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**ETHNIC ARITHMETIC AND THE CHALLENGES OF NATION  
BUILDING: A STUDY OF MALAYSIAN EDUCATION POLICY  
FOR NATIONAL INTEGRATION, 1970 TO PRESENT**

**HAZRI BIN JAMIL**

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## CHAPTER 6

# ETHNICITY AND EDUCATION POLICY DEVELOPMENT FOR NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN MALAYSIA SINCE 1970

### 6.1 Introduction

As outlined in Chapter One, this research investigates ethnicity issues surrounding Malaysian education policy aimed at achieving national integration within this multiethnic society and aimed at building a united and harmonious Malaysian nation. In the process of developing and implementing policy in education to achieve this aim, the state faces many challenges surrounding different ethnic groups' interests in regard to cultural, social, political and economic matters. Ethnicity issues exist within the context of Malaysian plural society in which ethnic differences are socially, economically and politically constructed. This context of plural society, as discussed in Chapter Two, has affected and shaped the processes and production of education policy since British colonial times, and continues to influence education policy processes in Malaysia.

In Chapter Two also, I discussed the series of Education policy settlements and traced education policy production since British colonial times until the period of the 1960s. This included discussion on the establishment of the state's education committee to study and make recommendations for the education system of independent Malaya. The first committee established in the period of independence was known as the Education Committee 1956. This committee produced the Razak Report of 1956 that was implemented under Education Ordinance 1957. After three years of implementation of this report's recommendations, the Rahman Talib Report of 1960, which reviewed the implementation of Razak Report, came into existence. Both the Razak Report and Rahman Talib Report formed the basis for the Educational Act of 1961, until this was replaced by a new education act in 1996.

In this Chapter, the central intention is to provide a policy chronology of policy production related to ethnic challenges in the education system in Malaysia. The policy or programme in education which is analysed and discussed in this Chapter relates to school



level which direct or indirectly seek to enhance national integration, but which raised ethnic challenges. In this policy chronology, the intention is to provide knowledge and understanding about ethnic challenges, their influence on policies, and how the state was mediating and managing those challenges.

The narration of Malaysian education policy in this policy analysis ranges from a narrow focus on examining the texts of the various documents including official and private documents regarding the policy and ethnic challenges, to broad analysis of policy processes that includes policy implementation, related issues of ethnicity, and policy action and inaction. This accommodated both coherence and complexity in relation to the issues being studied. The intention in analysing such documents is to construct an account over time relating to ethnic challenges in Malaysian education policy or programmes aimed at enhancing national integration. This begins with an account of the policy settlement since 1970. Subsequently, the analysis narrates education policy development and implementation from 1970 which is related to particular issues in specific education policies. It details the numbers of policies and programmes within the education field, having regard to the form of policy and programmes with the specific intention of promoting national integration and those which had other purposes but created ethnic challenges.

The emphasis in this Chapter regarding challenges of ethnicity in Malaysian education policy deals more with Chinese community activities, than those of other ethnic groups, as the Chinese are powerful economically, have proper organisations in relation to their school system, have more political bargaining power, and more members in the state ruling political parties than might be expected proportionally. The more explicit tensions of ethnicity work across Malay and Chinese narratives, as both ethnic groups have strong positions in the contested arena of ethnicity and education, rather than with the Indian community which has minority status.

This Chapter then provides a critical chronology of education policy developments related to the politics of ethnicity and policies for national integration since 1970. This is in line with the theoretical framework of critical policy sociology which demands both an



historical and social science approach to policy analysis. This Chapter provides the historical account of education policies for national integration, while the two subsequent data Chapters provide the social science account through analysis of interview data. The historical analysis provided in this Chapter draws on primary and secondary source documents and relates to research questions numbers one, two and three as outlined in Chapter One. CDA is the approach adopted to document analysis. This analysis also builds on the historical account provided in Chapter Two and on the concepts of ethnicity, nation, nation-state, plural society and nation building considered in Chapter Three and on the understanding of policy as outlined in Chapter Four.

## **6.2 The Policy Settlement Since 1970 – Changing Orientation to the Dominant Aspiration**

The period after the 1969 ethnic riots, specifically beginning from 1970 was marked as the starting point for the changing policy orientation of the state in developing a united Malaysian nation. Since then, national unity has become more important and led the government to implement policies with the special intention of national integration. In view of inter-ethnic economic disparity as a major problem precipitating ethnic tension that brings the turmoil into existence (Malaysia, 1976, p.5), the state believes that ethnic tension can be resolved by accommodating such dissatisfaction amongst particular ethnic groups. Thus, discourse on economic disparity between ethnic groups has inspired the state to form a united multiethnic society on the basis of equality in distribution of resources and prosperity. In this sense, the state believes that integration could not be achieved if one or more groups felt economically disadvantaged in relation to other ethnic groups. It positioned the state ideology that social integration must be based on the principle that equitable income and opportunities between ethnic groups in Malaysia plural society should be attained (Malaysia, 1971a, p.1). Specifically, for the state, the condition for developing a united and harmonious Malaysian nation was to ‘narrow the gap’ of economic and social status between the Malays and other ethnic communities, especially the Chinese. In addition, the state also believed that language issues and particular ethnic group’s dissatisfaction with the liberal approach in implementing the spirit of education policy since independence was amongst the important causes of the riots (Malaysia, 1971b; Kheng, 2002; Wahid, 2005).

Framed by these beliefs of ethnic groups' conflict, the state inclined their policy to improve the social, economic, culture and language status of the ethnic majority. Since then, the state policy, which has generally been viewed as providing preference to Malays (also regarded as *bumiputera* or son of the soil policy (Mason and Omar, 2003)), and also been viewed as an affirmative policy for the *bumiputera*, directed policy implementation to enhance the social and economic position of the disadvantaged ethnic majority. This also simultaneously focused on implementing the ethnic aspirations on language and culture of the dominant majority for the Malaysian nation.

Based on this premise, the National Economic Policy (NEP) was initiated by the government as a vehicle to unite the nation post 1970, in the aftermath of the ethnic violence in 1969. The NEP's strategy consists of two pronged-strategies: the first, its emphasis on eradication of poverty among all in Malaysian society, irrespective of ethnic group; and the second was the restructuring of Malaysian society to correct economic imbalance, specifically to reduce and eliminate the identification of Malay and other indigenous people with low income and agricultural pursuits (Malaysia, 1971b). The state believed that both strategies are major aspects for enhancing national unity by ensuring a more equitable distribution of income and opportunities. The intention of further policy development was to ensure that this source of ethnic group conflict could be eradicated.

The period of the Second Malaysia Plan 1971-1975 (Second MP), has been the most pronounced phase in stipulating the objective of NEP. In line with the NEP's strategy, national integration in this five years plan can be understood in terms of social integration through fairer distribution of income and opportunities within Malaysian society (Malaysia, 1971b, p.1). In this development plan, the main discourse in uniting the nation was to ensure that the majority ethnic group can be assisted regarding their social and economic situation. This guided the state policy orientation post 1970 to develop a united and harmonious Malaysian nation. In this regard, the approach of the Second MP and future development plans is to help build national unity through development, in which progress as a united nation (Malaysia, 1971a) based on equal distribution of wealth amongst the multi ethnic society in Malaysia, whilst ensuring the status and rights of the dominant ethnic group will be strengthened. The then Prime Minister Abdul Razak bin Hussein, when presenting the motion on The Second MP in House of Parliament on July



12, 1971, pointed out that national unity depends on how the state can ensure the inter-ethnic disparities in economic and social position can be resolved.

From our past experience, we fully realize that it is not sufficient to provide only the economic infrastructure. This is obvious from the events of May 13, 1969, which mostly tore this nation asunder. The lesson to be learnt from this painful event makes it imperative for all of us to foster national unity and harmony among the various races which are at present compartmentalized not only according to their way of life and culture, but even more significant is the existence of imbalances in the economic conditions among the races today.

(Malaysia, 1971a, p. 3)

While the intention of such policy was about improving the economic dimension and standing of Bumiputera, discourse on *Bumiputeraism* also brought the Second MP to identify that education ought to be the major vehicle in promoting unity among all Malaysians by providing an opportunity for social and economic mobility within society. In this regard, education has been recognised amongst the most important fields to accomplish the aims of NEP, particularly in improving the standing and the opportunities of the Malay. In the period of the 1970s, many of the education policies developed were implicated within the introduction of NEP and supported the dominant ethnic group's aspirations regarding language and culture of the nation. Thus, the significance aspects of educational developments pertaining to national unity during the period subsequent to 1970 involved a combination of strategies for promoting national unity and enhancing the economic and social status of the Malay.

Jayasuria (1983) concluded four major thrusts in education policy in respect of mass schooling in Malaysia succeeding to 1970, which are:

1. The promotion of national unity using National language as the medium of instruction at the primary level and at the levels above the primary.
2. The promotion of national unity by exposing all ethnic groups to a common syllabus and common set of examinations.
3. The expansion of education at all levels to turn out *Bumiputeras* in sufficient number to correct the under representation of *Bumiputeras* in the various sectors of the economy and employment.
4. The introduction of moral education with a view to the inculcation of values and attitudes that are desirable in a plural society.

As to serve the NEP's aims and objectives, the production of Malaysian education policy post 1970 can be seen as central amongst NEP's strategies of promoting social mobility for the Malay (Ganguly, 1997, p.257). This policy also can be regarded as a vehicle to implement the so called affirmative action to uplift the Malay (Omar, 2003), who constitute the majority but who are economically disadvantaged. From a similar perspective, Mohamad (2005) sees that the purpose of such policy was for group enhancement, and is often considered a quintessential tool of the state for social engineering in restructuring the ethnic disparity in respect of economic opportunities and standing. Thus, this approach opened a new era of determination to overcome ethnic divisions, to develop and build Malaysia's nation (De Micheaux, 1997).

After the end of the period of NEP in 1990, the government introduced a new policy, named the National Development Policy (NDP), which was a successor of the NEP. The NDP has become the basis for developing the country during the subsequent ten years (1990-2000). In this policy, education was identified as an important enabler to foster national unity. It showed that the state was constantly concerned about the role of education as the most important factor that has an impact on national integration. The state re-expressed this aspect of education's role:

To inculcate and nurture national consciousness through fostering common ideals, values, aspiration and loyalties in order to mould national unity and national identity in a multi-ethnic society.

(Malaysia, 1990, p.5).

In the Fifth Malaysia plan (1986-1990), the state further strengthened the role of education in promoting national unity, expressing the Malay language as important instrument for achieving this goal;

The implementation of the use of Bahasa Malaysia as the medium of instruction, served to strengthen the basis for national unity in that it promoted effective communication among Malaysians through a common language.

(Malaysia, 1986, p.6)

The NDP was supported by the subsequent outline perspective plan, also known as the National Vision Policy (NVP). This perspective plan aimed at developing the country to be a 'developed' country by 2020, and was originated by the idea of the then Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad when he delivered a speech titled 'Malaysia: The Way Forward' to the Malaysian Business Council on 28<sup>th</sup> February 1991. This speech



commonly known as Vision 2020 has been officially accepted as the basis for developing the nation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to become a developed country with targeted date of 2020.

Malaysia should not be developed in economic sense. It must be a nation that is fully developed along all dimensions: economically, politically, socially, spiritually, psychologically and culturally. We must be fully developed in terms of our economy, in terms of social justice, political stability, system of government, quality of life, social and spiritual values, national pride and confidence.

(Mahathir Mohammad, 1991, Malaysia The Way Forward)

The notion of Vision 2020 raised twenty challenges for the Malaysian nation to achieve the status of developed country by 2020, but in Malaysia's own mould. In Vision 2020, the discourse of developing and integrating the nation surrounds these challenges that Malaysia needs to conquer in order to be a fully developed country. The importance of national unity is the paramount challenge for the nation as this has been stated as the first challenge of establishing a united Malaysian nation.

There can be no fully developed Malaysia until we have finally overcome the nine central strategic challenges that have confronted us from the moment of our birth as an independent nation. The first of these is the challenge of establishing a united Malaysian nation with a sense of common and shared destiny. This must be a nation at peace with itself, territorially and ethnically integrated, living in harmony and full and fair partnership, made up of one 'Bangsa Malaysia' with political loyalty and dedication of the nation.

(Mahathir Mohammad, 1991, Malaysia The Way Forward.  
Source: Department of the Prime Minister Malaysia)

The NVP incorporates the critical thrusts of the previous development policies, which are NEP and NDP with the principal objective of national unity (Malaysia, 2001a). However, the different and new discourse in Vision 2020 in uniting the nation is about the construction of 'Bangsa Malaysia' (Malaysian nation), which means the integrated nation of a multi ethnic society with common identity and loyalty to the nation, a harmonious society sharing the wealth and economic opportunity of the country.

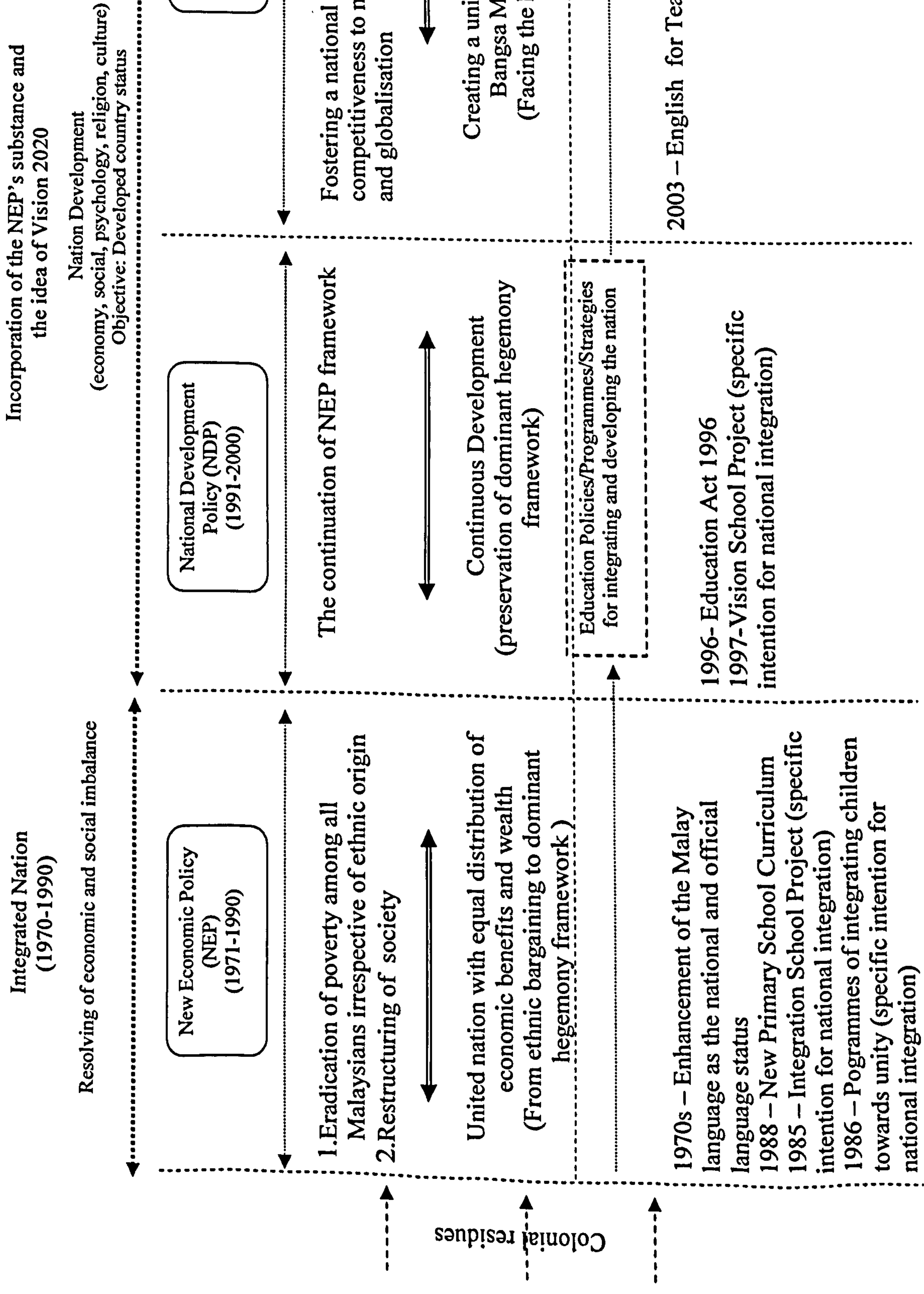
This idea of Vision 2020 became a major discourse within the state mechanism in developing the nation sequentially to achieve the status of developed country. As the Vision 2020 envisages Malaysia to be a developed nation by the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Abdullah, 2003), this plan wanted the progress and development of the nation to constitute the nation as a competitive player in the global field. While focusing



on economic, technological and scientific advancement as indicators for developing the country, the official discourse in achieving the aim also places education as an important instrument for promoting national unity, social equality and economic development (Lee, 2000). This influences the state mechanism of creating a united and developed nation in the next twenty years (2001-2020).

It can be argued that education policy in Malaysia is derived from these national policy frameworks for developing the country. However, while the NEP has been viewed as the foundation for policy implementation post 1970, which focused on Malay interests and their privileged status as *bumiputera*, the education policy development and implementation reflects the spirit of Razak Report and Rahman Talib Report, which are the basis for national education policy. The implementation of policy post 1970 maintained these reports recommendation embodied in Education Act of 1961. It became a principal regulation in running the education system in Malaysia, specifically related to school system and language of instruction. Hence, such discourse surrounding education policy processes and issues were always associated with the education policy framed by these two documents.

Given the surrounding discourses of national unity, a harmonious society, the aim of developing a common identity and loyalty as the Malaysian nation, whilst needing to achieve a status as a developed country within a 'Malaysian own mould', the state has incorporated various integration policies and programmes in the educational sector, towards the achievement of national unity. The main policies and programmes that have been produced for developing the nation, including education policy since 1970 to the present time are illustrated in Figure 6.1.



*Figure 6.1: Malaysian Economic Policies and Education Policies/Programmes/Strategies  
(Adapted from Berna, 2003, p. 217)*



### **6.3 The Policy Orientation in the 1970s - The National Language and Dominant Aspiration Phase**

The ethnic riot of 1969 has provoked the state to modify its policy orientation from a liberal approach of accommodation to the reinforcement of Malay political dominance. Mauzy (1985) refers to the period after 1969 as the 'era of new realism', in which the state began to impose policy that could ensure the Malay's interests would be protected. More important, according to Mauzy (1993), was the fact that the ethnic bargaining process was terminated and replaced by the policy orientation that inclined to dominant group political supremacy. In this period, the policy movement in achieving the 'ultimate objective' of putting Malay language as the main medium of instruction in education system seemed to be aggressively imposed by the state.

#### **6.3.1 Language towards Integrating the Nation – Strengthening the Dominant Aspiration**

Although there was no section in NEP's document relating to language in restructuring ethnic groups, the NEP's idea has given opportunity to the Malay language nationalists to push their agenda of making Malay language as a major language in all sectors, including language of instruction in the education system. In this regard, the language issue, which was amongst the main reason for the ethnic riot 1969 has created a foundation for the Malay language nationalists and academics to bring this issue into the national discourse (Kheng, 2002, p.126-129). In other words, the NEP provided the foundation for Malay nationalism to re-define language hegemony and Malay status as the indigenous ethnic group in the country.

Accordingly, the major change in education policy was the implementation of Malay language as the medium of instruction. The policy was started through the unilateral declaration made by the Minister of Education in 1970. The reason for implementing this policy as was pointed out by the then Education Minister is the need to review the state approach to disseminating a feeling of belonging towards the nation of all children in Malaysia (Datar, 1983).



This changing policy orientation regarding the national language in Malaysia was drawn into public policy production, including in the education domain. In the Second MP, education was recognised as contributing significantly towards promoting national unity (Singh and Mukherjee, 1993) by the 'formulation of education policies designed to encourage common values and loyalties among all communities and all regions.....the careful development of a national language and literature, of art and music; the emergence of truly national symbols and institutions based on the cultures and traditions of the society' (Malaysia, 1971a, p.3). In this sense, the identification of national language as an important instrument for enhancing national integration was expressed, stipulated by the state's ideology of 'one language and one nation' (Malaysia, 1971a) in pursuing national integration.

In this changing policy orientation, the implementation of Malay language policy in the education system was outlined as a clear course of progression. The final aim of this policy was the Malay Language to be ultimately used as a medium of instruction in the universities by 1983. Other than language of instruction, the policy for assisting and positioning the Malay dominance in higher education was further entrenched by the quota system derived from affirmative policy for the bumiputera, which allocated 60 percent of the public universities places for the bumiputera students. The first move by the government to gradually convert English schools into Malay schools, began with standard 1 in 1970, when universities were also aligned with the National language (Hon-Chan, 1977, p.32-33). For the Chinese secondary schools, the option given by the government was that either they convert into a Malay school or remain as private schools outside the National Education System (Haque, 2003).

This major programme of action in the education field, in respect of national integration, meant that for the first time in Malaysia's educational history, Malay language was accorded the position it was promised under the 1956 Education Bill and Education Act 1961, both of which were based on the Razak Reports and Rahman Talib Reports. In this regard, this is to accomplish the aim of education policy post independence (Chee, 1979), which brings the discourse of the 'ultimate objective' relating to the national language to

be the main language of instruction in Malaysia education system in integrating the nation. The state's impatience to create and inculcate a national identity through the national language after 1969 was demonstrated by the status and function of Malay language in developing the nation. This ultimately became a non-negotiable proposition. This drastic change demonstrated the state's intention in accommodating Malay aspirations regarding culture and language. The policy action thus put an end to the state's liberal policy of deliberate gradualism, which delayed the full implementation of its language policy in national education system in the period before 1970. The change demonstrated the ideology of national language for nation unification, thus reveals state action aimed to recuperate the weakness in policy implementation in the period after independence to 1969 (Mauzy, 1985).

However, despite the government policy of promoting the Malay language to develop national integration, to some degree, the other ethnic groups' interests in education also needed to be accommodated, especially relating to the issue on the right to mother tongue usage in the education system, which had been promised by Educational policy since independence. Accordingly, the Chinese and Tamil primary schools remained within the national education system. At the secondary school, Malay language was to be the only medium of instruction. Prior to their promotion to Form 1 at these schools, students from Chinese and Tamil primary schools needed to experience a year in 'Remove Form', as an immersion programme in Malay language to help them cope with the change of medium of instruction at the secondary level (see Figure 6.2). Furthermore, so as to strengthen the status of the National language, the government has made the National language a compulsory subject for the Malaysian Education Certificate (Hon-Chan 1977, p.44).



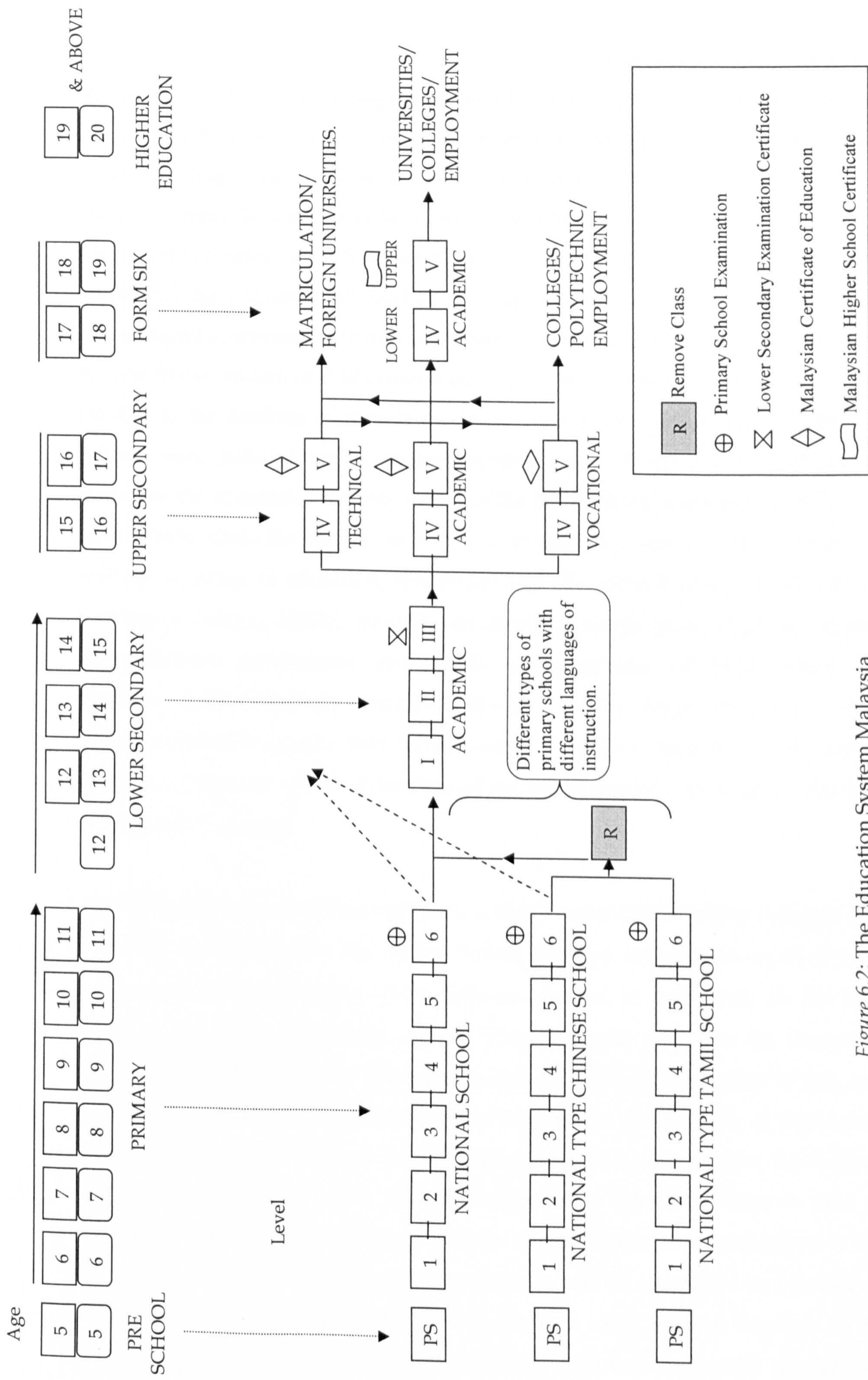


Figure 6.2: The Education System Malaysia



The bureaucratic and unilateral implementation of the policy was a strategy to enforce the development of national language in the education system. This was understood as a desire to achieve national integration by making non-Malay use Malay widely in the mass schooling system. While this was one intention, there were other sweeping changes framed by the discourse of *Bumiputeraism*, which were intended to enhance social and economic mobility of the Malay. For example, Jasbir Sarjit Singh (1982) argues that the conversion of English-language schools into Malay language schools was designed to reverse the 'initial advantage' that the colonial education system gave the non-Malay section of Malaysian society in terms of a better school system, using English as the medium of instruction. In this regard, this policy enforcement was infused with political and economic considerations of the Malay position, to overcome the economic 'minority status' of the Malay through educational policy. In other words, while the aim of the policy is to develop a united nation through the national language in education, this policy was also perceived as a pro-Malay or *bumiputera* (Kheng, 2003b), providing an advantage for the young Malay to enhance their academic performance, and thereby strengthen and lift Malay social and economic mobility through education (Takei et al. 1973a; Singh, 1982; Lim, 1985). These concomitant agendas thus accommodated the policy orientation in developing the nation, inspired by the discourses of social, economic and political disparity between ethnic groups.

This shift in Malaysian educational policy which committed to Malay language had important implications for the nation. Firstly, this had reduced the segregation of schools that existed because of the different medium of instruction, in this case referring to English and Malay schools. Even the state maintains the vernacular school system at the primary level; in the secondary school level, there is only one type of national school which uses Malay language as the medium of instruction. Other types of schools are not recognised by the state as being under the national education system. As a result, the Chinese secondary schools continue to exist as independent schools in which their certificate of examination is not recognised by the government. In this sense, this policy movement can be interpreted as intended to create national schools with truly national character using national language as the medium of instruction. With this movement, the state was hoping that the national



school would become non-ethnic in character – the previous role that was played by the English medium schools.

Secondly, this new emphasis in Malaysian education policy satisfied the aspirations and expectations of the Malay youth who perceived the education field as their chief instrument of social mobility (Takei et al. 1973a; Chee, 1979; Singh, 1982). The policy change enabled Malay students to use this language that may have helped them to achieve higher education attainment, thus enhancing their social and economic mobility. Here, the role of national language is not only for national integration through the mass education system, it goes further as a tool to eliminate the imbalance in opportunities in the academic and economy sectors between ethnic groups. While the strategy provides a unifying experience to the children and increases effective ethnic relations, the social equality and education opportunity for the Malay are also to be pursued by Malay as the language of instruction. As Singh and Murkherjee (1993) suggest, this policy framework had a dual role for education in integrating the nation.

The dominant aspiration as the basis for constructing the education policy through the promotion of national language for developing national integration has been consensually agreed by the major ethnic groups. This spirit embodied in Razak Reports, and further strengthened by the Rahman Talib Reports, derived from ethnic groups' consensus regarding national integration and nation building. This is understood as a part of a 'social contract' that was accepted by the major ethnic groups due to independence as *quid pro quo* or reciprocal exchange between them, whereby the non-Malay conceded the 'special rights' of the Malay in return to the granting of citizenship to non-Malay.

### **6.3.2 Ethnic Challenges to Language Policy in Education –Contested Interests**

The state leaders believed that national integration in schools would be achieved in the landscape of policy change post 1970. As the then Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman noted: 'The education policy is one pillar which supports our national unity...' (Tunku Abdul Rahman, 1981, p.83). The changing policy orientation was inclined to dominant aspirations with the consciousness of equal accommodation to



other ethnic groups' interests in relating to their rights to mother tongue. However, the justification for such change did not rest solely with the ethnic agenda in ensuring their rights in education, especially related to the entwined issues - language medium of instruction and the choice of education. As a prescription for the ethnic tension between the ethnic majority and minority, this policy action was challenged by the minority as they saw such changes as imposing ethnic majority aspirations and thus posing a threat to their culture and language rights.

New policy implementation after 1970 which emphasises Malay language raised unease amongst the non-Malay community, especially the Chinese. They saw, while the policy aimed at realising the objective of national education policy, this was aimed to achieve the ultimate objective of a single school system. Although the implementation schedule only involved English type primary schools being converted to national schools using National language as the medium of instruction, the non-Malay felt this also posed a threat to mother tongue education of non-Malay. This feeling of unease amongst the non-Malay community on the policy practice has been shown by their response towards the policy implementation.

Beginning in 1971, when the state started its gradual conversion of English schools into Malay medium schools, the demand for Chinese primary education among the Chinese started to gain momentum. This was a clear response towards the policy (Ganguly, 1997) shown by the non-Malays where they strongly adhered to their mother-tongue languages (Singh and Mukherjee, 1993; Soong, 1999). The evidence of such a scenario has been shown by the data on the increasing enrolment of students in the Chinese medium schools. For example, in 1971, there were 413,270 students receiving primary school education in the Chinese primary schools and this figure increased to 498,311 by 1978 (Guan, 2000). In 2002, the number of student in this type of schools was 628,901 which make 21.1% of the total population of students in primary education in Malaysia (see Appendix L). By the 2000s, the proportion of Chinese students in national schools (using Malay language as a medium of instruction) had declined to about 2%, and among Indians, it was 4% (Independent Committee on the Issue of Ethnic Segregation in Schools, 2002).



This puzzling trend represents a significant deviation from the official goal of moving toward a unified, homogenous education system (Reid, 1988) aimed to accomplish the 'ultimate objective' of a single schooling policy. Whilst the state ideology aimed to inspire national integration through the language medium and school system, the non-Malay reaction indicated negative policy implications in terms of their ethnic interests and challenges. In this sense, the increasing numbers of students in National Type Primary schools could be linked to the non-Malay consciousness and their rational choice towards education, especially amongst the Chinese.

Wah (1984, p.107-108) raised three factors related to the scenario of school choice amongst the non-Malays after the implementation of policy after 1970. First, the implementation of Malay language as the medium of instruction in English primary schools eliminated the English school as this type of school can guarantee social mobility and has high economic value. The abolition of this school has 'forced' the non-Malay to send their children to their mother tongue schools. Secondly, the Chinese community particularly believes vernacular education can provide more opportunity in employment especially in the private sector as the non-Malay has limited prospects in the public sector because of *Bumiputeraism*. Thirdly, the emergence of ethnic consciousness in the 1970s in which the non-Malay community, especially the Chinese, supporting the campaign for preserving and protecting the vernacular education caused by the feeling of being threatened by the policy that was more aligned with Malay aspirations. For the Indian community, there was a much different response regarding their vernacular schools affected by the policy implementation in 1970. This is because there was no systematic and effective organisation that could mobilise the Indian community to struggle for the development of Tamil primary schools.

Contestation towards the state ideology in education relating to language and schooling system however, had already emerged from when the government produced the Education Act 1961. For example, the Democratic Action Party (DAP), which is the opposition party that has always been seen to express the Chinese's voice on issues of education and language, overtly opposed the policy of Malay language as the main medium of instruction in the education system. They worked with a different discourse in terms of integrating the nation. While accept Malay as the national and



common language, they continued to ask for the inclusion of Chinese and Tamil as the joint official languages with Malay as 'a sign of equality'. They proposed that official status be accorded to the Chinese and Tamil languages and the abolition of the classification of "national" and "national-type" schools by giving equal treatment for all the four language streams of education – Malay, Chinese, Tamil and English. In addition, they proposed that Chinese and Tamil be accepted as media of instruction as well as examination at primary and secondary levels, in all Chinese and Tamil media schools (DAP, No Year). This alternative discourse of national integration compared with the official one challenged the ethnic majority aspiration and instead supported the notion of equal rights for accommodating other ethnic rights in respect of culture and language. For the non-Malay, such a Malay language policy approach was a systematic means for abolishing other ethnic cultures and identities (Datar, 1983). This provoked a feeling of cultural discrimination as there is no effort by the state to protect and develop multiculturalism in Malaysia.

Such sentiments based around ethnicity towards the policy were already informed by the state. The state leaders disclosed their anxiety about this opposition to such policy and labelled it as anti-national provoked by seditious elements. The then Prime Minister, Tun Abdul Razak, in his statement when presenting the Second MP in the parliament, raised the issue that any policy implementation, even though constructed for integrating the nation, would be interpreted according to the ethnic interests.

Undoubtedly, there are certain groups – whom I regard as anti-national and subversive – who will capitalize on this issue to the effect that the Second Malaysian Plan will only benefit one particular group – to the exclusion of others

(Malaysia, 1971a, p.7)

Some scholars regard the phenomena of ethnic consciousness which existed in 1970s as the side-line effect of implementation of the Malay language policy that concentrated on Malay interests (Wah, 1984; Means, 1986). As such, the policy was rejected by the non-Malay community as they claim this policy intimidated non-Malay interests. However, while such allegations that this policy was discriminatory, undemocratic and inequitable for other ethnic group's cultures and identities, it is at the same time important to see that this policy was related to the May 13 1969 ethnic riots. In this sense, the formulation and implementation of the policy was the state endeavour to alleviate ethnic tensions between the major ethnic groups. In addition,



this can be interpreted as the state's action in responding to their failure in implementing and enforcing policy in education from independence until the ethnic riots of 1969. The intention was to fulfil the demands of the Malay towards their special rights and language issue, which were regarded as legitimate rights for the 'son of the soil' of the country. Since the sensitive issues of language and special position of the Malays has been regarded as a sensitive element in relation to ethnic tensions, the state believes that this issue need to be tackled to reduce the sense of insecurity felt by the Malay, when they see the widening gap between Malay and the non-Malays in the economic and education spheres (Malaysia, 1971a).

On the other hand, the Malay nationalistic element also pressured the state to implement such policy in order to strengthen Malay language, culture and ethnic superiority in the country. The pressure from the Malay nationalists pushed the state to strive aggressively to enlarge the presence and function of Malay identity and cultural symbols in the official and public spheres (Guan, 2000). Therefore, the policy of the Malay language as the main language of instruction is derived from this element, in interplay with the state endeavour of assisting the Malay in their social and economic development. In this regard, it can be considered that the language policy in the education system in the 1970s, while on the one hand a tool for integrating the nation, on the other it gave support to the Malay, as this group has been identified as the disadvantaged ethnic majority. This has led to greater ethnicity consciousness amongst the state leaders and to some degree, the decisions were coloured by an ethnic bias and influenced the way the state mechanism implemented such policy.

### **6.3.3 Challenges to the Education Amendment Act 1972 - Protecting the Vernacular Schools' Identity**

Beside the implementation of national language in the education system after 1970, another issue during the 70s that also brought resistance from the non-Malays was the amendment of Education Policy Act 1972. This incorporated the recommendation of the Aziz Report which proposed that the School Boards of fully-assisted schools should be abolished (Soong, 2001). Related to this aspect, Section 26A of the Amended Education Act 1972 sanctioned the Aziz Report's recommendation that:



On the date to be determined by the Ministry, every board of managers and governors in any fully assisted school or fully assisted educational institution shall be wound up in such manner as the Minister may determine; and thereupon it shall cease to employ and to be the employer of teachers and other employees and every instrument of management or government pertaining to such school or educational institution shall cease to have effect.

(Malaysia, 1972b, p.12)

In spite of this piece of legislation as an effort to create a single system of teacher service in all schools under the national education system, this was interpreted by the Chinese community as the government intention to abolish the power of the school board of Chinese schools for the appointment and dismissal of teachers. In this sense, they saw that the government agenda was to remove the status quo and character of Chinese school by abolishing the existing power of the school board (Soong, 2001).

In principle, the report recognised the role and position of the school board as the organisation that can 'serve a useful purpose as an intermediary between the government and the public in that grievances or misgivings regarding the administration of schools and educational matters can be voiced and ultimately brought to the attention of the authorities...Most important of all, it can help to instil in the minds of the public the concept that education is the joint responsibility of the Government and the public' (Malaysia, 1971c, paragraph 8.39). However, this report had cited examples of abuses and malpractice by the school boards, in relation to teacher and staff appointment (Soong, 2001). This has led the government to include such suggestions of the Report to reduce the power of the school boards to eliminate negative practice by the school board, especially related to the appointment of teachers and staff in school.

The significant implication from this regulation was the end of the period of school board autonomy. This has been viewed by the non-Malay as a threat to the status quo and identity of their vernacular schools, as they believed that 'the absence of the school board means the absence of the Chinese schools' (Memorandum by Federation of Malaysian Chinese School Board Associations, 1977, p.8). Even though the government expressed the view that the action taken was only to reconstitute the school boards, particularly in relation to teacher and staff appointment (Malaysia, 1972c), this was interpreted by the Chinese school boards as the government's



intention to dismiss such institution, which they believed indicated an agenda to abolish the vernacular schools (Yek, 2002).

In relation to this issue, the then Minister of Education, Hussein Onn, in the parliamentary debate on the amendment of Education Act, affirmed that the power of the School Board would remain unchanged except for the appointment and dismissal of teachers and other employees of the schools (Malaysia, 1972d, p.5372). However, the opposition accused that the reason for taking away or reducing the power of the School Board was suspect, since the Education Act 1961 already gave the Minister of Education power to deal with members of Boards who failed to live up their duties by striking them off the register of Governors or Managers (Malaysia, 1972d, p.5372). For them, the understanding that had been agreed by the government and the Chinese schools since they accepted to become fully assisted National-Type (Chinese) primary schools indicated that the School Board would be left intact, had now been violated by the new section 26A in the policy (Malaysia, 1972d). As a reaction to the Chinese protest regarding this regulation, the government allocated section 32 (A) which allows the School Boards to write a letter to the Minister of Education if they disagree with the headmaster of the school within thirty days after the appointment.

The non-Malay community constantly pursued their interests of protecting their vernacular schools in any state plan related to this issue, even though the government decided to persist with the regulation. For example, in the 1974, when the government announced the setting up of a Cabinet Review Committee on Education, there were over three hundred memoranda, including one by the All Malaysian Chinese Guilds and Associations raising this issue with the government. They submitted fundamental requests for developing Chinese education in the country, as well as expressing misgivings about the 1972 Education Amendment Act and other areas of government policy. In particular, they asked for the removal of the threat to the Chinese primary schools posed by section 21(2) of the 1961 Education Act.

