates that the focus on teaching and learning for example via the TITAS and Ethnic Relations subjects is not enough. The respondents preferred activities/programmes such as seminar, public lecture, dialogue, roundtable discussion, and conference on promoting national unity. Besides that, publicity or more advertising on those activities as well as the Secretariat of *Rukun Negara* (SRN) should be arranged so that more students are aware of those activities/programmes. The effectiveness of activities/programmes versus teaching and learning in promoting national unity are shown in Figure 4.9 below.

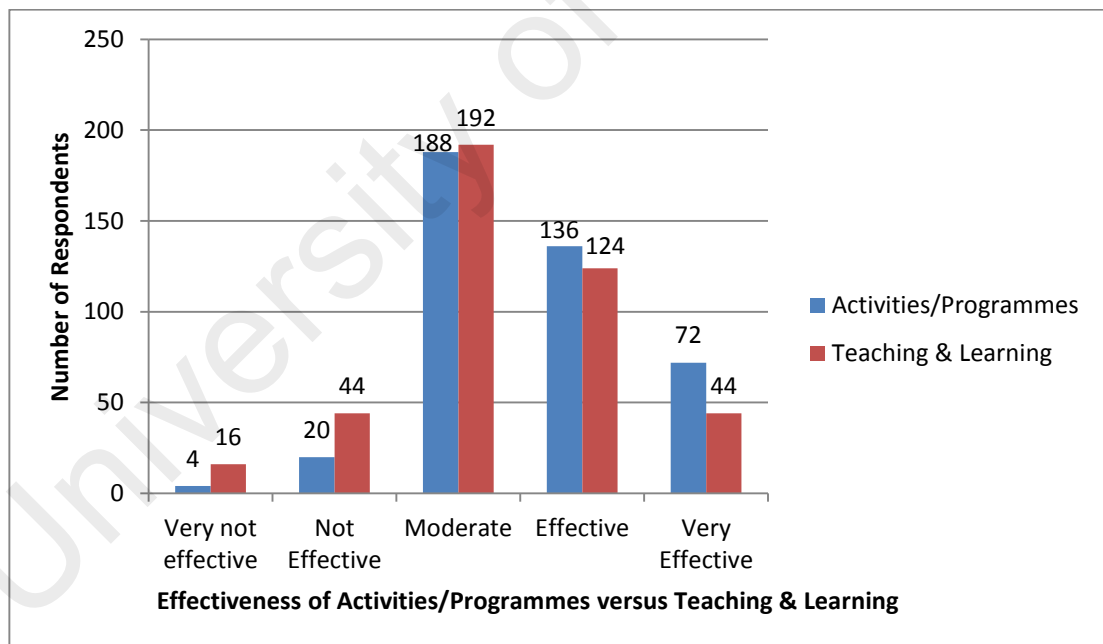


Figure 4.9: Activities/programmes versus teaching and learning to promote national unity

In the interview session with ethnic relations expert, he shared that the term national unity is a very big concept. Firstly, national unity is an ideal condition in which Malaysia or Malaysians are trying to achieve and the best alternative word/term for national unity is

multi-racial harmonious. Recently, the government has even used the term 1Malaysia to promote national unity. The expert further explained that the Malaysian government is not practicing the assimilation approach as the end result would be the different/minority groups losing their culture. Furthermore, the assimilation approach is very hard to implement as culture is not something that will be easily forgotten. Therefore, what the government is trying to achieve is a certain level of tolerance and mutual respect for some reasons mainly economic development and security, so that people could preserve their own cultural perspectives and practices.

The above analysis summarises that nation building is essential to national unity which lies at the heart of what Malaysia was, is and will be. National unity has been, and remains to be at the heart of all Malaysians' endeavour for peace. National unity has also been one of the fundamental themes for nation building since the independence of Malaya followed by the formation of Malaysia on September 16, 1963. Policy makers always take national unity or ethnics harmonious into considerations during the policy making process. The government has made a lot of effort, especially the JPNIN, to promote and nurture national unity not only at the national level but also at the university level. However, national unity can only be achieved if all the involved stakeholders, from policy makers to individuals, must be receptive and contribute to the effort of achieving national unity.