Despite some protests from Chinese and Indians in particular, the state maintained their belief that all policy was constructed to accommodating the national interest of bringing the nation together. The then Prime Minister, Dato' Hussein Onn regarded that, "all aspects of the government's policy are geared towards the achievement of



national unity. All (including education) are meaningless if the people are not united” (cited in Watson, 1980, p.7). However, ethnic resistance on this issue is a manifestation of responsiveness element amongst non-Malay community to protect their ethnic based education institutions from such policy, which they believe implied the ‘ultimate objective’ of National Education Policy. Albeit that the implementation of such policy tended to improve teacher professionalism and to settle the problem of teacher-shortage in all schools at primary level, including in the Chinese and Tamil schools, this was correlated by the non Malay as state intention of eliminating their vernacular schools through producing a single system in education using Malay language as the medium of instruction. Thus, whatever action was taken by the state that affected this type of schools has been interpreted through the lens of ethnicity to challenge the dominant hegemony and the idea of assimilation.

#### **6.4 The Eighties – Tensions Between Educational Purposes and Ethnicity**

As with the constant struggle to protect rights to mother tongue, and to protect related education institutions, the Eighties were also shrouded with the issue of ethnicity in education policy in Malaysia. In this period, ethnic challenges towards government policy were manifested in relation to the issues of “3Rs” system in 1980, the integrated school project in 1985, to the posting of non-Mandarin qualified administrators to the Chinese schools in 1987.

##### **6.4.1 Curriculum Issues –Challenges for Language and Cultural Identity**

In 1982, a new curriculum for all primary school was introduced. This was the Integrated Curriculum for Primary School (ICPS), which emphasised Reading, Writing and Arithmetic, which was also been known as the 3Rs curriculum. The introduction of this new curriculum was based on the recommendations made by the 1974 Cabinet Committee to Study the Implementation of Education Policy (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1979). In principle, this new curriculum emphasised content and pedagogical aspects at the primary school level (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1982). This was geared to improve the quality of teaching and learning and thus would not affect the current practice of language instruction in the school system. Nevertheless, the major challenge to this curriculum innovation was brought by the Chinese community. The Chinese views on the introduction of this curriculum related



particularly to their rights and interests regarding mother tongue and the school system. The way the state implemented this curriculum was also viewed by the Chinese as demonstrating an intention to switch language of instruction of the Chinese and Tamil primary schools to Malay.

The 3Rs curriculum's controversy occurred when the Ministry of education announced that all curriculum materials in ICPS would be provided in Malay language except for the language subject (Malaysia, 1981). This included the text books, curriculum syllabus, guidelines and resource books for Art, Music, Physical Education and the Moral Education subject. The announcement regarding the implementation of this curriculum was received by the Chinese with disagreement. Their impression was that this curriculum had a hidden agenda of the Education Ministry, namely, to change the medium of instruction in Chinese and Tamil primary schools. For them:

...if the 3R System as has been recently revealed were to be implemented in the Chinese primary schools, it will mean bringing an end to the existing Chinese primary schools and subsequently the traditional culture as taught to the children through the teaching contents of the existing texts.

(Yong, 1982)

For the Chinese, the implementation of this curriculum gave a grave threat to the Chinese schools' character and integrity (*National Echo*, 9 January 1982). The resistance towards the curriculum policy included various Chinese education organisations and Chinese-based political parties in Malaysia. Despite most of the Malay political leaders, especially in the United Malay National Organisation (UMNO) interpreting that the resistance of Chinese community on this new curriculum was chauvinist one; the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), which is amongst the major political party in the ruling government, carried the same tune of contestation with the Chinese community (*New Strait Times*, January 24, 1982).

The united sentiments amongst the Chinese communities regarding this issue was shown by their unanimous demands to the government for changing the approach in implementing the 3Rs (The Joint Statement of United Chinese School Committee Association of Malaysia (hereafter UCSCAM) and MCA, 4th January 1982; The Joint Statement of UCSCAM and Gerakan, 5th January 1982; The Joint Statement of UCSCAM and DAP, 5<sup>th</sup> January 1982; The Joint Statement of UCSCAM and



Malaysian Chinese Assembly Hall, 13th February 1982). In this case, while adopting different political ideologies, the common interests in relation to their education institutions provoked a common attitude and ideology of protecting their identity and culture in education context. Based on the belief that the 3Rs would lead to a change in the Chinese primary schools' character, the Chinese Malaysian society raised four common demands for ensuring the Chinese school would not be harmed by the implementation of this new curriculum (Memorandum on National Culture, 1983):

1. all teaching and reference materials for the Chinese primary schools, other than Malay and English, must be written and edited in Chinese as before;
2. other than Malay language and English, the medium of instruction and examination must be in Chinese, as before;
3. the humanities, moral and music lesson must reflect the character of Chinese culture; and
4. the number of hours devoted to the teaching of English must be increased.

The interpretation of the 3Rs amongst the Chinese community derived from the feeling of anxiety towards the state action relating to their education system. It also occurred from their concern for ensuring their language and cultural survival in facing what they perceived as Malay hegemony in Malaysia education policy processes. The Chinese interpretation of such policy was that it worked to favour the Malay and their ethnicity interests, rather than the national interest. They saw this as an expression of dominant ideology of the Malay and their aspirations towards Malaysian education system.

The Chinese educators saw that the 3Rs implementation contradicted the first promise of the Cabinet Committee of 1974, which recommended the continuation of the current practice of the Malaysian school system with the Chinese and Tamil schools using their mother-tongue as the language of instruction. This for the Chinese and Indians is an assurance for preserving the Chinese and Tamil primary schools that the Cabinet Committee has recommended.

In responding to the strong protests from the Chinese community, the government decided to emphasise that they 'had no intention and had made no effort to convert national-type schools into national schools and would not change the medium of



instruction' (*New Straits Times*, 24 January, 1982). In explaining the reason for using the Malay language in some subjects in the 3Rs curriculum, the government asserted that this was intended to improve Malay language amongst all children in the schools. For example, in Music Education, the Malay songs were intended to improve Malay language amongst pupils in Chinese and Tamil schools (Malaysia, 1982, p.52). In addition, the then Minister of Education released a press statement that mentioned that the government had no intention to change the Chinese and Tamil Primary schools through the implementation of such curriculum (Press Statement Minister of Education, 1982).

Continuous pressure by the Chinese community for the alteration of the curriculum made the government compromise on this issue. There was concern about learning materials and text books when the Ministry of Education assured that these curriculum materials would be provided in the language of instruction of the schools (Press Statement by the Minister of Education, 1982). This demonstrated how ethnicity challenges influenced policy processes which resulted in the alteration of the policy in implementation. Supported by their political bargaining power, ethnicity aspirations amongst the Chinese forced the state to compromise towards their demands on this related issue.

It was clear that the dominant discourse of national integration was challenged by ethnic minority aspirations regarding their culture and identity. While the state favour toward Malay aspirations and Malaysian education system, the Chinese posited the discourse of multiculturalism for uniting the nation towards equal and non-discriminatory cultural development. The contrary ideology for uniting the nation can be seen in the 1983 document, when the major Chinese organisations in Malaysia sent a memorandum to express their opinions and demands regarding the concept of national culture. Clearly, the Chinese community rejected such policy that tended to force assimilation. They argued that:

...the present national policies on language, education and culture are heavily tainted with communalism and tended towards a forced assimilation. The policies have been formulated only from the perspective and stand point of only one ethnic community. This contradiction between Malay-centric policies and the multi-facet dimension of our society is the core of the problem.

(Memorandum on National Culture, 1983, p.95)



In contrast with the state ideology of national integration, for the Chinese, the premise of national unity should be based on the equal acceptance of language, culture and education systems of other non-majority ethnic groups. The fear existed that if Malaysian Chinese stopped being concerned about their language and culture, and willingly accepted Malay values and traditions as the basis of national culture, they would lose their cultural roots (Leng, 1982). While they have been criticised for being chauvinistic and unpatriotic for clinging to Chinese language and culture, the Chinese argued that national unity and a Malaysian identity should be forged on the basis of equality among ethnic groups and respect for another's culture. This position was thus one of multiculturalism. They emphasised:

We firmly believe that the co-existence of several sub-systems of schools founded on mother-tongue as the medium of instruction within the national education system and the equal acceptance of the cultures of all ethnic groups as the foundation of the national culture are feasible and consistent with the multi-ethnic nature of our country. The acceptance of all these premises would enhance national unity.

(Memorandum on National Culture, 1983, p. 102)

For the Chinese community, the present national policies on language and education possessed a strong sense of ethnocentrism and tendency toward language assimilation (Memorandum on National Culture, 1983). Thus, they demanded that the government should abolish all legislative measures unfavourable to the existence and development of the language and education of all ethnic groups (Memorandum on National Culture, 1983, p.100). In this regard, the Chinese anxiety was evident in respect of the discourse on the section 21 (2) of the 1961 Education Act, which they saw as a serious threat to the existence of the Malaysian Chinese and Tamil schools. They argued that the section 21 (2) has made even the existing Chinese primary schools liable to be converted to Malay medium schools by the Minister of education (Soong, 2001).

The choice of language for the medium of instruction in school is the most sensitive issue which related to ethnic contestation and tensions. This aspect of ethnic resistance was not only directed to policy related to language, but also towards other government actions that such ethnic groups felt affected their mother-tongue education and schools' identity. The non-Malay interpreted the Constitution guarantee of the rights and freedom to learn, to use and develop the language of other ethnic



groups, as giving opportunity for them to be used in the education system. This, according to them is reflected by the agreement among the people of all ethnic groups before independence (Memorandum on National Culture, 1983).

However, how the state accommodates such ideology and interests of the minority depends on the circumstances of the ethnic demands. This can be seen in how this aspect was officially interpreted. The case to refer to was the judicial judgement in the case of Merdeka University Inc. (a proposed private university with Chinese as the language of instruction) against the Government of Malaysia. In the judgment, it is clear that the right and freedom to use languages other than national language is not for official purpose. In giving the court decision, the Judge concluded:

I can conclude that Merdeka University if established would be “public authority within the definition in Article 160 of the Federal Constitution and that its purpose would accordingly be an “official purpose” within Article 152(6) and it would therefore be excluded by the parenthesis in proviso (a) to Article 152 from its protection”. (Cited in Rahim, 1997, p.3)

While the plaintiff argued that the effect of exception in Article 152 (1) (a) in the Federal Constitution is to protect the rights of ethnic minority use of other language as a medium of instruction in the education system, the Judge comes to this conclusion:

I am of the view that ‘using’ is in fact confined to use a medium of expression or communication within the language or ethnic groups concerned and cannot extend to user as a medium of instruction as such.

(Cited in Rahim, 1997, p.4)

The Court decided that because there is no word ‘in’ in Article 152 (1) (a), thus the rights for teaching ‘in’ Chinese language or other languages than the national language is not allowed and in contradiction with the National Education Policy (Rahim, 1997).

At first glance, the ethnic challenges surround the policy process appear to indicate a concern over the possible loss of ethnic identity. For the Chinese, the preservation of language is perceived as crucial to the preservation of their identity and culture (Chee-Beng, 1985). Thus, every action taken by the state that touched on language and education has been interpreted by the Chinese as bringing the discourse of ‘ultimate objective’ to make Malay language the medium of instruction in the national



education system (Memorandum on National Culture, 1983). While they accept Malay language as the National Language to be used as the language of communication in Malaysian multi-ethnic society, they oppose the status of National language as a basis for enforcing linguistic assimilation or linguistic discrimination (Joint Declaration by The Chinese Guilds and Associations of Malaysia, 1985, p. 17). For them the government should withdraw the policy ideology of ‘one language, one education system’ enacted in the current legislation of National Education Policy, which has strong assimilationist tendencies (Joint Declaration by The Chinese Guilds and Associations of Malaysia, 1985, p. 17).

In this sense, the ethnic consciousness of protecting culture and identity prevents them from merely accepting the government education policies relating to national integration. Rather the Chinese in particular, and Indians in general believe that the policy processes have an intention to destroy their mother-tongue education. Thus, any measure to implement policy or related programmes involving schools, understandably evokes feelings of anxiety amongst the non-Malay community, especially the Chinese regarding the position of their mother-tongue education and Chinese schools’ identity. In contrast, they demand for a policy of a ‘common curriculum but many different media of instruction’ (Joint Declaration by The Chinese Guilds and Associations of Malaysia, 1985, p. 18).

#### **6.4.2 Integration School Programme 1985**

In 1985, there was another series of ethnicity challenge to the government agenda and ideas within education for integrating the multi ethnic society. This was precipitated by the Ministry of Education’s proposal Integration School Programme (ISP). This initiative was aimed to eradicate constraints for integrating multi ethnic children caused by the different type of primary schools. The aim was to bring together all children from the different types of schools and increase ethnic interaction amongst them. The programme consisted of two models: the first combines three types of schools (national, national type Chinese and Tamil primary schools) in one complex; the second was to be established between these different types of schools located close together in which in such activities could be provided together. The purpose of this project was to bring together the Malay, Chinese and Indian children from all these schools through joint co-curriculum activities, sharing school facilities, and



developing collaboration between Parents and Teachers Associations between the schools (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1985, p. 3-4).

For the Malay, they supported this idea, as they believed this programme would eliminate the root of polarisation caused by the different types of school extant in the Malaysian education system (*Berita Harian*, 12 December 1985). In parliamentary meeting, one United Malay National Organisation's (UMNO) representative said that this programme could eradicate primordial and ethnic sentiments amongst Malaysian school children (Malaysia, 1985). Official documents for this programme provided by the Ministry of Education did not raise the question of abolishing the current school system. In Guideline Book for ISP, it was stated that the main aim was to encourage children from different ethnic backgrounds to come together in such co-curriculum activities, thus to increase interaction amongst them (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1985, p. 5). However, in the early document it was proposed that such activities needed to be carried out in Malay language (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1985, p. 5), which provoked ethnic resistance. This was interpreted by non-Malay community as a move to change the character of Chinese and Tamil primary schools. In addition, the constant Chinese's fear about the 1961 Education Act, which gave power to the Minister of Education to convert the Chinese primary schools into Malay medium schools, influenced this resistance (Joint Declaration by The Chinese Guilds and Associations of Malaysia, 1985, p.18).

The Chinese and Indian communities viewed this measure as another attempt to alter the character of the Chinese and Tamil schools, thus to bring about the ultimate objective of having only Malay-medium school under the government's education policy. For the Indians, they did not support this programme as they believed this would lead to the abolition of the identity of Tamil primary schools (Letter from the Chairman of Education Bureau, Council of Headmasters Selangor's Tamil Schools to Deputy Minister of Education, 30<sup>th</sup> September 1985). In order to guarantee that the character of National-Type Primary Schools would not be changed, they demanded the government drop the idea of ISP (Joint Declaration by The Chinese Guilds and Associations of Malaysia, 1985, p. 18).



Pressure from the Chinese and Indians towards the programme came to a climax when about 2500 Chinese and a number of Indian people assembled in Penang to demonstrate their disagreement with such a programme (*Berita Harian*, 12 December, 1985). Yet, while the Chinese continued to show resistance, the Chinese-based political parties also gave support for rejecting the programme. As the then Acting President of MCA, Mr, Neo Yee Pan opined, the ISP 'will not bring about racial integration but will create resentment among the pupils and teachers' (*The Star*, 8 November, 1985). In a parliamentary meeting, the DAP Secretary claimed that ISP has provoked suspicion of the government action in relation to preserving the Chinese and Tamil primary schools (*Berita Harian*, 29 Oktober 1985).

In response to growing Chinese political pressure and desire to incorporate the government agenda of uniting the nation within education policy, the state moved to accommodate such demands from the Chinese and Indians in implementing this programme. The modification of the programme came into existence after discussion between the Ministry of Education and Chinese education organisations. Amongst the main changes was the replacement of the programme name from Integration School Programme to Pupil's Integration Programme for National Unity, which only involved special activities outside the classroom. In addition, two main suggestions from the Chinese organisation were accepted by the government to be included in a Guideline Book for this programme - words assuring the Chinese and Tamil schools character remained secure: the medium of instructions of these schools can be used freely in such activities; and the second was that decisions concerning such activities must first be unanimously agreed upon by the schools involved (Joint Statement by UCSCAM and United Chinese School Teachers Association of Malaysia (UCSTAM), 8 November 1985).

Changes in the document thus gave confidence to the non-Malay that the Chinese and Tamil primary schools would remain secure. They concluded, based on the changes made, 'there is no danger that the new programme will change the character of the Chinese Primary schools and Tamil Primary schools' (*The Star*, 9 November, 1985).



### 6.4.3 Bureaucratic Managerial Measures and Ethnicity Interests – Exacerbating Ethnic Tensions

The episode of ethnic conflicts within the education sphere in the 80s reached a climax in 1987 when the Ministry of Education announced the posting of non-Mandarin educated headmasters and senior teachers to National-Type Chinese primary schools. The matter of teachers' promotion in all government's schools are managed and administrated by a board in the Ministry of Education. In the promotion process, several aspects to consider include the candidate's capability, competence, personal character, qualifications and experience (Malaysia, 1988a). In this sense, in administrative principle, there is no ethnicity consideration in teachers' promotion in all government's schools, including Chinese and Tamil primary schools.

However, this administrative step taken by the government faced immense opposition from the Chinese community. This issue of teacher promotion in Chinese primary schools was interpreted by Chinese education organisations as surreptitious government action to change the Chinese medium school into a Malay school. The Chinese community believed that the appointment of non-Chinese would change the Chinese schools' character. For them, the non-Chinese educated teachers could not effectively manage the school's activities, administration and management as the medium language used in these schools is mother tongue. Consequently, the Chinese reacted passionately to this policy action and raised a large protest and organised frequent meetings attended by Chinese political leaders from all the three major Chinese-based political parties (MCA, Gerakan and DAP).

Although the government received strong opposition from the Chinese communities, the state remained firm in its decision. The then Minister of Education, Anwar Ibrahim in his statement, said that 'after making the necessary adjustments and taking into consideration all views expressed, the Government would stand firmly by its decision and would go ahead with the promotion of non-Chinese educated teachers' (*New Strait Times*, 6 October 1987). On the other side, the Malay intellectuals and groups gave praise and support to this state's decision.

The government's stand on the decision led the Chinese to increase this protest when the Chinese educational organisations and Chinese-based political parties joined



together to raise their concern and resistance regarding this issue. In supporting the Chinese struggle for abolishing this administrative change, the then MCA president claimed that 'the promotion exercise has clearly deviated from the promise contained in the Barisan Nasional (National Front) general election manifesto' (*New Strait Times*, 10 October 1987). The Chinese asked the government to resolve this issue or otherwise they would consider organising a school boycott if the government failed to meet their demands (Joint Statement of Hua Tuan and Malaysian political parties, 14 October 1987).

Even though the state adhered to its decision, to some degree, the Chinese challenges pressured the government to respond. This can be seen when the government formed a Committee of five ministers from major ethnic-based political parties (UMNO, MCA, Gerakan and MIC) in coalition ruling party to study the issue and propose a solution. The decision made by this committee was to make some adjustments regarding this administrative action. This included the suggestion that the four main positions which are the headmaster, senior teacher for curriculum, senior teacher for pupils' affair and evening sessions need to be filled by teachers who were qualified in Chinese language. Meanwhile, the position for senior teacher for co-curriculum can be filled by non-qualified Chinese language teacher, based on his/her experience, training, and proficiency in Chinese language.

The issue of the promotion of non-educated Chinese (that is non-Mandarin speaking) in Chinese primary schools precipitated a conflict discourse between the two major ethnic groups, and thus turned the matter into ethnic issue. While the Chinese challenges were about the struggle of preserving the ethnic identity of the schooling system, the Malay brought the opposite view, and interpreted this resistance as chauvinistic and challenging the national education policy aspiration. It also provoked the impression amongst the Malays that there was an unwillingness of the Chinese to accept teachers from non-Chinese ethnic background for such positions. Furthermore, in a more extreme view, some Malay political leaders proposed to the government the gradual abolition of the Chinese and Tamil primary schools so as to prevent ethnic polarisation (*Watan*, 20 October, 1987; Malaysia, 1987b). They regarded the Chinese resistance on this issue as ethnocentrism which 'never accept the reality of the National Education Policy which calls for Malay language as the medium of



instruction in all national schools' (*New Strait Times*, 11 October, 1987). In contrast, the Chinese denied such allegations as the then President of MCA asserted that the Chinese would accept even Malays or Indians as administrators in these Chinese primary schools, provided they had suitable qualifications in the Chinese language (*News Straits Times*, 17 October, 1987). In the parliamentary debate relating to this issue, the Secretary General for DAP said that the DAP would be the first to support the appointment of a non-Chinese with the Chinese qualifications to illustrate that the issue was not communal (Malaysia, 1987b).

Strong opposition from the Chinese society and responses from the Malay regarding this issue raised ethnic confrontation. The UMNO's leaders pressured the government to investigate whether the Chinese organisation had been influenced by subversive elements (Statement by Civil Rights Committee, 14 October 1987). In aggressively responding to this issue, the UMNO Youth organised an enormous rally to demonstrate the Malay superiority on this issue. The Chinese claimed the action taken by the UMNO was to create other issues out of an issue which had been resolved by the cabinet (*News Straits Times*, 17 October 1987). These reactions from the Chinese and the Malay brought the state to the view that ethnic tension was reaching a potentially dangerous level. As a result, the state responded by launching *Operation Lallang* which led to about 150 people being arrested (Guan 2000). This operation was the government action taken under Internal Security Act 1960 (ISA) as the government believed the scenario of ethnic tensions precipitated by this issue might well jeopardised national security. Such action of the government to end this issue was related to the political conflict within the major ruling party, the UMNO. The leadership crisis in the UMNO in 1987 has led such politicians to divert the crisis into the ethnic issue, thus raising the ethnic consciousness amongst Malays to protect their superiority, as a way of diverting from the real issue of leadership in the UMNO (Soong, 1999).

## **6.5 1990s - The Pragmatic Phase: Pursuing the National and Global Interests**

The period of the 1990s shows Malaysia has been involved in an economic and social transformation which has been effected by globalisation. Intense competition in business and trade, and the need for science and technologies advancement has



brought new challenges to national education system in Malaysia. This situation has required the state to alter national policies, including in education. Whilst the state continues to mediate national and domestic issues in education, the significant impact of globalisation to the nation forced the government to respond to the challenge. The 90s witnessed Malaysian education policy experiencing transformation in various aspects, derived from the state's paradigm policy response in respect of national and globalisation matters. With the concern for progress and being a competitive nation in the global sphere, this is the age where more pragmatic concerns have been addressed together with concerns of nationalism (Gill, 2002).

Being aware of the need for Malaysian people to compete in the global economic field, the state considered education policy in terms of meeting the global challenges. As with many other nations and their educational policy in the context of globalisation, the Malaysian government saw the need for education to contribute to the competitiveness of the Malaysian economy. One response was in relation to English, the language of business and international communication. This was reflected in the state education policy and programme subsequent to 1990.

#### **6.5.1 Producing a New Education Act: The Policy Process and Challenges of Ethnicity**

The discourse of global impact on the nation doorstep made the state reconsider the role of education for national development. There was the view that existing education practices needed to be changed due to such demand. The state thus attempted to formulate a new education act that could accommodate the global challenges and the aim to be a developed country. Accordingly, in February 13, 1987, the government formed a Committee in the Ministry of Education level to study the Education Act of 1961 in order to produce a new education act. In the policy formulation process, the Committee received various suggestions and memorandums from NGO's from different ethnic groups, educational organisations, political parties and religious organisations (Malaysia, 1988b). Then, the Committee proposed recommendations to the Cabinet Committee to study and discuss all the recommendations. Subsequently, the Cabinet Committee decided to form a negotiating committee of the Education Act to study and discuss the proposed Bill and give opinions and suggestions to the government before obtaining approval from



the cabinet. Representatives from the education field, society, academicians, professionals and political parties from both the government and opposition were invited to join this committee.

The ethnic challenges to the policy can be seen since the formulation stage of this act. In the early proposal of the new education act, the Chinese organisations gave some conditions before agreeing to join the negotiating Committee. For instance, UCSCAM, amongst the major Chinese education movement organisations, has given certain conditions to the government. These include the discussion on the Bill must be run without the Official Secret Act; the representatives who attend the committee should not follow the condition that Malay language will become the main language of instruction in all schools; Islamic concepts will not be prioritised in the education system; and other languages from Malay could be used in this Committee (Yek, 2002).

These conditions indicate the awareness of the Chinese education organisations about the possibility that the new education Bill would affected the Chinese education system, linked to their anxiety that this new act will bring the notion of an 'ultimate objective' of the national education policy for single language of instruction, which was already embodied in the education Act of 1961 (Report of Malaya, 1961). However, the Chinese reaction to the Bill was interpreted as not respecting Islam and the status of the national language in the context of the Malaysian constitution (Malaysia, 1991). Some state leaders contended that UCSCAM's demands were a manipulation of ethnic sentiment to reject this new education act (Yek, 2002).

Despite such challenges, the Chinese organisations decided to join the committee to represent the Chinese aspirations and opinions relating to the proposed Bill. Based on the introduction in the document of the Bill, the non-Malay argued that the document implied national education policy for achieving the ultimate objective of the single system of schooling using the Malay language. The Chinese society criticised the introduction in the document which stated that education policy was to be executed through a national system of education which provided for the national language to be the main medium of instruction, common curriculum and examination (Malaysia, 1990). The Chinese read this as meaning that the state's intention was to abolish the



vernacular system in Malaysia (The Federation of Chinese Schools' Board Management Organisations of Malaysia, 1991, p. 16). Thus, they demanded for an explicit statement in the document that recognised the mother tongue education for all ethnic groups in the country (Statement from 5 Chinese Education Organisations on Education Bill 1990, 1990)

To lessen such unease amongst the Chinese community in respect of the Bill proposed, the Ministry of Education agreed to withdraw section 21(2) and section 26(A) in Education Act 1961, where both pieces of legislation had been viewed by the Chinese as threatening the status quo of the vernacular schools system. In contrast, the Malay claimed that this decision would hinder the achievement of the ultimate aim of national education policy and was thus unacceptable to the aspirations of the ethnic majority (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1990). This new Bill to be known as 'The Education Act 1990' should be tabled in parliament. However, the parliament process for this Bill was postponed by the government as the ruling coalition did not have the confidence to table the new Bill in parliament through the general elections in 1986 and 1990, due to reduced votes for the ruling party (See Appendix M: *election results in 1986, 1990 and 1995*). Ultimately, the Bill was withdrawn and inactive for about five years, only to re-emerge in 1995 as the subsequently enacted Education Act 1996.

### **6.5.2 The Education Act 1996: Policy Changes for Educational Advancement**

Controversy regarding the new education act recurred in 1995 when the then Minister of Education, Najib Tun Razak announced that the government would table the Education Bill of 1995 to the parliament in June 1995. The whole episode of this policy production was shrouded in secrecy as this new education Bill was categorised as a secret official document under the Official Secrets Act without any reason provided. Thus, the public discourse on the Bill's document was obstructed by undemocratic ways in the policy process.

Call and demands for disclosing the Bill's document to the public discourse have been received by the government from many organisations, particularly the Chinese education organisations, which were already apprehensive and suspicious of the



impact of the new education act on the status quo of Chinese schools. They demanded for the postponement of this Bill to be tabled in the parliament before the government publicised it to the society (Letter from UCSCAM to Minister of Education, 12 October 1995). Moreover, they demanded the government ensure that the Bill would meet the aspirations of a multi-ethnic society in relation to education. For them, the government should not include in the Bill such sections that would disturb the development of mother-tongue education. This was based on the belief that an enlightened education act to take the nation into 21<sup>st</sup> Century should encourage diversity and not restrict opportunities or choices (Memorandum on the Education Bill, 1995a, p. 10).

Even though the state leaders made promises for ensuring the status quo of the mother tongue education in the new education act, the Chinese continued to express their anxiety. However, the government continued to take an undemocratic approach, when they brought this proposed Bill to the parliament process without prior consultation with the public. The Bill was tabled in parliament for debate and then was gazetted in August 1996, namely as the Education Act of 1996. Based on the various premises aimed to develop the nation, especially in enabling the Malaysian society to meet the high standards of knowledge, value and skill which were necessary in a global world, achieving the country's vision of attaining the status of fully developed nation and its mission to develop a world class education system, and based on the National Philosophy of Education, this new Malaysian Education Act was to be executed

...through a national system of education which provides for the national language to be the main medium of instruction, a National Curriculum and common examinations; the education provided being varied and comprehensive in scope and which will satisfy the needs of the nation as well as promote national unity through cultural, social, economic and political development in accordance with the principles of Rukunegara.

(Malaysia, 1999a, p.10)

Discourse on educational advancement in this act was aimed at achieving the status of developed nation and boosting the standard of the education system of the country. This new act can be seen as the state's endeavours to pursue the education advancement regarding international standards of education, while at the same time enhancing the national ideology in the Malaysian education system. These entwined



missions are articulated in the Malaysian Education Act 1996, which recognised that education for Malaysian is:

To enable the Malaysian society to have a command of knowledge, skills and values necessary in the world that is highly competitive and globalised, arising from the impact of rapid development in science, technology and information... It is the mission to develop a world-class quality education system which will realise the full potential of the individual and fulfil the aspiration of the Malaysian nation

(Malaysia, 1999a, p.9)

While such sections tend to progress Malaysia education for meeting the global demands, this Act was underpinned by the ideology of national education policy that embodied national aspirations in education system based on the Razak Report, the Rahman Talib Report and the Education Act 1961. In this act, the status of national language as the main medium of instruction was maintained by the state as it clearly stated that ‘the National Language shall be the main medium of instruction in all education institutions in National Education System...’ (Malaysia, 1999a, p.22). To maintain the existing system, being liberal and accommodative to non-Malay rights to their mother tongue, this act provided an exception to the Chinese and Tamil primary schools to use their current medium of instruction (Malaysia, 1999a, p. 22 & 28). Furthermore, as assurance and guarantee to the status quo of these types of schools, this act has abolished section 21(1) and 26(A) in Education Act 1961, as both sections have been viewed by non-Malay as potentially threatening the Chinese and Tamil schools.

This new act extended the state’s control over education and covered the private education institutions (Malaysia, 1999a, p. 22). The implementation of this new education act is evident in the existing national education system through the medium of instruction, common curriculum and common examinations. This new education act demonstrated that the state remained committed to education for constructing national identity and integrating the nation. Related, this was to avoid the Malay opposition to the policy, providing them with the statement of protection of the status of Malay language in the act. As the then Minister of education pointed out, the status and dignity of the National Language will not be weakened, even in a very small portion (Malaysia, 1995a).



Within the global-inspired emphasis of competition, high standards and quality of education and the proficiency of English language, this act also demonstrated the pragmatic concerns of the state regarding language in order to make Malaysian education be internationally recognised. In particular, in section 17 (1), this act provided the minister a power to determine what language shall be used as medium of instruction in such educational institution under desirable circumstances (Malaysia, 1999a, p.22). Perhaps, this was to giving more space and power for the state to accommodate the need for English language in the education system, allowing pragmatic decisions and action without constraints of legitimacy in dealing with language for the medium of instruction.

Through this ministerial power, subsequent state action can be seen to accrue English language in the Malaysian education system, which reversed the education policy orientation and apparently returned to the period after independent until 1969. The policy action presents a state decision to allow English to be used in Malaysian education. For instance, the increasing private education institutions using English language was the product of policy implementation following the act (Wahid, 2005).

The state leader's ideology for the nation also exerted influence to the changing policy orientation when the then Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohammad suggested a return to using more English in schools. Having concern for the importance of English in facing the rapid developments in science and technology, the policy of English for Teaching Mathematics and Science (ETeMS) was a step taken by the state to boost the standard of English of the Malaysian people. Thus, the following policy practice in Malaysian education demonstrated the liberal-pragmatic concern of the state regarding language in education. This been interpreted by both the non-Malay and Malay as affecting their interests in education. While the non-Malay sees this as posing danger to their mother-tongue education, for the Malay the policy action does not accommodate their special language status and contribute to their educational attainment.



### **6.5.2.1 Conflict between National and Ethnic Interests: How Ethnic Groups Regarded the Education Act 1996**

In 1995, the enormous victory for the National Front enhanced state confidence to produce the new Education Act in 1996. This new education act was about enabling the state to progress the education system in achieving the status of developed nation. Globalisation has influenced the state to reconsider education to meet challenges caused by the global demands for education for enhancing the country's development. At the same time, the state still needed to mediate ethnic challenges around the core issues of language and education in Malaysia's multi-ethnic society. Matters about the privileged status of the Malays and the views of other ethnic communities in relation to their rights in education also need to be heeded (Hing, 2003). In this regard, the national interests surrounding these challenges had to be resolved by the state in education policy, as ethnicity remains significant and of core importance.. The conflicting discourse regarding the Education Act 1996 is between these two major ethnic groups – the Chinese and Malay - both had their own interests to be protected in the Malaysian education system.

#### **6.5.2.2.1 The Chinese**

The continuing struggle of Chinese educators to have their rights regarding mother tongue recognised in education is amongst the major issue needing to be tackled by the state in Malaysian education. For the Chinese, they believe that the education system should encourage diversity to fulfil the aspirations and needs of the multiethnic society (Memorandum on the Education Bill, 1995b). The Chinese did not agree to some sections of the 1996 Education Act which aimed to strengthen the status of national language as the main medium of instruction. For them, then education Act of 1996 does not give legal protection to Chinese primary education, even though sections 21(2) and 26(A) Education Act 1961 have been eliminated (Statement from 7 Chinese Education Organisations on Education Bill 1995).

The Chinese community argument about this act revolved around the contested ideology between national education policy for achieving the objective of Malay language as the medium of instruction and their effort of protecting the status of mother tongue instruction in the Chinese schools. They saw that section 17 (1) stated 'the national language shall be the medium of instruction in all educational



institutions in National Education System except a national-type school established under section 28 or any other educational institution exempted by the Minister from this subsection' (Malaysia, 1999a), but did not reflect educational policy as originally stated in the Education Ordinance 1957, which fully guaranteed the Chinese schools the use of and teaching in the mother tongue (The Malaysian Chinese Organisation Election Appeals Committee (Suqiu Committee), 16<sup>th</sup> August 1999, p. 12). For them, this section of the new Education Act meant that mother tongue education of the Non-Malays was no longer a right, but existed only at the behest of the Education Minister (Soong, 1999, p.146). In addition, Section 62 on the dissolution of board of managers or governors of government educational institutions was interpreted by the Chinese as the government attempting to eradicate the character and identity of the Chinese secondary school. Both sections, for them, posed a serious threat to the identity of Chinese and Tamil schools, and did not legally protect the status quo of national type of schools in Malaysia (Malaysia, 2001b).

The Chinese continued to be suspicious of the status of Chinese schools. For them, this act did not explicitly guarantee security of the Chinese schools. As they pointed out, it was difficult to see that any of their constructive proposals of 1990 had been taken into account. Related, they demanded liberal education policy fair to all ethnic groups in Malaysia, while encouraging diversity and increasing opportunities of choices in line with the Government's Vision 2020, and believed this was not given effect to (Memorandum on the Education Bill, 1995b).

In contrast, the state leaders denied that such legislation was aimed at abolishing the rights of Chinese and Indians for their mother tongue education systems. In explaining the spirit in this act relating to Chinese and Tamil schools status, the then Minister of Education asserted that the government would ensure that the status of Chinese and Tamil schools and their boards of management would remain secure. This act, according to him was more liberal for ensuring the interests of all ethnic communities would be accommodated. For the government, the education Bill of 1995 was opened to discussion to all ethnic groups through the negotiating committee of the Education Act, constituted during the process of policy formulation (Malaysia, 1995b).



The Chinese viewed that the definition of “National System of Education” stressed Malay as “the main medium of instruction’ and believed this was a step backward for the preservation and sustaining the growth of language and culture of other ethnic groups. The Chinese interpreted this Act as carrying the discourse of the ultimate objective in national education policy to produce a single education system using one language of instruction (Memorandum on the Education Bill, 1995b). For the government, the Education Act 1996 was not mean to abolish other languages of instruction in any other education institutions, as the Chinese and Tamil schools were exempted from implementation of Malay language as the medium of instruction. However, the state believed that the aims of national integration through the education system could be realised through the use of national language as the medium of instruction, the introduction of national curriculum and common examinations, all of which were in line with the principles of the national ideology - Rukunegara (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1999).

Essentially, for the state, linguistic diversity is conceived as incompatible with national unity, as the state priority is for an education system which uses Malay language for achieving national integration. For example, Mr. Mahadzir Mohd. Khir, who was the then Secretary of Parliament for the Ministry of Education, in explaining such a principle in parliament, pointed out that the ‘government priority is a national education system which uses Malay language as the medium of instruction as we cannot deny that national language is a tool for national unity’ (Malaysia, 2001c, p.133). Furthermore, he asserted that the reason why the state was reluctant to recognise the Unified Education Certificate Examination (UECE) for the Chinese private secondary schools examination, was that such recognition would encourage the situation in which each ethnic group in Malaysia would develop their own school system (Malaysia, 2001c, p.134)

While the Chinese challenged the policy orientation in terms of protecting their culture and ethnic rights in the Malaysian education system, some Indian leaders proffered a different discourse relating to the status of Tamil schools. This discourse related to the position of Tamil schools which were left behind in terms of educational achievement. There is a suggestion from Indian leaders to implement a policy that uses Malay as medium of instruction in Tamil schools. This brought forth the



ideology of liberal and pragmatic concern for academic achievement, which is more important for social and economic mobility for the Indians, rather the preservation of their language and schools status quo. In a speech, Mr. C. Krishnan, member of parliament from MIC, observed: 'I been informed that children in Tamil primary schools cannot get a good marks in Malay language subject. I propose to the Ministry of Education, it is a time, if possible, some subjects in Tamil schools can be taught in Malay language' (Malaysia, 1999b).

#### **6.5.2.1.2 The Malay**

Malaysia is a post-colonial nation that over the years has centralised her education policy using Malay language to establish national identity. In this regard, the Education Act 1996 has been questioned whether its proposed benefit to the Malay and was in line with their aspirations in developing national identity. The Malay viewed the survival of Malay language (Rahim, 1997) as a national and official language would be harmed by a certain section in this education Act. For example, they believed that the executive power of the Minister to determine whether such educational institutions are permitted to use languages other than Malay as their medium of instruction will threaten the status of Malay language as main medium of instruction at all levels in the education system in Malaysia (Rahim, 1997; Wahid, 2005). In policy practice, some Malay educationists believed that one day English would replace the Malay language as the main language in the Malaysian education system because of the relaxed defence of Malaya language in the Act (Kumpulan Prihatin, 2005; Bakar, 2005).

This act also been viewed as contradict with the Malaysian Constitution that allocates the Malay Language as the national and official language for the nation. In parliament, Malay opposition groups demanded the use of national language (Malay) as medium of instruction in all government schools. They claimed that the step taken by the government of eliminating section 21(1) Educational Act 1961 would dominate national-type schools and potentially remove the status of national school as the prime school system in the national education system (Malaysia, 1995c, p. 126). In this sense, while the Chinese were very passionate about their mother-tongue education, in contrast, the Malays viewed such decisions in this new education Act towards the



vernacular schools status as detrimental to the development of a national language to foster national unity.

In this new education act, there was also a dynamic tension between Malay language and English. One is pulling in the direction of establishing itself as the language of the nation and the language of identity, the other pulling in another direction towards being the language for pragmatic instrumental purposes, as a means of international communication. In this act, the state demonstrated the importance of English in the Malaysian education system, while trying to maintain Malay language as the main medium of instruction. However, for the Malay community, this might not happen as the minister has the power to abolish national language for the medium of instruction based on some circumstances and where the minister thinks it is needed (Rahim, 1997). Having concern about the status of Malay language, the leaders tried to convince that the government will not compromise in preserving the status of Malay language in the Malaysian education system (Malaysia, 1995c).

Yet, the discourse of the importance of English for the national development led to the ideology that such maintenance of extreme nationalistic language policies would have led to the isolation of Malaysia in economic and technology advancement, and thus hamper the Malaysian people from being competitive in the global arena. This pragmatism has also changed the world-view of Malaysians, which recognised that extremist nationalism would not assist in nation building (Omar, 2000, p. 253). While such policy maintenance of Malay language, although being viewed as a benefit to the Malay and tailored to nationalistic aspirations, in contrast, was the view that this would result in a shortage of people capable of communicating effectively in English in the international scene. For the state, to reconsider the role of English for developing the country was important in the global context, so that the nation could be internationally competitive in trade, and scientific and technological advancements. In this sense, the concept of nationalism in language has been redefined to accommodate the challenges associated with globalisation and the global interests of the nation. As the then Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad stated:

Learning the English language will reinforce the spirit of nationalism when it is used to bring about development and progress for the country. ... True nationalism means doing everything possible for the country, even if it means learning the English language.

(Mohamad , 1999)



The state policy emphasis on English in the education system in Malaysia has been received by many Malay academicians as a betrayal of the spirit of national education policy which had been embodied in the Razak Report and Rahman Talib Report. For them, discourse about the importance of English for national development and international relations amongst the state leaders harms the role of Malay language, especially in the private sector (Wahid, 2005). Furthermore, the changing perspective which inclines to the importance of English thus suggests the Malay language has less economic value, means most in the private sector are keen to employ workers who are proficient in English.

### **6.5.3 Vision School - Institutionalising National Integration**

Cultural diversity within the nation has been one significant source of heterogeneous and competing demands on education and schools (James, 1996). In the case of Malaysia, the government accommodated such demands of a multi-cultural society by allowing the continuous division of primary schools, viz. national primary and national-type primary schools, using the common curriculum and examination, however using different media of instruction (Malay, Chinese and Tamil language). Some 90 percent of Malaysian Chinese enrol their children in Chinese primary schools (UCSCAM, No Year). For the Tamil primary schools, there are about 90,000 pupils for the enrolment of year 2000 (Majlis Bertindak Kebangsaan Bagi Sekolah-sekolah Tamil, 2000).

The Malaysian education scene which consists of different type of schools based on language affiliation has produced a discourse of ethnic polarisation in the education sphere. This pattern of schooling has been viewed as an impediment for the construction of national identity because of its producing ethnic boundaries amongst the Malaysian younger generation. The cluster of different ethnic children in different types of school is contrary to the national aspiration of ethnic integration. This school structure has been a main stream discourse about ethnic disintegration in the Malaysian education system. On the other side, the state leaders want school to be an institution for socialising the multi ethnic students to have better understanding and tolerance and thus believed that the Malaysian school system was an obstacle for building national identity. For example, the recent Prime Minister of Malaysia maintains that the existence of various streams of schools contradicts with the state



intention of a single system in education. For him, any action for increasing national type primary schools (Chinese and Indian) will produce a multi system in education, which is contradictory to the spirit of Malaysian education policy for integrating the multiethnic society in Malaysia (*Utusan Malaysia*, Mac 15, 2005).

Discourse about eliminating such obstacles for integrating the Malaysian younger generation caused by different type of school has implanted the idea of the Vision School (henceforth VS) for developing effective ethnic relations amongst school children. For example, this appeared in the Ministry of Education proposal of the VS concept, which confessed that the Malaysian primary schools system produced ethnic segregation and thus placed the children in their own ethnic group (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1995).

Until today, the primary education system still practice their different streams, which is Malay language stream in national school, Chinese language in National Type Primary School (Chinese) and Tamil in National Type Primary School (Indian). Each school existed separately and clustered within their community.

(Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1995, p.8, phase 4.3)

The VS idea, introduced in 1995 was inclined to the discourse of removing the barrier of ethnic-based schools to promote better interaction among younger Malaysians. In producing this idea of integration through education, the state believes that integration can be achieved through more interaction between children from different ethnic groups who had been divided by the ethnically based school system in Malaysian education. This was to accommodate both the state's agenda of national integration, while maintaining the ethnic interests of the various groups and their school identity.

As the concept of VS is to promote national integration by bringing multi-ethnic children from different type of schools under one roof, this can be considered as a strategy of institutionalising integration through the school system. Inspired by the belief that by providing such an environment of sharing school facilities and encouraging social interaction amongst the children, the state believes that this would enhance the spirit of understanding and tolerance and values of plural society to the children from different ethnic streams of primary schools (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1995). Thus, the idea of VS is to inculcate ethnic interaction between children in their days in school. This programme appears to be based on the 'contact



hypotheses' (Soong, 2000, p.11). Others opined that this strategy of integration believed the physical planning and contact was a means to achieving national unity (Abdullah, 2003), that is, the belief was the ethnic harmony, tolerance, and integration can be achieved if the different ethnic groups mix and interact frequently.

As a new and innovative concept in national integration in the Malaysian school system, the government believes that the VS concept is an appropriate strategy and approach to increase interaction amongst children from different ethnic groups who are segregated by their different schools which use different languages. The VS can enhance interaction amongst different groups in order to integrate them. As the Ministry of education declared:

Vision school is based on the concept of learning together under one roof or in one compound for all ethnic groups. This concept means that two or three different type of schools and administrations are place in a same building or area.

...This situation will provide attempts to entrench the values of plural society, and develop understanding and tolerance spirit between ethnic groups, specifically amongst pupils since primary education level.

Ministry of Education Malaysia (1995, p.9)

The project of VS brings together the National, Chinese and Tamil schools in one school area. While the original version encompassed all three streams of schools, the subsequent concept allows a situation where maybe only two schools are combined (Ministry of Education Malaysia, no year). As mentioned above, the objective of such schools is to create an environment where Malay, Chinese and Indian children can interact with each other in the school compounds to ensure better ethnic relations amongst the younger generation. On February 19, 1997, the Cabinet agreed with the Education Ministry proposal to build seven VS under the Seventh Malaysian Plan (Seventh-MP 1995-2000). This task was intended by the Ministry of Education to achieve the first educational objective which is to 'produce a Malaysian that is loyal and united' (Ministry of Education, 1995), through the strategy of promoting integration amongst school children.

#### **6.5.3.1 Ethnic Challenges to VS - The Preservation of School Identity**

Ethnic challenges relating to the VS issues focussed around disagreement between the national interest in implementing the state agenda of national integration and the



ethnic groups' interests in protecting their mother-tongue education. Almost immediately after the announcement of this project, strong opposition came from the Chinese Community. The Chinese community believed that the VS will destroy the Chinese schools character, as they contended that rather than unity, "the underlying purpose of the government is to convert all mother-tongue primary schools to schools using Malay language" (*Malaysiakini*, January 31, 2000). They felt that this programme was inimical to national unity as this will create discontent amongst the minority groups regarding their rights to mother tongue instruction (UCSCAM, 2000). They also argued that the concept of VS in its approach is thought of as following the concept of the Integration School, implemented by Singapore from 1960 to 1987, whereby different vernacular schools were changed into English stream schools. In the Malaysian context, this can be assumed as the agenda for national language for all these schools. It also being regarded as reproduction of the state programme of Integration School introduced in 1985 (UCSCAM, 2000).

In the 1995 document of the VS, the state ideology in implementing national language as the main medium of instruction was a premise of the VS concept. In this official document, it was clearly stated that in achieving national integration, the basis is National Education Policy which is based on the Razak Report 1956 in which 'national language as a uniform medium of instruction for all type of schools is a important feature and need to be completely implemented with gradual strategy' (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1995, p.8, phase 4.2). This has been interpreted by the non-Malay as being rooted in the notion of 'one language and one nation', which is the main ideology embodied in the national education policy.

For the Chinese community, VS is the state endeavouring to change the medium of instruction of the Chinese primary schools (Press Statement by UCSCAM, October 8, 2000). The Chinese organisations interpreted the VS concept as the state's mechanism to eliminate the core of Chinese schools identity, which is mother tongue as the medium of instruction. In the concept paper of VS produced by the Ministry of Education, the Chinese saw no explicit statement that would protect the status of the medium of instruction for the Chinese and Tamil primary schools. The only statement in the document was that the official language of outside class is Malay language for encouraging pupils to use this language (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1995). This



is different from the statement in the Guideline Book for the Programme to Integrate Pupils toward Unity published in 1986, which has been accepted by the Chinese community. The document provided more confidence to the Chinese community regarding the protection of their schools, as it was clearly stated in Chapter One that the programme is a special activity to unite children from different streams of primary school, thus 'it does not involve in whatever form of religious aspect, academic, medium of instruction, curriculum and administration in these three types of schools. It must be implemented outside the school official time. Thus, it will not damage the identity and status of these schools' (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1986b, p.1).

In this regard, the need to be explicated in official terms is important to show how the state would protect the identity of Chinese and Tamil schools, when introducing such programmes of integration in the school system. There is no doubt that the demand for state assurance for protecting the Chinese and Tamil schools in relation to mother tongue is crucial for ensuring such programmes of integration in the school system can be accepted by the ethnic minority. In this sense, the need to resolve ethnicity issue relating to such programme depends to a large extent on how the policy makers can communicate in clear and unambiguous fashion in policy texts. In other words, the covert meaning in the policy texts has produced different interpretation in policy implementation and become a source of ethnicity discontent.

The Chinese community believed that the VS programme carries the hidden agenda to abolish the Chinese schools' character. They argued that VS is a strategy to achieve the ultimate objective of national education policy to produce a single school system, using national language as the medium of instruction. For them, this program is a ploy to terminate the vernacular schools, which are Chinese and Tamil primary schools (Ng and UCSCAM, 2002)

This view was based on their interpretation of section 4.3 in the VS concept proposal of 1995. This, according to them was the hidden ideology of the state regarding the position of vernacular schools in the national education system, and demonstrated the state interest in implementing the spirit of the Razak Report 1956, which wanted to gradually implement the Malay language as the medium of instruction in the school system. Even though the Ministry of Education in their proposal and guideline



concept of VS denied that they had any intention to eliminate the Chinese and Tamil schools, the intent in sections 4.2 and 4.3 in this proposal was interpreted by the Chinese community as the state's hidden agenda relating to Chinese and Tamil primary schools. In this regard, for the Chinese organisations, the VS concept is a vehicle of achieving the ultimate objective of national language as the main medium of instruction;

On the face of it, a "vision school" is a school designed to achieve "national unity", when, in actual fact, its underlying purpose is to ultimately convert all mother tongue primary schools (whether Chinese or Tamil schools) to Malay schools, using Bahasa Malaysia as the main medium of instruction.

(UCSCAM), 2000, p.4)

In relation to the Education Act 1996, the Chinese communities interpreted the VS as a vehicle for achieving the objective of using Malay language as the main medium of instruction (UCSCAM, 2000). The feeling of distrust of the government programme at enhancing national integration is developed from what they described as 'bitter experience':

The Chinese community has had a similar bitter experience with the conversion of the Chinese secondary schools to national-type secondary school when the previous Education Act 1961 (now repealed) was implemented. As the proverbial saying that "once bitten, twice shy".

History seems to be repeating itself again unless the concept of vision schools is jettisoned or thrown abroad.

(UCSCAM, 2000, p. 4-5)

There was thus fierce opposition from the Chinese community to the VS project. For example, UCSCAM managed to collect more than 10,000 signatures of the people who were against the establishment of the school (Abdullah, 2003). The Chinese educationist group claimed that this programme would turn all vernacular schools into monolingual schools using Malay language as the sole medium of instruction. Influenced by such challenges, the Johor Jaya Vision School was aborted.

However, despite mounting pressures from the Chinese educationist group, the government was determined that the programme continue. The USJ Vision School was established as the litmus test of the government's concept of integration. The USJ Vision School was opened to the public in June 2001, consisting of Malay (SK Datuk



Jaafar), Chinese (SJKC Tun Tan Cheng Lock and Tamil (SJKT Tun Sambathan) medium primary schools. This school catering to pupils aged six to twelve (standard One to Six), in which each group has its own classroom and administration building, while sharing the same hall, canteen and playing field. Each school is run separately with their own headmaster and the medium of instruction remains as before, with Malay, Mandarin and Tamil for each school.

As a response, UCSCAM urged the Chinese community to boycott the school by not sending their children there, while the government appealed to the public to give it a try. The stakes were very high as reflected by the MCA President's statement that, "the school in Subang Jaya is considered as a test bed. If it fails, the government will not implement Vision School" (Leslie, 2002). After about six months in operation, the USJ Vision School is considered success, at least in terms of enrolment. Despite opposition from the Chinese educationalist group, the response from the Chinese community has been overwhelming. As Subang Jaya assemblymen comments, "although the Tamil school's recruitment is rather slow, the other two have produced resounding success" (*The Star*, 2002).

In the Eighth Malaysian Plan (2001-2005), the Prime Minister called for the number of schools under the VS Concept to be increased and activities to integrate students to be intensified (Malaysia, 2001d). On the other hand, the Chinese continued demands to the government to stop attempting to change Chinese and Tamil schools by implementing the VS concept (UCSCAM, 1999 & 2001).

## **6.6 Education Policy Processes in Malaysia: The Contested Landscape of Interests**

Discourses of ethnic challenges derived from ethnic responses to such policies in the education system aimed at integrating the nation. The contradictions and tension between the state ideology and the ethnic minority stand point on national integration were rooted in the tension between dominant hegemony and the multi-cultural nature of Malaysian society. This conflict of ideas about national integration is a contested terrain (to use Ozga's (2000) term) between the ethnic minority seeking to preserve their cultural and language identities with the dominant aspiration of the ethnic majority to enhance their culture and social status in the process of nation building.



The ethnic challenges towards education policy for national integration between different ethnic groups in Malaysia exist and are marked by the competitive discourses of language, culture and identity, and also influenced by the discourse of *Bumiputera* and *non-Bumiputera* or Malay and non-Malay in Malaysian social, political and economic spheres, in and through the policy processes. These ethnic groups' challenges derived from the state ideology in utilising the policy about ensuring the provision of the dominant ideology in Malaysian education policy, and also at enhancing social and economic mobility for the Malay. In this sense, the ideological instrument of 'us' and 'them' (which refers to Malay as the dominant policy producers and the Chinese who have less power in policy production but who have a strong economic position and political bargaining power) influenced the state policy mechanism in preserving the special privilege for the Malay or *Bumiputera* and favoured the dominant ideology of national integration, but on the other hand produced resistance from the significant ethnic minority, the Chinese. This was manifested in policy such as the NEP and other policies related to affirmative action for the ethnic majority, who are considered economically disadvantaged. This indirectly strengthened the continuation of ethnic boundaries, which historically were constructed by the colonial policy practice. Thus, the scenario in this policy process pulled the Malays and non-Malays in different directions and sharpened the subjective feeling of differences between them (Chan, 1971). Such differences were between Malay and non-Malay or *Bumiputera and non-Bumiputera* and entwined with being advantaged or disadvantaged in the ethnic contestation within the policy process in education aimed at achieving national integration.

The ethnic challenges regarding the policy produced in Malaysian education are rooted in different principles and interests of different ethnic groups in relation to education. While the Malays continue to fight to hold on to their position as the 'sons of the soil', and believe that their language and culture should be the core of national identity, the Chinese and Indians struggle for equality, justice and their rights towards culture and identity. Hence, the non-Malay promote different discourses for enhancing national unity, focused around the notions of equality and non-discrimination. For them, such policy action should also be based on the protection and enhancement of other groups' cultures and identities. Regarding the economic aspect, such affirmative action should be based on the status of the weaker sectors and



not ethnically based or based on religious belief. Thus, for them, the social construction of ethnic boundaries in the policy process drawn by the concept of *Bumiputera-non-Bumiputera* should be abolished to eliminate such distinctions and discrimination between ethnic groups in Malaysian society (The Malaysian Chinese Organisation Election Appeals Committee (Suqiu Committee), 16<sup>th</sup> August 1999, p. 11).

Although policy production is a state endeavour to promote national integration, implementation has produced real tensions amongst the different ethnic groups, who bring contested ideologies and interests to the discourse about national integration. The obstacles for achieving a common ideology for national integration in the school system between majority and minority ethnic groups are understandable - the Malays would not agree to any ideology that was not entirely Malay, while the non-Malays would resist such an ideology as amounting to assimilation of the non-Malays.

In settling the ethnicity issues in the education policy processes at enhancing integration in Malaysian schooling, the organising logic of the state approach drew on the intention of protecting the supremacy of the dominant group, as well as accommodating the demands of other ethnic groups. This can be called an accommodative policy in Malaysian education in settling the ethnic contestation and the politics of ethnicity in relation to education resources. However, the ethnic minority sees that the latter might have been hidden, and that the production of policies in education is constantly framed by the dominant hegemonic discourses. In this sense, Malaysia, in implementing and producing policy in education for achieving national integration, functioned as a discreet form of multiculturalism. Even though this policy approach and tactics to some degree did not satisfy the Chinese, Indians or the Malay, this is the way the state has tried to accommodate all interests, while ensuring the hegemonic control of the dominant group, and while also building the nation through the education system.

Such consensus between the major ethnic groups prior to independence has been regarded as the foundation for building the nation, including the ethnic minority recognition of the status of the Malay language, their religion and special privilege (Wang, 1978). This refers to the social contract between ethnic groups as the basis for



nation building in the multi-ethnic society of Malaysia. The problem emerged in relation to ethnicity surrounding education policy was that the consensus did not continue as the basis for policy for national integration. Such policy through enforcement within undemocratic ways of implementation precipitated unease amongst different ethnic groups. Most of the policy produced by the state was the decision of the policy makers within the official machinery of the state and involved less consultation with the recipients of policy. This brought multi-faceted interpretation to policy.

Although such ethnic challenges can be viewed as rooted in strong attachments to identity and culture, the policy orientation of ethnic-based policies also contributed to the construction of a consciousness of ethnic identity. In this sense, education policy becomes one of the most important contributors to the maintenance of cultural distinctions, which produce a sense of ethnicity and distinct ethnic identities in Malaysian pluralistic society. Competition and survival in Malay-based policy have caused the non-Malay to find ways of ensuring their interests in both economic and education fields. In education, various changes in the Malay-dominated state policies and attitudes have led to anxieties among the non-Malay about the future of their education. This brings diverse preferences regarding type of education between ethnic communities, in which *ceteris paribus*, the higher the degree of feeling threatened by such policy in education, the higher the ethnic inclination to their preferred education system and schools. On the other hand, for the Malay, any policy action that they see as posing a threat to their status and special position will bring discontent to the state.

Ethnicity issues in Malaysian education policy cannot only be seen in the context of ethnicity. This is a complex issue comprised of a pastiche of features; for instance, it also involves competition and challenges inside and outside the national context. State emphases in policy, while to some degree influenced by discourses of ethnicity, on the other hand are also inspired by regional and international factors. For instance, the continued discourse amongst the Malaysian leaders about the standards of English in Malaysia declining in terms of English language proficiency, even compared to other countries in Southeast Asia (Omar, 2000) has influenced the state action to enhance the standard of English amongst Malaysian. Singapore has perhaps been a significant reference society for Malaysia here.



While the state's campaigns for national language is based on emotion (Omar, 2000), and to promote such language for national identity and dignity, the policy implementation emphasis given to English is based on pragmatic-reasons. Hence, discourse on the importance of Malay in developing the nation was surrounding by the politics of emotion, and on the other hand for English, was the politics of reason. This is a tension between the nationalistic concern and the pragmatic concern of developing the nation through language utilisation. This is also related to the struggle for protecting the ethnic privileges of the Malay with the state endeavouring to progress national development in the global field. For the non-Malay, both the pragmatic concern and the politics of ethnicity are at play, relating to the preservation of ethnic and culture identities and for their economic benefit as well. In the long run, based on the policy scenario and the state attention to economic interests, perhaps the politics of reason will ultimately be more powerful, as the state policy-orientation relates to the desire to be a developed country and competitive within the global economy.

Given the milieu of ethnic division and ethnic politics in Malaysia, the social contract amongst the major ethnic groups, the Malay dominance and the bargaining power of the minorities, has produced a problematic situation for the state, and produced polemics surrounding the policy. However, arising from this situation and given the complexity of the ethnicity landscape, and the landscape of economic and political interests, policy development and implementation, to some degree, have been much influenced by political and economic contingencies. For pragmatic reasons, there is a growing recognition by the state of the multiethnic character of the Malaysian education system as an attractive advantage and asset in an increasingly globalised world. For now, indications are that the state generally has recognised the value of preserving Chinese education in the country. An important factor is perhaps the pragmatic concern that the Chinese-educated Malaysian Chinese, and Malaysia in general, would be a valuable human resource in developing and strengthening the commercial links between China and Malaysia, since China would be a major economic force in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Guan, 2000). This can be seen in such policy action allowing medium of instruction other than national language in some educational institutions. In this sense, the state will be more pragmatic in determining which languages are appropriate for such educational institutions, particularly in



relation to English as the medium of instruction, or other languages of instruction, influenced explicitly by economic and global interests.

The recent discourse amongst the state leaders shows that the acceptance of various streams of the school system is a unique feature for the country and an added advantage for the nation (*Nanyang Siang Pau*, January 2, 2007). However, beyond the state politics of policy implementation, the recent scenario of school choice amongst multi-ethnic parents in Malaysian society is of more concern to the politics of reason. These parents are seeking material or economic advantage for their children and are less concerned with the maintenance of ethnic boundaries. For example, there are now some 60,000 Malay pupils studying in Chinese-medium schools, not necessarily because their parents wanted them to learn the Chinese language, but because they believed the teaching there to be more committed (Lin-Sheng, 2003, p. 149). Thus the discourse of multiculturalism in the schooling system means the state and the society are beginning to recognise the different types of school system. This change in perception has also directly benefited Chinese education in the country and helped generate the state policy orientation for preferring multilingual education.

In addition, the creation of a more confident Malay community both in the area of politics and economics, affected directly or indirectly by the state policy of affirmative action, has lessened the sense of pre-1969 insecurity. As a result, a communal call did not evoke the same degree of political response as has been the case in the past. The emergence of a new generation of Malaysians from all communities, who are willing to question ethnic-based politics, to some degree reflects the success of the government's efforts in inculcating a greater sense of being Malaysian through the educational system. Younger Malaysians in seeking to play a meaningful part in society now tend to reject ethnic approaches and are instead inspired by new and more universalistic ideals. Issues of human rights, justice, democracy and freedom have become the rallying calls (Hing, 2003, p. 357-358).

Accepting Malaysia as a multi-ethnic society with conflicting cultural values and interests, education policy and programmes need to accommodate or blunt the tensions and competing interests between different ethnic groups, while needing to deal with the policy of preserving Malay rights, and to accept a politics of reason



which sees education in both English and Chinese languages as important national assets for facing the global challenge. In this sense, the process of policy production in the Malaysian education system demonstrates an attempt to keep faith with accommodation, tolerance and consensus in managing ethnicity issues in the context of globalisation. The role of the state is as a conscientious keeper of the balance to develop a united and developed Malaysian nation.

## 6.7 Conclusion

Malaysian education policy has been influenced by many factors. The plural nature of its society, the struggle for preserving ethnic and culture identities, and independent efforts of some ethnic communities to make provision for their mother tongue and the desire to maintain dominant ethnic group status and hegemony are amongst the challenges. These, in addition, have also been complicated by the global demands and influences upon the national educational system in this developing the country. Thus there are multiple forces pulling the policy in different directions.

However, the desire of the state to ensure that education plays central role in unifying and integrating the multi-ethnic population remains important in policy processes in education in Malaysia. Within the explanation of the historical contexts and policies in Malaysian education system aimed at enhancing national integration provided in this Chapter, it has been demonstrated that Malaysian education policy since 1970 has played a significant role in reinforcing the national agenda of integrating the nation. Such policies have been to some extent successful in eliminating ethnic differentials, but on the other hand have also contributed to the construction of ethnic differences.

The historical analysis provided in this Chapter has demonstrated that the focus of education policy on national integration has retained the status of meta-policy within Malaysian education since 1970. The continuing effects of colonial developments in education in relation to education policy and ethnicity were also demonstrated. The state centric approach to policy development in education has seen an accommodative strategy which has sought to achieve national integration across ethnic groups and build the nation, while also working with a *bumiputera/non-bumiputera* binary, yet recognising the demands of the ethnic minorities in relation to their rights to cultural and language maintenance. The analysis demonstrated some limited success for the



policy, but also how the policy and this strategy helped to perpetuate ethnic divisions. In this way, we can see in Appadurai's (1996) terms how the nation (cultures) and the state (political and policy approaches) remain the project of each other. At the same time, the analysis showed how the demands of globalisation in relation to language (for example the enhanced economic significance of English and Mandarin) and for better human capital, along with discourses about human rights and equal opportunities, have challenged some of the older ethnic politics.

Chapters Seven and Eight draw on the interview data collected for this research and discuss the issue of ethnic challenges in Malaysian education policy. The discussion is based on the interview data obtained from interviews with a number of individuals from different ethnic backgrounds. Both Chapters are concerned with competing perspectives and discourses on Malaysian education policy at achieving national integration amongst different ethnic groups and as manifest in different policies. Specifically, Chapter Seven considers policy processes in the Malaysian education system aimed at achieving national integration, its concepts and orientation and the reason for ethnicity based challenges in policy production. Chapter Eight explores the views on the national and global challenges surrounding Malaysian education policy derived from the research interview data.



## CHAPTER 7

# EDUCATION POLICY AND POLICY PROCESSES FOR NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN MALAYSIA

### 7.1 Introduction

The intention of this Chapter is to answer the fourth research question of the study as outlined in Chapter One: How does the multiethnic society of Malaysia regard the education policy initiatives for achieving national integration as currently constituted in Malaysia? Given the framing of this research as critical policy sociology, the qualitative data collection approach of semi-structured interviews was adopted. Chapters Seven and Eight which provide analyses of the interview data have been structured around different themes which arose from the analysis. Thus data analysis provided the framework and structure for these two Chapters. This Chapter deals with the competing perspectives on education policy for national integration amongst the three main ethnic groups in Malaysia, indicating how this policy is a contested terrain. This contestation became evident through the application of CDA to analyse the interview transcripts, which also demonstrated the contestation across the three contexts of the policy cycle, the contexts of influence, policy text production and implementation. Chapter Eight deals with other issues which arose in the interview analysis, including the place of languages in education and the effects of globalisation.

This Chapter thus deals with interview data related to the different perspectives and discourses on the policy processes and structure in the Malaysian education context, specifically related to the aim of achieving national integration. As explained in Chapter Five, interviews were conducted with individuals from different ethnic and professional backgrounds who were directly and indirectly involved in the policy process around ethnic issues in Malaysian education.

The analysis in this Chapter is informed by the theoretical perspectives outlined in Chapters Three and Four, especially those sections which discuss ethnicity, nation, education and policy. The analysis utilises the methodological approach discussed in Chapter Five. The discussion in this Chapter is related to that of the previous Chapters



regarding education policy for integration and its relation to ethnicity issues. While the series of policy settlements and related ethnic challenges have already been explored in Chapter Six, this Chapter revisits issues of ethnicity that concern the complexity and contested discourses of education policy for integration.

The Chapter begins with an analysis and discussion of different perspectives on the state education policy for national integration. This was developed from the interview data, specifically the emerging themes were developed from the interview transcripts. The discussion tries to accommodate the multifaceted perspectives regarding Malaysian education policy for integration and its relationship with the policy process in achieving such an aim.

## **7.2 Education for National Integration – Conflicting Discourses**

National integration remains an important aspect in Malaysian education policy. The aim of integration and the role of education in integrating the multiethnic students were manifested by state policy action in the Malaysian education system, including the school. The concern about education for national integration in the Malaysian education sphere was exemplified in public and official discourses regarding the issue of integration amongst multiethnic children in schools.

In this section, I discuss how the interviewees viewed the Malaysian education policy for national integration through the school system. The section focuses on the interviewees' perceptions of the state's concept of national integration in and through the Malaysian education system. This is followed by an analysis of the interviewee perspectives about the policy approaches in promoting the policy idea of national integration, discourses about the school system, the educational strategy and policy implementation in Malaysian education for achieving the aim of national integration. The intention in this section is to develop an understanding of issues of ethnicity related to the Malaysian education policy processes for national integration.



### **7.2.1 The Policy Achievement**

Despite the Malaysian education policy's relative success in developing a national education character through nationalising the education system after independence, ethnic distance in culture and language still exists in the school context. One interviewee stated that while the policy has developed a uniform system in Malaysian education, the policy had still not achieved its aim of bringing together all ethnic groups through educational means. In viewing the scenario of integration in Malaysian education system, the interviewee commented:

The first thing we must remember is that national system has succeeded in integrating the curriculum content. The curriculum is uniform even though the language of instruction is different. So that is one of the first aims in the immediate post independence period in the 50s. This was the aim because before independence the schools were not only teaching in different languages, they were teaching different things, and they were still looking outward and not looking inward. Integration at the level of making all children studying the Malaysian context, in the same kind of curriculum has been accomplished. We have generally put what could be regarded as a national system and system is indeed similar throughout the country. But if you think of integration as bringing children together from different culture, different languages, that hasn't been achieved.

Interviewee 01 (A/Chinese)

The lack of success of the policy outcome related to national integration is also illustrated by the words from the interviewees that signified that the policy has failed in its aim for integration. For example, some interviewees used the words "artificial" and "superficial" in observing the level of integration amongst multi-ethnic society in Malaysia. This is reflected to their perception that the national integration amongst Malaysians is still flawed. These interviewees commented:

I fell that the government has made their efforts. But integration in Malaysia is very artificial. People don't integrate willingly. They have to be pushed. The government organized function and call all races together, but they won't do it in their own. It's very political. Ok the National Front will call for a function for showing integration, so we go. They will organise the dinner, you know the various races will go because the dinner is free.

Interviewee 07 (EA /Malay)

I think national integration in this country is very brittle. You know, it, is only ok at superficial level but beneath is very brittle. You know anything might explode and it will be nothing.

Interviewee 03 (EA& A/Malay)



These interviewees regard that the weakness of integration between different ethnic groups in the school was exemplified by the limited interaction between children of different ethnic backgrounds. They agreed that in the real situation, Malaysian children tend to mingle and cling with their own groups and cultures. This was demonstrated by the friendship patterns amongst the children in the schools, and the same situation also occurred in institutions of higher learning as well, for example in the universities. The interviewee extracts below indicate the scenario of inter-ethnic relationships in the Malaysian school context:

You look at the school where one particular group tends to choose friends of their own ethnic group. You find even teachers in common room where they sit and mix together with their own ethnic group.

Interviewee 03 (A & AE /Malay)

Even in university, there is no integration in terms of ethnic relation. The Indians with their own ethnic group, the Chinese are in their groups and Malays are in their groups. They don't have integration. They go along their ethnic line. This has happened even in the national school. You go to national schools, the Malay, Chinese and Indians does not mix with each other. There is no integration there. They are in their own ethnic group.

Interviewee 02 (AE & NGOs/Indian)

In the national secondary school, although they are in same compound and in the same classroom, they also not very united. Here one group and there is other group. This continues in the universities, we can see that there is one group, and there one group together with their own ethnic group. I think the reason is because they have different opinions, especially they may feel something not satisfactory about the government policy and implementation.

Interviewee 05 (NGOs/Chinese)

Related to this, one interviewee describes the situation of ethnic relations amongst the younger generation in Malaysian education context thus:

My children now are not like me. They don't have non-Malay friends. So do you consider the national integration has been successful? I am a good Malaysian, I got Chinese friends, Indian friends, but my children are not like me. This show that the government attempt for integrating the children is not successful.

Interviewee 07 (AE/Malay)

This image of inter-ethnic relations amongst students in the Malaysian school-site demonstrates that state policy is yet to achieve its aim in terms of promoting ethnic interaction amongst different ethnic groups in schools. It shows that the policy



outcome has failed in bringing together children from different ethnic groups and developing significant ethnic relationship for constructing inter-ethnic cohesion. Amongst the factors that contributed to segregating the children is the language issue, which refers to the mother tongue issue of the ethnic minorities. These issues are discussed in Chapter Six and indicate that language is a major aspect for producing conflict discourses between the state and ethnic minorities within the policy context for integration. The interviewee comments that this is a difficult issue that is an obstacle to the policy aim of achieving national integration through the schooling process:

While we are talking about different aspects that have been accomplished without much problem for producing national education system, the main issue preventing greater integration of children from different ethnic groups is the issue of mother tongue education and different medium of instruction. I think we could say that the government since independence has been very sensitive to the political implication in this issue.

Interviewee 01 (A/Chinese)

The tensions between ethnic communities and the state regarding education policy for national integration continue to exist. Controversial issues emerged from the conflicting discourses regarding issue about ethnicity, language and culture in the policy context. The interviewee suggests that the tensions will always be there:

I think that in terms of ethnicity and language and cultural issue we have gone through a difficult phrase. However, I suppose we never reached a point of critical difference, and controversial issue is always come up.

Interviewee 01 (A/Chinese)

A similar argument is raised by another interviewee regarding the idea of integration in the state policy. For this interviewee, the state's concept for national integration is unsuccessful to 'promote real understanding' amongst the different ethnic groups in Malaysian plural society. The interviewee comments on this point:

Malaysia has for the most part been a peaceful country that has not experienced serious racial conflicts. We can attribute at least some credit to the educational system for this success. However, the education system is still flawed in that it does not promote real understanding between different ethnic groups in the society, beyond mere acceptance and tolerance. This is in part due to the fact that the educational policies have not effectively encouraged meaningful interaction among students from the different communities.

Interviewee 11 (EA /Malay)



In this sense, the 'real understanding' in the context of national integration is related to the concept of integration 'beyond mere acceptance and tolerance' amongst different ethnic groups in Malaysia. This can be linked to the discourse of national cohesion and connected to issues of democratic and fair policy orientation in satisfying the rights for all Malaysians for education and culture, as well for economic and political rights. This also indicates that national cohesion cannot be simply interpreted as peaceful ethnic relations in terms of political stability alone in Malaysian pluralist society.

The interviewee has argued that superficial integration and harmonious ethnic relations were achieved through fear and other drastic measures in the policy process. In this sense, the interviewee refers to the state action in 'controlling' sensitive issues of ethnicity and preventing them being discussed openly and publicly in Malaysia. For this interviewee, laws that prohibit open public discussion on issues related to ethnicity, including language, religion and culture limited the interaction between ethnic groups. Hence, there is too little inter-mingling in terms of open discussion on ethnicity issues and this, for the interviewee 'has had the inadvertent effect of limiting greater institutionalised integration' (Interviewee 11). The interviewee suggests that any attempts at developing 'meaningful interaction' should be based on freedom and open discussion on ethnicity issues for building real understanding among the races in a multiethnic society. This would enhance a discourse of democratic policy processes in abetting and enhancing national integration in the Malaysian plural society context.

Furthermore, the interviewee suggests that the Malaysian education policy process did not accomplish the aim of national integration as the policy framework was not adapted to the changing scenario of Malaysian plural society. The interviewee suggests that recent education policy developments for national integration were not changed to accommodate the changing era and society. For this interviewee, the state makes less effort to modify the policy spirit and philosophy to fulfil the present demands. The interviewee comments on this point:

To a large extent the aim of the Razak report in 1956 and the Rahman Talib Education report in 1961 have been to promote national unity. The weakness or failure of these initiatives is that they have not adapted to the demands of the subsequent and present day periods. There has been little evolution of the philosophy of educational policy since then.

Interviewee 11 (EA/Malay)



The above discussions outline the comments of the interviewees regarding the circumstances of Malaysian education policy and efforts at achieving national integration through education. These opinions have placed the differing views of the various ethnic groups regarding the conception and ideology of national integration in Malaysian education context. This indicates that there are different interpretations about the concept of national integration for Malaysian plural society.

The following section discusses the diverse perspectives on the concept and meaning of integration. The way interviewees have understood 'integration' is entwined with their discourse on ethnicity and other social and economic issues within the Malaysian education policy context. Such perspectives represent ideas, which contradict the state concept of national integration. This is in some way influenced by ethnocentrism and conflict of interests amongst different ethnic groups regarding social, political and economic aspects.

### **7.2.2 Concept of National Integration**

In section 7.2.1 above, discussion on the interview data indicated that the aim of integration through education has still not been accomplished in Malaysia. Most of the interviewees' perspectives on the policy for integrating multi-ethnic children are derived from state's concept of 'education for integration'. This refers to the belief that the ethnic interaction in the school can enhance harmonious relationships and thus such social experience is important for developing ethnic integration. Indeed, this ideology of promoting national integration appeared in the policy action in the Malaysian schools context. For example, special programmes such as the Integrated School Programme, Pupil's Integration Programme for National Unity and Vision School (VS) were influenced by this idea of promoting integration amongst multiethnic students in the school. This has been discussed in Chapter Six, which explained how these programmes were produced by the state and how certain ethnic communities responded to them. The ethnic responses on these particular policies and programmes signal the contested ideas on the policy concept of integration - between what was posed by the government and what is accepted by the ethnic communities in relation to their interests and their desires towards education, culture and language, and their concern about economic benefits as well.



This section provides an analysis and discussion of the interview data which demonstrates the contested discourse on concepts of integration from different individuals interviewed. The individuals involved in the interviews discussed different perspectives on the notion of integration in the Malaysian education context, embedded in different experiences, ethnic and professional backgrounds. In some circumstances, there is interplay with discourses relating social, political and economic interests, linked to ethnic position.

One Malay interviewee commented that Malaysian education policy was established in a clear framework to unite the multiethnic younger generation through the education system. He refers to the policy framework commenced by the Razak Report of 1956. For the interviewee this should have guided the subsequent policy enactment for integration in Malaysian schools. The interviewee explained that this Report embodied the main ideology of Malaysian education policy to develop common identity, values and the national sense through the national education system. Amongst other means of building the nation was the use of national language in the mass education system to develop a kind of imagined Malaysian nation which is united and sharing common identities and values. The interviewee commented:

If we observe the early developments when our country obtained independence status in 1957, we find that one of the early attempts in educational planning based on unity in the process of nation building was officially commenced with the establishment of the Razak Education Committee. The Razak Report outlined a clear vision, namely an educational system focused upon and orientated towards nationhood and language. In this context, the Malay language became the instrument or catalyst for unity and this is explicitly stated in the report. Although this is envisaged as a gradual process, in essence the building of nationhood had clearly commenced via the educational process. This became the cornerstone of National Education Policy and subsequent reviews and revisions by the Rahman Talib Education Review Committee (1960) which also generated a report. Both these reports became the bedrock or foundation of the Education Act 1961.

Interviewee 06 (A/Malay)

In this regard, the Razak Report has been viewed as the earliest attempt of Malaysian educational planning towards unity in the process of nation building. The main idea is to develop a united Malaysian nation through the diffusion of a national ideology and national language in the mass schooling system. As discussed in Chapter Six, particularly, the period after the 70s witnessed this concept of uniting and building the nation through the educational process has influenced Malaysian education policy production, as this can be regarded as the state movement towards enforcing such



ideology as a result of the ethnic riots of 1969. This emphasis was influenced by the Malay nationalist ideology and their desire towards building a national identity based on dominant values and aspirations. Regarding this policy orientation, the interviewee claimed that some consequences indicated that the policy succeeded in achieving its aim in diffusing the national ideology of shared values and national identity across different ethnic groups in Malaysia. The interviewee argued that for a period, the policy practice in relation to national language in education has been successful in producing the nation that pervades the nationalistic criteria. The interviewee commented thus on this point:

The EPRD reveals that 5.4 million graduates of the national education system encompassing the various ethnics have been produced since 1970 when it was first implemented in the Rahman Yaakub era until 2001. The majority of this group will form the bedrock of national development in fields such as education, administration, law, engineering, medicine and others. Although at tertiary level, they would have certainly pursued their studies abroad and be required to use a language other than Malay, but the basic education obtained at primary level, for about 11 years, would certainly have been in the Malay language. Thus, this encapsulates the meaning of nation building in terms of unity, and the question of how we define race and selfhood. We have succeeded in producing a workforce imbued with nationalist characteristics and it is certain that those imbued with this nationalist consciousness will become the bedrock/cornerstone of national development.