Although many activities/programmes have been organised to nurture national unity, responses show that students are not inclined to participate in the activities/programmes as students feel that the time is better spent on achieving academic excellence, majority of the respondents still agreed that national unity is very important and needed not just to be publicised at the general level but also at the university level.

4.3 PROMOTING NATIONAL UNITY – CHALLENGES & RESOLUTIONS

The national unity expert identified three (3) factors as the main challenges of promoting national unity at the university level. Firstly, students are more in favour of carrying out activities with the same ethnic group rather than with other ethnic groups. The same preference applies to hostel accommodation as well. Secondly, the lack of interest and awareness on the importance of national unity by the managerial level of Public Higher Education Institutions (HEI) results in the efforts of promoting national unity to be neglected. Lastly, globalisation and the ease of access to online resources have further complicated the efforts of promoting national unity. Online resources that have not been verified of its authenticity or wrongly spread may cause conflict among students.

According to ethnic relations expert, the main obstacle to promote national unity in Malaysia today is the weakness in the execution of the plans and activities. More often than not, what is executed or practised is not as what was proposed. While most of the time, policies on promoting national unity introduced are good, the execution of these policies have been disappointing as seen in the national schools in Malaysia. In reality, ethnic polarisation during student intake goes against the national unity objectives. Some schools that lean towards becoming an Islamic oriented school, end up making non-Muslim students uncomfortable and thus request for a transfer.

Additionally, the national schools' qualities have also been declining. Today, the situation for national schools is like moving backward since it has deviated from its initial aim is to gather students from different races to study under one roof.

Nowadays, many Malay parents send their children to vernacular schools like Chinese schools. While the percentage is not big in comparison to the Malay population, it has

increased substantially over the years. 30 years ago, it was unheard of Malay parents sending their children to a Chinese school. Vernacular schools have happened to be able to gather more and more students from difference races to study in the same school. Although it happens in the opposite way, the impacts are good and vernacular schools seem to be more like national schools with a diversity of students from different races.

Polarisation is not just happening in primary and secondary schools, it is also happening in universities. Some universities in Malaysia like University Technology MARA (UiTM), only accept students of a certain race. He further explained that while it is not wrong to promote Malay Studies in universities, universities as institutions that disseminate knowledge should not be limited to students of a particular race.

Besides that, ethnic relations expert also further explained that a university's top management should have a clear policy that the role of university is not just about chasing university world ranking. Publication is not as important as human development. Students are the main client/stakeholder in the university and the main aim of education is to educate and prepare students academically and mentally for the working world. More dialogue as in "real" dialogue should be greatly promoted among the lecturers and the students especially in the Ethnic Relations subject. As a lecturer, his/her job is not about transferring knowledge, but being neutral and equipping students with broader mind-set, i.e. to think and discuss. This way, the lecturer will not be perceived as being bias to a certain ethnic group.

Unfortunately, the curricula introduced at the university level have not been good exposure for students to learn about either civilisation or ethnic relations. Most of the curricula tend to be more Islamic. All subjects taught at the school and university level

should emphasize and relate to all ethnic groups. During the teaching and learning sessions, contributions from all civilizations should be acknowledged. For example, in a science subject, contributions from all civilizations ranging from Indian Science, Malay Science to Chinese Science should be included in the teaching module. This will equip students who graduate from Malaysia with the understanding about all civilisations. As to the current education policy, even the Malays do not understand their own civilisations. For example, currently, Malay students are not able to recite one of their traditional poetry. As we move towards peaceful co-existence or ethnic co-existence, one should be able to quote the poem, philosophy, religion and etc. of other races. These are common values that should be shared between today's youth.

He also mentioned that national unity is very important to overcome conflicts. Concurrently, it is important for the citizens not be influenced by politicians especially on issues related to ethnic relations. True national unity is achieved when society is not able to be influenced. Singapore is a good example where religious leaders can gather together despite their different faiths.

Results from quantitative data also showed that more than 80% of the respondents are sure that there are issues/challenges in promoting national unity among the university students. Figure 4.10 next page shows the respondents' view on the presence of issues/challenges in promoting national unity to students at the university level.

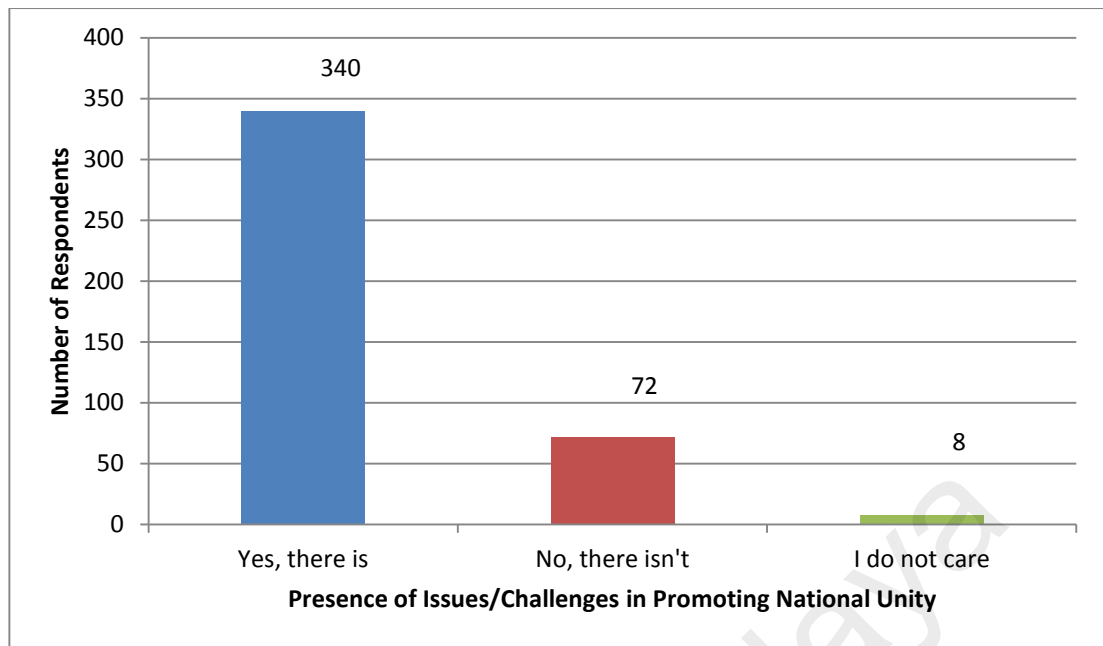


Figure 4.10: Respondents' view on the presence of issues/challenges in promoting national unity to students at the university level

Majority of the respondents agreed that the main challenge of promoting national unity at the university level is getting the students' attention and interest in the importance of national unity and activities related to national unity. Students enter university to obtain a degree in order to secure a good job in the near future. Thus, spending more time and working harder to obtain good academic results is more important than learning or promoting national unity. Besides, the lack of interest among the university's managerial level as well as among the lecturers further compounds the challenge. Most of the universities' missions/main focuses are on the marketability of graduates and academic for higher ranking, but not on national unity. The ranking of main challenges/obstacles in promoting national unity at the university level are shown next page in Figure 4.11.