Interviewee 06 (A/Malay)

In addition, the interviewee claimed that the policy has produced considerable results in developing a society which is relatively homogeneous and which has been successful in eradicating a sense of ethnic prejudice. The interviewee accepted that this has reduced ethnic boundaries and enhanced ethnic interaction through the common language of communication in education. Thus, the interviewee believed that 'the slogan proclaiming a new language a new culture, new language new thinking was actually being realised' through the implementation of national language policy in education processes. The interviewee commented:



The implementation... had till 1970, depicted that the ideals envisioned and planned by Tun Razak and his colleagues had yielded obvious results from several angles. One of which being racial unity. This could probably an interesting study if it could be carried out in schools. This is based on my impressionistic views during my visits to schools over the last 5 years, my involvement in teachers' unity training programmes during the implementation of which, I was able to witness how interaction took place amongst children from various ethnic backgrounds. I was truly moved and thankful those children from the various ethnic groups did not display any characteristics of ethnic discrimination, or ethnic prejudice and their discussions or arguments appeared to be relatively uniform. I believe that the slogan proclaiming a new language a new culture, new language new thinking was actually being realized. It was as if children from the Chinese and Indian communities did not appear flustered by language differences as well as differences in world-views, value systems and outlooks. This I think has been one of the successes of the national education system.

Interviewee 06 (A/Malay)

The interviewee also argued that the emergence of nationalistic sentiment is a 'sign of determination' whether the integrated nation of a pluralistic society has been achieved. Indeed, the interviewee suggested that this basis of nationalist criterion needed to be diffused through the mass education system. The interviewee regarded that the regional culture which refers to the dominant ethnic culture should be the fundamental basis for building the nation. Here regional culture refers to Malay culture and language. This construction is an assimilationist one and the fabrication of the nation based on historical and dominant ethnic aspiration:

In building a nation state, or even a national cultural policy, the most important underlying uncertainty is the regional culture. This has been a historical fact for centuries and as well as its oral and written traditions. That is only natural that something fundamental and native be highlighted. I consider this to be a rational stance.

Interviewee 06 (A/Malay)

The above perspectives on the education policy concept of integration represent the dominant group's ideology (read as Malay nationalist) in culture and national language. However, the non-Malays bring contradictory views on the concept of integration in the education policy context. They claim that the ideology in state education policy for integrating the nation has produced dissatisfaction amongst other ethnic communities relating to their culture and language identity. This has produced conflicting discourses on the idea of integration between the Malay and non-Malay, in relation to assimilation and multiculturalism in constructing integration. The tension is between those keen to assimilate the ethnic minorities to the dominant group's



culture through language in education. This point was illustrated in the following comment:

We have different opinion about concept of national integration. When I review about the policy, especially the educational policy of the government, they say, especially in the 50s and the 60s, normally the government and the Ministry of Education emphasise that they were try to achieve the national integration through the mono language system. At that time, the policy is highlighted the national language. I still remember the slogan 'one nation, one language', something like that. Under this concept the government at all time emphasised educational policy on this basis. That's why because of this, there are so many conflicts on this disagreement. Because of this concept and the diction of this basis arise.

Interviewee 05 (NGOs/Chinese)

For the Indian interviewee, the concept of integration is more than language, which is about respect for and understanding of the other cultures and beliefs, and not imposing one group's beliefs on others. This also signals rejection of assimilation. The interviewee argued that the important dimension for integration is recognition of cultural diversity and harmonious relationships in culture and respect for different ethnic sentiments. This is about understanding of multiculturalism in Malaysian society. The interviewee stated that:

As I said earlier, we should also take into consideration that integration just not through the language. We can bring about greater integration by understanding other people feeling or other people sentiments. You should not sort of condemn other culture or values and over emphasises your own faith or belief.

Interviewee 09 (A/Indian)

The Malay interviewee also echoed the same sentiment about cultural understanding in Malaysian pluralistic society. Furthermore, this interviewee regarded that social, political and economic tolerance is also an important aspects for building ethnic integration. This is an important aspect for integration in relation to fair distribution of social and economic resources and political rights across different ethnic groups. The interviewee commented:

Yes, I am looking to more than that, not just you integrate, and talk together. Integration is more than that. We have to understand the different cultures in our society. To me integration is also about the willingness to give and take, because three ethnic groups are not in the even playing field. So one is at the advantage of the other and if there is a real natural integration, than there is an indication of willingness to give and take. But I don't think that is about real, voluntarily, and willingness.

Interviewee 03 (A/EA/Malay)



One Chinese Interviewee commented that the basis for integration depends on how the ethnic minority interests in relation to language would be accommodated in education. The interviewee explained that the state ideology of national integration in relation to language in education has produced apprehensions amongst the Chinese regarding their rights to their language. While accepting the status of Malay as a national language, the interviewee asked for the preservation of vernacular schools in the national education system as currently practised:

We agree that Malay is the National Language. There is no argument, no objection. But meanwhile, we should support the development of the other languages. We should support other stream of school because in Malaysia you have the national schools and national type of schools for the Chinese and Tamil language. This mean multi type of schools, don't based on one type of school. The government can consider one type of school, but if we follow this way, can national integration be achieved? This will develop other feeling from other ethnic groups, even from open minded Malay. The national integration should be achieved through the fair policy not just formally you of together you just learn one language will achieve the unity.

Interviewee 05 (NGOs/Chinese)

In this competing discourse of negotiating the basic aspect for national integration through education in Malaysian multiethnic society, the interviewee admitted that the state's effort at national integration in schooling was rather unfair and ethnically biased in terms of culture and language. For this interviewee, such policy was not representative of the aspirations of all ethnic groups in relation to language rights in education. For this interviewee, the concept of fair policy meant government policy implementation on Chinese schools should be the same as that practised on the national schools. The interviewee commented:

I still remember when the government introduced a New Economic Policy, the Chinese Chambers and the Chinese Assembly Hall and also Chinese educationists feel that this policy has quite a lot of things that has been overlooked. What you ask about fair means if they are not applied in Chinese schools.

Interviewee 05 (NGOs/Chinese)

Other Chinese interviewees seemed less optimistic about the monolingual approach in relation to achieving national integration. For example:

The government tries to find national integration its own way and for many years in the 80s and 90s it was defined as monolingual policies. This policy is less contributed for integrating multi-cultural society in the country.

Interviewee 04 (NGOs/Chinese)



The concepts of 'fairness' and 'equal' in the education policy are linked to social and economic aspects. This for one Chinese interviewee is the basis for achieving integration. The interviewee expressed this:

The government still overlook that the unity must based on the fair policy, not just because three people group together, the unity will be achieved. You see in Taiwan and mainland China also has a lot of disagreement. In Malaysia, PAS and UMNO, they have same religious, same language, all the same but the disagreement is very big. So they also quarrel and fight with each other. Why? This is because of the policy, because of the concept. So, you come back to the school. If you want to achieve the national unity, the basis is fair policy in social, economic or even others.

Interviewee 05 (NGOs/Chinese)

Discourses about 'fairness' and 'equal' in relation to policy are also linked to the minorities' concern regarding the policy for strengthening the Malay position in social and economic spheres through affirmative action. This also contributed to the divergent discourses regarding national integration of Malaysian multi-ethnic society. One interviewee noted:

When you talk about integration and you don't really practise it fully, then how we are going to achieve integration? Even though you talk about patriotism, this is the same thing. In order to achieve this aim we have to equal to everybody. Of course we have to understand the government policy, you know, in one thing to help the Malay, but it is a sort of thing must come to an end. You see they put thirty years for the economic policy and there is a fear that they are going to re-implement. Some people feel, and the politicians feel that this policy is not been achieved. So they have to come back to it. So there are a lot of arguments.

Interviewee 09 (A /Indian)

In some situations, the controversial ethnic issues produced by the policy have affected the relationship and understanding between different ethnic groups. Here is an example of the ethnic boundary constructed by this policy:

Before independence, or even in the 60s, the communications very close. I got a lot of Malay friends. We simply sit together and all the time we have close contact. But later, because of the controversy of some policy issues, then there become boundary for us to together.

Interviewee 05 (NGOs/Chinese)

In relation to the concept of 'fairness' in education, the discourse amongst the Chinese and Indians is linked to their claim regarding mother-tongue, culture and identity issues. However, the Malay brings different interpretations of 'fairness' into this policy. For example, the Malay interviewees linked this concept to their special rights



and their cultural and language status. This is related to the Malay rights as the ‘sons of the soil’ of the country. In my interview with the Malay participant, this notion of ‘fairness’ in policy was interwoven with the notion of Malay rights in relation to their position as the dominant group within the policy context. This interviewee has said that the policy is fair in relation to the way it has protected the rights of the dominant Malay group. The interviewee expressed that the Malays also feel the situation as unfair when they experience their rights being marginalised by the policy. One Malay interviewee commented:

The problem is that the minority do not respect the history and the reality when they talking about fairness. They talk about fairness for their children, about scholarship and things like that. Discrimination towards an ethnic group is even worse that discrimination towards an individual. People seldom talk about it. People see the Malays, the majority, as strong but what are they strong at? The ones controlling the economics are the minority and not the majority. Because they control the economics, they control the politics as well. Now many of the Malay children also didn’t have the opportunities that are theirs rightfully.

Interviewee 10 (A/Malay)

In this sense, discourse about fair policy is linked to different interests of different ethnic groups. They feel that their interests are either marginalised or ignored by policy implementation in education. The policy-in-practice produced different interpretations in relation to the majority and minority ethnic interests, which are entrenched in different social and economic positions in Malaysian society. On one side, the minority groups – the Chinese and Indians, who have significant political bargaining in the policy processes, make strong demands for their rights and interests, on the other hand the Malays who feel that the policy practice has deprived them of their special rights and status as the dominant ethnic community in the country, standing up for their rights. This point indicates that the Malaysian education policy faces multifaceted demands in respect of ethnic groups’ interests in relation to language, culture and identity, as well as economic interests. Hence, the competing interpretations regarding the policy concept were inspired by differing and competing ethnic perspectives and related to social and economic contestation.

These contradictory ideas about national integration and how the policy should accommodate the different discourses of different ethnic groups in education complicated the role of the state in promoting national integration in schools. In this



case, the Malay interviewee suggested that the essential relevant strategy is to diffuse national ideology across such differences in schools to enhance understanding amongst the younger generation. While accepting the multi-ethnic nature in Malaysian schools which is historically, socially and politically constructed, the interviewee commented:

It is rather unfortunate when the national education system which has been carefully planned ultimately cannot be implemented in totality due to appearance of chauvinistically laced issues. Thus we are forced to accept the reality that there exists a national type stream at primary level for Tamil and Chinese schools and at secondary level in private Chinese secondary schools. This to a certain extent is of little assistance to nation building as we ultimately produce different streams. Nevertheless, I feel that there is a need to have certain measures to diffuse the national ideology and concept in national type primary schools so that they will not have a different sub-system although it would be difficult to shut down these schools physically. I feel in terms of implementation the ministry and the government itself should have the relevant plans.

Interviewee 06 (A/Malay)

The interviewee's idiom 'we are forced to accept the reality' demonstrates the element of disinclination in accepting the different types of schools at the primary level as currently constituted in the Malaysian education system. Yet, national integration must accept such a reality, and must be premised on a certain ideology that can develop understanding and tolerance, acceptance and recognition of different ethnic positions based on history and the reality of Malaysian plural society. For this interviewee: 'If this understanding is infused via the national type primary schools into the non-Malay community, I am confident that the nation building process will attain greater success' (Interviewee 06). This point emerged when I asked what the interviewee meant by the national ideology in integrating the different ethnic groups in Malaysian plural society. The interviewee explained the national ideology for uniting the nation in the following way:

National ideology does not imply an ideology that destroys selfhood. National ideology is an ideology that helps in the attainment of unity, understanding and comprehension of national characteristics. This should be linked with the agreed social contract. The acceptance and the acquiescence of the Malay community in receiving the other communities as citizens is well documented. This is balanced by the acceptance of four main issues by the other communities. Among them was language in that the Malay language is the national and official language, the position of the Malay sultans, Islam and the special rights of the Malays and other *bumiputeras*. In my opinion, these constitute the basic premises for nation building. Thus, the agreed social contract should not be destroyed. It is an important agreement as it constitutes the turning point on which the nation's foundations were laid upon.

Interviewee 06 (A/Malay)



Hence, the 'national ideology' needed to infuse children's thinking is related to the 'social contract' between the major ethnic groups. In this sense, the younger generation could be able to understand that the minority groups (in this case referring to the immigrant groups during the British colonial era, who have occupied a significant social, economy and political position since independence – the Chinese and Indians) have already accepted the position of the Malays in the country in return for their minority rights as citizens of the country. This is regarded as a key element for the nation building process. This has shaped the concept of Malay and non-Malay reciprocal relationships in the process of nation building, and for the Malay, this is regarded as a fundamental aspect for national integration and ethnic harmony. From this point of view, the minority groups' recognition of Malay social and political supremacy, as well the preservation of ethnic minorities' rights as citizens in the country, are important aspects of nation building. The interviewee believed that such ideology needs to be diffused in the education process of the younger generation in schools to 'constantly reinvigorate or resurrect the younger generations' and recognise 'the understanding and observance of the social contract we cobbled together at the dawn of independence' (Interviewee 06).

The above perspective on national integration signifies such concerns of maintaining Malay dominance over policy matters in the Malaysian education sphere, including the policy and programmes for national integration in schools. What is covered in the texts is the ideology of Malay supremacy related to the 'social contract' which has influenced Malay thinking. The interviewee hoped that the state mechanism for formulating and implementing policy in education should 'indoctrinate' such an ideology in the Malaysian younger generation.

The ideology is predicated on the belief that the Malays are the dominant ethnic group who are the 'masters' of the country, and that the Chinese- and Indian-Malaysians who form a significant minority in Malaysia should be grateful to the Malays for granting them citizenship. This discourse of Malay status forms the bedrock of the policy process for national integration and is also intimately related to discourse of Malay – non-Malay or *bumiputera - non-bumiputera* dichotomy. While these aspects have influenced the policy process in Malaysian education, they have also created feelings of ethnicity in Malaysian social life and how the communities regard the



policy orientation in relation to ethnic differences. Joseph's (2006a) research on the construction of ethnicity amongst Malaysian schoolgirls indicates that the policy has influenced Malaysian children in how they negotiate the discourse of ethnicity (see Chapter Three, page 68). This evidence demonstrates the effects in practise of *Malay-non-Malay* or *bumiputera-non-bumiputera* dichotomy.

The concept of 'Malay supremacy' which is also synonymous with the concept of Malay special privilege and their ethnic status as the 'son of the soil' has become a common usage in public and political discourse in Malaysian pluralist society. This is even evident in the government-approved secondary school history textbook published in 2004 by the Language and Literature Centre, the government-owned publishing company, which defined this term in its English translation is as follows: 'A passion for all that is related to the Malay ethnic, such as political rights, language, culture, tradition and the homeland. The Malay Peninsula is regarded as the Malays' traditional land' (Ministry of Education, 2004, History Textbook, Form Two, p.10). Supporting the policy concept relating to this particular ideology, one interviewee commented:

Be opened to our society, our historically blind leaders and our grandchildren about our history. Tell them how we gained independence, so that everyone is aware of the Malay's struggle...through history lessons. The history textbook must show the basics of nationalism. You must explain the concept even to the Malay.

Interviewee 10 (A/Malay)

In addition, the interviewee supported the use of national language for achieving national integration. The interviewee commented on this point using Indonesia as a reference nation:

Language is the most important tool in communication and this is what the Indonesians are trying to do. Indonesia is a country of various nationalities, culture and descendents. It is very difficult for them but they accept the Malay language as their language of unity. This did not happened in Malaysia. Our students need to understand and be aware of and to think about others. So we have to be open during lessons, in history, languages, civics and others.

Interviewee 10 (A/Malay)

In part, the issue of the special status of the Malays can evoke an emotional sentiment for the Malay, as it is seen as a challenge to the status quo of the Malay in the social and political dimensions. This is exemplified in an interview when I asked about the special privilege of the Malay to the Malay participant. The interviewee responded



with such an argument and showed an annoyed expression when other ethnic groups question Malay status. This brings an emotional reaction towards those who question the dominant position of the Malay. Thus, this discourse shows the Malay opinion that the minority groups must show gratitude to the Malay and accept the dichotomy of *bumiputera* – *non-bumiputera* rights in the policy context. It has demonstrated how ethnicity is defined and structured according to the relative positions in the political and economic dimension (Hirschman, 1987) and how the construction of ethnicity is linked to social and political ideology in relation to culture, identity and economic position. This was shown in the interviewee's response to a question related to the special privilege of the Malay:

Researcher: How do you regard special privilege for the Malay? Should the government maintain the privilege?

Interviewee: Of course. The Australian aborigines have given the special right until time memorial. The Red Indians has given their right. There is no time limit. Why must we have a time limit? That was the understanding. We are very angry with the bloody Gerakan Chairman, Dr. Lim Ken Yeik. Oh...don't talk about the social contract, he spoke like that. What was the social contract? You are a non-citizen of this country; we gave you the citizenship in return for our right. Now when you have got the citizenship you are questioning our right. If I am in the government, I will tell him you have to be grateful. We make you citizen of this country; you all were only temporary resident of this country. We gave you the citizenship in return of our right.

Interviewee 07 (AE/Malay)

The above lines of thought in this interviewee's comments indicate such sentiment and the belief of the Malay position in relation to other ethnic minority positions (in this specific case referring to the Chinese). This can also be seen to have influenced the dominant Malay political ideology that such privilege is the 'birthright' of the Malay and as such Malays need to be treated in a preferential way. This probably signals a Malay dominance paradigm that featured some Malay thinking in relation to the position of other ethnic groups. It also indicates a Malay expression of anxiety for losing their 'special' rights in relation to social, political and economic interests.

Other criticisms suggest that the policy concept on integration ignores the broad meaning of 'integration' in the context of Malaysian plural society. For instance, another interviewee commented that the state overlooked the notion of integration as a complex phenomenon, based on different understanding of integration in the



Malaysian education context. The different understanding and the interpretations of the concept of integration in education policy will influence the policy process and how it is received by the society. The interviewee commented on this point:

I think going back to what is the concept of integration and what is the translation of integration to the policy. As you have been aware that it has always been a controversy as different groups understand different things.

Interviewee 01 (A/Chinese)

Another interviewee argued that the government has not conceptualised the meaning of integration thoroughly and ignored important multicultural aspects in Malaysian society. Thus, in this argument, the policy and programmes on integration in education were greatly influenced by the ethnocentric views of the Malays and their control of the government policy machinery. Broadening the concept of national integration, the interviewee explained:

I mean the government is only looking at one aspect of integration. What? The school putting the students together under one roof, did you think that is integration? It is not all integration is about. National integration covers more than education. It covers the whole area, your political rights, and your economic rights. That is the major issue.

Interviewee 04 (NGOs/Chinese)

Having disagreed with the concept of integration as simply 'putting together' all children from different ethnic backgrounds under one roof, for some, this concept itself contradicts with the ruling coalition that is made up of ethnic-based political parties. For this interviewee, this ethnic basis of political power sharing in the Malaysian political scene contributes to the construction of ethnic divisions, which contradict the process of integration. The interviewee observed:

The interpretations of everybody under one roof and you have people in government allowing the fact that the political party representing one race. Where UMNO is represents the Malay, MCA is represents the Chinese, and the MIC as well. This is from colonial time and we are still using it. Like today, we are talking about what the new world and those kind of stuff. It is hypocrisy, completely hypocrisy. UMNO, MCA, MIC do not have the right to talk about integration. They do not have the right because they are hypocrite people. They form political party on the name of the race.

Interviewee 04 (NGOs/Chinese)

Despite the ethnic-based political ideology, for one Malay interviewee, the aspect that hinders integration is not only related to the division of ethnic groups in respect of culture, identity and language differences, but also division within the Malay



community, affected by the different political ideologies from the ruling Malay political party. This referred to how the government perceived the idea of democracy in policy and practice. The interviewee noted:

The leaders who are the moulders, for instance in the current political climate leaving aside partisan politics...if you are member of say B party, and not the governing A party, then you will be subject to pressure. We all know the stories of how fertiliser subsidies have been withdrawn and how a certain state which previously received PETRONAS royalties stopped receiving it and which was then granted as compassionate payment. All these are actions that clearly constitute a form of intimidation to the citizenry. Meaning that if you have a differing view to that of the prevailing mainstream view, decision or policy, you will be ostracised and subject to intimidation.

Interviewee 06 (A/Malay)

The broad comments in this section collectively indicate the different and highly contested concept of integration in Malaysian education policy. This has emerged from different perspectives of integration; which is based on the interviewees' ethnic background and professional experience in Malaysian education. In negotiating the concept of policy for integration in the Malaysian education context, this discursive contestation represents multiple meanings and interests in respect of integration related to ethnic interests and state policy processes.

There is a contested discourse between Malay and non-Malay regarding national integration in education policy in Malaysia. This signified that education for national integration in Malaysian education is connected with complex issues of ethnicity in relation to language, culture, identity and economic interests as well. The Malay demands the policy should accommodate the Malay aspirations and their special privilege in education processes in building the nation. Meanwhile, for the non-Malay, they are keen to apply discourses of 'fair' policy and multiculturalism in preserving their culture and rights in the social and economic dimensions in education, despite accepting the current national character in the Malaysian education system.

### **7.2.3 Policy Approaches**

Interviewees contested the current formulation and implementation of education policy for ethnic integration. For some, such policy approaches did not tackle the problem of integration and also ignored the fundamental contributing factors that



hindered integration. In conceiving the relationship between the policy approach and the aim of integration, one interviewee commented:

We must get to the bottom of what integration is based on. We must allow real integration to take place in our schools, in our society. We must question the root of polarisation in this country, so forth we must respect democracy and human rights in this country. If we can do all these things, perfect.

Interviewee 04 (AE & NGOs/Chinese)

In this sense, the concept of integration is linked to the concepts of democracy and human rights in macro social, economic and political contexts. This was also connected to the rights of the cultures and languages of all ethnic groups in education. In relation to this, other aspects that are important regarding democracy and human rights in education context are linked to the notion of fair and equal practice of the policy. As one Indian interviewee commented this might eliminate the experience of being marginalised amongst minority ethnic groups in the country:

You see, integration in any society can be achieved by many ways. One way of course is through education. The other way is, you know, giving equal opportunity to other ethnic groups. I think that is one of the things that are now bagging or troubling, you know. People feel that they are been sort of marginalised. So, when you feel like that, then of course you can have all your policy so we are going be integrated but then you don't really practise it.

Interviewee 09 (A & NGOs/Indian)

The implementation of programmes for national integration in schools seems not to be working or to be unsuccessful because of the approach taken by the state in implementing the policy. This refers to the implementation by force rather than through negotiation between the government and the policy recipients. This was considered as a factor that provided an obstacle to the achievement of the policy. The Malay interviewee observed:

You find national integration trying to inculcate by the community seems not to work, but it works with some outside forces, policies and so on. So I think in order for the country to survive and to work together and so on. The national integration should come natural rather than forcing. We can see the government is forcing in implementing idea for national integration, and the outcome is caused by the forcing effect.

Interviewee 03 (A & EA /Malay)

In this sense, rather than forcing the idea, the state's approach should be more flexible; recognise the nature of pluralistic society, and not enforce a homogenous character.



Another interviewee commented that such a policy approach which did not allow differences can create problems in integrating the nation. For one interviewee, the state needs to empower the schools to implement their own plans for integration, rather than force the schools to accept and implement the top-down policy relating to the aim of achieving integration. This, for the interviewee, will bring a stronger democratic sense in the policy approach, and bring flexibility in policy processes. This point was raised by the interviewee using Singapore as a comparison or 'reference society':

I feel being more flexible is actually a strength and not a weakness. You see Singapore recently begun to experiment with flexibility. They allow schools to be more independent, to try new things. Of course, bureaucratic you worry after that whereas if you are more open minded then you allow people to do slightly different things. I am sure there will be different products that are actually society strength.

Interviewee 01 (A /Chinese)

The interviewee's perspective above pointed out that the notion of flexibility is more suitable in implementing the state agenda for achieving national integration. Moreover, the interviewee regarded that the recognition of diversity as a strength for the nation rather than pursuing homogeneity. The interviewee noted, that, 'One of the good things about Malaysia is that we are actually very pluralistic by the nature of our population. This is strength for us if we can recognise it. Whenever we think this is a weakness and then attempt to create some form of uniformity, then it will create a problem' (Interviewee 01, A/Chinese).

In accommodating the demands of the ethnic minorities relating to their interests in language and the type of schools in Malaysian education, the state actually practises a liberal and 'compromised' approach. In trying to accommodate Chinese demands, the state sought a compromise. This refers to some policy practices in the Chinese and Tamil schools where the state has granted financial assistance, provided teaching staff and learning materials for the schools. Thus, to the Malay, the government is tolerant towards the Chinese and Tamil demands in education. The interviewee sees that this has hampered the Malay 'supremacy' rights in the country. One interviewee's comments indicate such feeling of discontent concerning the policy practices that accommodated ethnic minority demands in education. The interviewee noted:



The government always tolerate to other ethnic groups. The Chinese and Indian make demand after demand. They have success gain many of their demands. From capital assisted schools to fully funded schools, from not giving text books to all schools to giving book loans to all schools, from no University Tunku Abdul Rahman to an establishment one, from a fully Malays MARA to now MARA is opened to all ethnic. Our government policy is not strong in supporting The Malays' Lordship.

Interviewee 08 (AE /Malay)

The above interviewee's perspective illustrates the Malay discontent regarding the policy approach which was interpreted as favour to other ethnic interests; this has been viewed as marginalising Malay rights. This indicates that the ethnic struggle around social and economic gains through education is interwoven with ethnicity in the education context, and influenced by interpretation of the policy in relation to their ethnic interests. While the state tries to accommodate the demands of the ethnic minority – the Chinese, the Malay sees it as a weak policy in not preserving the dominant status of Malay and their special rights in the country.

### **7.3 National Integration and the School**

The Malaysian school system at the primary level is characterised by different types of schools based on different languages of instruction – Malay for the national schools, Mandarin and Tamil for the National Type (Chinese and Indian) schools. All types of schools are included in the Malaysian national education system attributed to the education policy framed by the Razak Report and this practice continues until this day. The continuation of this vernacular school system has produced conflicting views on the aims of integration in these schools. In this regard, discourse concerning the 'school' system demonstrates arguments on the effects that these schools produce ethnic polarisation. The discussion in this section demonstrates different perspectives on the policy process aimed at achieving national integration in relation to the context of the Malaysian school system.

#### **7.3.1 School and Ethnic Polarisation**

In the Malaysian education system, the Chinese and Indian community have a strong sentiment and legacy in relation to mother tongue institutions. Historically, the mother tongue education for these ethnic minorities is institutionalised by community involvement and policy practice in the British colonial era. This structured the education system in post independence Malaysia through political consensus amongst



the political elites from the three major ethnic groups (Malay, Chinese and Indian) in settling a national education system for independent Malaysia. As explained in Chapter Six, this was evident in particular policy documents, namely the Razak Report of 1956 and Rahman Talib Report of 1961 that formed the structure of Malaysian education system.

Today, the existing vernacular system at primary level demonstrates the continuous policy practice for accommodating different aspirations of different ethnic groups regarding language in education. This context of ethnic sentiments in relation to language has structured different identities within the schooling system represented by the medium of language instruction. One interviewee commented on this scenario:

In our country, where there is a multi-ethnic society, there is a strong feeling that the basic education or the primary education should be in their mother tongue. You see, vernacular system has been existence before we got independence. You know, when the Barnes Report was trying to abolish vernacular system and having English and Malay. The moment, because there is strong resistance from the Chinese communities, then the British put aside their plan.

Interviewee 09 (A/Indian)

The vernacular schools, especially the Chinese schools, are constructed by community efforts. These schools have received strong communal support since well before independence. They were built by the Chinese communities to serve their community interests in education during the time of British colonial administration. For the Tamil schools, their links with the community are not as strong when compared with the Chinese schools. One interviewee commented on the legacy of the vernacular schools related to particular ethnic communities. This interviewee explained the legacy of Chinese and Tamil primary schools in the following way:

The Chinese schools, the strength I think is historic and they are all very old and have been around, some of them over 100 years. It is not easy to say close them, right, and actually it is their strength and their link with the community is strong. If you compare Chinese school with Indian school, Indian school which is plantation school, the link with the community is not strong. So when the plantation owners don't want to run the school, the school will just collapse. In addition, it is not a community-supported school.

Interviewee 01 (A/Chinese)

The strong Chinese community links with the school continues until this day. The huge numbers of children in these schools shows that these schools continue to



survive on the basis of community support. Hence, for the interviewee, any policies aimed at abolishing these schools will produce ethnic resistance:

The community support for the schools is very strong. The number of schools relative to the total number of students is huge. So if they are closed overnight, massive problems when millions of children not having schools to go to, and the government have never been able to solve these problems. So I think they are realistic problems like these as weak so political problems, the commitment is actually strong.

Interviewee 01 (A/Chinese)

Another interviewee argues that the vernacular schools did not contradict the national education policy, as this school system was officially included in the national education system. For the interviewee, the use of common curriculum and the national language in all types of schools signifies the common character for all these schools.

The interviewee comments:

Since 1957 we had our Chinese school system and our Tamil school system and all colour in national school system. And it has also not been contradicted with the national integration policies because, we all the national language is still everyone in the schools because we all share the national curriculum and because there is interchange in the communities between the schools. Like now, we have more and more non-Chinese in Chinese schools. You know, because this is a free flow of communities, so in that sense we do not see that as contradicting the integration policies.

Interviewee 04 (NGOs/Chinese)

The interviewee provided further comments for justifying that Chinese schools do not contradict the national education policy in promoting Malay language in education in Malaysia. As the interviewee pointed out:

When we say the single school system, what you mean by that? Do you mean the Chinese schools don't have any Malay language or English? My two children, you know have A's in Malay and grade one for their SPM (Malaysian Certificate of Education). People do not know that in the Chinese school, Malay is just as good as in the national school. It seems that the Chinese school cannot speak Malay, you know that is why you think that is not part of the education, but they are. They are part of the education system.

Interviewee 04 (NGOs/Chinese)

One Malay interviewee who was a former high level education administrator supports such a view regarding the justification of the National Type Chinese Schools. This interviewee believes that these schools do not develop chauvinistic elements amongst the students.



The vernacular schools are consistent with our aims at national integration. After fifty years of independence, we do not see a problem, for example, in which the Chinese community has become so strongly Chinese that they do not consider themselves as part of Malaysia.

Interviewee 11 (EA/Malay)

While the state attempts to promote national integration in the school context, the existing vernacular school system at one level appears to scuttle the state agenda for national integration. In this context, one interviewee believed that it is difficult for the school system to promote integration. In this sense, the schooling system has been viewed as positioning children ethnically. In this regard, the different systems of schools based on the different medium of instructions at primary level constructed the image of ethnic divisions and thus has produced ethnic polarisation in the Malaysian education system. With nearly 90 percent of Chinese students in Chinese vernacular schools and with a large proportion of Malays preferring national schools where the Malay language and Islam are emphasised, and about 50 percent of the Indian population preferring the Tamil schools, this scenario has been viewed as heavily segregated along ethnic lines. One interviewee suggested these ethnic divides hampered the promotion of national unity. The interviewee commented on this point:

We have three different streams of schools. You can see a polarisation. The Chinese in the Chinese medium school, Indian in Tamil medium primary schools, and the national school tend to be predominantly Malays. Therefore, from those criteria it seems like we are actually not progressing, in fact we are going backward.

Interviewee 01 (A/Chinese)

In viewing the issue of ethnic polarisation in the school context, one interviewee who was a former senior official in the Malaysian Ministry of Education claimed that this situation would develop ethnic boundaries amongst the children of different ethnic groups and thus would contribute in constraining ethnic interaction amongst children of different ethnic backgrounds. The interviewee argued that when particular ethnic groups tend to choose their own type of schools identified by ethnic markers in terms of language and culture, this would create problems for children to interact with other children from different ethnic backgrounds in the secondary schools, where there is a single national school system. The interviewee observed:



These schools stressed their cultures and their ethnicity. If all Chinese schools still hold firmly to Chinese culture and reject other languages as the medium of communication, then there are pupils who would not be able to further their studies at the secondary school where there are mix ethnic groups in this school.

Interviewee 08 (AE /Malay)

This perspective posits that the schooling process at primary level has contributed to a particular construction of ethnicity; and such differences would limit the ability of the children to interact with other children from different ethnic backgrounds at the secondary level. Thus, for the interviewee this situation would segregate the children according to ethnicity and defeats the aim of the education policy to achieve national integration through enhancing ethnic integration at the school site. The following comments from another interviewee illustrate a scenario of ethnic interaction in the school context:

When you look at the school system where one particular group tends to choose school of its own ethnicity and you find even teachers in what you call common room sit and mix together with their own group, with own interest which is indirectly own culture, indirectly with their own race.

Interviewee 03 (A & AE/Malay)

These perspectives on the schooling system in Malaysian education context suggest that ethnic polarisation was constructed by the policy practice allowing different ethnic types of schools. The ethnic identification of school hinders social interaction between ethnic groups and allows the formation of ethnic boundaries amongst the children.

In viewing the ethnic composition in schools, another interviewee explained that the pattern of ethnic homogeneity continues to exist, even in the context of the national secondary school. For the interviewee, who is Malay and was a former senior education administrator, this pattern of schooling thickens ethnic boundaries and has hampered socialisation processes for integrating multiethnic children in schools. The interviewee claims that without having heterogeneous ethnic experiences, the children from one particular ethnic group would find it difficult to mix with children from different ethnic backgrounds. The interviewee commented:



The former Chinese secondary schools which are now SMK (National Secondary School) also, in Penang, from hundred secondary schools, twelve are former Chinese based. So there is not much racial integration in these Chinese based schools...The existing you carry on but the medium of instruction is Malay, but still 99 percent of the students in Chung Ling are Chinese...although the medium of instruction is Malay, they were mixing only with Chinese students. So for eleven years of their lives, they mixed with the Chinese

Interviewee 07 (AE/Malay)

Indeed, another interviewee believes that integration can happen if the student is provided with an ethnically heterogonous environment at the school-site:

...any integration should start from young. From the primary level, let them mix, they will have good friends.

Interviewee 09 (A /Indian)

Similarly, another interviewee comments that the existing school system raised problems for national integration. For this interviewee, the policy produced a complex situation for achieving national integration when the policy needed to accommodate different interests amongst the schools. This interviewee claims that this problem would not have occurred if the Chinese and Tamil schools remained as independent schools outside the national education system, as had been practised before independence. The current situation regarding the schooling system has constrained the state agenda for integration. This can be regarded as a criticism of the Malaysian education policy that maintains the existence of vernacular schools. The interviewee commented:

During the period before independence, it was a case of Chinese schools for the Chinese and Tamil schools for the Indians, but on a different status. There are many Chinese schools but officially they were private schools. However problems arose when these schools were included in the national education system. Should they be left as they were, there wouldn't be any such problems.

Interviewee 10 (A/Malay)

Discourses relating to ethnic integration are also linked to the position of national schools which use Malay language as medium of instruction. The state's intention is to promote these schools as the "preferred school" amongst the parents from all ethnic communities in Malaysia. This state agenda is derived from the national education policy ideology of Malay language for integrating the multiethnic children in



Malaysian education system. In pursuing such an aim, the state agenda is to develop a multiethnic character in the national schools. However, this effort has been unsuccessful as the schools in Malaysia remain homogenous ethnically. One interviewee considered that this has hampered the government policy for building multi-ethnic character in the national schools. This interviewee comments:

...many leaders have pointed out that the education system hasn't been successful in integrating. I think the few times the top leaders of the country have openly said that the education system has not been successful in integrating children of different race. This has been a concern that national system or national schools are not attracting mixed children, you know.

Interviewee 01 (A/Chinese)

Hence, the problem which inhibits the policy in achieving the aim of integration is not only related to ethnic groups' strong attachment to their mother tongue education, this is also related to the quality of education in such schools. In this sense, this is related to the failure of the national schools to convince the parents, especially the Chinese to enrol their children in these schools. What is noted here is the policy to empower the national schools for attracting multiethnic students is hampered by the image of the schools from the point of view of the Chinese and Indian communities. Here, the public perception, especially amongst the Chinese, is that the national schools would not benefit their children in terms of educational attainment. This leads them to prefer vernacular schools for their children.

There are various factors contributing to the construction of the negative image of national schools. Some interviewees remarked, while the state intended to make these schools play a role in integrating children from different ethnic backgrounds, in the actual context this has not happened, as the schools instead promote ethnic polarisation. The interview extract below indicate such a perception:

You go to a national school and see whether Tamil students, Chinese students, Malays students together. The Malay, Chinese and Indian Chinese schools are there, but there is also no integration there. Chinese are there, among their own group of friends, the Indians are there among their own group of friends, still there is no integration.

Interviewee 04 (NGOs/Chinese)

Although the state attempts to make national schools represent heterogeneous ethnic groups, the ethnic communities' responses to such policy intention has not been helpful. Such comments indicate that the school-site is not only the strategy for



integration, other means perhaps are more crucial for achieving integration. However, one important aspect that perhaps contributed to the community response is related to the unsuccessful image of the national schools to convince the non-Malay parents regarding their children's education interests and their preference for mother-tongue education.

### **7.3.2 School Image**

Related to the discussion in 7.3.1 above, this section represents the interviewees' perspectives on the image of the school in the Malaysian education system. Discourses regarding this matter also indicate that ethnic community preferences for particular schools are related to the image of the schools and the way they respond to policy in relation to cultural, language and economic interests. For one Chinese interviewee: this is actually more powerful than any politicians or any pressure groups could accomplish (Interviewee 01, A/Chinese). In this sense, the quality of the schools, language medium and the educational and economic advantages are important attractions for the Chinese community.

In the Malaysian education context, the vernacular school system continues to serve the ethnic minorities' rights regarding mother tongue education. In this policy practice, the state maintains the existing school system as the state had no intention to abolish these schools. However, while the policy maintains the practice of three types of school – National School, National Type Chinese and Indian Schools, the main agenda of the state policy is to reinforce national schools as the mainstream schools in the Malaysian school system. One interviewee commented:

The government is not too keen on abolishing vernacular schools but the government wants to empower national schools as the mainstream.

Interviewee 08 (AE /Malay)

The state effort to strengthen the national schools was aimed at attracting all Malaysians to prefer this type school for their children's education; thus the hope is to make the national school multiethnic in their student composition. Despite such efforts, the state is facing a problem in building confidence, especially amongst non-Malay parents to enrol their children in the national schools. This was related to the national schools' image which has contributed to fears amongst some members of the



Chinese and Indian community in relation to their educational interests for mother tongue and the desire for academic achievement. The feeling amongst the society towards national schools in relation to educational quality is illustrated by one interviewee:

But do Malays have faith in the national schools? I think the Malays don't have faith in the national school. I give another example. There are about 65,000 non-Chinese studying in the Chinese schools. I think about 65,000. The majority are Malays.

Interviewee 02 (AE & NGOs /Indian)

Such preferences for Chinese schools are influenced by pragmatic reasons. Perhaps for the Chinese, the reason is about mother tongue education and their commitment to support the Chinese education institutions. However for some Malay parents, the attraction of the Chinese schools is the discipline, and innovative ways of teaching that is practised there. The interviewee commented:

Why the Malays enrol their children to Chinese schools? I think they have more confidence in Chinese schools than the national schools. They feel education in Chinese schools is better. The discipline is good even though curriculum is the same. The Chinese schools are more attractive. In national schools, you only have English as a second language. In Chinese and Tamil schools, we have three languages.

Interviewee 02 (AE & NGOs /Indian)

Here we can see that the above perception regarding national schools is based on the quality and advantages of education practised in the Chinese schools. One Malay interviewee was in accord with such an argument in relation to the factors that discourage non-Malay parents from enrolling their children in national schools. The interviewee explained:

You know the outcome of the Chinese schools and the outcome of students from the Malay schools. Why is it so? You look at the teacher's concept and so on and you look at the culture in the Chinese schools and national schools. You look at the ethics of the Chinese and national schools. You look at the ethos of Chinese and English schools. That issue will tell you that is why they are not willing to send their children there.