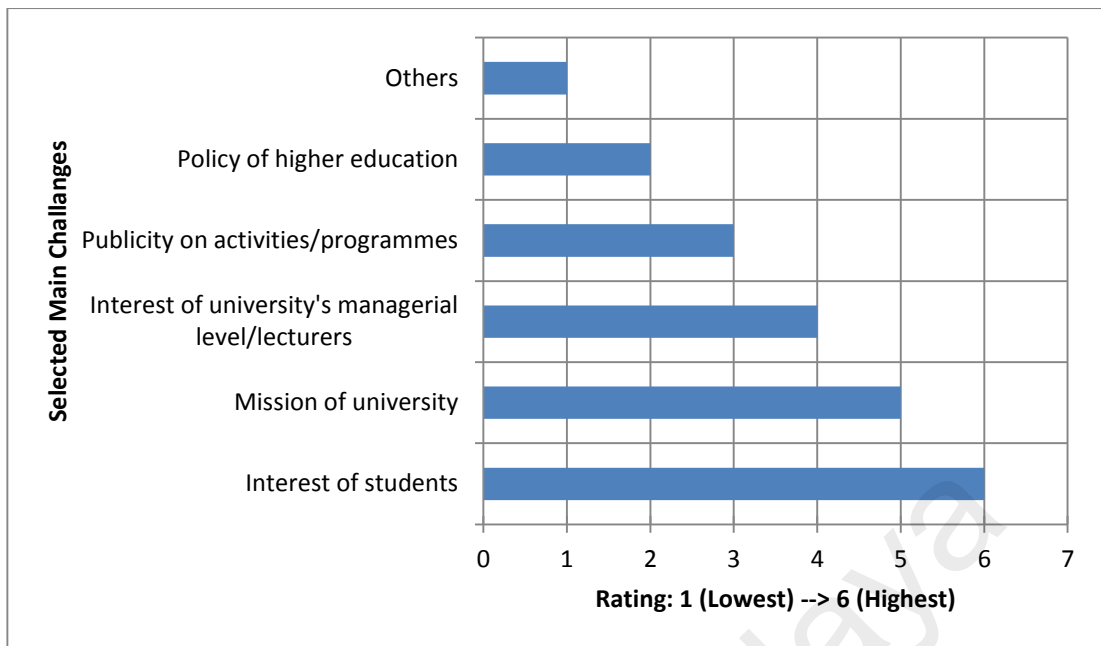


Figure 4.11: Ranking of main challenges/obstacles in promoting national unity at the university level

The above analysis summarised that the main challenges of nurturing national unity at the university level is that, students are more in favour of doing their daily activities with friends from the same ethnics group than with other ethnic group. Besides, the lack of interest and alertness on the importance of national unity by the managerial level of university that mainly focuses on academic performances also caused the efforts of promoting national unity to be neglected.

Majority of the respondents agreed that national unity is important, yet at the same time, they also felt that the environment in the university is not keen to promote national unity rather is it more towards encouraging students to obtain a better academic result. Although national unity has been one of the focal points in the education policy, in reality, this has been overshadowed by Malaysia's dream to promote Malaysia as one of the best education hubs around the world. University of Malaya, for example, has been placing more efforts and emphasis on improving its academic performance for a better placement

in university world ranking and this has caused the nurturing of national unity to be neglected.

In order for national unity to be nurtured, leaders need to be neutral, open-minded, willing to listen, understanding and tolerant before trying to promote national unity to others. If a university's management is keen on promoting and nurturing national unity among the students, they should first prepare themselves in every aspect by implementing national unity in their subjects, activities and programmes. Lecturers should also be sensitive to the different culture and traditions of different ethnic groups and be neutral in their teachings.

4.4 PROMOTING NATIONAL UNITY – DIALOGUE AS A WAY FORWARD

According to ethnic relations expert, dialogue is not just a way of communication but plays a more important role in conveying the information and discussion of two or more parties. Dialogue is defined as “a discussion with the groups/people whose thought differ from ours”. The main objective is to learn from others whom may have a new and different way of thinking. In a dialogue, all parties must try to listen to the others with empathy in order to understand their position/thinking as accurate as possible." Results from the quantitative data showed that more than half of the students (56.2%) do not understand the true meaning of dialogue. Respondents' understanding of the true meaning of dialogue is shown next page in Figure 4.12.

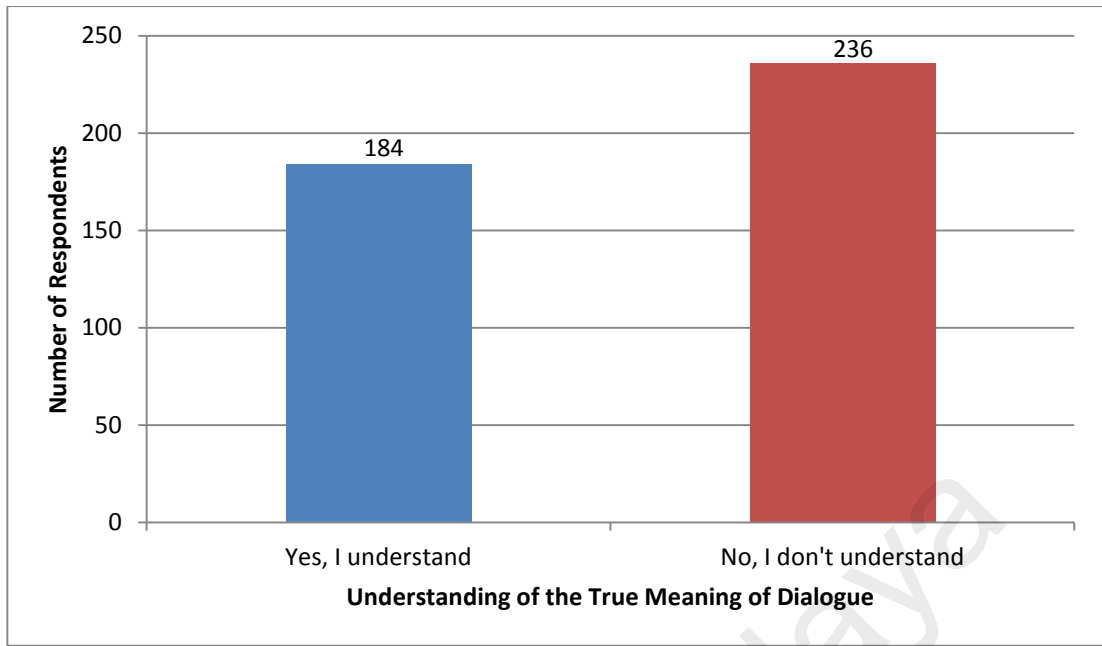


Figure 4.12: Understanding of the true meaning of dialogue

However, more than 80% of the respondents acknowledged the importance of dialogue as one of the mechanism to promote world peace and national unity. Figure 4.13 below shows the respondents view on the importance of dialogue.

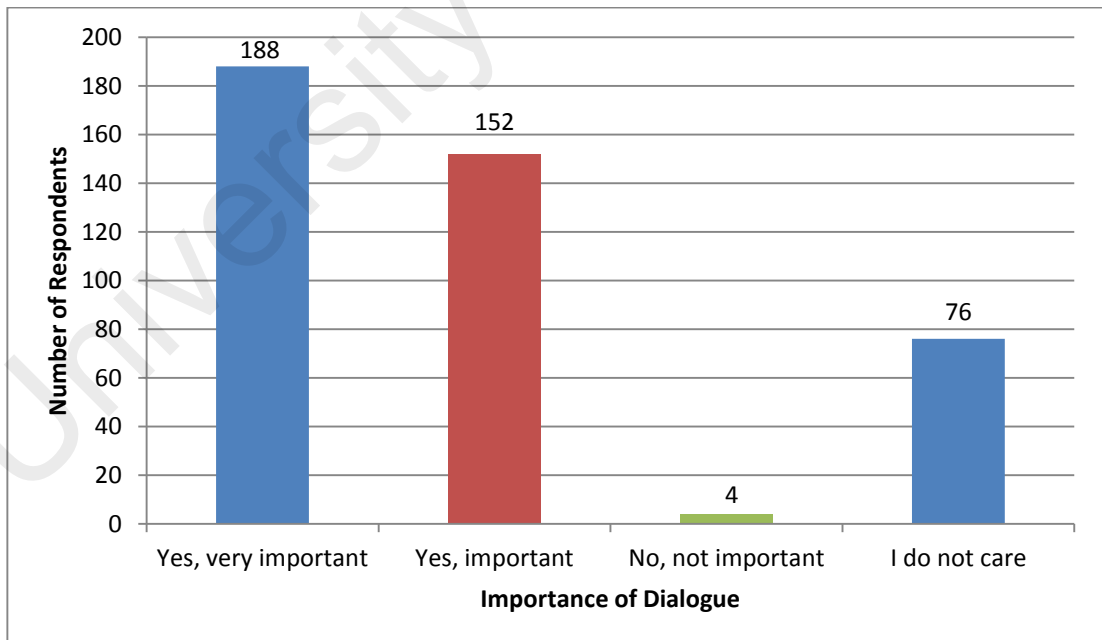


Figure 4.13: The importance of dialogue

When respondents were requested to rate the importance & necessity of dialogue, data showed that most of the respondents agreed that the practices of dialogue is important to