Interviewee 03 (AE /Malay)

The interviewee further commented on this point:

They are much more hard working. You go to the common room of the Chinese school and look how the culture within the Chinese common room. These are the simplest indicators. It is just simple and looks at the number of exercise books that are completed within a year compared to Malay school.

Interviewee 03 (AE /Malay)



Such claims regarding the image of the Chinese schools in relation to their academic performance was supported by some official research by the state education department:

We have made a study in Penang to compare the performance of National School, Chinese type national school and Tamil school. The Chinese primary school, in terms of their performance in exams, I am not talking that in term of providing them a good education, I am talking about the performance in examination...they perform better than national primary school.

Interviewee 07 (AE /Malay)

In this discourse about schools and education policy for integration, an important aspect which needs to be considered then is community concern about the standard and the quality of education provided. This indicates that the problem of ethnic inclination for particular schools is not only linked to ethnicity, but also reflected pragmatic concerns for educational advantage. It challenges the state in their agenda for empowering the national schools to be the preferred school for all ethnic communities. In this sense, ethnicity and pragmatic ideologies seem to provide an obstacle for the state in making the national schools the mainstream school in Malaysian education for achieving its aim of national integration.

The image of Chinese schools is linked to their community's attachment to the schools. In this case, one interviewee provided an explanation regarding the role of the Chinese community in assisting the progression of Chinese schools:

Community attention is the important part of the Chinese schools. The whole community takes an interest in the school. Community, the teachers' association and the school alumni association are taking interest in the school. When the school needs everything, these groups will raise some money for the school. They look after the discipline and the academic of the school. So the important part of education is the culture in these schools. What is the important here is what the educational principle and spirit instilled in the school.

Interviewee 04 (NGOs /Chinese)

Related, the interviewee commented further in relation to unattractive aspects in national schools. :

Recently there are many stories about bullies in the schools, bully, gangsters in the schools and all kind of stuff. It is what parents don't want. This is happened in national schools. Especially in the last few weeks or months, you hear all the stories in the newspaper. It's going to make the national schools even worse than they were before. Malay kids are being beaten up by these bullies. What happen when the Chinese and Indians going there? It will be worse.

Interviewee 04(NGOs/Chinese)



In other aspect of school choice, parents also consider the advantages their children can gain from attending a particular type of school. Thus the discourse on ethnicity and the school system is inextricably linked with discourse of social and economic advantages in and through the educational process. This is an unintended community response in relation to the state agenda to empower the national schools as the mainstream school in the national education system. The Chinese see the policy of empowering national schools as less beneficial in terms of the educational and economic interests of their children. This is also linked to what can be gained through mother tongue education. The Chinese interviewee who had children in Chinese schools expressed this point:

They feel the mother tongue is very important. So this is the first reason they want to send their children to the Chinese school. Secondly, in the Chinese school, in fact the curriculum all same, all fix by the Ministry of Education, same. Thirdly, they can learn not only Chinese, Malay and English. That mean they can learn three languages and of course other reasons is the performance is good. The math and science result always quiet good.

Interviewee 05 (NGOs/Chinese)

Moreover, the ethnic communities, especially the Chinese viewed that some aspects of the policy as being beneficial to the ethnic majority. This has developed a social response from the ethnic minority in relation to the Malay preference policy. It thus makes the Chinese position themselves outside the policy practice and contesting for social and economic opportunities through education. One interviewee commented on this point:

When you see a big change, this is because there is a social change. It wasn't just change in medium of instruction that make Chinese parents move their children out. It is also because at that same point in time, even if you get a good result, you may not get into university. So it became important to know languages and to be in a situation where you are more competitive and actually it has made Chinese school became very competitive. Everybody knows you must get 4As to get into medical school. So actually, pressure to do well is even stronger. So it actually the whole atmosphere of contest system of a very big polarisation and the government is Malay. Everything to do is about Malay, and you feel as an outsider. So better join the outsider, otherwise it is no use trying to be there.

Interviewee 01 (A/Chinese)

In addition, the policy practice has constructed the Chinese preference in relation to the Chinese schools, and also influenced them in protecting their interests in the social and economic domains in relation to education. The interviewee noted:



The whole political scene was very different. Polarisation was in the air, and after May 1969, the government policy also shifted. Too much compromise that was thought to be the problem to a more Malay dominant in culture, in business, quota system began...even if you get a good result you are not assured getting a place in university. You might not be able to get a job in government, so that is a beginning of the big divide. As a result you look at the figures; Chinese parents tend to take the children out, but new children enrolling in the Chinese schools becoming more and more.

Interviewee 01 (A/Chinese)

The above interviewee extract demonstrated how the Chinese have responded to the policy practice. The policy in this sense has been interpreted as marginalising them in relation to opportunities in education. This has motivated the Chinese to take an alternative way that can preserve their interests in education and provide opportunity for gaining success in the disadvantaged environment within the policy context in Malaysian education. In this sense, the school choice amongst the Chinese community can be considered as a response to the policy preference for the Malays. Thus this situation has provoked ethnic and communal attitudes in preferring education that would provide advantages in facing the challenges from a perceived Malay biased policy in education.

In relation to the division of national and national type schools, the policy has also created the sense of being 'outsiders' amongst the ethnic minority. For the Chinese, they feel marginalised in relation to their school as the policy practice has appeared to be unfair to the Chinese schools:

What you ask the fair means they are applied in Chinese schools? First the provision of fund...if based on fact, it is not fair because we review on the every five years Malaysian Plan...In. every Malaysian Plan we found that for the National School provides ninety seventh percent, for the Chinese school they just provide 2.4% of the total.

Interviewee 05 (NGOs/Chinese)

Furthermore, the interviewee noted that the policy in its implementation is unfair to Chinese schools in relation to the development of the schools. The interviewee commented:

The Chinese school not only never increased but reduced. May be in 1960 there is three hundred thousand, now there are 640 thousand student in Chinese school. So in this way you can see, the student, the numbers of student is increase double but the numbers of school has been reduced.

Interviewee 05 (NGOs/Chinese)



For the Indians, they face the same experience regarding the policy practice relating to Tamil schools. This exemplified by the comments of an Indian interviewee:

I'm an Indian. I was from the Tamil school. That implementation will never come in the 9th Malaysia Plan for the Tamil schools which I am very sure will not happen because I'm an Indian.

Interviewee 02 (A E & NGOs/Indian)

They feel such policies when implemented will ignore the existence of Tamil and Chinese schools. The sense of 'being an outsider' within the policy processes and the feelings of mistrust about the state policy in education system are constructed by the policy practice which has been read as not accommodative of the Chinese and Indian interests in education. For instance, the Indian interviewee pointed out the weak and poor physical conditions of the Tamil schools as demonstrating that the state in its policy implementation has marginalised these schools. Here we see a politics of non-decision-making at work in its implementation to these schools. The Indian interviewee felt that this image of Tamil schools shows that the government has not implemented a fair and equal policy for all type of schools within the national education system:

When I joined the service in 1968 there are schools in my district, Kuala Muda is still the same. Plank buildings. I can tell you these buildings are 100 years old. Don't you think we have been left out of the main stream? The government only talks about all these things, in talking but don't seem to implement what they said. Like Tamil schools in my area, there are about 20 schools in my district. Lots of them still need basic facilities, that the buildings were put up 100 years ago.

Interviewee 02 (A E & NGOs/Indian)

For this interviewee, policy implementation will continue to overlook the Tamil schools from the mainstream of national educational development. This produces the notion of whose interest 'counts' in policy. In this sense, being an outsider is linked with the way the policy is enacted:

Does the minister mean the school is Malays schools, Chinese and Tamil schools? He means only Malays schools. I believe that implementation will never come in the 9<sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan for the Tamil schools which I am very sure will not happen.

Interviewee 02 (A E & NGOs/Indian)

For another Indian interviewee, the implication of such policy practice is victimisation of the students in Tamil schools:



I am looking at the Tamil school. The schools are very badly managed. They don't have proper facilities, and then the victim of the system is the children themselves.

Interviewee 09 (A Indian)

Lately, the Indian community became concerned about improving the Tamil schools. They have developed a strategic plan to improve performance of Tamil schools. This is the community's response to the state's lack of interest in these schools. One Malay interviewee pointed out:

The national schools have performed better than Tamil primary school. Then, off let, Indian community has come out with very gigantic program of assisting these Tamil schools. I don't know what the program they call it. Dr. Thambiraja, lecturer from MU, he was the brain behind this. Whereby their own professional assists Tamil schools, they perform better. Now Tamil schools are performing better under this programme. I forgot what the name of this programme. Under the MIC, whereby they give extra lesson, extra tuition to Tamil schools, and the Tamil schools performance is coming up

Interviewee 07 (AE/Malay)

Another factor that inhibits the policy agenda in empowering the national schools to be the mainstream school for all ethnic groups is religion. This aspect refers to the practice in national schools of Islamic values that develop unease amongst the non-Muslim communities. One interviewee commented on this point:

Religion is one of the reasons you see. It is too much religion in the national schools. We don't want our children practising very high Islam. I'm a non-Muslim, I shouldn't talk about these but I think this is one of the reasons.

Interviewee 02(EA & NGOs/Indian)

The feeling of unease towards the practice of Islamic values in national school also influenced the way the Chinese and Indians have responded to the state agenda in promoting a multiethnic character in the national schools. For example, the interviewee pointed out that most of the non-Malay students are less interested in taking up the quota for non-Malay students in residential schools because of the element of 'anxiety' regarding Islamic practice in these schools:

The fright is there. I got friends whom their children are much better in examination, like UPSR than PMR examination and they have been offered a place in the residential school. However a lot of them didn't send their children there. These people are scared of religious activities there. That's why when the government announced now in the matriculation classes there are 10% places, the places are not taken by the Chinese and Indians. That is one of the reasons. A little bit of thought there, we talk of fright there. Religious factor, the fright is there.

Interviewee 02(EA & NGOs/Indian)



Discourse about national integration and the schooling system in Malaysian education sphere is interwoven with the discourse about policy practice, social, economic and ethnic preferences in relation to education matters. This section has shown how the policy contributes to the construction of different images of different types of schools populated by different ethnic groups. It has shown that while the state is keen to develop a strong multiethnic image of national schools, the implementation processes in the national schools have been regarded by the Chinese and Indian community as favouring the Malay aspirations, culture and identity with little emphasis in recognising the minority aspiration in respect of the place of their culture and language in the national schools. This situation is further strengthened by pragmatic ideology in relation to social and economic advantages in education which can be gained from being educated at a particular type of school.

#### **7.4 Educational Ideas and Strategy in Promoting National Integration**

One of the special programmes for national integration in the Malaysian education system is the Vision School (VS). As discussed in Chapter Six, this programme attempts to enhance interaction amongst students from different ethnic backgrounds where Malay, Chinese and Indian students share sports fields, assembly halls and canteens, but attend classes conducted in their mother-tongues. One interviewee viewed the VS as an experiment in education policy aimed at achieving national integration. This interviewee commented that the interesting aspect of VS is:

The idea of vision school I think is an interesting one. The idea is to integrate children from different ethnic groups, they studying in the same area yet their parents want them to be educated in their mother tongue.

Interviewee 01 (A/Chinese)

The idea of 'sharing' and 'being together' is to increase ethnic interaction and thus promote national integration amongst students. This would be practised without any ethnic groups losing their rights in respect of mother-tongue. It is a policy strategy to reconcile the two aspects of interests - the state policy agenda of national integration and accommodation of the Chinese and Indian regarding their mother-tongue. Hence, for the interviewee, this programme connotes an 'imaginary concept' of the state policy in promoting integration in the school context. The interviewee commented:



I thought that exactly Vision School in my mind is a very imaginary concept like you put 3 small primary schools in one big compound. They will be taught in their own respective classroom in their own respective languages but they have a same canteen, having curriculum together.

Interviewee 01 (A/Chinese)

Some parents believe that VS concept can promote better interethnic relationships, thus it will help to promote national integration. The idea is to synthesise elements of Malay, Chinese and Indian education into one-real entity, having different culture and identities, but living in harmonious relationship, symbolised by the idea of VS. This programme can be read as physical planning to promote integration in the school-site. For one Malay interviewee, VS can be regarded as the best and achievable method for achieving the aim of ethnic integration through the existing school system. In supporting the policy idea, the interviewee claims that this is 'the best step envisaged by the government when they could not transform the form and structure of existing national type schools' (Interviewee 06). For this interviewee, VS provides the possibility to bring multiethnic children together without changing the identities of the different school system. The interviewee commented:

To my knowledge, the Vision School concept will not change the nature or the identity of their present schools. In fact in this context too, I still view the Vision School as a feeble attempt in inculcating unity. I still view the Vision School as a feeble attempt in inculcating unity. Probably, this is perceived to be the best step envisaged by the government when they could not transform the form and structure of existing national type schools.

Interviewee 06 (A/Malay)

We see here also the VS as a compromise for accommodating ethnic interests for their mother tongue education and as for achieving the state agenda for enhancing ethnic interaction amongst children from different ethnic backgrounds. We might say this is the state's approach for eliminating spatial boundaries in relation to ethnic interaction in the education system in Malaysia. Thus putting together different types of schools is an appropriate measure for achieving national integration without destroying the schools' character in their language, culture and identity. For another interviewee, the idea of VS is not only diffusing tolerance and understanding, but the VS concept also is related to economic efficiency in best utilising the physical facilities of the school.

The idea is good. The policy involves change, sharing of classroom amongst all these three schools, sharing of laboratories and so on. When it involves sharing, it involve efficiency, so it very efficiency in the sense that the class will be used all the time. That means the national education concept inculcates the value of sharing.

Interviewee 03 (AE/Malay)



One interviewee suggests that this programme can be implemented without ethnic resistance if the government has a good strategy for implementation. For this interviewee, the strategy should avoid ethnic communities' dissatisfaction regarding the *status quo* of their schools. This is related to the way the state is implementing the idea that would eradicate such ethnic challenges to the VS. The interviewee noted:

In every state there is a model vision school. I think money is not such a big problem. In the past 20 years we have spent lots of money building schools. If you study the figures you will see this. So take a good location. Every state has some very suitable location. There are new housing areas which actually tend to be multiethnic. You can locate this piece of land and going to build vision school, a new school altogether and not moving any Chinese schools out of their locations. That is not asking anybody to change anything but build from scratch. You can call these as National Vision School Penang, , National Vision School Selangor, whatever or call by the name of a town, a new town that is very possible, the number of new town in Selangor, for instance.

Interviewee 01 (A/Chinese)

However, the contested element and challenges by the ethnic minorities to this programme indicate that there is a range of complex issues related to the concept, strategy and implementation of the VS programme. The policy seems too complicated in the implementation stage in facing the multiethnic character of the current Malaysian education system. In this regard, another interviewee revealed the fears that the ethnic minority groups have towards this VS programme. The following extract below reveals the relationship between the policy idea and implementation strategy:

Well first of all, look at the vision school. Where are they are located? Are they located in the Chinese vicinity, Malays vicinity, or what? The other one is who will be the major groups of students in those schools. So if they are willing to be built in area where one particular ethnic is more than other, there will be dominance. Dominant in this sense is the majority. That means one group enforcing on others. That is one reason why it did not work.

Interviewee 03 (EA/Malay)

There is apprehension on the part of the ethnic minorities as regards the VS policy. They view the implementation of the policy with suspicion:

The government does not want to build more Chinese and Tamil schools. Then they want promote Vision School and Integrated School. Why should? Of course, you can imagine why Chinese schools and Tamil schools are opposing this.

Interviewee 04 (NGOs/Chinese)



This shows the fears the Chinese have regarding any policy of integration. For them integration would eventually lead to the closing down of Chinese schools. This is a sentiment of mistrust entrenched in the Chinese response to policy processes for national integration. One interviewee commented:

I think this is a long historical work that great mistrust on the government point of Chinese schools organisation because national policy, the idea of national policy since post war years has been perceived correctly or wrongly aimed at destroying Chinese schools

Interviewee 01 (A/Chinese)

This reveals that the Chinese community continues to interpret the state policy in education for integration within the perspective of ethnic consciousness in relation to their language and schools status. While the idea of VS tries to enhance integration without having ethnic resistance regarding the rights to mother-tongue and maintaining the ethnic groups' autonomy for their schools, the policy approach and the way of implementation has produced feelings of insecurity amongst the Chinese and Indians regarding the status quo of the Chinese and Tamil schools. Even most of the Malay interviewees agreed that the implementation of the state's VS project for achieving national integration would be viewed with suspicion and fears by the ethnic minority groups that the vernacular schools would be negatively affected..

## **7.5 Policy Implementation**

At the level of implementation, the policy has been viewed as being not successful in realising the policy agenda for national integration. One Indian interviewee claimed that this was a result of the teachers' and school administrators' interpretation of the policy. In this sense, the problem of policy process is 'in' the implementer, but never 'in' the policies (Ball, 1997, BERJ, p.265). The interviewee commented:

The government policy might be good. The Education Minister may say something. It might be agreed and passed certain educational laws, they might have agreed in cabinet meeting and so on, and then they may announce something, but when the implementation comes to the classroom level, the practice is different.

Interviewee 02 (AE &NGOs/Indian)

For this interviewee, the main reason for unsuccessful implementation is the lack of understanding and knowledge of multiculturalism amongst the teachers and administrators in the schools. This shows that policy for integration in schools has to



involve pedagogical and curriculum measures to develop competence and skills amongst the teachers and the administrators on multiculturalism for instituting integration. The interviewee noted on this point:

There is a complete lack of understanding about the Indian or Chinese culture. Of course, this is because the people who are at the top there, that mean the headmaster, they themselves have not come through medium of education which has broad understanding of other people. Now we talk about integration but then they themselves don't understand the sentiment, the feeling, culture and the values of other ethnic groups.

Interviewee 09 (A &NGOs/Indian)

Another perspective on the Malaysian education policy reveals that policy-in-implementation is contrary to the policy concept for national integration. Some interviewees read that Malaysian education policy in practice as constructing a sense of ethnicity by separating ethnic groups in some schools. This refers to the special schools for the Malay which is the result of the policy that seeks to give special treatment to the Malay/Bumiputera in their schooling experience. For example, the MARA's secondary schools (the schools under Majlis Amanah Rakyat or People Trust for Indigenous People – government institution to assist the Malay/Bumiputera in their economic position) are the policy practice of affirmative action for Malay/Bumiputera in education. One interviewee commented that this has created a boundary between the multiethnic students because these schools are only for the Malay. The interviewee argued that this revealed conflicting agenda in the policy implementation process:

You talk about integration and how everybody should be together. Then there's MARA only for the Malay. The recent Minister of Higher Education says as long as the minister does, whenever MARA to be not open to anymore non-Bumiputera. So what are we talking about?

Interviewee 04 (NGOs/Chinese)

The ethnic composition within the school and its relationship with the affirmative policy in education for the Malay generate the sense of 'insider' and 'outsider' amongst different ethnic groups in Malaysian society. These cross purposes between the policies of national integration and the state practice in implementing policy in favour of the Malay have created such feelings. It is entrenched in the state policy processes and thus conflicts with the discourse of national integration in Malaysian education. For the interviewee, the policy practice of national integration through education is confusing.



You want schools to be opened and integrated and then MARA cannot be allowed to be opened to non-Bumiputera. What are we talking about? This is complete hypocrisy.

Interviewee 04 (NGOs/Chinese)

In the implementation process, it is clear that the education policy in Malaysian education attempts to maintain the status quo of the vernacular schools in relation to the state's preference for the national school that uses national language as the medium of instruction. While the minority groups demand for the development of more Chinese and Tamil primary schools, the policy inaction is against such demands.

One interviewee explains the policy:

It is a policy. We do not allow them to increase the number. As the guideline, where possible, we do not allow them to build new Chinese schools. They can expand the existing school and they can improve the existing school, but as far as I know, there will be no new school for SJKC and SJKT.

Interviewee 07 (EA/Malay)

What is important to note here, then, is that even the policy texts seem more open to acknowledge and show compromise for the Chinese and Tamil schools, in real practice, through the state's bureaucracy and machinery, the policy is only to maintain the existing *status quo* of the vernacular schools. This is based on the belief that the expansion of vernacular schools in the Malaysian education system will enhance ethnic polarisation and will be a mismatch to the state's agenda for empowering the national school as a site for enhanced integration amongst students from different ethnic backgrounds. Hence, the policy practice regarding vernacular school can be interpreted as allowing the ethnic minority their rights for mother tongue instruction, and to justify that the state is not practising ethnocentrism in its policy. In addition, such practice stops at elementary level, and then there is the attempt to make national secondary schools conform to the policy ideology of integration, in terms of bringing together all children in the same schools and using Malay as the medium of instruction. The interviewee commented:

Our students at the elementary level were compartmentalised, Malay school, Chinese school and Tamil school separated. But being a multiethnic country, the government was very considerate. We are only the government in the world which allow them to choose vernacular elementary education. But if we allow them to go on at the secondary level, they will still compartmentalised, Malay secondary school, Chinese secondary school, Tamil secondary school, and then it would continue divided.

Interviewee 07 (EA/Malay)



Accordingly, the interviewee observes that this kind of policy implementation shows that the state is practising a fair policy for all ethnic groups in Malaysian society regarding language and culture in education. The policy implementation is trying to accommodate ethnic minority rights through their vernacular schools and also considering the need of national unity through the schooling process. The interviewee said:

You know, we accommodate the request of the other ethnic groups to the government, which means that the Malaysian government in term of education, we are not racist. We are not anti Chinese and Indian or practiced racism in our policy. If we are really talking about national unity, we would abolish all these Chinese and Tamil schools, and have only national primary school.

Interviewee 07 (EA/Malay)

However, for the Chinese, the policy practice discriminates against the vernacular schools. The Chinese interviewee criticises the policy that it does not allow for increasing the number of Chinese and Tamil schools:

What is the priority of the government? The population of schools are exploding. The government said does not want to build more Chinese school and Tamil school. Then they want promote Vision School and Integrated School. Why should? Of course, you can imagine why the Chinese school and Tamil school are opposing it.

Interviewee 04 (NGOs/Chinese)

In addition, policy implementation regarding vernacular schools has been viewed as unfair. As another Chinese interviewee commented:

The only thing is the implementation of the government, especially the Ministry of Education. They never treat fairly for all type of school. The numbers of student is increase double, but the numbers of school reduced. This very clearly indicated that the implementation of the government is not fair. We have the figure. I think the figure can speak the thing.

Interviewee 05 (NGOs/Chinese)

In implementing the programme for promoting integration at the school level, the controversial issue occurs because the implementer does not bring to play the original intention of the policy idea. Thus, such implementation often faces challenges from the particular ethnic communities, resulting in the neglect of the original intention in the policy amongst the policy implementers. This has happened, for instance in the implementation process of the VS programme. The interviewee raised this point:



I think at the policy stage it worked with good intention. The problem is that at the planning stage it has been done at central level, where the implementation stage at the state level. We take a school in Kedah is being built in Malays community area, there is only a small community of Chinese. The purpose of building the school is that because there is one small school Chinese school. They thought of closing that school and one small Indian school.

Interviewee 03 (AE/Malay)

Within the administrative level, the decision on the implementation of the policy idea embraced other purposes that provoked resistance from the ethnic communities. In the implementation process of VS, the administrative approach strengthened the belief of the Chinese and Indian communities that the programme was intended to abolish vernacular schools rather than integrating their children. The Indian interviewee commented on this connection of policy and the implementation process in relation to the position of the vernacular schools:

They ask questions because they feel that if they just giving, they fear that slowly we have only Malay language. Maybe the government will reduce the number of hours of teaching Chinese and Tamil. This is the fear that they feel that maybe this is the first step towards abolishing the Chinese and Tamil schools.

Interviewee 09 (A/Indian)

Moreover, the process of implementation has resulted in ethnic discontent. Without prior consultation in relation to implementation, some elements have raised suspicion amongst the Chinese community in relation to vernacular schools. The undemocratic, administrative way of implementing the policy has produced different interpretations in respect of ethnic interests. As one interviewee commented regarding the implementation of VS:

The current situation is that the integrated schools are forcibly implementing a scheme without prior consultation. Also, the intention is clearly to control these schools' management through a Board that is required to report to the government. In this scenario it is understandable why the policy will be received with suspicion.

Interviewee 11 (AE/Malay)

Implementation of such policies and programmes at the school level has often met with political controversies, resulting in the 'forcing down' of the policy.

The problem is that when a policy is perceived as being enforced by the authorities, there is a natural aversion against it.

Interviewee 11 (AE/Malay)



The implementation process of education policy and programmes for integration at the school level have tended to be reactive and crisis oriented. This generally arises from the challenges of some ethnic groups regarding their culture and language identity, and also relates to the mode of implementation of the policy.

## 7.6 Conclusion

This Chapter has uncovered a multiplicity of perspectives regarding Malaysian education policy processes aimed at achieving national integration and in relation to ethnic issues in the policy. Based on the analysis and discussion of the interview data, this Chapter has revealed conflicting discourses concerning policy for integrating the multiethnic society through education. The discussion has also indicated that the issue of ethnicity and policy for integration in Malaysian education are entwined with 'different principles' of integration, including issues of culture, language and identity, and are also connected to social and economic interests relating to education. Integration is thus a contested concept along ethnic lines.

The competing perspectives and contestation regarding the concept of integration represent different imaginaries of the nation, again demonstrating the nation and the state as projects of each other (Appadurai, 1996). The accommodative state strategy also seemed to ensure that all ethnic groups remain unsatisfied with and suspicious of education policy aimed at achieving national integration. Policy production in education seemed to be more about accommodating ethnic politics than seeking for broader ideals, perhaps of multiculturalism and high educational standards for all, irrespective of ethnicity, socio-economic status and urban-rural location. The policy also helped socially construct ethnic boundaries amongst and between the ethnic groups in Malaysia. In this way, in contributing to cultural and ethnic distinctions, Malaysian education could be seen as *pseudoethnicity* (Collins, 1975) and also demonstrative of what Hacking (2002) has called 'looping effects', whereby socially constructed categories have real material effects. Education policy for national integration in education in Malaysia could be seen to work in this way.

The principal tension in the policy is between seeking harmonious balance amongst the ethnic groups – Malay, Chinese and Indians – and those fighting to preserve special rights and privileges, as well the assertion of political supremacy of the Malay



versus the demands for the preservation of various ethnic languages and cultural identities. Hence, policy processes in the Malaysian education context, in attempting to enhance integration have involved multiple interests in respect of ethnicity in realising the national agenda for integration. This becomes the backdrop of mounting ethnic discontent with policy processes in Malaysian education. There are various factors involved in this discontent, including the ethnic factor itself in relation to the preservation of language and culture, and in relation to differing social and economic outcomes. This is the root cause of ethnic challenges around Malaysian education policy processes geared to achieving national integration.

Discourses on Malaysian education policy evidenced in the research interviews also touched on what the exemplar for the policy should be for integrating and accommodating different ethnic groups in Malaysian plural society. This is a difficult situation for the state in pursuing a definite strategy that can accommodate tensions between differing and competing Malay-non-Malay aspirations for the nation. While the state attempts one strategy after another seeking to solve the problem of ethnic integration, these policies also construct the notion of 'outsider' and 'insider' in the policy context, involving discourse about fairness, discrimination and marginalisation in the policy for both Malay and non-Malay. This production of ethnic feelings in relation to policy is linked to the ethnic groups' perspectives regarding the way the policy has affected their interests in education. Therefore ethnic issues related to language, culture and economic interests remain dominant challenges for education policy and policy processes in Malaysia.

Many of the Malay interviewees expressed their concerns about their rights as the indigenous group and want to see policy accomplish their aspirations in the process of nation-building. However, for the non-Malays, they tended to look askance at policy which might be considered as hegemonic and assimilationist when the state tended to 'force' the policy agenda for integrating the nation. This tension amongst the major ethnic groups has influenced state policy and processes in considering suitable means to accommodate and mediate such ethnic issues. Based on some of the interviewees' comments, such policy practice has incorporated discrimination in the policy process between and within ethnic group boundaries. Perhaps as a result, some official



pronouncements about educational policies in relation to national integration projects in school have been interpreted as ethnically biased.

To broaden the account provided in this Chapter regarding policy and ethnicity issues in Malaysian education, Chapter Eight discusses the Malaysian education policy context and its attempts at mediating and meeting the various demands of ethnic, national and global needs in relation in achieving national integration. Chapter Eight will concentrate on the conflicting discourses of ethnicity regarding policy for pursuing national integration and connecting the state agenda to the other interests in relation to national and global factors that affect contemporary Malaysian education policy.



## **CHAPTER 8**

# **EDUCATION POLICY AND ETHNICITY: NATIONAL AND GLOBAL CHALLENGES**

### **8.1 Introduction**

In the previous Chapter, analysis of the interview data concerning education policy for integration and how integration was a contested concept across ethnic groups was provided. This Chapter continues the analysis of the interview data, confirms that integration is a contested concept and documents other important themes which emerged. These include the place of language in education, the concept of the nation, emergent discourses of human rights and equal opportunities in relation to socio-economic circumstances and pressures from globalisation upon contemporary education policy.

As with the analysis provided in Chapter Seven, the analysis in this Chapter is informed by the theoretical discussions of ethnicity and nation traversed in Chapter Three and by discussions of policy, the policy cycle and critical policy sociology and its methodology in Chapters Four and Five. Specifically, the analysis in this Chapter seeks to answer research question five (p.9).

In seeking to answer research question number Five, this Chapter is structured into four major sections: first the Chapter will discuss the perspectives of the interviewees concerning language issues in the Malaysian education context; this is followed by discussion of the interviewees' discourses about ethnic challenges to education policy for integration; thirdly, the Chapter extends its discussion about how the interviewees regard the policy orientation in facing national and global demands of national development through education; and finally, the Chapter considers how the interviewees negotiated the concept of the Malaysian nation in the context of a Malaysian pluralist society.

### **8.2 Language Policy for National Integration in Education**

In Malaysia, language is an important aspect of cultural and ethnic life. Ethnic challenges to language matters in the Malaysian education sphere are interrelated with



different ideologies and perspectives of the different ethnic groups in relation to language for national integration. As discussed in Chapter Six, ethnic challenges in relation to language in education emerged following the British colonial era and to this day remain an issue of ethnic contestation in policy in education. Chapter Seven also touched on this aspect that indicated that language is an essential factor for ethnic groups' contestation in discourses concerning national integration in Malaysian education. In this section, I will discuss in more detail the relationship between ethnic challenges and language in policy implementation in the Malaysian education system.

### **8.2.1 Language and Education Opportunities – A Matter of Ethnic Rights in Education**

In the Malaysian education system, the Chinese and Indian communities have strong sentiments and legacies in relation to mother tongue education. Historically, the mother tongue education for these ethnic minorities has been institutionalised by community involvement and policy practice of the British colonial era. This has continued to structure the education system in post independence Malaysia through political consensus of the political elites of the three major ethnic groups (Malay, Chinese and Indian) in 'settling' a national education system for an independent Malaysia. As explained in Chapter Six, this was evident in the following policy documents: the Razak Report of 1956 and Rahman Talib Report of 1961. These two documents formed the bedrock of the Malaysian education policy and created the structure of the Malaysian education system.

The present vernacular system at primary level demonstrates the continuous policy practice for accommodating different aspirations of different ethnic groups regarding language in education. However, this context of policy practice has structured different identities in the schooling system, which produced the ethnic character of the schools represented by the language of instruction. One interviewee commented on this scenario thus:



You see, vernacular system has been existence before we got independence. You know, when the Barnes Report was trying to getting rid off vernacular system and having English and Malay. The moment, because there is a lot of hue and cry, then the British put aside. Then the British produced Fenn-Wu Report. Finally, we have the Razak Report. The Razak Report, this is the policy we still following. Maybe this is a kind of compromise, to allow the community to have at least the primary education in their mother tongue. In our country, where there is multi-ethnic society, that a strong feeling that the basic education, the primary education should be in their own mother tongue.

Interviewee 09 (A/Indian)

The interviewee phrase of 'strong feeling' for mother tongue instruction in education signifies that mother tongue is related to ethnic group sentiment in relation to their cultures and identities. This is also influenced by a strong community involvement, especially amongst the Chinese, in their struggle to preserve the vernacular schools in the Malaysian education system. Accordingly, any policy with an agenda to abolish the vernacular system would face strong resistance by the Chinese and Tamil communities. One interviewee commented:

The Chinese schools, the strength I think is historic and they are all very old and some of them over 100 years. It is not easy to close them right? And actually it is their strength and their link with the community is strong.

Interviewee 01 (A/Chinese)

In the context of ethnicity in relation to language in education, considerations of multiculturalism and multilingual medium of instruction in the Malaysian education system seem to be an important means for satisfying Chinese and Indian aspirations in education. This also has been regarded as assisting the state in enhancing integration. In this sense, issues of integration in the Malaysian education sphere are interrelated with discourses about Chinese and Indian rights to their language in education. One Indian interviewee believed that a 'policy of accommodating' the language rights for the Chinese and Indians should be the basis of ethnic cohesion in the Malaysian education context, as this could accommodate the Chinese and Indian aspirations for education in Malaysia. The interviewee commented on this point:

You see, we have the basic in learning language. Chinese have their own basic and we have our own basic. If the government says, if the government teaches our own language in these schools, I think it will be not a failure. If the government is sincere in teaching the languages, mother tongue, in all these schools, what the government sponsored it will be a success.

Interviewee 02 (EA/Indian)



Ethnic challenges in relation to mother tongue in education is influential in the Chinese community's response to policy. This is connected to the Malaysian social and political landscape, where the Chinese community has strong organisations to protect their interests in education. Within the ruling coalition, the Chinese political leadership has strong bargaining power which makes the state consider mother tongue issues favourably when making policy decisions on education. The policy orientation regarding mother tongue and vernacular schools, in other words, can be regarded as reflective of the state approach for accommodating the Chinese and Indian aspirations in the Malaysian education system. This is reflected in the politics of policy-making when it comes to mediating the ethnic interests related to language issues and the vernacular schools. One interviewee commented:

Usually MCA and Gerakan will be challenged by DAP, and by Chinese schools organisations. This is because our political system has always been built on Constitutional model. So it is the elite coming together to make bargain. So this pattern was set all the way back in the days of the Razak Report in 1956. Actually to that extent is the basic of how the primary school system is run and how the secondary school system is run.

In the Malaysian modern post-colonial society, demand for mother tongue education amongst ethnic minorities is also influenced by discourses concerning human rights in education. For instance, one Chinese interviewee explained that the reason for protecting the mother tongue as the language of instruction for the Chinese community in Malaysian education is related to their rights in respect of language and culture. Here we can see that the concept of human rights has shaped the ideology behind the ethnic challenges regarding education policy in Malaysia - moving from an ethnicity perspective to the human rights perspective. This kind of shift in the discourse related to the mother tongue issue in Malaysian education moves language issues away from the narrow chauvinistic label in language politics. This shift in the discourse on ethnic challenges for mother tongue is influenced by the flow of ideological thought about equality and opportunity in education across the nation. Derived from the notion of rights in education, this aspect has permeated ethnic contestation to a policy that disregards such rights. One Chinese interviewee commented on this point:



What we try to stress to the government is that mother tongue education is a human right. It is a constitutional right and it is not in contradiction to the national integration policy. That is the important part of it. In the 80s and 90s, the government always put forward national language as the main language. As the principle it's nothing wrong with it, it makes sense, but it also does not make sense that the Chinese and Indian language must not give way, must not exist. You know, it does make sense because that parts of the constitution as well as the education system in this country.

Interviewee 04 (NGO/Chinese)

The issue of ethnic challenges in relation to language in Malaysian education is also caused by different interpretations of the policy. While the state regards the policy has having accommodated the Chinese and Indians' rights for their mother tongue education, the Chinese and Indians view the policy in practice has not having accomplished such a right. For the Chinese, the right for mother tongue is about their right to use their language as the medium of instruction in the Malaysian education system. One Chinese interviewee rejected any policy that attempts to deny this right and argued that this policy is against the constitutional rights of the Chinese and Indians in relation to mother tongue. The interviewee regarded that Malaysian education policy based on the Razak and Rahman Talib Reports as having recognised such rights. The interviewee commented:

What is the meaning of the constitutional provisions for ethnic communities and provisional national education policy? The policy always guarantees that the other community have their own community education system. But the government has progressively interpreted the national education policies in its own way.

Interviewee 04 (NGO/Chinese)

While the Chinese and Indian interviewees are anxious about their rights to mother tongue education, one Malay interviewee argued that policy did not discriminate against Chinese and Indians in respect of mother tongue in education. The interviewee noted that national education policy well recognised the need for mother tongue education for these ethnic minorities. Moreover, this interviewee interpreted the policy to be fair in accommodating the minorities' rights to their mother tongues. The interviewee noted the flexibility of Malaysian policy in accommodating the Chinese and Indians' rights for mother tongue instruction:



The constitution clearly stated in Clause 152 that although Malay is enshrined as the national language, the use and the learning of other languages is not prohibited. This means that the study and acquisition of languages other than Malay is legally provided in the country's constitution which offers latitude and flexibility for this purpose.

Interviewee 06 (A/NGO/Malay)

Similarly, in response to this issue of mother tongue, another Malay interviewee suggested that the policy-in-practice has provided opportunity for all students in schools to study various languages as the state has offered various languages to be taught as subjects in the school curriculum. Specifically, the interviewee referred to the implementation of the People Own Language (POL) classes in the national schools. This, for the interviewee, is concrete evidence of the policy action to ensure that the multi-ethnic students in Malaysian schools have the opportunity to learn their language, and thus accommodated the minorities' right for learning their mother tongue. The interviewee commented:

You can study Mandarin, Tamil at the national schools. In fact now we are thinking of making Mandarin and Tamil subjects in our schools. Everybody learn Malay, everybody learn English, everybody learn Tamil, and everybody learn Mandarin.

Interviewee 07 (AE /Malay)

The interviewee believed that Malay language is an important language for national unity. In this sense, the ethnic interaction between the Malay and non-Malay and the aim for unity could be promoted by the use of Malay as a common language of communication for the multiethnic society in Malaysia. The interviewee explained the policy's success in promoting national integration through national language in what is practised in the secondary schools. This, for the interviewee, has developed a sense of 'acceptance' amongst the different ethnic groups. In this sense, the sentiment of 'acceptance' can be developed through the use of Malay language by students from different ethnic backgrounds. This is an important means of eliminating the ethnic boundaries caused by linguistic differences. For the Malays, accepting the Malay language by the non-Malays is an important factor towards ethnic integration. The interviewee commented:



You see students at the secondary level study and communicate in Malay. I can see its success in command of the language amongst the non-Malay students. I have met many non-Malay students who are very fluent in Malay. The ability to be fluent in Malay has a sort of the Malay to accept them. This people who also the citizen in our country, they speak Malay very well. This is very important factor towards national unity. There is some kind of acceptability.

Interviewee 07 (AE /Malay)

In this sense, the ideological thought for ethnic integration is the use of national language for all Malaysian through the education system. The Malay sees that Malay language can eradicate language-based divisions of the different ethnic groups in the schools system, and this could eliminate the ethnic differences because of language differences. The interviewee further commented:

The ability to speak the language has made the Malay to be associated them. The Malay speaks that, "ooh they are now one of us because they can speak our language". This is very important factor for ethnic integration. I think by making Malay as the medium of instruction in school in many ways assisted towards national integration. You can hear Chinese boys and Malay boys speaking Malay, conversing in Malay. You see Chinese boys and Indian boys conversing in Malay. What is this show? That is link, they able to communicate them, and lead to harmonious relationship.