promote and sustain world peace, this is then followed by promoting and nurture national unity, avoid conflicts, understand differences, understand sameness. Majority of the respondents agreed that the practice of dialogue carries a more important role than simply just a way of communication. The ranking of the importance & necessity of dialogue are shown in Figure 4.14 below.

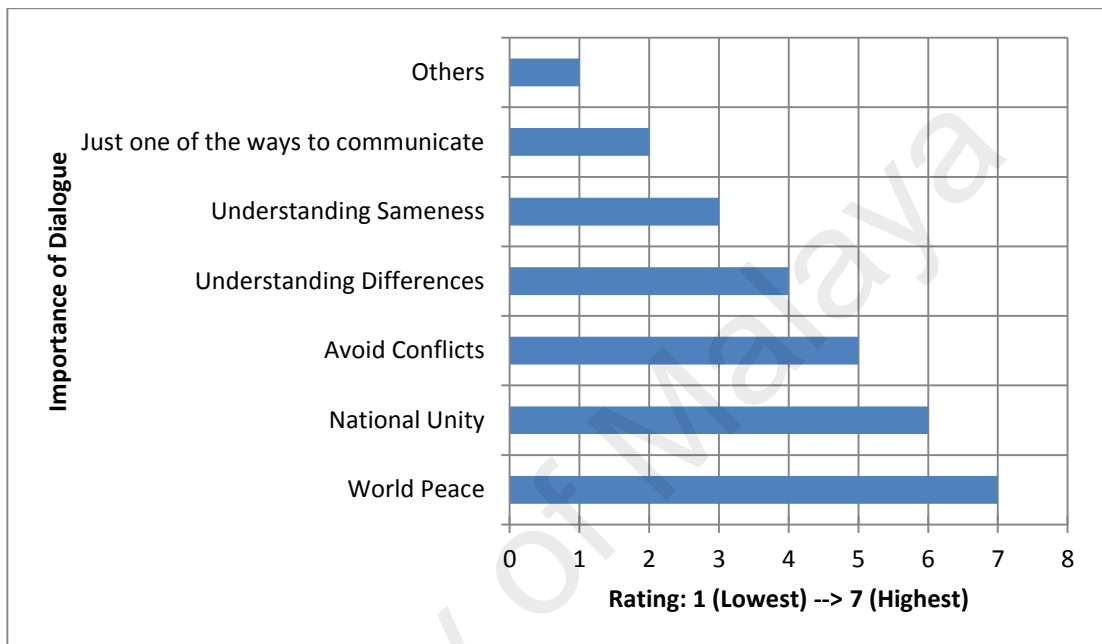


Figure 4.14: Ranking of the importance and necessity of dialogue

The national unity expert also mentioned that dialogue can be used as a mechanism to build unity, for example discussions on sensitive issues such as issues related to religion. Social cohesiveness for religion is also very important in nurturing unity which can be done via closed discussion in a dialogue session.

The above analysis suggests that dialogue is very important and can be a very good mechanism for nurturing national unity. Dialogue is no longer just a communication tool to achieve a consensus decision; instead it is a way to understand differences and sameness amongst society thus sustaining peace and national unity in Malaysia. This also indicates that there is a possibility that dialogue could be used as a way to build national unity by understanding the needs of each different ethnic group, resolving conflicts, and

fostering national unity among students at the university level. However, true dialogue needs to be promoted and practiced by each and everyone around the world. To practice dialogue is to constantly tell oneself to listen first and listen calmly and mindfully. One should not make any judgment on what the other is saying instead one should try to understand the other.