Interviewee 07 (AE /Malay)

The tension between policy and ethnicity in relation to language has positioned the Chinese and Indian to protect their vernacular schools in preserving the status of mother tongue as practised in the Malaysian schooling system. Such ethnic sentiments regarding mother tongue are also linked to equal opportunity for gaining knowledge in education, which is linked to ethnic and socio-economic background of the children. In this sense, the Chinese believe that demand for mother tongue is for ensuring that their children can effectively gain knowledge in schools through their native language. The Chinese believed that the best way for their children's education is through mother tongue instruction. One Chinese interviewee commented:

We always argue that it is important because it is their mother tongue. Can you imagine the Malay, the Malay in kampong (village/rural area) going to school for the first time, in primary school, learning in language that is not his mother tongue?

Interviewee 04 (NGO/Chinese)

While discourse about mother tongue amongst the Chinese and Indians has influenced ethnic minorities' consciousness in relation to their rights and education interests, one Malay interviewee believed that this could constrain the state agenda in promoting



integration through national language. In addition, this interviewee believed that discourse about human rights in relation to mother tongue amongst the Chinese and Indians carries certain implications regarding the role of Malay language for nation building. The interviewee argued that the mistakes made in policy making during independence has contributed to developing amongst the Chinese and Indians an ideology about their rights to mother tongue instruction in the Malaysian education system. In this sense, the interviewee referred to the context of ethnic consensus in the politics of policy making between the Malays and non-Malays that contained compromises for accommodating the Chinese and Indians' interests in education, and agreed that this has affected Malay aspirations for the national language in the Malaysian education. The interviewee noted:

The Chinese had always been very aware of the cultural factors. At the beginning they had struggled for it but on an unofficial level. Now they are doing it officially as part of the nation. Therefore, they have to be taken notice of in the decision making process. Now they have the questions on basic rights. We are back to where we made the mistake before we gained independence. This has makes the role of the Malay language keeps diminishing.

Interviewee 10 (A /Malay)

The interviewee's expression in the text above signalled such concern regarding the policy implications for the Malay language as it was affected by Chinese and Indian discourses in relation to ethnic rights for language in education. Here we can see how the Malay responds to demands from the Chinese and Indians in relation to the mother tongue issue. For the interviewee, the notion about rights to mother tongue instruction could produce challenges to the national agenda for establishing the Malay language as the main medium of instruction and also challenge its role of uniting the nation through education. This has also been viewed as providing a challenge to the Malay aspirations for nation-building.

Another Malay interviewee believed that the question of mother tongue in Malaysian education policy reflected the lack of understanding amongst the Chinese and Indians about the concept of nation building in the Malaysian pluralist society. This interviewee argued that the minorities lack a clear understanding of the national ideology which positioned the Malay language, culture and values as the main elements for the nation building process. The interviewee commented:



When they consider that everything is an attempt at reducing their rights to learn and master their mother tongue, it is a reflection on the fact that concept of nation building and national characteristics are insufficiently grasped and observed.

Interviewee 06 (A /Malay)

In relation to these competing discourses about mother tongue instruction, one Malay interviewee suggested a framework for resolving tensions between the Malay and non-Malay aspirations in relation to language in education. While supporting the notion of mother tongue instruction as a basic right for all ethnic minorities, the interviewee suggested that state needed to reconcile the importance of national language, and in addition should give adequate attention to English as the important language in international context. The interviewee, who was involved in policy making suggested:

Mother tongue languages should be promoted and encouraged as a basic right, as long as the national language and English receive adequate attention in all schools. I would support a policy that all students become proficient in the national language of Malaysia, as well as in the English language, and that all students have full access to gaining proficiency in their mother tongue as well.

Interviewee 11 (AE /Malay)

In this sense, the interviewee believed that policy needed to deal with and accommodate various interests in relation to ethnic rights and national and global interests in managing competing interests for developing the nation. For the interviewee, the official recognition of the status of Malay language must be continued, while steps to improve the proficiency of English amongst Malaysian students must be undertaken and the policy needs to accommodate the linguistic needs of ethnic minorities. This idea signals that the state needs to be concerned with multiple demands of language in education in Malaysian pluralistic society; however, the construction of national identity should be pursued through the role of national language. The interviewee noted that the policy should take into account: 'The spread of national identity through the national language and the accommodation of global and ethnic demands on language and culture' (Interviewee 11).

Minority ethnic challenges to language policy are linked to ethnic sentiments regarding values and cultural identities. The relationship between language and cultural identity is evidenced by a strong sentiment of particular ethnic groups for protecting their mother tongue institutions, which are the vernacular schools in the



Malaysian education system. The Chinese and Indian preference for vernacular schools is shaped by their desire for maintaining their culture and language through educational means. In other words, in the Malaysian education context, different ethnic groups often seem to stress the point of having a link with their culture, values and language through the particular schools. Thus, protecting their schools is about protecting their language, values and cultural identities. The Chinese, especially, have always interpreted state attempts to impose the dominant group's values and culture through the national language in education, as assimilationist. One Indian interviewee commented on this point and referred to Chinese community:

If you put them under national school, they will learn with Malay language and maybe some Islamic value would be included and there won't be much effort to teach Chinese value or Chinese language. In the long run, say given about twenty years, thirty years, you will produce a generation of people who do not have knowledge about their own self, about their own culture, about their own value. The Chinese community, they have a very strong tradition. They hold very strongly their culture. To them taking away their mother tongue mean a complete loss of identity.

Interviewee 09 (A /Indian)

In the Malaysian multi-ethnic society, language is also linked to economic interests. In this sense, discourse about language is interrelated with economic opportunities. The connection between language and economic opportunity has influenced the ethnic groups in their thinking and action for preferring the vernacular schools. This is a rational-pragmatic response of ethnic minorities in pursuing their economic interest in education. In this respect, we can see such an example of how the Chinese community preference for Chinese schools is strongly linked with economic preferences in responding to the Malay-preferences policy. One interviewee commented on this point:

Language is also how people get jobs and make a living. I mean, when you decide where to send your children, you have to make a decision. In this basis, you can see how the Chinese parents have moved their children from one kind of school to the other type of school. In the 60s and 70s, we could see many Chinese parents moving their children towards English school because at that time when you go to the secondary school, you have to do all in English. After May 1969 the government policy has changed. Malay dominant in culture, in business, the quota system began. Even if you get a good result you are not assured getting a place in university. You not be able to get job in government. This is a beginning of this big divide. As a result, you look at the figures. Chinese parents tend to take their children out, but the new children enrolling in the Chinese schools becoming more and more.

Interviewee 01 (AE /Chinese)



The Chinese and Indians feel that they are being marginalised by the policy of Malay preference. This has made them struggle to obtain the education rights and opportunities in relation to social and economic interests. The policy also has been viewed as unfair to them. In this sense, the policy has constituted feelings of being marginalised amongst the minorities and has influenced them to react as an outsiders in the policy context. One Indian interviewee also expressed the same opinion regarding the policy practice in relation to their opportunities in Malaysian education:

People feel that they are being marginalised. Every year we have the end of form five or form six, the result come out students with A's and will get scholarship. But some people, especially Chinese and Indian students have got the A's, but they are deprived. They didn't get the scholarship or place in the university, they didn't get it. So they feel frustrated.

Interviewee 09 (A /Indian)

The discourse and contentions about national integration through education between the Malay and non Malay has shown that language is an essential aspect of ethnic challenges to the policy. The Chinese and Indians view that accepting the Malay aspiration in language in education amounts to accepting assimilation to Malay culture and values. Such ethnic ideologies of protecting the mother tongue is about protecting their rights to their culture and identities, and also for their economic interests in the context of majority ethnic group-preference policy in Malaysian education. For the Chinese, in spite of preserving their language and cultural identities, mother tongue is also connected to economic interests, as reflected in their ideology that their language gives more economic advantages. For the Malay, the hegemonic ideology based on Malay aspirations in relation to language is the foundation for uniting the Malaysian multi-ethnic society. Contested aspirations between the Malay and non-Malay dominate ethnic challenges to the Malaysian education policy for integration.

### **8.2.2 Language for Education and National Development – Conflict of Interests**

In response to globalisation and a desire to advance knowledge in science and technology for the Malaysian younger generation, Malaysian education has undergone a change in its policy. Competition in global and international arenas has influenced the state policy orientation in relation to language in education. The changing orientation in policy is based on the state agenda for improving the standard of



Malaysian education in international comparisons, which could be pursued through the introduction of the English language in Malaysian education. In viewing English as an important language for improving education in Malaysia, the state has implemented a policy which has made English the medium of instruction for teaching Mathematics and Sciences (ETeMS) in both primary and secondary schools. In Malaysian public and political discourse, ETeMS has been viewed as a state endeavour aimed at improving the standard of English and acquiring knowledge in sciences and technology amongst Malaysian students. The context has been globalisation and the Malaysian policy desire to be internationally competitive and to achieve developed nation status. This section specifically discusses and analyses the interviewee data concerning ETeMS, as this is amongst the series of policies, which have raised further ethnic challenges in Malaysian education.

In respect of ETeMS, one Chinese interviewee argued that this policy has harmed the development and function of mother tongue in the Malaysian education system. This interviewee also read ETeMS as a state agenda to produce a single system of Malaysian education; however English is a preferred language for achieving such an intention. The interviewee claimed that the policy has followed Singapore's policy towards English. Perhaps, looking at the progress of Singapore, Malaysia sees English as crucial to uplifting Malaysian people to be globally competitive. The interviewee commented:

What they were talking about a few years ago about the national integration? Today they're stressing English. So in the time to come, it's a Singapore policy. It's on English policy with the provision for Chinese, Malay and Tamil in the schools. That is all. We are all becoming in this schools. Now with the policy on English you are back to the Singapore system. Why don't we just call them the same as in Singapore? Maybe they had English, for math in English, science in English and then Chinese, Tamil and Malay. It will become one type of school. Its not Chinese school, Tamil school or Malay school, no those will exist anymore. So is it good for the country? Good for what the government want but it's not what the community want.

Interviewee 04 (NGO /Chinese)

Discourse about ETeMS has also indicated negativity towards this policy idea. This is a rejection of ETeMS which is demonstrated by giving a 'negative label' to the policy idea. One interviewee commented:



This policy was perceived as a betrayal of the vernacular languages and the national education policy, which is now rejected by Malays and Chinese. I would say that there is no real ethnic challenge with this policy. It is simply a bad policy.

Interviewee 11 (AE/Malay)

The assertion of the policy as 'bad policy' reveals that such branding shows the disagreement on the way the state tackled such problems in the education field. This has been interpreted as inconsistent with national education policy ideology in relation to national language and mother tongue as the medium of instruction in the Malaysian education system. At another level, it also signalled an autocratic approach in imposing the policy; as such the process has been viewed as a 'one man show' in the politics of decision-making. In this sense, this policy is derived from the leadership ideology for nation development in the area of science and technology and English enhancement through the education system. This undemocratic approach in policy making was pointed out by one Malay interviewee:

You see, Dr. Mahathir, the former Prime Minister was the man behind this. He said we need to promote our students' knowledge with Science and Technology, and Science and Technology in English. We have to improve our knowledge in Science and Technology, so study science and mathematics in English. That is bloody stupid thing to do.

Interviewee 07 (AE/Malay)

Furthermore, the policy also received another label as one interviewee regarded this as a 'short-sighted policy'. This interviewee criticised the state's approach in facing the global challenges in relation to the shifting paradigm towards English. In making comparison with other developed countries, the interviewee regarded the state's interpretation of the appropriate response towards global challenges in relation to education, as not appropriate and not in alignment with the national interests. The interviewee commented:

The government introduced policy based on their own interpretation of how you need English to survive in globalisation. I think this is a short sighted policy. We don't hear about the Russian, the French, the German, the Japanese and the Chinese changing all their education system to English because of the globalisation. Why should Malaysia suddenly change to English?

Interviewee 04 (NGOs/Chinese)

The interviewee further criticised the government practice regarding the language policy in education in Malaysia.



In policy after 1970, English has been taken over by Malay language, and so at that time there was no English schools. We were talking about the education policy and we always talking about today. A few years ago we assume it was Malay policy but in 1961 it was English, and then was Malay and now it has been English again. So what are we talking about? You know, the language policy is changing all the time and yet it depends on how the government wants to stress its language policy.

Interviewee 04 (NGOs/Chinese)

For another interviewee, the policy of ETeMS was pulling the nation backward as the national language policy in education has been seen as successful in developing the nation. One interviewee commented:

This is step backward. We have seen that the implementation from 1970 to 2000 have been solid. We have not been left behind knowledge wise. We have produced thousands of professors not only in humanities but also in the science disciplines. We cannot say that as we acquire knowledge in the national language, we are less developed than other nations.

Interviewee 06 (A /Malay)

The comments above contain criticisms of the approach taken by the state in implementing the policy. This indicates that ETeMS as a policy is not well received by large sections of society in Malaysia. The challenges to this policy are beyond ethnocentric sentiment, rather discourses about the policy are entrenched in the resistance towards the policy idea and the way policy has been imposed. It is viewed as a disadvantage to all ethnic groups' interests in education. This also shows that the policy has not been thought through properly before it was implemented. One interviewee regarded this policy to be a failure in its planning and implementation approach because it did not have proper planning strategy. In this context, Singapore again has become a basis for comparison.

This is what I stressed to be the result of a very tolerant leadership. If Singaporeans intend to initiate change, they are usually armed with a well-planned strategy so much so that the policies are inevitably implemented successfully. In Malaysia, there may be weaknesses and a lack of political will.

Interviewee 06 (A/Malay)

In respect of implementation, the policy has been problematic in translation in to practice. The policy implementation has created a difficult situation for the implementers when it has been implemented in a rush without a proper strategy. The scenario in the level of implementation demonstrated that insufficient preparation and



planning created a problematic situation for the policy recipients, in this context, students and the teachers. One interviewee commented:

You have read in the paper. There are some people writing to say that “I did my form 5 in English and how I make this hard switch as a student, and how form 5 I have to study in English and suddenly when I go to university, my lecturer says he doesn’t know how to teach in English, and now I have to go back into Malay”. So now, we are a difficult mix up situation...I would prefer actual transition not so abrupt, a gradual transition but I think Malay change is always very hard.

Interviewee 01 (A /Chinese)

Although the interviewee agreed that English is important for Malaysian students, the argument is about the methodology taken by the state in enhancing the standard of English of Malaysian students. This for another interviewee contradicts the educational realities in Malaysia. The interviewee noted:

The question of English language education, no one opposes, everyone agrees to it. But when the methodology is in stark contrast to educational realities, this we cannot agree with.

Interviewee 06 (A/Malay)

Furthermore, this interviewee suggested the opposition to ETeMS is because of the wrong choice of strategy for policy implementation. The interviewee commented:

The importance of English in the dissemination of knowledge must be tackled within the paradigm of improving the teaching itself and not through other subjects particularly those which cannot enhance the mastery of English. For example in Mathematics, how much is the language element used in the question of formulae and their operations? Science is also a technical field which does not use much language when compared to other subjects. This is about the question is the wrong choice of strategy in the question of the use of English in Science and Mathematics and not the question of opposition to efforts to improve the mastery of the language.

Interviewee 06 (A/Malay)

The comments above reflect the disagreement on ETeMS as a result of inappropriate approach for tackling the problems of declining standards of English amongst Malaysian students. As the interviewee noted, this policy approach has rather complicated the situation and is a wrong choice of educational strategy that has affected students’ learning. In this sense, another interviewee argued that the policy has confused the students in their educational experience. The interviewee commented:



The strategy should not be teaching math and science in English. You are further complicating the students. The students know Malay language, they know their mother tongue, and now they study math and science in English. To me this is confusing them.

Interviewee 07 (EA/Malay)

In arguing ETeMS as the strategy for improving the standard of English in Malaysian education, the interviewee suggested that the state needs to consider other approaches that are more appropriate in managing the national situation and demands of globalisation in relation to the importance of English language. The interviewee commented:

Maybe with the context of globalisation we need English. But we disagree on the way it is being done. In terms of how it is being done, there are many other professional ways.

Interviewee 07 (EA/Malay)

Similarly, another interviewee agreed that state has pursued a wrong strategy in dealing with the basic problem of the standard of English amongst Malaysian students. For this interviewee, the policy strategy is 'confusing and disorderly'. The interviewee noted:

We are weak in English but we try to remedy it in another area. We try to teach mathematics and science in English when we do not even have a proper command of it, very confusing and disorderly.

Interviewee 08 (EA/Malay)

In this respect, another interviewee suggested:

It would have been more effective to simply provide students with better English language instruction and hire better English teachers, than to have mediocre teaching of complicated and technical subjects outside of the student's native language.

Interviewee 11 (EA/Malay)

One Chinese interviewee has pointed out a similar point in relation to the policy strategy of improving the standard of English amongst Malaysian students. The interviewee commented:

We never oppose to promote the standard of English, but if you want to promote this policy, you should have a better strategy. At least you can set up more language lab or increase the period of teaching English. We strongly insisted that to teach English in Math must use mother tongue to teach. This is not only our view. Even by the UNESCO, they also mention that uses the mother tongue to teach something, to teach the subject of knowledge will be more effective. Based on this concept, we insist that the Chinese school must use Mandarin.

Interviewee 05 (NGO /Chinese)



Another interviewee argued that ETeMS has weakened the students' ability in gaining knowledge in science and technology in school. For this interviewee, the policy could lower the standard of education for those subjects amongst Malaysian students. The interviewee commented:

In theory it could promote greater proficiency and expertise in the English language. However, it has had the predictable, though unintended consequence of actually lowering Malaysian student's proficiency in the fields of math and science.

Interviewee 11 (AE /Malay)

One Malay interviewee opined that mother tongue instruction is the best way for the students for obtaining maximum learning in their education. It is questionable whether the policy of ETeMS is an appropriate strategy for improving English language or whether this can be pursued by other relevant strategies, for example, through improving teaching and learning English language in schools. The interviewee argued:

At the basic level, a person would find it easier to learn through one's native language. At the same time, our system does not neglect the English language. So why use English to teach Science and Maths? Why not just improve on the effectiveness of the learning of English itself?

Interviewee 10 (A/Malay)

This disagreement about the state's approach in stressing English has been clearly caused by the state's approach in responding to globalisation for Malaysian education advancement. For one Chinese interviewee, the implementation of ETeMS is not the appropriate means to improve the standard of English, neither is it appropriate for improving the standard of science and mathematics. This interviewee asserted that learning through mother tongue is historically proven to enhance the students' achievements in mathematics and science. This has been evident in Chinese schools since the British colonial period. The interviewee commented:



Just because English is dominant in the global context, it doesn't mean that everybody must study math and science in English. Do you know that the Chinese school, in the colonial period when the school, when the schools were using English, the Chinese schools in math and science was no problem, was better than the colonial schools? After independence, when the schools are using Malay language, the Chinese schools in math and science are also better than the national school. So why should we change? Now everything is back to English. Do the Chinese schools have to do math and science in English? Because it's already proven in the colonial time, that the colonial was in math and science was no better than, was not as good as Math and science in Chinese for the Chinese students. So why must change? Because English is the global language, it doesn't make sense.

Interviewee 04 (NGO /Chinese)

The effect of globalisation and international economic competition has influenced the paradigm shift in the Malaysian government's policy orientation towards language in the national education system. Despite English being an important language in this matter, the government also sees that other languages as important for economic purposes also needed to be promoted through the education system. As an economic exigency, the state has begun to make Mandarin another important language in Malaysian education. As China is becoming an important nation economically at the international level, the state sees that Mandarin is important to assist Malaysians in gaining economic opportunities through business relationship with China. Hence, the interplay of language and economic purposes has influenced the state ideology about languages in Malaysian education. One interviewee commented on this point:

Now, even the government recently, when they see the change of the world especially the globalisation, recently Abdullah Badawi (recent Prime Minister of Malaysia) also mention even in national school they want to teach Mandarin also. This is of course they know, now the in the world English is the strong language, the world language; metropolitan language and Mandarin is also become internationally important language

Interviewee 05 (NGO/Chinese)

This can be regarded as a pragmatic ideology in education policy in relation to language. However, this policy orientation has been viewed as giving an advantage to the Chinese when compared with the Malays. One Malay interviewee raised this point:

We know that in terms of the economic, the strength of the Chinese now and so it is at the advantage. And when you want to apply for job in Mandarin, it is the preference. The knowledge of Mandarin is the preference.

Interviewee 03 (AE /Malay)



Another challenge in relation to the issue of ETeMS is also linked to the policy implications for particular ethnic groups. For example, one Malay interviewee regarded ETeMS as disadvantaging to the Malay students. In viewing this matter, the interviewee commented:

The policy changed by our government has made them retreat and use a foreign language in learning a few subjects. This is interruption. We see these obstructions as hurdling up a runner.

Interviewee 08 (AE/Malay)

An Indian interviewee also suggested that ETeMS has brought about certain disadvantages to the Malays. While the state has the good intention of enhancing the standard of English and is keen to improve the students' knowledge in science and technology through English, this policy is interpreted as 'leaving the Malays behind'. The interviewee sees that thus far the policy on Malay language has shaped the way of thinking amongst the Malay students that English is less important in pursuing their education. Consequently, it has affected the Malay when the state changed its policy orientation in favouring English. Now, this is viewed as marginalising the Malay group, especially in the rural areas, in their education and in relation to their economic prospects. In this case, the government policy on Malay language has thus far benefited Malay, but now is beginning to disadvantage the Malay. While the policy of Malay language in education is trying to help the Malays in their social and economic mobility, the policy of ETeMS seems to hamper such development. The interviewee commented on this point:

The biggest mistake that the government has made is for the 30 years, the emphasis more on Malay language. In 30 years time the Indian caught up, the Indians are much caught up with the language. Now the Indian you see are good in catching up the second language. They can easily talk English better than their Malays counterparts can. You see the Chinese also caught up with English. For the Malays, because of the government policy, they are left behind. They thought English was not good. Now they want to do everything in English, in mathematics and science, it will take time.

Interviewee 02 (AE/NGO /Indian)

The following conversation also represents the discourse of 'Malay disadvantage' caused by ETeMS. This also brings out the notion of different ethnic groups advantages and disadvantages in Malaysian education as clearly connected to education policy decisions. The conversation with the Indian interviewee below



revealed such perceptions about how the policy has affected the Malay position in relation to their educational opportunities:

- Researcher: Did you mean this kind of policy is a disadvantage for the Malay students?
- Interviewee: Yes, for the Malay community.
- Researcher: Why? Is it because, as you said that since 30 years ago government policy was more focused on Malay language and has developed a negative mind set toward English amongst the Malays? Do you think the paradigm of the Malay community will shift towards English?
- Interviewee: Yes...yes...paradigm shift was there. Now you want to put another shift. Now we know it is good. It will take a longer time.
- Researcher: At one time Malay community felt that they are at the advantage because Malay language is very important.
- Interviewee: Very true.
- Researcher: Now they feel that they are at the disadvantage.
- Interviewee: This is because of the new policy, this policy on English.

Interviewee 02 (AE/NGO /Indian)

The Chinese interviewee also remarked on the impact of the policy implication for the Malay students' achievements in education. The interviewee commented:

I still remember all the Malay education conferences, conference about Malay education. In that conference, one expert said that because of using English to teach Maths and Science, 500,000 of the Malay children affected negatively.

Interviewee 05 (NGO /Chinese)

In relation to the discourse about globalisation and the role of Malay language, the main question that been raised is whether this language can accommodate the global challenges that have come to the nation's door step. Is this language able to accommodate the global demands for social and economic changes? For some years the education policy sidelined the importance of English and concentrated on implementing the national language; now discourse about the importance of English has become a matter of importance for the nation as it faces global and international competition. Related to this point, one Indian interviewee argued that the Malay needed to accept this changing scenario in education, so as to be able to compete with others affectively in the global and national contexts. The interviewee commented:

When the world is expanding, people are now global and of course, you can say Malay children must really make their effort to learn the English language. If the Malays don't learn the English language, you see, right now as I see when the Chinese and Indian, they are not very good in English, Malay are really completely down except for the urban Malay and some educated parents.

Interviewee 09 (A /Indian)



Notwithstanding the aim of ETeMS, one Malay interviewee regarded it as harming the role and function of Malay language, and disadvantaging the Malay students in their education attainment. The interviewee argued that Malays would be marginalised by the policy compared with other ethnic groups, as the Malay language thus far was important in assisting the Malay students in education, especially those in the rural areas. The interviewee commented:

The Chinese will not have any problems as they already have the national type schools and whatever extra is to their advantage. We will see growth in Mandarin and Tamil in national schools. What will happen to the Malay language then? This may be in line with what our leaders wanted. They want purposely minimize the role of the Malay language in education especially when Science and Maths are no longer taught in the language.

Interviewee 10 (A /Malay)

Furthermore, the implementation of ETeMS also produced feelings of unfairness amongst the Malays. The interviewee referred to the government practice of compromising its policy implementation in the Chinese schools, where these schools could continue to use mother tongue for teaching mathematics and science subjects. However, the different practice at the national schools is regarded as disadvantaging the Malays. The interviewee commented:

When the Chinese requested to be allowed to use their language, we entertained their request. But when the Malays asked to be allowed to teach Maths and Science in the Malay language, we said that the language is not suitable. This is a very superficial statement that reflects an acute lack of understanding of history on the part of the decision makers.

Interviewee 10 (A/Malay)

Different practices in different types of schools (National schools and national Type Chinese schools) also have been seen as practising a 'double standard' in policy implementation. The Malay interviewee regarded the double standard in policy implementation of ETeMS as giving undue advantage to Chinese students compared with the majority Malay students in national schools. The interviewee noted:

The Chinese are always one step further. They know that to teach mathematics and science in English will give a problem. So they requested and the government allowed. Why the government doesn't allow for the national school? This is double standard. If you allow it for the Chinese school, you should allow it for the national school. They, in fact, their students are learning better. When they teach in English, the students cannot understand they also teach in Mandarin.

Interviewee 07 (AE /Malay)



When I asked the interviewee the reason for the government's tolerance and flexibility in implementing ETeMS in Chinese schools, the interviewee explained:

Because Chinese primary schools in Malaysia have certain elements of independence. This is because the land, the building belongs to them. They have been assisting the government in many ways on spending for education in Chinese elementary schools. So this is a way that the government, what we call, to allowing them. So as long as they agree with the government policy to teach Math and Science in English, the government quiet happy about it.

Interviewee 07 (AE /Malay)

The extract above reflects the element of independence and bargaining power given to the Chinese community in implementing the ETeMS policy in Chinese schools. In contrast, the national schools which are fully under government authority are powerless in challenging the implementation of ETeMS policy in their schools. The interviewee also sees the state as not being consistent in implementing the policy in relation to different types of schools. For interviewee this shows that the government is anxious about the Chinese challenges to the policy and needs to give them some leeway when implementing the policy. The interviewee commented:

But why can't we do the same thing at national schools? This is what I feel that sometime it is not consistent. You see that is inconsistency in government policy when it comes to implementation and application regarding the various cases. Sometime they worry about the Chinese reaction.

Interviewee 07 (AE /Malay)

The discourse about ETeMS is also linked to the social and economic structure of Malaysian society. This refers to the context of rural and urban society in relation to the policy implications. For instance, one interviewee expressed concern about the policy's implications for rural students. In this sense, different social and economic backgrounds of rural and urban students are interrelated with different contexts of policy implementation. This has also produced a notion of unequal access to educational opportunities for rural students; the policy could disadvantage them in their educational achievement. The interviewee commented:

Maybe the urban people, the urban schools will be able to adapt because they have some knowledge of English, their parents have knowledge of English. But we are worried about the rural school, whether the rural children will be able to cope with this change.

Interviewee 09 (A /Indian)



Similarly, another interviewee commented on the policy implications for rural and urban sectors of society. For this interviewee, the policy has harmed the rural students' performance in education as they lack proficiency in English compared with urban students. Here, the students in urban areas from middle class families have an advantage over the rural cohorts when it comes to ETeMS because of their social and economic background, compared to the students from rural areas and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. In this sense, the challenge to policy is linked to discourses about different social and economic positions in relation to policy implementation. The interviewee commented:

I have been involved with children with learning difficulties in different kind of areas and I have been going to few Malay schools and Tamil schools. We have volunteers helping children who actually have learning difficulties keeping up with the teaching. So, I have to say this because it affects my perspective on this question. For urban and high socio-economic level families I think you expected they will agree with this English is something they hear around there. Their children may even speak English. It applies to Malay as well as Chinese, as well as Indian, it is not an ethnic issue it is actually socio-economic

Interviewee 01 (AE/Chinese)

What has been discussed in this section demonstrates the tension between the state ideology in preparing the nation to meet the challenges of globalisation and the different perspectives of the different ethnic communities and their particular interests which are guarded so fiercely by the vested interest groups. This shows that the state is facing a delicate situation in accommodating multiple demands of global and national interests in relation to education in Malaysia.

Discussion in this section has demonstrated that the ETeMS policy has encountered many critics and arguments derived from different social and economic concerns of different ethnic groups in Malaysia. For the Chinese, mother tongue, culture and identity are main issues in this policy context; on the other hand, the Malay interviewees show their concern about the Malay position in relation to language and economic opportunities. The issues about ETeMS are not only related to ethnicity, they are also linked to discourses about socio-economic position, rural/urban location and inter and intra-ethnic divisions in Malaysian pluralist society.



### **8.3 Education for Achieving National Integration – Competing Aspirations**

Is fighting for the Malay language to be the main language, being unfair to the others?  
This has to look back to the basic rights of the Malay.

Interviewee 10 (A /Malay)

The interview excerpt above underlines Malay aspirations in relation to Malay language status, which is influenced by the ideology of their special rights as the ethnic majority in the country. For the interviewee, demands for making Malay language as the main language is justifiable because it was historically and officially the ‘right’ of the Malay as the dominant ethnic group in the country. This had already been negotiated and settled by the founding fathers at the time of independence. This is a ‘national given’. There are no more discussions and compromises on this issue.

While the Malay interviewee stressed that the status of Malay language is one aspect of Malay special rights, the Chinese and Indian demand for their mother tongue in education is also connected to the question of rights in relation to language for education. One Malay interviewee sees that such aspirations of concessions for ethnic languages amongst the ethnic minorities have influenced the official policy-making process in Malaysian education. The interviewee commented:

The Chinese had always been very aware of the cultural factors. From early days they had struggled for it but on an unofficial level. Now they are doing it officially as part of the nation. Therefore, they have to be taken notice of in the decision making process. Now we have the questions of basic rights.

Interviewee 10 (A/Malay)

When placed together, the discourse on the concept of rights in relation to language in the Malaysian education system expressed by the various interviewees from different ethnic backgrounds differed. Such discrepancies were based on different ethnic groups’ aspirations in relation to language for education and for integration. These were divided between the dominant group’s aspirations for integration and the ideological stream in the Chinese and Indian perceptions concerning their language rights for education. This case can be traced from one Indian interviewee’s comments:



We have the government which wants to think about integration, it is good and idealistic. But in the real situation, the parents and the community want primary education at least to be in their own mother tongue.

Interviewee 9 (A /Indian)

One Chinese interviewee also commented on the similar point that the right of the ethnic communities is embodied in the national constitution and educational policy:

What is the meaning of the constitutional provisions for ethnic communities and provisional national education policies? It always guarantees that other ethnic communities have their own community education system.

Interviewee 04 (NGO /Chinese)

Chinese and Indian aspirations in relation to their rights in language and culture were interpreted by one Malay interviewee as the lack of sensitivity on the part of the non-Malays towards the national ideology of Malaysian education, which is based on the Malay aspirations in language for building the nation. The interviewee commented that:

Now, I feel that other the other communities should also reciprocate that acceptance shown by the Malay by striving to understand our intentions with regard to the language issue for instance...We are not implying that the language question is solely a Malay concern because as it assumes the role of national language, it becomes appropriated by all citizens. In politics, they desire something, or maybe due to survival questions or the question of getting something they covet most has caused the increasing loss of sensitivity to national issues that are Malay-based.

Interviewee 06 (A /Malay)

For another Malay interviewee, the current discourse of rights surrounding ethnic challenges to policy has weakened the role of national language in promoting national integration. In this sense, the ideology of national language for unity seems to be irrelevant in relation to the minorities' discourse concerning national integration through education. The discourse of human and individual rights has come to be an important for the ethnic minorities in Malaysian education system. This is seen as a challenge to the Malay aspirations of using the national language to achieve national integration. The interviewee commented:



Now people say that language is not a factor in achieving unity. More important is the nation's spirit of unity. Everyone needs to acknowledge and accept that the other person has the right to be free in the country and this includes the aspect of education. I noticed that this opinion is becoming more and more widespread. Maybe at the earlier stage when we were about to gain independence, we already had people who had this type of opinion although most of the Malays would deny it. Even Chinese would not agree but because they realized that here is not China, they did not fight for their language. But at one stage, they did request for the Chinese language to be made the official language in education.

Interviewee 10 (A /Malay)

In the implementation of national education policy, one Malay interviewee noted that the state has not adhered to the policy texts about the status of national language. For this interviewee, the process of policy implementation is not democratic and contradicts the policy provision for the Malay language in the Malaysian education system. The interviewee argued:

Back to the constitution but we see that the constitution is often infringed. For instance, we say that Malay is the National Language but is it true that Malay as the national and official language is portrayed as legislated in the constitution? The 1961 Education Act which states that Malay is the medium of instruction has never been amended until the 1996 Education Act. But at the policy implementation stage, cabinet directives supersede parliament meaning that the voice of the citizenry has been usurped by a cabal of ministers. Thus the constitutional provisions have been flouted and executive encroachment into legislation has materialised. This is what I term to be the weakness of our own leaders.

Interviewee 06 (A /Malay)

In modern Malaysian society, such persistent discourse concerning minority/immigrant status amongst the Chinese and Indians is seen by one Malay interviewee as providing challenges for the dominant status of the Malay. In this sense, the discourses about human rights, equal opportunity and justice are regarded by this interviewee as a factor that could weaken the Malay hegemonic status and privilege. The interviewee questioned how Malay political leaders could manage to implement the policy in the face of mounting ethnic minorities' challenges to protect the Malay interests in the country. For this interviewee, the state needed to take a stronger stand to withstand the challenges of the minority communities. This is an anxiety of one Malay interviewee regarding the discourse of rights amongst the Chinese and Indians in relation to Malay social and political positions. This emerged in my interview with one Malay interviewee:



**Interviewee:** When the other ethnics have identified themselves as being the loyal citizens of this country and the question of being a migrant no longer surfaces, this shows that the Malays to lose something.

**Researcher:** What do you mean by the Malays losing something?

**Interviewee:** I mean that if I positively state that there has appeared a belief in the minds of these races that are true citizens of that land even though that is what we hope for. So, they are not inclined towards the land of their ancestors. But if the Malays themselves or their leadership do not handle this new development positively and proactively, this will be the source for the diminution of Malay strength. This is because they now possess a stronger bargaining power. If... let's say the non-Malays previously considered themselves to be immigrant and the Malays were perceived to be tolerant and accommodative, what now when they have cast asunder their ancestral ties with the motherland and have totally mortgaged their loyalty to the country and are therefore entitled to demand equal treatment. How will the Malay leadership handle this conundrum? Thus in this issue, the Malay leadership cannot divorce themselves from their socio-linguistic and historical bases.

Interviewee 06 (A /Malay)

Another Malay interviewee felt that the state policy was facilitating loss of educational privileges amongst the Malay because of the way the state has implemented such policy, which had sacrificed Malay privileges in education. The interviewee observed:

We eventually lost as now they have the Tunku Abdul Rahman College and University Tunku Abdul Rahman which are two Chinese medium universities. On the other hand, the Malays, we upgrade a Teacher Training College to an institute which is further upgraded to a university and in doing so we lose an institute, for example Sultan Idris Teacher Training College is no longer exist.

Interviewee 06 (A /Malay)

Moreover, the Malay continuously feels that the state has to assist the Malay, and education is an important tool for that purpose. Demands from the Malays for preferential treatment of the Malays is based on the belief that they are the dominant ethnic group in the country, but still being left behind in social and economic respects.

Another Malay interviewee commented:

Malays are still weak. So, why don't we develop and improve the Malays, especially in education? From the perspective of the Malay status, we see education as the only way to improve their fortune. If knowledge is not pursued, it means that, one day, Malays would become extinct.

Interviewee 08 (AE /Malay)



For another Malay interviewee, the Malay is still disadvantaged in the economic competition compared to other ethnic groups in Malaysia. The interviewee commented:

People see the Malays, the majority as strong but what are they strong at? The ones controlling the economics are the minority and not the majority. And because they control the economics, they control the politics as well. But people do not want to admit that. They control through the contributions that they made.

Interviewee 10 (A /Malay)

Furthermore, another interviewee argued that the Malay political leaders have made many compromises in the implementation of policy for maintaining political power. This has hindered the development of a national ideology of uniting the nation through the Malaysian education system. For this interviewee, the context of political compromise in the policy process is shaped by the ethnic-based political parties, which lead to ethnic bargaining and contestation in the policy-making process. This political scenario has been to the detriment of the Malay, because the Malay political leaders often compromised in relation to ethnic minorities' demands in education. The interviewee, in answering my question, commented:

Researcher: Do you think that the government thus far failed to prepare an educational system with national characteristics?

Interviewee: I am not implying that the government has failed in the form of a definitive. But I presume that the political situation and the political will is lacking. The political situation indeed hinders the government from acting likewise. Secondly, the political will is also lacking as we observe that politics is viewed as a form of variable that is extremely important especially in the context of maintaining power. It is in this process that I feel that numerous compromises have been made when in fact had we been resolute from the start. I feel the situation might not have deteriorated to the present state.

Interviewee 06 (A /Malay)

One Malay interviewee suggested a solution for mediating the different discourses of achieving national integration through the education system. For this interviewee, this could be achieved through a single school system that used national language as the medium of instruction, and the same time provide for the ethnic minorities' desire to learn their mother tongue. In the interviewee's comments, Singapore again became a 'reference nation':



**Interviewee:** The best situation would be that everything falls into place and there would be no need for national type schools. This should be a coveted dream that should be made the target. If there is no such target, we would not achieve our nation building aspirations. Singapore has succeeded in this regard. Previously, there existed different types of schools but now only national schools exist.

**Researcher:** But the Singaporean education system is based on English not on any language of the various ethnic groups.

**Interviewee:** Yes, English and its situation are indeed different. I mean, if previously there were ethnic-based streams, now only Pupils Own Language (POL) or mother tongue learning is allowed. Each student learns his/her mother tongue within a uniform school system. So if that were to happen here, we reject the use of English as in Singapore, but use Malay as the main medium of instruction and the mother tongue be taught within the framework of the national school system.

Interviewee 10 (A /Malay)

The Chinese and Indians prefaced their comments with recognition and support for the policy of integration through education, and accepted that Malay language is the national and official language for the nation. However, they raised several aspects of such policy implementation that evoked unease amongst the ethnic minorities. The main concern is related to the policy implication for their mother tongue language in education. The Chinese believe that despite the assurances that the policy would not abolish their rights to mother tongue education and the vernacular schools, they have generally experienced restrictions in their effort to build new vernacular primary schools. This experience has created an element of mistrust amongst the Chinese community towards state policy for integration. One Chinese interviewee commented on this point:

That's why I say no restriction or they never mention cannot set up the new school. But, the fact, in the implementation they never do so. They use this as propaganda, only during the election they are just give as a grant.

Interviewee 05 (NGO /Chinese)

Such experience as above has created feelings of mistrust amongst the Chinese community concerning the state's commitment towards Chinese language. The Chinese are continuously suspicious that policy practice in Malaysian education has a hidden agenda for abolishing Chinese schools. Another interviewee noted:



If you speak to Chinese leaders up to today, they see every change as potentially another attempt to try to pull the rug from under. So we have to understand this historical background, whether it is right or wrong, this has become resistant if you see government tried to destroy your characteristics. They see it as part of a long history.

Interviewee 01 (A /Chinese)

The Chinese are of the opinion that the state has only maintained the current existing schools in policy practice without allowing them to build any new schools. For the Chinese, this policy practice shows that the state would carry out the sole objective of national education policy embodied in the Razak and Rahman Talib Reports which is aimed at achieving a single national school system with Malay as the main medium of instruction. One Malay interviewee noted:

There are some elitists among the Chinese schools who actually suspicious to the leadership of our education. They are afraid that their language and culture would be phased out. They are visionaries. But to me, they were mistaken. We see from one viewpoint, they from another.