As proposed by Leonard Swidler, the practice of dialogue allows us to learn from each other. Before entering into dialogue, there should be a preparation phase when participants try to understand the meaning of dialogue and prepare themselves. He suggests the following attitudes before entering into dialogue (Arya, 2015).

1. Be open-minded to learn, to grow, to change and eventually to act together on agreed activities.
2. Be interactive and avoid domination or the thinking such as 'I am better' or 'my faith is more perfect than yours'
3. Be truthful and sincere without lazy tolerance to wrong principles
4. Show trust and respect without hidden agenda
5. Distinguish the conversation at principle level from that at practical level and keep the conversation at the same level
6. Express clearly one own position or belief while showing the readiness to listen and understand other's position
7. Listen first and avoid prejudgment on other's position or belief
8. Prepare to change when the change is mutually beneficial. Seek win-win conversion not win-over conversion
9. Be self-critical in a constructive way

4.5 CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, there have been many activities/programmes to promote national unity by the JPNIN at the university level. Based on the feedback/evaluation of the implemented programmes by the respondents, 80% of the organized programmes achieved its objective which is to strengthen unity among the participants. However, both the respondents and experts of ethnic relations in the country felt that the activities/programmes to promote national unity have not been effectively executed due to the main challenges that the efforts of promoting national unity have not been highly accepted or recognized by most of the stakeholders in the university. The university's managerial level, lecturers and students would prefer to put in more efforts in improving academic performances for a better placement of university world ranking as well as for a better academic result for their bachelor degree in order to secure a good job in the future. UNESCO has been employing dialogue extensively as an important tool in fostering mutual understanding, self-expression, peace and reconciliation. Results also showed that it is possible to implement or practice dialogue as a way to foster national unity at the university level. Dialogue should be practiced amongst all at the university level in order to avoid conflicts, understand differences and sameness.

However, dialogue literally is not just a conversation. Dialogue should also be understood as it also facilitating the internal conversation within individual. When we are reading about other civilisations or other religions, dialogues are going on within ourselves. Besides, we should also bring civilizational dialogue into university's curricula by discussing the contacts between the civilisations and contribution of different civilisations, so that all students could see the greatness of each civilisation and everybody in the class would see the lecturer is not biased towards one ethnic group or other ethnic group. National unity is thus also important to prevent people from being mobilized by others.

Government (bureaucrats), politicians and religious leaders as the nation's leaders also played an important role, not just in the policy making, but as a role model to all the citizens. Last but not least, national unity is not just about eating-and-living-together-in-difference, but real national unity is achieved when Malaysians doing it themselves for and with each other without directives or incentives from anyone especially from the state.

University of Malaya

Chapter 5

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CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter concludes the study by focusing on the research objectives once again and offering suggestions for future areas of research based on the results obtained from this study.

5.1 CONCLUDING REMARKS

As a conclusion, the findings of this study do support the hypotheses and has fulfilled the objectives that is, 1) To explore the achievements/activities aimed to promote national unity organized by the JPNIN in universities, 2) To explore the different perspectives – University of Malaya students and experts of ethnic relations in the country on issues related to national unity at university level, 3) To identify the challenges of nurturing national unity at university level and 4) To examine the possibility of implementing/practicing dialogue programme as a way to foster national unity at university level.

Based on JPNIN's survey, it is shown that 80% of the organized programmes have achieved its objective that is to strengthen national unity among the participants. However, majority of the university (UM) students seem to be not interested or even care of participating in activities that are aimed at promoting national unity within the university. Many of the university students would rather spend most of their time trying to achieve better academic results than participating in curricula activities.

The government's focus should be on the initiatives to promote national unity not just at the school level but also continuing it at the university level. As history has shown national unity cannot be cultivated primarily through selective levels/areas and easy

access to target groups only. It is suggested that the JPNIN could put in more effective and efficient efforts to nurture national unity at the university level as based on survey, there is still a lack of sense of national unity among the university students. The need now is for the promotion of policies and as well as the execution of it at the university level.