Interviewee 8 (EA /Malay)

One Malay interviewee also agreed that the resistance to the policy by the Chinese emanates from the sentiment of mistrust towards the policy agenda of integrating their children. The interviewee commented:

Interviewee: The feeling of mistrust between them is still there.

Researcher: Do you think the feeling is still deep?

Interviewee: Is still very deep you know. You know it is only some factors try to cool it down. For example, the political issue and so on. It is because something they have lost. It is because as you know if you lose something.

Interviewee 3 (AE /Malay)

The Chinese struggle for the mother tongue is influenced by community consciousness in protecting their language and culture through education. This indicates that there exists a close relationship between the community and the schools in relation to language and education and this has contributed to preserving the Chinese schools in the Malaysian education system. One Chinese interviewee noted:

Generally those that are very hot about Chinese education system will not see Chinese political parties will champion but will see other organisation that fight for the Chinese schools.

Interviewee 01 (A /Chinese)



Another interviewee argued that the ethnic-based political parties are keen to compromise so as to maintain power. This Chinese interviewee rejected the argument that political parties have played a vital role in protecting vernacular schools. For this interviewee, the challenges are from the community and organisations which protect the Chinese schools from any policy agenda aimed at abolishing these schools. The interviewee commented:

The political parties are the one who you know, who pick up the issue that we raise. We don't need political parties, because they are political party. They have responsibility to take up the issue to the government or the parliament. When the issue becomes big, it becomes a political issue.

Interviewee 04 (NGO /Chinese)

It was clear that the Chinese community's sentiment regarding the schools and language is reflected in the strong commitment of the community for preserving their language, culture and identity through education. All strata of the Chinese community come out to defend the challenges to the Chinese school. One Malay interviewee who was the former education ministry official commented:

I see the movement of other ethnics as aggressive as compared to the Malays. These non-Malays presented a memorandum to the ministry. They include the Groundnut Growers Association, which really are not related whatsoever to Education. Still they sent these memorandum and c.c. to the Ministry. They do not just come from academicians but from professionals like the Chinese Engineers Association. Altogether, 32 branches of Groundnut Growers Association around Malaysia sent the memorandum

Interviewee 08 (AE /Malay)

In contrast, another Malay interviewee regarded the ideological paradigm amongst the Malay community as more focussed on other issues, which signalled that the Malays are less concerned about policy. This interviewee argued that Malay discourse about their interests in education is more towards welfare issues, when compared with that of the Chinese. This also indicates that the Malay is in a convenient position in the policy process. The interviewee commented:



The Chinese community appears to be aggressive due to the strength of the management boards of Chinese schools. They certainly have a strong force. On the other hand, the majority of Malay based educational organizations no longer advocate policy issues. The majority wanted to speak out about welfare, remuneration and workload issues and that has become their focus. Not many Malay based educational organisations talk about policy matters. Occasionally, there are some who do so but generally they are more focused upon welfare issues. But in contrast, the Chinese organizations are more likely to focus on their core issues. This is a paradigm that afflicts the Malays is closely linked to political and economic questions.

Interviewee 06 (A /Malay)

There are always opposing discourses about the policy for integration in Malaysian education. For the Chinese, a fair policy is a basic principle for achieving integration. In this context, the Malays also realised about fairness in policy in relation to education opportunities in Malaysia. The interviewee explained the dissatisfaction amongst the non-Malays in the following way:

This is the problem because the non-Malays are not happy with the New Economy Policy, with the special Malay right. They said they are born here, their parents also born here, they should have equal rights. They are not happy with the quota system.

Interviewee 07 (AE /Malay)

Furthermore, the interviewee suggested that the policy should be fair to all ethnic groups in the country. A fair policy should be based on socio-economic criteria rather than on ethnic grounds. Here we can see that discourse about fair policy is related to the socio-economic criteria. The interviewee commented on this point:

Affirmative action is not only in Malaysia, is everywhere, but to me, deep in my heart, the government, in terms of education the government should assist the bright but poor Malay students, Chinese students and Indian students. There shouldn't be a quota. If you are bright but you are poor, we must help. Can be a Malay, can be a Chinese, or Indian, but if you are rich, even you are rich Malay, you shouldn't have it. That what I feel in so far as education is concern. I have to be commons, you are poor, you can't afford, and you have it, whether you are Malays, Chinese or Indian. I don't mind our government helping a poor Chinese or Indian, but I also mind if our government help rich Malay. As we know, that is science secondary school or the residential schools were made for the rural Malay children. Now who are we sending there, the rich mans' children.

Interviewee 07 (EA /Malay)

One Indian interviewee also expressed the same opinion about fair policy for all Malaysians as the factor that inhibits the policy process in achieving integration through education. The interviewee noted:



There are other ways of integration, giving scholarship and all that must be there. This will help in the long way. You know, everybody must be given opportunities to come up. We must have a kind of policy that shows we are treating everybody equal. When you show some kind of discrimination, then you can have all the policy about national integration through education but you are not practicing it

Interviewee 09 (A /Indian)

In this regard, one Chinese interviewee argued that the affirmative action plan for Malays has constructed ethnic divisions in the policy. For the interviewee, this aspect contradicts the aims of integration based on a fair and just society. Here, we also can see rejection of ethnic-based policy. The interviewee commented:

We cannot agree with ethnic as a factor that determines the privileges. You cannot talk about integration in school if you cannot accept the fact that political parties should be multi-ethnic. So that is what we talking about. That's the essence of integration.

Interviewee 04 (NGO/Chinese)

Another factor that has contributed to limiting ethnic integration through education in Malaysia is related to religion. This refers to the practice of Islamic values in national schools in Malaysia. This aspect has also been viewed as a barrier for achieving the agenda for national integration. This religious aspect is regarded by the non-Malay as the Islamisation policy in Malaysian education. This has created an Islamic identity for the schools that has created boundaries amongst students from different ethnic backgrounds in the schools. One interviewee commented on this point:

It is a problem arising when there is particular religion elements entered in the school system. This creates an important bearing on how much the school is able to accommodate the multi ethnic population. I think the religious schools will less of the choice you know and some well known Islamic schools will absorb into the national system. You know they kept their identity and so on. We have to think about it. I don't really know about what is the best way to deal with this type of problem. I understand very clearly from Islamic perspective that is no such thing as education system that is secular. Islamic value must be within education system. For someone who is a devout Muslim finds it very hard to accept secular system so if you understand this then you can also think can be very difficult.

Interviewee 01 (A/Chinese)

For another interviewee, the practice of imposing Islamic religious values through the school system may be inappropriate for encouraging integration in the multi-ethnic context of the schools. The interviewee commented:



I think different schools have different degree on the religious factor. But through the years, the last 20 years, stories about how some principals try to push more kind of Islamic, Christian or Buddhist or whatever it is are not acceptable. They won't like it somebody pushing on it. You are in the west and people pushing Christianity, I am sure you mind that, it's the same thing. During 80's, national cultural policy do all kind of stuff, Islamisation policy and all that.

Interviewee 04 (NGO/Chinese)

Such anxiety regarding the introduction of Islamic values and practices in Malaysia schools has discouraged the non-Muslim parents from sending their children to national schools.

I am sure it builds up the image of the national school and makes parents not want to send their children to the national school. I am sure it is part of it.

Interviewee 04 (NGO/Chinese)

There are competing aspirations amongst the different ethnic communities in relation to national integration in Malaysian education. Malays and non-Malays have different aspirations and perceptions about rights in education, language for integration, and social and economic opportunities in and through the Malaysian education system. This contested discourse of policy for national integration in education is further complicated by the policy practice in disseminating Islamic values through education. These different ethnic groups' aspirations are linked to different ethnic positions in Malaysian social, economic and political contexts.

In respect of the issue of fair policy, the Chinese and Indians feel that equal opportunity could improve integration, as this would eliminate feelings of marginalisation. These also indicate that discourse about fair policy should be based on socio-economic circumstances of the Malaysian, rather than the policy based on ethnicity. In the context of ethnic competition in social and economic dimensions, the Malay remains focused on the hegemonic ideology of protecting their status and privilege in policy. In this context of protecting the Malay aspirations, education is still an important means for the Malay as a vehicle for social and economic mobility. On the other hand, the Chinese and Indians regard the policy practice as unfair to them and thus contributing to developing ethnic disparities, boundaries and distance.



#### **8.4 Ethnicity, National and Global Arenas – Multiple Demands in Nation Building**

In facing rapid social and economic changes in the global context, Malaysia has had to reconcile various demands and challenges to improve education standards for national development. In the context of global challenges, some interviewees believed that Malaysians needed to accept the reality that the state has to face such challenges in building the nation. This produced the discourse about the importance of English in pursuing science and technology advancement and to develop a competitive and capable Malaysia at the international level. For one interviewee, the discourse about globalisation and its importance for the nation has replaced the nationalist ideology in relation to language in education. The interviewee pointed out:

Some people would say from the point of view of the 21st century because you know at that time the whole world was different. Today people say Malaysia now has lost its competitive edge and our young people cannot speak English, English has become more important again, now the nationalist phase is over.

Interviewee 01 (A /Chinese)

Moreover, the interviewee regarded that the changing orientation towards language in education is influenced by economic and other interests in the global context. In a sense, this is a version of the human capital argument. For this interviewee, the policy discourse on the importance of English is derived from the state ideology about global challenges to national development in pursuing the status of a developed country. This is linked to the developmentalist strategy of the Malaysian state in the face of globalisation. This is also influenced by the state's belief that English is important in making Malaysian students knowledgeable and competent at the international level. In this sense, the interviewee sees that global demands have influenced state ideology in relation to language for education. The interviewee commented:

I think the reason to change to English is not to change the vernacular schools. I believe the government wants to change because they felt we need to be more competitive internationally. You know now is no longer the age of nationalism, but the age of globalisation.

Interviewee 01 (A /Chinese)

English also has been viewed as neutral and non-controversial for integrating different ethnic students through language in education. The interviewee noted that English is an internationally important language and also not attached to any ethnic groups in the



Malaysian society. Moreover, English is important in pursuing economic interests in education and business domains, especially in the global context. As this interviewee noted, English in education can provide 'a meeting of common ground' about what is important in education and for integrating the multi-ethnic students through language in education. The interviewee commented on this point:

If you use English not Malay, not Chinese, not Indian, so it is neutral point and it bring all the children together. In fact since we have already changed the teaching of science and mathematics into English that already provides a meeting of common ground

Interviewee 01 (A /Chinese)

Furthermore, one Indian interviewee questioned whether Malay or national language is adequate for pursuing global knowledge and understanding. This interviewee suggested that the role of national language needed to be reconsidered as English is vital to the progress of the Malaysian nation. The interviewee commented:

We are in the modern era and some people talking about globalisation, survival of the fittest. When you talk about this, then again people say can Malay language help to promote a better understanding of the world? The idea of using national language as the main medium of instruction is a very good thing. If the people in this country are the same and everybody is a progressive nation, you can go ahead, but now then people are talking about globalisation.

Interviewee 09 (A /Indian)

The interviewees' perspectives above about English in relation to globalisation suggest that this international language is important for developing Malaysia to be a developed country and a competitive global player. However, the discourse on the importance of English is seen as a challenge to the Malay hegemonic ideology in relation to national language in building the Malaysian nation. There is now a tension between the nationalistic and pragmatic ideologies in Malaysian education policy for national development in and through the education field. In this sense, the position and role of national language for the nation is questioned; rather these views attest to the fact that the pragmatic ideology in relation to language in developing the nation in the recent context of globalisation has won the day.

The paradigm shift towards English in the state policy is connected to a pragmatic ideology of education policy for developing the nation. In this sense, while globalisation brings new demands to the state for improving education quality, it has also influenced the state to consider discourse about the importance of English in the



Malaysian education context. It can be seen that state has readopted the previous policy from the early independence period until 1970 (this is discussed in Chapter Six, during which Malay and English were the main languages of instruction until 1970). This also brings about a contested aspiration of education policy towards language, between a nationalistic and a pragmatic ideology about education for national development. One interviewee commented on this point:

I very much wish that the national leadership will have wisdom and not be too pragmatic. Pragmatism is important in finding solutions to current issues but we must also be idealistic. There is a tendency now for certain people to say that we need not be idealistic but must be pragmatic. For me the two must be combined. We must be imbued with a sense of meaningful idealism, if we do not have a vision, no idealism, how are we to progress, to achieve a dream as in the case of nation-building we have just discussed. Secondly, we need to be pragmatic as well by taking into account the sensitivities of the prevailing situation. But extreme pragmatism will lead to the loss of our idealism and this has begun to happen.

Interviewee 06 (A /Malay)

Another Malay interviewee has commented on the implication of the new policy of English on the status and function of Malay language in Malaysia. The interviewee has argued that policy in education favourable to English could weaken the position of and role of Malay language for national development. This language would no longer to be an important language for Malaysians for acquiring and developing knowledge. For this interviewee, the situation has also affected the process of progressing the role and function of Malay language in the Malaysian education system. The interviewee observed:

After 1970, we used books in both Malay and English simultaneously. This helped the students to acquire both languages. It was proven with the success of our students overseas. The ability to comprehend what one has read is more important than the ability to converse with another person. What is important is the knowledge that we have gained and not what we have imparted with. We have to think about, one, we want knowledge from the whole world. Secondly, effect to the children of our nation. And third, what will happen to our language and the 'global' concept. Since science and maths are taught in English, the lecturers no longer want to come out with erudite articles in the Malay language. So what is going to happen to the treasure of knowledge in our language, there will be an enormous effect on it.

Interviewee 10 (A /Malay)

The discourse on global challenges to national language is also linked with such anxiety about losing the culture and language identity. One interviewee pointed out such a concern regarding the global impact on Malaysian culture and identities:



Globalisation introduces new challenges and provides some opportunity for change. If everybody thinks that English is more important than maybe there will be higher acceptance as a common language. But I think one will always bear in mind these people who feel it is sad to lose their identity, heritage, and they have a very strong argument. I mean it is sad for the local and national special characteristics of any communities to build up and there is a great of concern as a result of globalisation as an example of how languages in the world is going to die?

Interviewee 01 (A /Chinese)

Malaysian education policy has faced multiple demands in relation to national and global interests. While the issue of ethnicity in relation to language and cultural rights remains an important in ethnic challenges to policy, globalisation has also contributed in influencing the policy ideology of developing the nation through education. This dichotomy of national and global interests for Malaysian society has also produced tensions between idealistic and pragmatic ideologies in Malaysia.

### **8.5 Negotiating the Concept of the Malaysian Nation**

Different aspirations, interests and demands towards education policy for achieving national integration among the different communities in Malaysia have brought about rather contentious issues regarding the concept of a Malaysian nation. One Chinese interviewee suggested that concept of the Malaysian nation must be based on democracy and multiculturalism, which could adequately represent the pluralist character of the nation. The interviewee noted:

Malaysia is truly Asia, which is we should be proud about. That is Malaysian visual. Your character, your national character is part of everything. We are the Malaysian nation, we are multi-ethnic, and that is what makes us special.

Interviewee 04(NGO /Chinese)

Similarly, another Chinese interviewee supported multiculturalism as the basis for Malaysian identity. This means that the state should promote cultural diversity in Malaysian society. This interviewee also recognised the status of Malay language as the official and national language for all Malaysians. The interviewee stated:

Interviewee: I think all Malaysian should promote their national identity, we as Malaysian, as a Malaysian citizen. As a Malaysian citizen must be more opened, multi-cultural, and even multi-religious up to the individual. If we use the force or the compulsory measure, this may bring negative effects.

Researcher: Did you mean that we should promote multiculturalism?

Interviewee: Yes, but meanwhile, we should also recognise Malay as the national language.

Interviewee 05(NGO /Chinese)



One Chinese interviewee also believed that the pluralistic nature of Malaysia society was an advantage rather than a problem for the nation. This interviewee suggested that policy should recognise such differences of ethnicity in Malaysia, rather than try to enforce social and ideological uniformity that might produce tensions amongst and between the ethnic groups. The interviewee, in this sense also suggested multiculturalism as a necessary policy initiative for Malaysian education. The interviewee commented:

One of the good things about Malaysia, that we are actually very pluralistic by nature of our population. As long as we can recognise this aspect, it is a strength. I think we will be OK. Whenever we think this is a weakness and are trying to make everybody the same, then it will create a problem.

Interviewee 01 (A /Chinese)

One Indian interviewee suggested how the idea of multiculturalism could be implemented in Malaysian schools. For instance, this concept could be disseminated through the school curriculum. For this interviewee, teaching and learning others' culture and values could promote greater understanding among different ethnic groups. The interviewee suggested:

We can have the Malay language and the Malay culture as the main thing. We should not forget to incorporate the culture of other races, Chinese values and Indian values. It can be taught in the school, about Indian, about Indian culture, Hindu religion. I think by teaching a bit of others people's religion, they will not become a Muslim or not change their religious. In fact, I think it will go a long way in helping to promote a greater understanding. There is no harm in school giving some kind of exposure about other people culture, other people's religion, a bit. So that the children will get the right understanding about and they will appreciate the country better, and they know that we are one nation, integrated Malaysian.

Interviewee 09 (A/Indian)

The discourse of multiculturalism in Malaysian education policy is also connected to the discourse concerning equal rights in education in multi-ethnic Malaysia. For one Indian interviewee, equal opportunities and fair policy for all ethnic groups in the country are the basis for producing national cohesion through the education system. This interviewee accepts the policy for assisting the Malays; however, the policy also should be fair for the non-Malays. The interviewee noted:

We can have a national identity based on equal rights. Of course, equal rights meaning that, you know, we still give allowance for the rights of the *bumiputera*. We can still have Malay language, but providing opportunity for others to learn their own language. I think that will go a long way in projecting very fair national identity for the country.

Interviewee 09 (A /Indian)



The discourse about the concept of Malaysian nation from the Malay interviewee's perspective emphasises the importance of an historical perspective in developing the nation. One Malay interviewee regarded the discourse of 'Malayness' in relation to nation building as being rooted in historical and political contexts of the Malaysian pluralistic society. For this interviewee, the basis of building the Malaysian nation is disseminating the universal and common values across different ethnic groups in the country, while maintaining the Malay's culture, values and identity as the foundation for national identity. In this sense, there is interplay between the discourse about the Malaysian nation and historical dimension of the country from the Malay point of view. The interviewee commented:

We need to look into universal values, meaning that although the foundations are still Malay, cross-ethnic noble values must be made the basis for building selfhood and nation building within the current context, for ultimately, although impossible. It is easier to embrace something that is universal than that is linked to ethnicity or communalism. But I wish to emphasise that the issue of Malayness is not an ethnic issue but a historical one. Without the Malaccan Malay sultanate, there would not have been Malay Peninsula or the Malay states which is now inherited comfortably by the different communities.

Interviewee 06 (A/Malay)

In this regard, another Malay interviewee supported the view and suggested that knowledge of history is crucial in determining the development of the nation. This would help the people understand the special status of a particular ethnic group as the indigenous people of the country. The interviewee said:

We need to have a base that's universally related to fairness and respect for history. If we take that as a principle, then other issues can easily be solved. Having respect for history is very important. They can only remember what happened today.

Interviewee 10 (A/Malay)

For another Malay interviewee, the fundamental aspect for building the Malaysian nation is based on the 'social contract' between major ethnic groups agreed to during independence. When I asked a question concerning the basis of the Malaysian nation, the Malay interviewee commented:

The basis is easy. Other ethnic groups should accept Malays as the main ethnic group in this country. They should read the social contract which they agreed to in 1957. When the three generations of race accepts and protects the rights of the Malays, then it would not be dropped

Interviewee 08 (AE/Malay)



The concept of the Malaysian nation was constructed differently between different interviewees from varying ethnic backgrounds. Discourses about this concept amongst the interviewees were also interrelated with different aspirations regarding rights, culture and identities. The Chinese and Indians have raised questions about a fair and just society for developing the nation; however, for the Malays, the context of nation building should be based on the historical context of the nation. The Malay believed that the dominance of 'Malayness' in the Malaysian nation is historically and politically justifiable and should be the basis for national identity. The discourse of a social contract amongst the Malay interviewees also shows that the Malay is bent on protecting their dominant position in relation to ethnic relationships in Malaysia.

## **8.6 Conclusion**

In this Chapter, I have discussed the different points of view from different interviewees involved in the research regarding Malaysian educational policy for enhancing integration and developing the nation against national and global scenarios. This was an attempt to understand the context of ethnicity, national interests and global factors in relation to discourses on Malaysian education policy which aimed at uniting multi-ethnic students through education. The discussion in this Chapter indicates that policy endeavours for integration are complicated by different contexts and challenges, which involve different interests related to ethnicity, and national and global demands. Here we can see that the endeavour for national integration in and through the educational system in Malaysia continues to face contested aspirations, interests and ideologies of the different ethnic groups, and also contested idealistic and pragmatic ideologies in relation to globalisation and the issue of language.

The meta concern in Malaysian education policy is integrating multiethnic students in the schools through language, culture and other policy approaches. What have been demonstrated in this Chapter are the contested ideologies of the Malays and non-Malays in pursuing the spirit of national ideology through the education. The Malays regard Malay language, culture and values in the Malaysian education system as the basis for building and uniting the nation. In contrast, the Chinese and Indians construct their rights in relation to mother tongue instruction and preserving their cultures and identities. Moreover, ethnic groups' consciousness in relation to educational policy also depends upon sentiments about their respective social and



economic positions. This has produced discourses about fair policy for all Malaysians in the process of achieving integration. Here socio-economic concerns come to the fore, irrespective of ethnicity.

This Chapter has demonstrated competing and contradictory ideological issues about ethnicity, and national and global interests in Malaysian education policy. The different discourses about policy for enhancing integration and progressing the nation in relation to national and global challenges are influenced by ethnic-based social, economic and political positions of Malays and non-Malays. These different ethnic ideological paradigms were transplanted into the consciousness of Malay and non-Malay in protecting their interests and aspirations in education. What has also been conveyed in the discussion in this Chapter is a sense of Malay and non-Malay consciousness in struggling for their rights and privileges based on social, economic and political positions as currently constituted in the Malaysian social-political landscape. The competing ideologies of the Malays and non-Malays are also reflected in the ethnic contestation for economic and social positions and advancement.

Malaysians of different ethnic origins in contemporary postcolonial Malaysia constantly negotiate competing and contradicting ideologies and paradigms about the concept of the Malaysian nation. We see here Appadurai's (1996) observation of nation and state today being a project of each other. The conflicting discourses on the concept of nation in Malaysia for Malaysian pluralistic society are between the Malay hegemonic paradigm (which the ethnic minorities tend to see as assimilationist) and the idea of multiculturalism, which is linked to fair and democratic ideals for the Malaysian nation. While the Malay interviewees are keen to practise discreet multiculturalism, which recognises cultural diversity in Malaysian society set against Malay values as core values and central to the identity of the nation, the Chinese and Indians want 'full' multiculturalism, which recognises equal rights for all Malaysians in respect of social, economic and political opportunities.

It is clear that the state needs to deal with multiple aspirations and conflicting ideologies of ethnicity embodied in Malaysian ethnic groups' challenges to education for enhancing integration. The different ideologies and principles in the Malay-non-Malay discourses about integration and national identity reflect the conflicting



aspirations within Malaysian pluralistic society. The state needs to mediate and manage this complexity of different ideologies and aspirations. In other words, the goals of national cohesion and development through education in Malaysia have to be pursued within the context of ethnic contestation and competing educational aspirations. This conflicting discourse of ethnicity in Malaysian education policy is also overlaid by national and global interests. Global pressures have also realigned some of this contestation in terms of the actual and desirable place of English language in Malaysian education. Furthermore, globalisation can also be seen to have strengthened the significance of Mandarin in Malaysian education as well. Both signify the changing balance between national and global framings of Malaysian education policy.

The analysis of the interview data in this Chapter has again demonstrated the contested nature of the concept of integration and also the contested nature of the concept of the nation between ethnic groups. The Malay position tends towards assimilation, while the Chinese one pushes multiculturalism, with the policy more accommodating of the former rather than the latter position. Contestation over nation and education policy for integration has also been recontextualised by global pressures regarding the quality of education provided for all students in Malaysia. These global pressures have also rearticulated concerns about language with English and Mandarin being positioned differently in the context of the globalisation of the economy. In this context, what we have witnessed is contestation between idealistic and pragmatic ideologies in relation to nation and ethnicity and in relation to appropriate education policy responses to the pressures of globalisation. This analysis has also shown how the context of influence within the policy cycle now takes in global pressures from beyond the nation, while globalised policy discourses about the need to improve the nation's human capital, about human rights and equal opportunity in education have also influenced discourses amongst the ethnic groups regarding education policy for national integration. These discourses in the context of globalisation mean that the ethnic groups are in a sense more of one-mind, as Malaysia faces global challenges and seeks to compete globally, which will require high quality education for all Malaysians. This is indicative of Appadurai's (1996) argument that globalization has seen the flows of ideas, what he calls 'ideoscapes',



which have affected aspirations about the nation amongst the different ethnic groups in Malaysian plural society.

Chapter Nine, which follows, concludes the thesis. In particular, it seeks to summarise the 'findings' of the research for understanding policy and issues of ethnicity in Malaysian education. The Chapter also provides interpretations from the research about ethnicity and education in relation to achieving integration in the multiethnic society which is Malaysia. The Chapter also outlines the contribution to knowledge of the research and suggests some future research directions.



## CHAPTER 9

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 9.1 Introduction

As noted in Chapter One, the principal aim of this study was:

To analyse and provide an understanding of ethnicity issues and other related challenges, and their influences on and through national education policies in Malaysia, including language policies, and national and global issues, aimed at enhancing national integration through the education of the multi-ethnic younger generation, 1970 to the present.

Accordingly, this study sought to answer five specific research questions as outlined in Chapter One (pp. 6-9). The overarching purpose of this concluding Chapter then will be to report the 'findings' of the research in relation to the principal aim and these specific research questions. At the outset of this Chapter, it is worth noting that the policy document analysis, policy chronology and analyses of the interview data have confirmed the observation made in the first Chapter that ensuring national cohesion has been a meta-policy goal of Malaysian education policy since independence. This policy goal has expressed and been influenced by a politics of ethnicity. Indeed, the policy chronology also demonstrated how many contemporary policy issues concerning ethnicity, national integration and schooling have their beginnings in colonial times and can in some ways be seen to be part of the colonial inheritance of Malaysia and part of what Gregory (2004) has called the 'colonial present'. However, the analyses provided in the preceding Chapters have also demonstrated the rearticulation of these issues in changing national and international contexts across time. The politics of ethnicity have remained significant, as demonstrated in the data analysis, since independence and notably since 1970, the time frame of the research reported here. The analyses provided in the data Chapters have demonstrated this reality quite clearly. What we have seen is a state strategy of accommodation of competing ethnic interests rearticulated against changing national and global contexts.

This study has analysed issues of ethnicity and related challenges in Malaysian education policy aimed at achieving national integration. As noted in Chapter One, the focus has been on ethnicity rather than religion, with the latter dealt with



incidentally as it was raised in the research interviews, while at the same time acknowledging the relationships between ethnicity and religion in Malaysia. Chapters Two to Five outlined the theoretical framework of the study, critical policy sociology, as well as the methodological approach adopted for data collection, through historical analysis, document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Chapter Six analysed the changing policies historically and discussed the multifarious ethnic challenges in relation to education policy production for integration in the Malaysian education system since 1970. In Chapters Seven and Eight, analysis and discussion of the interview data were focused on ethnicity, as well as national and global challenges to Malaysian education policy aimed at achieving national integration. The global context has seen the introduction of English as the language of instruction in Science and Maths, a policy mimicking that of Singapore, a significant reference society for Malaysia, and thought to be necessary to the global competitiveness of the Malaysian economy in the context of globalisation. However, as the analyses have shown, this has had differential impact across schools attended by students from different ethnic backgrounds. Additionally, there seemed to be recognition of the significance of English as a global language of business, but almost universal opposition to the way the policy had been developed in a top-down fashion and also opposition to the conceptualisation of the policy and its educational and other effects.

Analysis and discussion of education policy throughout these chapters were aimed at providing understanding of Malaysian education policy and the ideologies and politics behind ethnicity based challenges to the policy. Thus what has been provided has been an analysis of Malaysian education policy aimed at national integration in the context of complex and changing ethnic politics and in the context of a developing nation and globalisation. One primary concern here has been to offer an account and explanation of Malaysian education policies for national integration.

The central thesis derived from this research is that policy and ideology for integration produced in the Malaysian education system mediate the multiple demands, varying interests and ideological differences within Malaysian pluralistic society and amongst its various ethnic groups and politics. At the same time, however, these policy frames tended to be in line with national education policy for national integration as articulated in the Razak Report of 1956, which relied on the Malay language in the



school system as a major tool for ensuring national integration. In implementing policy for national integration, the state continued to accommodate competing interests and aspirations of different ethnic groups in relation to language, culture and school provision. This accommodative state strategy in policy practices has sought to manage tensions regarding ethnicity in Malaysian education. This has been a response to the politics associated with the ethnic arithmetic of Malaysian society. For example, ETeMS is required of Malay national and Tamil schools, basically because of lack of political resistance from the Malay and Tamil communities. In stark contrast, ETeMS in Chinese schools has seen the allowance of both English and Mandarin as the languages of instruction, because of the strong resistance by the Chinese community to full implementation of the policy. As noted in Chapter Six in relation to *The Vision School* policy, strong resistance from the Chinese communities has also influenced the government's implementation of the policy. These ethnic politics, however, as demonstrated throughout, are also complicated by the standing and aspirations of the different ethnic communities in economic and political terms. The main policy aim of the government has been to try to make national schools mainstream schools for all ethnic groups. However, this policy desire has been seen by the non-Malay, particularly the Chinese, as not meeting their language and cultural interests. The Chinese see the provision of Chinese schools as central to the protection of their interests in terms of language and culture, but also in economic terms as well.

As indicated in a number of research interviews, some individuals across the three ethnic groups also pointed out the significance of socio-economic status and urban/rural location in respect of education and the opportunities it provides. Here we see the interweaving of ethnicity and socio-economic status, complicating to some extent ethnic politics. These voices noted that those from low socio-economic status were disadvantaged through schooling and that policy in education needed to address this issue. This applied across the three ethnic groups. Policies which recognised this would offer one way forward for education policy in Malaysia. Better opportunities for those from low socio-economic status, irrespective of ethnic background, would also tie with the perceived need to improve the education of all in the face of global economic competition.



## 9.2 Researching Malaysia Education Policy: Matters *Of* and *For* Policy

In this study, I have utilised the sociological and critical approach to policy study in education in researching Malaysian education policy aimed at achieving national integration in relation to various ethnicity challenges to policy. As explained in Chapter Four, the policy cycle model has been adopted for investigating the complexity of policy processes and production of Malaysian education policy. This approach helps analyse the influence of multiple interests in relation to ethnicity, ideology and discourses, in national and global arenas as manifested in education policy and policy processes. Policy sociology, as defined in Chapter Four 'is rooted in the social science tradition, historically informed and draws on qualitative and illuminative techniques' (Ozga, 1987, p.144). Thus a policy sociology approach stresses the need for an historical or chronological approach to analysing policy and also the need for engagement with policy players and policy makers, usually and as with this study, through semi-structured interviews, conversations with a purpose. In this study, policy sociology was deemed to be apposite for examining the relationships between education policy and its contexts of challenges, and between policy motives and actions focussed on achieving the aim of national integration. This policy research is thus 'putting back together' the various contexts of influence in Malaysian education policy and the various perspectives on education policy in Malaysia in dealing with ethnicity issues.

This research attempted to inform conceptually policy makers and readers about Malaysian education policy and ethnicity challenges regarding its nature and context, ideology and processes and the policy approaches and orientation in implementing policies for achieving national integration through the schooling system. In this regard, I have argued that this research, framed by policy sociology and a critical orientation, is based on the conceptual use of knowledge for contributing to the production of policy for national integration. This research *of* policy did not focus on providing solutions to these policy problems of ethnicity as documented and analysed throughout this thesis, rather the analysis engaged with the broader political, social and economic dimensions of these issues through research interviews, history and document analysis. As noted in Chapters One, Four and Five and above, this research thus is research *of* policy. I would argue that the insights and knowledge provided can, and indeed should contribute to developing understanding and informed debate about



ethnicity, education policy, and issues of national integration in the contemporary Malaysian education system. This can be regarded as useful for educational policy development in Malaysia concerned with matters of the integration of the differing ethnic groups. Hopefully it will also contribute to democratic debates about the issues.

### **9.3 Ethnicity Issues and National Integration in Malaysian Education Policy**

Based on the discussion and analyses in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight, matters of policy and national integration in the Malaysian education context can be seen to be interwoven with a number of major discourses and issues. The following sections consider the aspects of ethnicity that can be linked to these discourses about policy established for negotiating ethnicity challenges and achieving national integration.

#### **9.3.1 Ethnicity and Language Issues**

The research reported has shown that language is an important source of ethnic discontent in Malaysian education. It is clear that ongoing ethnic challenges towards integration policy in education are linked to discourses about language rights. Here there is a contested ideology between Malay and non-Malay in relation to national language and mother tongues and their usage in the education system.

This study indicates that Malay domination in culture and language in the education system contributed to constituting the Chinese and Indian attitudes to the place of their languages through the space provided by education policy. However, this ethnic endeavour for preserving mother tongue institutions (in this context in the Chinese and Tamil schools) is to some extent antipathetic to national aspirations for uniting a multi ethnic society through a national language. In the context of the Chinese and Indian desires about language in their education, the policy of uniting the nation in education through national language has faced ongoing challenges.

This study reveals that Chinese and Indian feelings of language discrimination in relation to mother tongue usage in education policy practice are an impediment to the education objective of achieving national integration through the policy ideology of national language. This policy ideology, which reflects Malay hegemonic aspirations, has been read by the Chinese and Indians as discriminatory in respect of their rights to



their language and culture in the education system. In this sense, language for these ethnic minorities is the most important aspect for preserving their cultures and identities, and also has been regarded as their right in the Malaysian education system. In this context of ethnic feelings of being discriminated against in relation to policy practice in the language of education, the ethnic minorities' contestation has produced tensions with Malay aspirations regarding the role of language in education. As a consequence, we can see the state always has to negotiate its education policy orientation and policy implementation in order to reconcile issues of language for uniting the nation. The Malay discourse concerning language is linked to aspirations about the importance of Malay language for integrating the multi-ethnic society and developing a national identity through the education system. This is the Malay aspiration for maintaining their ethnic supremacy as the dominant ethnic group, an aspiration which has pervaded Malaysian education policy.

While policy in Malaysian education remains concerned about national language and role in developing national identity and integration of different ethnic groups, the Chinese and Indians read this policy ideology and practice as unfair because of its failure to recognise their rights to mother tongue instruction in schooling. The demand amongst the non-Malay is that policy should be based on equal practice in disseminating language and culture rights through the education system. Such rights could eradicate what they see as discrimination and marginalisation in the policy. Related, the most important aspect behind ethnic challenges in relation to language in education is a rejection of the assimilation of both culture and identities that they believe would happen through the implementation of the 'ultimate objective' of Malaysian education policy, that is, Malay as the language of instruction in all schools, as articulated in the Razak Report of 1956.

This research has shown that the failure of the policy in engaging with language issues has been caused by state policy approaches at the implementation level. In this sense, the state is more inclined to an accommodative orientation in managing and mediating the competing interests of different ethnic groups in relation to language in education. However to some degree the research has demonstrated how this accommodative strategy has contributed to developing a sense or feeling of being advantaged and disadvantaged, for both Malay and non-Malay alike in relation to



their social, economic and political positions. While both Malay and non-Malay are dissatisfied about the current policy in relation to their interests and aspirations towards education, the state in dealing with ethnicity issues is inclined to negotiate the issues based on political circumstances. This is evident in the interviewee data where both Malay and non-Malay interviewees argued that state actions have been detrimental to one particular group in order to accommodate demands by other groups. In this context, we can see political compromise and the politics of accommodation in the policy process for achieving national integration in relation to language issues. This has been the state's approach for dealing with ethnic arithmetic in policy formulation and implementation.

This research has also shown that in Malaysian plural society, language is linked to economic interests. In this sense, ethnic sentiment in language was influenced by the perception of what language can provide economic advantage. This is amongst the factors in the Chinese community's preference for their vernacular schools; they believe these schools have given advantage to their children in relation to language for economic opportunities, especially in the private sector where Mandarin is one of the most important languages of contemporary global commerce. In this context of ethnic challenges, the Chinese community preference for Chinese schools can be regarded as an ethnic response to the policy of Malay preference, which they see as marginalising them in respect of educational opportunities. Hence, in this way, their response to policy can be regarded as 'playing as outsiders' in order to find other ways for achieving their interests in education and for protecting their related economic interests.

This study has shown that the case of ideological contestation in language in education in Malaysian multi-ethnic society is very specific to Malaysia's history and contemporary social structure. Such ideological contestation is a consequence of historical and societal features of Malaysian plural society that structured different identities through the schooling system in relation to language of instruction. This is a colonial residue and the politics of ethnic consensus has shaped such ideology about ethnic differences and rights in relation to language in the education system in Malaysia. Language and ethnic divisions in the Malaysian education system, in this sense, have been historically, politically and socially established by policy and ethnic



community consciousness, which in turn have been influenced by ethnic challenges in the policy process until this day.

### **9.3.2 Ethnic Aspirations and Equality in Education**

The ethnic challenges in Malaysian education policy are rooted in the different principles and interests of different ethnic groups in relation to education. While the Malays continue to fight to hold their position as the ‘sons of the soil’, and inspired by the ideology that Malay language and culture should be the core of national identity, the Chinese and Indians struggle for equality, justice and their rights regarding culture and identity. This is a conflict of ethnic aspirations within the policy of education for building a united Malaysian nation.

Related, this research has shown that the Malay and non-Malay ideological differences about integration are linked to a discourse about equality in policy practice for accommodating their interests in education. For the Chinese and Indians, such policy action should protect and preserve other groups’ culture and identities, as well as meeting the needs of the dominant group. Regarding the economic aspect, affirmative action should be based on the status of the weaker sectors and not be ethnically based or based on religious belief. Thus, for the non-Malay, the affirmative action or preference policy of affirmative action for Malay constructs ethnic boundaries in the policy process and is based on the ideology of a *Bumiputera-non-Bumiputera* dichotomy, which for them signifies inequality in policy orientation. For the Chinese and Indians, this policy ideology should be reviewed to eliminate such distinctions and discrimination between ethnic groups. In contrast, the Malay are keen to protect a policy for assisting them, as they regard this historically and politically as the rights of the Malay. For the Malay, their indigenous status is important for determining the concept of rights in the social, political and economic context of Malaysian pluralistic society. The Malay also regard such privileges for the Malay as important in ensuring harmonious and fair relationship with others, and as a basis for equal distribution of economic resources and wealth in society between the Malay and non-Malay. This is important for the Malay, as they see that the basic aspect of producing a harmonious society in Malaysian pluralist society is that the policy should guarantee that the majority are not left behind and feel discriminated against in respect of their social and economic positions. This stance was evident in most of the



Malay interviews as expressed in the discourse about the rights of the Malay, which is embodied in the concept of a 'social contract' as the foundation for building the Malaysian nation.

This study also revealed that such ethnic challenges are caused by ethnic-based feelings of being marginalised by policy practices in education. In respect of policy, both Malay and non-Malay feel that they have been treated unfairly and that their interests have not been met. From the interview data, the study has shown that policy has provoked a feeling of discrimination amongst ethnic groups in respect of the discourse about whose interests count in policy. This is a contested discourse about rights in education for Malay and non-Malay within the context of a policy practice of Malay-non-Malay or *bumiputera-non-bumiputera* division. While the Chinese and Indians expressed their concerns about education policy in its implementation and practice, particularly in relation to their rights to language, culture, values and opportunities in education, the Malay on other hand, also feel discriminated against in terms of their rights and opportunities in education, when the policy tends to adjust its context and practice in accommodating demands from the minorities.