There are also a few challenges during nurturing the sense of national unity among the university students. The main obstacle to promote national unity in Malaysia today is the weakness in the execution of the plans and activities. More often than not, what is executed or practised is not as what was proposed. Besides, the lack of interest on the importance of national unity by stakeholders like the management, lecturers and students of the university also resulted in the efforts of promoting national unity to be neglected.

Immediate implementation of a more practical system at the university level for nurturing national unity should be encouraged. The various activities/programmes and also teaching and learning process should be made more multi-racial centered in order to enhance public confidence on the existence of equality. Top management of the university and lecturers should be role models to students and practice dialogue in their daily activities so that students are more open minded and ready to openly discuss and understand other ethnic groups. Initiatives or efforts to promote national unity is not just about directing students to eat-and-live-together-in-difference, but more practical initiatives that involved stakeholders, from policy makers to individuals that are able to stimulate Malaysians to have the sense of national unity for and with each other without directives or incentives from anyone especially from the state is desperately needed.

The Ministry of Education should also consider removing the policy and practice of having some public tertiary institutions offer places to only specific ethnic groups.

Transparent criteria of admissions should be applicable to all public tertiary institutions and should be stated out clearly. The criteria should include a weighting for socio-economic and geographical/regional background to compensate for socio-economic and geographical/regional disadvantage. The ministry should also consider introducing/expanding the provision of scholarships for academic excellence, to be applied to the top applicants/enrolees in selected fields deemed as critical to Malaysia's social, cultural and economic needs and future regardless of their ethnicity. All explicit or implicit quotas especially during the students' entry to local public university should be end; as students' entry to local public university should be based on or should be entrusted to those qualified regardless of their ethnicity.

Consideration should also be given to the establishment of a special department or agency to look after the minority groups and to ensure the fair and unbiased implementation of government programmes. Such an agency should be broad based and include representatives from the government, interest groups, ethnic minority communities and NGOs.

Last but not least, the practice of dialogue should be encouraged at all levels as one of the important way in understanding the differences and different way of thinking of one and others. Dialogue is no longer just a communication tool to achieve a consensus decision; instead it is a way to understand differences and sameness amongst society thus sustaining peace and national unity in Malaysia. This findings of the study also indicates that there is a possibility that dialogue could be used as a way to build national unity by understanding the needs of each different ethnic group, resolving conflicts, and fostering national unity among students at the university level. However, true dialogue needs to be promoted and practiced by each and everyone around the world.

This study serves as a preliminary study on the link between the nurturing the sense of national unity among the university students and dialogue practices in Malaysia, which can be a springboard for subsequent researches on these topics. Among the issues that can be researched and looked upon further are the reasons for the pathetic state of lack of understanding of not only the students but younger generations in general and the ways the government and other institutions can help strengthen the understanding of the importance of dialogue and national unity for a more cohesive Malaysian society.

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APPENDIX VI

List of Publications and Papers Presented

1. Chang Lee Wei & Azizan Baharuddin. (2015). National Unity at the Local University of Malaysia: Dialogue a Way Forward. *KATHA*. (Resubmitted the revised manuscript to KATHA)
2. Chang Lee Wei, Azizan Baharuddin & Amran Muhammad. (2013). National Unity at the University Level: Importance of Civilisational Dialogue and Way Forward. *European Scientific Journal*, (4), 173 – 186.
3. Chang Lee Wei, Azizan Baharuddin & Amran Muhammad. (2013, November 10-12). National Unity at the University Level: Importance of Civilisational Dialogue and Way Forward. *Proceedings: 1st Global Multidisciplinary Conference, 10-12 November 2013: (UNESCO's World Science Day Celebration)*. Paper presented at 1st Global Multidisciplinary Conference: (UNESCO's World Science Day Celebration), Republic of Macedonia (173-186). Republic of Macedonia: European Scientific Institute, ESI.
4. Azizan Baharuddin, Raihanah Abdullah & Chang Lee Wei. (2009). Dialogue of Civilisation: An Islamic Perspective. *Journal of Dharma*, 24(4), 301-318