Findings from the interviews have shown that the Malay interpreted education policy as being fair in accommodating the Chinese and Indian aspirations regarding their language, culture and identity in education. In this sense, the Malay seem to limit the notion of rights to ethnic minorities' languages and cultures within a framework of dominant ethnic hegemonic aspirations in the education policy context. In contrast, the Chinese and Indian demand full recognition of their rights in education. However, for the Malay, such demands signified Chinese and Indian ignorance about the national ideology underpinning Malaysian education policy for achieving national integration. In this sense, the Malays are inspired by their dominant status and position to see the Malaysian nation develop based on Malay culture and values. On the other hand, the Chinese and Indians demand equal status for their cultures and language rights in education. In this context, ethnic minorities' aspirations concerning language and culture rights are influenced by a universal ideology about education, which is contradictory with Malay aspirations for national identity.



The Chinese interpreted that policy ideology as constraining their desire for mother tongue education, as they see that the policy has the ultimate goal of developing a single school system with Malay as the medium of instruction. They read the state education policy for national integration as being inclined to such a policy agenda. This demonstrates ethnic-based fears of losing their rights regarding language and cultural practice in the Malaysian education system, as a result perhaps of the ambiguities surrounding national education policy for integration. In viewing policy as text and as practice, the Chinese are always suspicious about the meaning of the policy in relation to their language and their schools. This is an element of mistrust which has influenced their interpretation of education policy, as this ethnic community have been concerned about losing their language rights in Malaysian education policy. However, we can see that the Malay interpreted that policy as fair in ensuring minority rights for preserving their languages and cultures in education. This demonstrates how education policy for integration in Malaysia has evoked different readings of its meaning amongst the different ethnic groups and in relation to different ethnic educational and broader aspirations.

### **9.3.3 Ethnicity, School and Cultural Identity**

The Chinese read education policy and programmes produced by the state for national integration as potentially affecting Chinese schools, since policy is never explicit about ensuring the *status quo* of these schools. The Chinese community remain concerned that the policy would bring the hidden agenda of achieving the ultimate objective of the national education policy. Hence, they react and are critical of the policy in terms of their ethnic interests. They see these suspicions as necessary to ensuring that they can prevent the state from imposing the agenda of a single school system using the national language of Malay as the language of instruction.

Based on discussion concerning ethnicity-based challenges and policy in Chapters Six and Seven, we can see that the school is an important social institution for the Chinese and Indians to preserve their languages and ensure cultural survival within the Malay hegemonic domination of the policy framework. This study has shown how the ethnic minorities, especially the Chinese, are very effective in protecting their vernacular schools in relation to policy production in the Malaysian education system. This is evident in their response to the policy when they feel it could harm the status of



vernacular schools. The vernacular schools survive because of ethnic community preference for mother tongue medium instruction and their interest in preserving cultural and ethnic identities through education.

Significantly, this study has shown that the constraints upon policy for promoting national schools for national integration are not only produced by ethnic sentiments regarding vernacular schools, but also produced by pragmatic factors such as the ethnic community choosing particular schools for their children in terms of their educational interests. In this sense, the policy to empower the national schools for attracting multiethnic students has been severely hampered by the image of the national schools from the point of view of the Chinese and Indian communities. Here, in the public perception, especially amongst the Chinese, is the view that the national schools would not benefit their children in relation to educational attainment. The Chinese schools are seen to be better schools. This is further entrenched in their response to the policy of Malay preference, which has contributed to developing preferences for vernacular schools as an alternative way for competing for social and economic opportunities, set against the Malay preference policy.

Most of the Malay interviewees felt that the maintenance of the vernacular schools did not help the national agenda for promoting national integration. Some of the interviewees drew on their own personal experiences of attending the former English schools where they had no problem in social interactions with different ethnic groups. But some are of the opinion that the vernacular schools are not responsible for ensuring lack of interaction amongst children from different ethnic backgrounds. This appeared in the Chinese interviewees' opinions, as they believe that national integration cannot be achieved based on the policy idea of bringing together children from different ethnic background into one school system. This is clear in the Chinese community resistance toward the idea of the Vision. School, which they regard as pursuing the ultimate agenda of developing a single school system with Malay as the language of instruction. The rejection of this policy idea is rooted in strong ethnic sentiments to ensure the *status quo* of the vernacular schools is not disturbed. In contrast, for the Malay, the strong attachment of the Chinese community to the Chinese schools is seen to 'thicken' ethnic segregation and boundaries in the Malaysian school system.



Additionally, this study has shown that Malaysian education policy and its relation to vernacular schools have been inherited from British colonial policy in education for the Malay, Chinese and Indians. This has structured the Malaysian schooling system and has been regarded by the Chinese and Indians as accommodating their aspirations regarding language and educational rights. While the primary objective of Malaysian education policy is to create a sense of national identity which could transcend all sectional, ethnic and other divisive loyalties, the minority ethnic communities' attachment to vernacular schools remains strong. Even the post-colonial Malaysian education policy seems successfully to have debunked cultural pluralism within the education system, which was the hallmark of the colonial education policy. In disseminating national ideology through national language, the vernacular schools in Malaysian education system are delicately positioned in relation to constructing homogeneity in the system. In this context, we can see that surrounding Malaysian education policy for national integration, the need for commonality and the need for cultural and language identities often pull ethnic minorities and the state in opposing directions. The important thing for the state is to ensure that a healthy tension is maintained between these opposing ideological forces that will serve the nation's needs in the long run.

#### **9.4 Malaysian Education Policy for National Integration**

The concept of superficial and artificial integration signified the level of ethnic integration amongst multi-ethnic society in Malaysia. This is what emerged from the discussion of the interview data that explained the interviewees' perspectives about the policy effects of Malaysian education policy aimed at achieving national integration. In viewing the aspects of what they regarded as a real integration, most of the interviewees believed that the level of ethnic interaction amongst students from different ethnic groups is a good indicator and thus suggest that education policy in Malaysia is still unsuccessful in achieving the aim of national integration across ethnic groups.

In this regard, this study has shown that the context of national integration and education in Malaysian education is intertwined with other contexts that influenced and shaped the policy orientation. This study has revealed that there are multiple



contexts and discourses that the state needed to take into account in formulating and producing policy for national integration in Malaysian education system.

#### **9.4.1 The Policy and the Ethnic Context**

In the Malaysian education context, policy changes since the 1970s can be seen as the consequences of the ethnic riots of 1969. This policy change has reinforced the implementation of national education policy post independence with the intention of assisting the Malay in terms of their social and economic opportunities. As explained in Chapter Six, the policy orientation post 1970s has been to strengthen the Malay domination in the education sphere and to enhance national cohesion based on the belief that ethnic inequality in social and economic matters between Malay and non-Malay needed to be eradicated to ensure harmonious ethnic relationships in the nation. Given this policy ideology post 1970, the research has shown that the policy changes have produced puzzling effects in relation to ethnic minorities' responses to the policy. Discussion from the research findings in Chapters Six and Seven indicated that ethnic responses to this particular policy orientation signified in ethnic consciousness in protecting their social and economic interests within the education policy context. This is apparent in the Chinese reactions to the policy documented in the thesis. The Chinese challenges are demonstrated by their action of locating themselves as outsiders in the policy context so as to protect their economic and education opportunities, as they feel disadvantaged by the policy of Malay preference in education and in the economic context.

In this sense, policy becomes one of the most important contributors to ethnic distinctions, which produces a distinct sense of ethnicity in Malaysian pluralistic society. Competition and survival within the context of Malay-based policy has caused the non-Malay to find ways of ensuring their interests in education and the economic field would be protected. In education, various changes in the Malay-dominated state policies and attitudes have led to continuing anxieties among the non-Malay about the future of their education. This brings diverse preference on the type of education between ethnic communities, in which is *ceteris paribus*, the higher the degree of feeling threatened by such policy orientation, the higher the Chinese preference for their vernacular schools. On the other hand, for the Malay, any policy action that they see posing a threat to their status and special position and privilege in



education will bring discontent to the state. This is influenced by the Malay aspiration to see the state protect their rights and interests in the social and economic domains, as they see that they still are left behind economically compared with other ethnic communities, especially the Chinese. Thus they demand that the state should continue to assist their social and economic mobility through the continuation of affirmative policy for *bumiputera*. In this regard, we can see that the ethnic context in Malaysian education policy is intertwined with Malay and non-Malay discourses about policy implications regarding their interests in both the education and the economic domains.

The concept of a Malay-non-Malay reciprocal relationship is embodied in the ideology of a social contract, which is for the Malay, the basis for building the nation. However, this ethnic agreement in relation to dominant and minority relationships in social, economic and political arenas has resulted in inequality in the distribution of educational resources. Given such a policy feature, this has created Malay and non-Malay or *bumiputera-non-bumiputera* divisions in the policy context. In this sense, the Malays argue that the historical backdrop and political context of the Malaysian plural society justified their status and need for special policy treatment. However, this contradicts Chinese and Indian discourses about liberal democratic society and achieving ethnic integration, which is also linked to equal distribution of educational opportunities.

The ethnic context within the Malaysian education policy sphere seems to be a core element in framing the policy orientation in both its formulation and implementation. These policy circumstances are shaped by the practice of ethnic-based politics, which have influenced the politics of decision making and policy implementation in mediating different ethnic preferences in education. However, in spite of practising political consensus in the politics of decision making, the ethnic-based politics have been regarded as contradictory to the national ideology of achieving integration. This, for some interviewees has led to the maintenance of ethnic divisions and influenced ethnic groups to protect their interests in relation to others. This, to some degree, extended the ethnic preference in protecting and struggling for their ethnic-based interests; this is what we can name as an 'ethnic-centred ideological circle' in education policy processes in Malaysia.



#### 9.4.2 Contested Discourses of Integration

This study demonstrates that there are competing discourses between ethnic groups in respect of negotiating national integration through the education system in Malaysia. The Chinese regarded policy in education as unfair and ethnically biased in terms of culture and language. However, for the Malay, the foundation of national integration should be based on the dominant group's aspirations for the country. The concept of fairness for the Malay is interwoven with the notion of Malay rights as the 'son of the soil' of the country, which has been historically and politically constituted in the nation. This shows that the Malay have continued to hold their dominant ideology in processes of building the nation.

In this research, the meaning given to integration by interviewees was also entwined with their discourse on ethnicity and other social and economic issues. Such perspectives represent contradictory ideas in relation to the state concept of national integration, in some way influenced by ethnocentrism and conflict of interests amongst different ethnic groups. The different ideas of integration through education mean tensions between what has proposed by the government and what is accepted by the minority ethnic communities in relation to their interests and their desires towards education, culture and language, and their concern for economic benefits as well. For the Chinese and Indians, the concept of integration is not about social interaction *per se*, rather it also constructed by the distribution of social, political and economic wealth of the society. In this sense, the ethnic minorities see that policy which has been unfair to a particular group will segregate the society between those satisfied and those marginalised by the policy.

The contradiction between the state ideology and the ethnic minorities' stand point concerning the concept of national integration was rooted in the tension between Malay hegemony and the ethnic minorities' aspirations towards education. This is marked by competitive discourses about language, culture and identity, and also influenced by the discourse of *bumiputera* and *non-bumiputera* or Malay and non-Malay. In this context of policy discourse, different perspectives about education policy for national integration in Malaysia are influenced by discourses about social, economic and political positions, in and through which ethnicity is at play. The different ethnic groups' aspirations have produced different ethnic challenges, which



are in turn related to Malay and non-Malay's different ideologies concerning integration through education. Integration remains a contested concept in Malaysian education policy.

The Malays hold such aspirations in their ideological perspective about national integration, in which Malay language, culture and values are the foundation for constructing national identity. This connotes that the Malay are prone to assimilationist ideology in developing national integration. In contrast, discourses about mother tongue have influenced and constructed ethnic consciousness amongst the Chinese and Indians. They have also been influenced by the universal ideology of human rights in relation to culture and language, which have produced challenges to main stream discourses about the need for language homogeneity, embodied in the ideology of 'one language, one nation.' In Malaysian modern society, human rights and equal opportunities in education have become major aspects which have influenced ethnic minorities' discourses about education for integration. These competing discourses about integration have thus influenced the policy process in accommodating multiple aspirations surrounding ethnicity in relation to rights and social and economic circumstances.

Some Malay interviewees believed that the state has sacrificed some of their privileges and aspiration in accommodating the Chinese demands in relation to education. The policy which is based on political consensus between the political elites has weakened the Malay position in education policy in Malaysia. Hence, the problem of the policy is about the distribution of educational resources in negotiating the different interests and rights in relation to ethnicity. In this sense, there is a sort of built-up ethnic division that forms ethnic differences in the policy context for both Malay and non-Malay. The policy in practice is constructing ethnic boundaries within the binary of Malay and non-Malay in the policy processes for achieving national integration.

#### **9.4.3 Assimilation and Multiculturalism**

Ethnic challenges in Malaysian education policy processes for achieving national integration have been mainly produced by the Chinese community, as this ethnic group has economic and political bargaining power. The root of these challenges is related to ethnic consciousness in relation to culture and identity. This ethnic



consciousness of protecting culture and language has thus influenced the Chinese rejection of the assimilationist tendency embodied in the dominant ideology for achieving national integration in Malaysian education policy.

Although state policy production is state endeavour to promote national integration, implementation has produced real tensions amongst the different ethnic groups, who bring contested ideologies and interests to the discourse about national integration. The obstacles for achieving a common ideology for national integration in the school system between majority and minority ethnic groups are understandable and explicable- the Malays would not agree to any ideology that was not entirely Malay, while the non-Malays would resist such an ideology as amounting to assimilation of the non-Malays. In this thesis, discourse about multiculturalism amongst the Chinese and Indians, includes ideas of cultural and language diversity, cultural tolerance and understanding between different ethnic groups and equal opportunities in education based on language and education rights for all ethnic groups.

In this tension between assimilation and multiculturalism, the state is keen to practise discreet multiculturalism to accommodate ethnic minorities' rights in language and culture, but at the same time to position Malay cultural and language supremacy in education. In this context of policy practice of multiculturalism, such recognition of multiculturalism is for specific circumstances and for accomplishing certain ethnic interests so as to maintain power and harmonise relationships, given the ethnic tensions in relation to language and cultural rights in education. This is evident in the state policy towards multiculturalism, which is demonstrated by the way the state mediates the different tension and interests of ethnicity surrounding the policy, based on tactful, adjustable, accommodative, pragmatic and political orientations so as to accommodate (and appease) competing ethnic interests in education.

The education policy in Malaysia with the aim of national integration works across segmentation of cultural diversity and the need for commonality for unity for building the nation. In settling ethnic issues in education policy, the organising logic of the state approach draws on the intention of protecting the supremacy of the dominant group, as well as accommodating the demands of the ethnic minorities. Even though this policy approach and tactics to some degree do not satisfy the Chinese, Indians or



the Malay, this is the way the state tries to accommodate all their interests, while needing to ensure the hegemonic control of the dominant group, while also building the nation within the context of cultural diversity.

### **9.5 National and Global Arenas in the Policy Context for National Integration**

This research has shown that globalisation has influenced the state ideology in developing the nation through education. This has appeared in some education policies for developing Malaysian education standards in the international arena and has also influenced the state orientation toward language and is reflective of a state developmentalist approach to globalisation. As discussed at various points in this thesis, policy favouring English has become an important aspect in Malaysian education for enhancing Malaysian educational standards in the context of globalisation. However, this policy concern has produced serious ethnic challenges. The ethnic challenges related to this policy are caused by a policy strategy that did not seek acceptance of the ethnic communities for the policy. As this study has shown, this is exemplified by ethnic resistance to the implementation of ETeMS, particularly amongst the Chinese. However, there is also concern about the policy, specifically the way it has been implemented, amongst the Malay and Indians.

The policy of ETeMS can be viewed as a strategy for negotiating global arenas of influence, and for enhancing the Malaysian younger generation's capabilities in the face of enhanced global competition. Here Malaysia is reflecting a globalised policy discourse of education policy today being central to national economic competitiveness in the face of an emergent globalised economy. While the state's intention in this policy is to enhance education in assisting the state agenda of achieving the aim of developed country status, in the context of ethnic politics, this policy has been viewed as producing contradictory effects in the mainstream agenda for enhancing Malay social and economic mobility through education. In this study, there are perceptions that this policy has marginalised the Malay in respect of their social and economic mobility and opportunities in education. In this regard, the Malay have been viewed as left behind by the policy as they were pursuing their educational success through national language in the Malaysian education system. As most of the



interviewees suggested, this is the case particularly for the majority Malay in rural areas and from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

This study also has shown that the state in implementing policy has been viewed as providing advantages for one group and disadvantages for other ethnic groups. Referring to the implementation of ETeMS, the state practice in Chinese schools is interpreted by the Malay as a double standard in relation to the policy implementation, with the opportunity for the Chinese schools to continue Maths and Science instruction in both Mandarin and English. The resistance to the policy is also related to the interests of all ethnic communities which are interplayed with their social and economic status. The policy towards English can be seen to have harmed the progression of Malay, Chinese and Indian mother tongue instruction. Discourse about ETeMS is also linked to socio-economic divisions between the Malay and non-Malay and in rural-urban society. Urban middle class families are more likely than others to be able to support their children in relation to English language instruction, thus potentially exacerbating socio-economic and rural disadvantages through the Malaysian schooling system. This situation is perhaps more likely to disadvantage Malay students than others.

Further, this study has shown that the state approach in mediating global demands in education is based on pragmatic consideration in producing policy in education. The economic has shaped the ideology of pragmatism in the policy process of enhancing education development in Malaysia. This is evident in the state action in the policy of language in education. In this context of a pragmatic approach, such consideration about language is derived from the state perspective regarding economic and national development in the context of global competition. For instance, this study has shown that languages that can advantage the nation in global and international business relationships have been promoted in the Malaysian schooling system, for example, as is the case with Mandarin.

However, this policy orientation has produced tensions between the pragmatic concern for national and education development and ethnic interests related to culture and identity. In the context of the policy emphasis given to English, the element of nationalistic ideology in promoting national identity remains important. Some



interviewees recognised the pragmatic importance of idealistic policy in the context of national aspirations, but were still critical of the implementation of this policy. In this case, discourse about policy for integrating the nation through language in education was surrounded by the politics of emotion and nationalistic idealism marked by national ideology in education policy for integration. On the other hand, the politics of reason also influenced the policy process for developing the nation and its human capital in the context of global challenges. As discussed in Chapter Eight, this is a tension between nationalistic concern and the pragmatic concern of developing the nation through language utilisation.

## **9.6 Summative Statement of Research Findings**

This section presents statements of the research findings in response to the five specific research questions that were established in Chapter One of the thesis.

1. Malaysian education policy aimed at achieving national integration post 1970 has been about strengthening the national education policy ideology for integrating the young generation through education. Since 1970, the state intentionally focused on making national language and national schools a central aspect for national integration in and through the Malaysian education system. However, this policy continues to be articulated and rearticulated in the face of the multifaceted demands surrounding ethnicity issues in Malaysia. The Malaysian education policy for national integration has also to reconcile ethnic tensions around the imagined community which is the nation and emergent global pressures and demands. Thus the state has produced and experimented with various policies in mediating different ideologies and interests in relation to ethnicity, nation and global interests. The same has been true in respect of the implementation of such policy. In these policies and policy processes aimed at integration, the central feature of Malaysian education policy has been an accommodative, pragmatic and political strategy, attempting to appease competing ethnic political interests, while at the same time seeking to create national integration across ethnic groups.
2. The important aspects of ethnic challenges in Malaysian education policy are about issues of language, culture and identities, and the school provision for certain ethnic communities. These ethnic challenges have been those related to ethnic politics and appeared to be important elements in framing the policy



orientation and policy implementation. The policy in practice seems to be inclined to ethnic-based politics, which mediate different ethnic preferences concerning education. The scenario of ethnic challenges also involved discourses about economic interests which have been influential in the politics of ethnic challenges to the policy. In the context of ethnic arithmetic, the state has practised an accommodative approach to manage and mediate various challenges from differing ethnic communities. As a consequence, the state has always negotiated its policy orientation and implementation in order to reconcile these issues of ethnicity with the policy agenda for uniting the nation.

3. While language remains an important issue surrounding ethnic challenges in Malaysian education policy, the challenge of making the nation competitive in the global arena in both education and the economic field has produced other contested education policy discourses. The pragmatic ideology of education policy in the context of globalisation has witnessed the introduction of English as the language of instruction in Science and Maths, but also produced challenges to the policy. The evidence presented in this research would also suggest there is a lot of opposition to the way this policy was produced and to its implementation, rather than opposition to the policy's intentions or goals. The tensions here work across nationalistic aspirations for national language status and the more pragmatic politics for developing the nation so as to better accommodate competitive global economic demands. There are also socio-economic effects to this policy, as the research interviews indicated, urban and high socio-economic status students would seem to be further advantaged in education by this policy, given their greater contact at home and elsewhere with the English language. The research interviews demonstrated that socio-economic factors were significant in relation to schooling and opportunities, across all ethnic groups.
4. The policy processes aimed at achieving national integration through education, as indicted in the research reported here, have been regarded as unsuccessful in producing 'real' or 'genuine' integration amongst different ethnic groups in Malaysia. The policy community represented by Malay and non-Malay interviewees produced different conceptions about education policy for integration. They regarded the policy processes to some extent as producing a sense of ethnicity and ethnic identities in Malaysia pluralistic society. By and



large, the Malay viewed the policy as inclined to marginalising their special rights, because of the accommodation of ethnic minorities' demands in education. This is in contrast with the ethnic minorities' perceptions of the policies, which they saw as keen to abolish their rights in education. The individuals interviewed in this research also expressed the view that the state in its education policy aimed at achieving integration, was more likely to develop and implement policy based on political circumstances and competing political interests, and in so doing to adopt an accommodative strategy rather than an authoritative one concerning national integration.

5. Discourses concerning ethnicity, the nation and globalisation in relation to education policy for national integration are interwoven with Malay and non-Malay discourses about policy and its implications for their interests in the cultural, educational and economic domains. Different aspirations and ideologies are embodied in different perspectives about national integration through education in Malaysia. In discourses about ethnicity, the nation and globalisation, both Malay and non-Malay interviewees are largely concerned with the implications of any policy for their interests and those of the nation. These different ethnic aspirations are entwined with the different language, cultural and economic interests of the ethnic groups which constitute Malaysian pluralistic society.

## **9.7 Recommendations**

This study has analysed the Malaysian education policy aimed at achieving national integration. It has looked at policy processes and structures and the national and global contexts in relation to ethnic-based challenges to the policy. From this study we have gained insights into issues of ethnicity surrounding the policy. However, I must be cautious about extrapolating from the research findings for informing policy so as to improve the current situation. Nevertheless, the research would suggest the following aspects may benefit from review:

1. The state needs to reconsider varying its approach for promoting integration in the Malaysian education setting that has included different school systems in relation to language of instruction. A concept of integration aimed at enhancing ethnic interaction amongst the children of different ethnic groups perhaps could contribute to developing a sense of tolerance and understanding between children



from different ethnic groups. However, this is not an easy solution to the integration issue, especially when this raises the issue of the position of vernacular schools in the Malaysian education system. Accordingly, the creative and innovative idea of integration is important in mediating different ethnic sentiments in Malaysian education. This can be pursued by the programme for integration aimed at enhancing ethnic interaction and understanding of different cultures, without an agenda that neglects historical sentiments in relation to ethnic and cultural identities. It is also important for the policy to have explicit statements and clear implementation for provision of Chinese and Indian education, as this could to some extent remove fears of the potential extinction of culture, language and identity rights for these ethnic minorities.

2. Discourses about integration are also connected to the social, economic and political contexts of contemporary Malaysian life. The demand for integration is entwined with demand for a democratic and fair policy for different ethnic groups. While the state has to remain steadfast on a policy for Malay privileges for the core aspects of the education system, it should also ensure that other ethnic groups are given social and economic opportunities in relation to socio-economic position and it should outlaw inequality of opportunities imposed on any individuals or groups. This could assist in producing a just and fair policy in the education field in the Malaysian context. The need to give more emphasis to socio-economic inequalities across and within ethnic groups, including both majority and minority groups, is a clear and significant finding of this research. Such a focus would offer indirect opportunities for ethnic integration.
3. A more democratic approach to policy production in education for achieving integration is important for mediating the contested aspirations and ideologies of ethnicity in the Malaysian education context. Thus, policy needs to reflect such demands in its production and implementation within the democratic process, so as to manage conflicting and competing discourses in relation to ethnicity, rather than enforcing policy by administrative and technical approaches that usually increase ethnic resistance. In this sense, open discussion and public participation in policy production are needed for avoiding ethnic sentiments and prejudice. This could enhance understanding about policy and its ideology in achieving national integration in Malaysian pluralistic society. More democratic discussions about education policy are required.



4. Recognition of cultural diversity through multiculturalism is more appropriate than enforcing or attempting to enforce homogeneity through assimilation so as to achieve national integration through the Malaysian education system. This is to recognise the Malaysian schooling system is a legacy from colonial policy practices, with the state continuing to accommodate ethnic minorities' rights to mother tongue. Within this context, the idea of multiculturalism is needed to consider how best to accommodate multiple aspirations of ethnicity in relation to cultural, language and ethnic identities and through the education system. The idea of multiculturalism should be promoted in the school curriculum for developing a concept of the Malaysian nation by recognising the cultural and linguistic diversity in education and society.
5. As this study has shown, ethnic harmony is an important aspect in the policy process of Malaysian education policy for enhancing integration. Policy should be based on a framework that can accomplish the multiple aspirations of different ethnic groups and at the same time be fair in the distribution of education resources, while recognising the need for preserving cultures and ethnic identities. It is of utmost importance that ethnic minorities' aspirations for language, identity and cultural maintenance should be given due consideration and accommodated to a certain extent, as long the overall and long term interest of nation building is not jeopardized. This perhaps can be pursued through a policy rooted in acknowledgment of multiculturalism and socioeconomic factors, rather than policy rooted only in ethnic-based politics. At the same time, recognition of the dominant groups' aspirations seems to be an important aspect for maintaining national cohesion, as this has been historically and politically constituted in the form of pluralistic society in Malaysia. This aspect of dominant ethnic aspirations and accommodation of ethnic minorities' rights in education are already constituted in Malaysian educational policy. However, policy implementation should be about meeting the ethnic aspirations of all groups.
6. The spread of national ideology through the education curriculum would help the state develop national identity and common shared values for constructing the imagined community of the nation amongst all Malaysians. In this regard, school curriculum through history and language subjects could be a tool for developing common values and identity amongst children from different ethnic communities.



7. While the policy orientation is based on Malay or *bumiputera* special privileges, fairness for all also has to be considered in policy implementation. Feelings of ethnic discrimination can probably be avoided if the policy practice is fair in accommodating both Malay and non-Malay aspirations about education. Education policy can contribute to constructing a just society and should be based on fair distribution of resources and economic prosperity and education opportunities. This perhaps can be achieved through policy based on socio-economic factors rather than ethnically-based policy in delivering education and economic opportunities.
8. Policy also needs to respond to global demands without neglecting concerns with building national identity. In the case of English language in Malaysian education, the implementation of such policy needs to ensure that various factors in relation to ethnicity and economic factors have been accommodated. In spite of ethnicity, other factors especially social class or socio-economic position are important in influencing ethnic groups' challenges to policy. In the context of such challenges, the state needs to be concerned about equal opportunities for all, irrespective of socioeconomic status and rural-urban location. Disadvantaged groups need access to high quality education irrespective of background, location and schools attended and irrespective of ethnicity. These are important considerations in relation to the place of English in Malaysian education.

### **9.8 Suggested Areas for Further Research**

This research has focused on Malaysian education policy for national integration and the challenges this policy has faced since independence. Given this concern, future research might take the following directions:

1. There is a need for a study to investigate the impact of Malaysian education policy ideology for developing common identity and values amongst different ethnic groups. In-depth case studies on the construction of national identity through education amongst students of different ethnic backgrounds could provide information on the effectiveness or otherwise of education policy in relation to national integration.
2. Very little research has been carried out on ethnicity in Malaysian education policy development. Thus such studies are needed to explore further how ethnic



issues influence the micro level policy processes in the school context. These studies would in effect be policy implementation studies.

3. Research is required into how the curriculum in the Malaysian education system develops national identity and constructs an ideology of the imagined nation amongst children and young people from different ethnic backgrounds. These studies would involve research into curriculum practices for developing national identity amongst the younger generation. Such research might also consider what a multicultural curriculum might look like in the Malaysian educational policy context.
4. Comparative studies of policy in education between nations which are multi-ethnic and pluralistic would be very useful. These would offer some insights into the problems faced in uniting multi-ethnic societies and the role that education systems and schools might play in relation to this. This would be a return to the original impulse for the creation of comparative education: the opportunity to learn from the practices of other nations facing similar educational problems.

## **9.9 Conclusion**

The complexity, coherence and incoherence of Malaysian education policy aimed at achieving national integration in relation to ethnicity have been documented and analysed throughout this study, utilising two main modes of data collection. The study has shown how Malaysian education policy for enhancing integration has dealt with complex and multiple aspirations in relation to ethnicity, national and global interests in an ever changing and developing context, where the colonial inheritance in terms of competing ethnic interests is also still seen to have effects. Indeed, we can conclude that the context of multi-ethnic society in relation to different social, economic and political positions has influenced the state to assume the existence of a social arrangement in continuous conflict with the policy ideologies of integrating the nation. Thus, to reiterate, policy for achieving national integration across ethnic groups has retained meta-policy status in Malaysian education policy since independence.

However, given the evidence mounted in this research, it can be seen that policy production for achieving national integration in this variegated context of ethnic politics, national concerns and global pressures has achieved a somewhat fragile



balance or settlement, where the borders between national and ethnic interests, between pressures for unity and realities of diversity are difficult to manage with any certainty and for long periods of time. Thus the ethnic integration policies, which have been the focus of this research, are always shifting in relation to their ongoing work of mediating and accommodating the multiple (ethnic) interests surrounding education. This has required the state to balance these various challenges in negotiating and reconciling these factors so as to facilitate the process of nation building through the education system. These policy intentions have been about creating the imagined community of a nation in which there are competing and differing national imaginaries across ethnic groups. Here we see a tension between assimilationist policy proclivities and multicultural realities and policy desires. We also see the accommodative strategies of the state in education policy working across these tensions and desires. Such tensions also relate to socio-economic status and realities which intersect with ethnicity, but in increasingly complex ways in contemporary Malaysia.

One central argument of this research has been that a policy sociology approach is able to provide the most coherent and complex explanations of how the politics of ethnicity and other related agencies influenced policy in Malaysian education aimed at enhancing national integration. This is a result of the recognition that both historical and social science perspectives are necessary to the effective understanding of policy. It is hoped that the effectiveness of policy sociology has been demonstrated in the research reported here in the multiple insights it has provided. This research has been concerned with providing knowledge and understanding of the issues being studied in an attempt to contribute to policy improvement in education in Malaysia through the detailed documentation and analyses it has provided of the chronology and politics of education policy seeking to ensure national integration.

The contribution of the research has been in its application of a policy sociology approach to analyses of Malaysian education policy aimed at national integration across ethnic groups and in its attempt to give some voice to those ethnic groups who have not been heard in education policy research conducted to date in Malaysia. Through a thorough, ongoing and articulated reflexivity, the research sought to reject a stance of epistemological innocence and in so doing sought to understand the



positions of the three main ethnic groups in Malaysia and to provide a full and fair account of the politics surrounding the structure and nature of school provision and the politics of ethnicity and education policies for national integration, which have played out in differing ways in Malaysian education since 1970. Such analyses and understanding are but one step in ongoing debates about a way forward in Malaysian education, given its multi-ethnic character and the pressures of globalisation. Such understanding will also need to accommodate economic opportunities and changing socio-economic realities across the ethnic groups which constitute Malaysia today in a globalising world. This research has demonstrated very clearly that in Appadurai's (1996) terms, the nation and the state in contemporary Malaysia remain the project of each other with education policy playing a central role in these projects.



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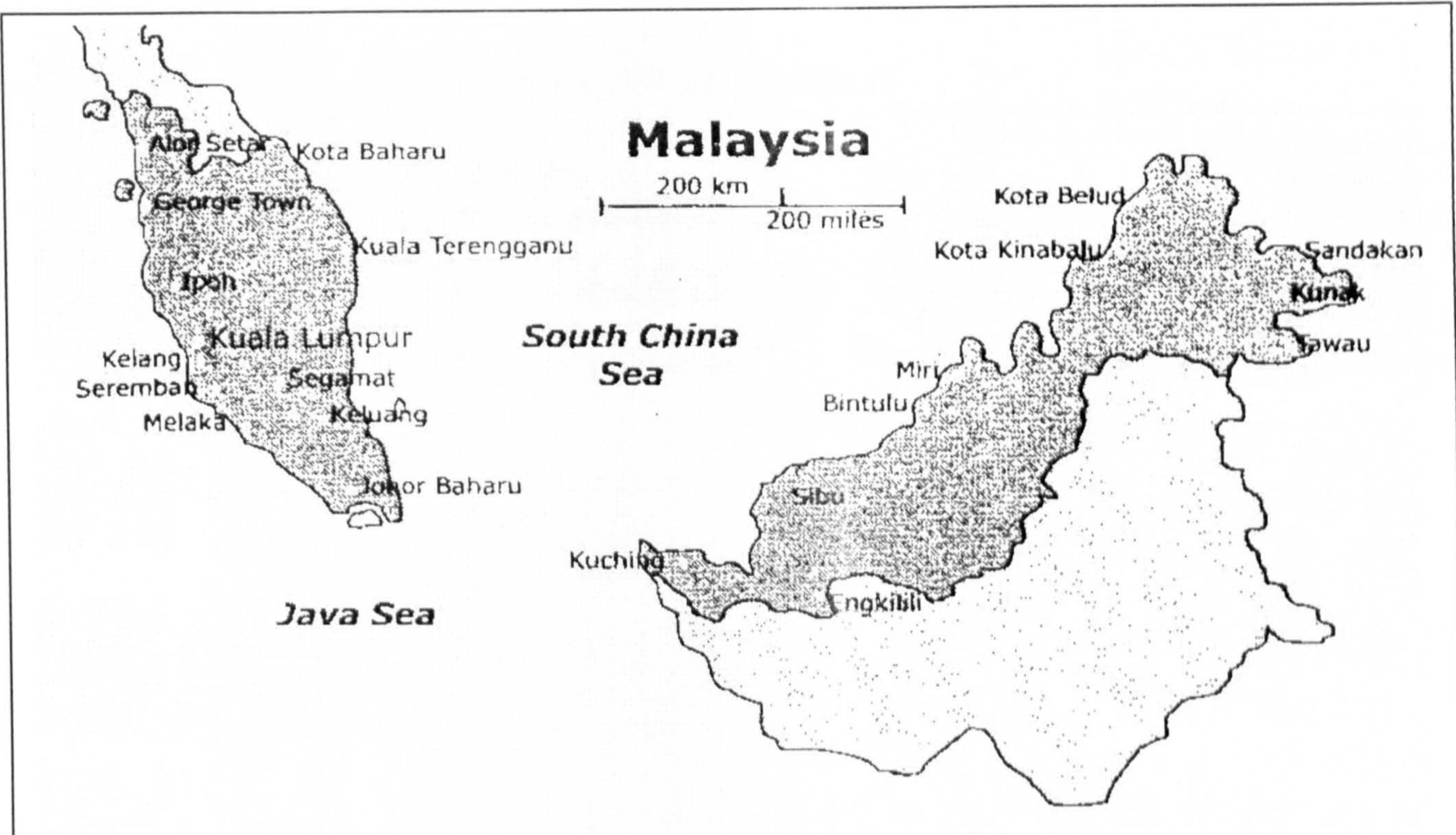
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**MALAYSIA: BASIC INFORMATION**



Land Area	:	329 758 sq km
Population	:	24.53 (mid 2002)
Capital City	:	Kuala Lumpur
Language	:	Bahasa Melayu (Official Language) English (Second Language)
Time	:	8 hours ahead of GMT
Official Name	:	Federation of Malaysia
Form of State	:	Federation of Malaysia
Head of State	:	King DYMM Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Ibni Al-Marhum Tuanku yed Putra Jamalullail
Head of Government	:	Prime Minister Dato' Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad (until 31 October 2003) Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (1 Nov 2003 – the date)

*Source:* Ministry of Education Malaysia, Educational Planning and Research Division (March 2004). *Quick Facts 2003 Malaysian Educational Statistics*



LETTER FOR ORGANISATION



**THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD**

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**School of Education  
Department of Educational Studies**

Web Page: <http://www.shef.ac.uk/education/>

*Professor John Nixon, Head of School*

The Education Building  
388 Glossop Road  
Sheffield S10 2JA  
Switchboard: +44(0)114 222 2000  
Fax: +44(0)114 279 6236  
Direct Line: +44(0)114 222 8083  
E-mail: [c.m.gafney@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:c.m.gafney@sheffield.ac.uk)

Date: 26<sup>th</sup> May 2005

.....  
.....  
.....

Dear Sir

**Request for Collecting Data and Making Interview with Potential Individual at:**

---

I am Hazri bin Jamil who is a full-time PhD student in the School of Education at The University of Sheffield in the United Kingdom. I am during conducting my research entitled "Ethnic Challenges of Nation Building: A Study of Malaysian Education Policy for National Integration (1970 to Present)".

This doctoral research will investigate and seek to understand ethnicity issues in Malaysian education policies that aim to achieve national integration; the historical focus is from 1970 until recent times. This research will analyse the ethnic challenges and influences on the production of Malaysian educational policies for national integration, related to language and curriculum issues.

For your information, I will get back to Malaysia for collecting data end of July until mid of September 2005. In order to facilitate data collection, I solicit your kind cooperation and the necessary assistance to enable me to complete this research.

Thank you for your attention and assistance.

Yours sincerely

(HAZRI BIN JAMIL)  
e-,mail: [H.Jamil@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:H.Jamil@sheffield.ac.uk)



INVITATION LETTER FOR INTEVIEW



**THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD**

**School of Education  
Department of Educational Studies**

Web Page: <http://www.shef.ac.uk/education/>

*Professor John Nixon, Head of School*

The Education Building  
388 Glossop Road  
Sheffield S10 2JA  
Switchboard: +44(0)114 222 2000  
Fax: +44(0)114 279 6236  
Direct Line: +44(0)114 222 8083  
E-mail: [c.m.gafney@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:c.m.gafney@sheffield.ac.uk)

Date: 11<sup>th</sup> June 2005

.....  
.....  
.....

Dear .....

**Invitation for Interview**

---

I am Hazri bin Jamil who is a full-time PhD student in the School of Education, University of Sheffield, United Kingdom. I am conducting my research entitled "Ethnic Challenges of Nation Building: A Study of Malaysian Education Policy for National Integration (1970 to Present)".

I have been informed by ..... that my application for collecting data and making interview with potential individual at .....has been accepted. I am very pleased that Mr. .... has proposed your name as one of the potential individual that available to be interviewed for my PhD research.

For your information, I will get back to Malaysia for collecting data end of July until mid of September 2005. In order to facilitate data collection, I solicit your kind cooperation and the necessary assistance to enable me to complete this research.

I am very pleased if you can propose a date, place and time for the interview session in August 2005. Attached herewith are documents to obtain your consent for the interview. Looking forward to hearing from you.

Thank you for your attention and cooperation.

Yours sincerely

(HAZRI BIN JAMIL)  
E-Mail: [H.Jamil@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:H.Jamil@sheffield.ac.uk)



INFORMATION SHEET**THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD**

**School of Education**  
**Department of Educational Studies**

Web Page: <http://www.shef.ac.uk/education/>

*Professor John Nixon, Head of School*

The Education Building  
 388 Glossop Road  
 Sheffield S10 2JA

Switchboard: +44(0)114 222 2000

Answerphone: +44(0)114 222 8116

Fax: +44(0)114 278 8318

Direct Line: +44(0)114 222

**INFORMATION SHEET**

Name of Researcher: **HAZRI JAMIL**

Research Title: **ETHNIC CHALLENGES OF NATION BUILDING: A STUDY OF MALAYSIAN EDUCATION POLICY FOR NATIONAL INTEGRATION (1970 TO PRESENT).**

**Description:** This doctoral research will investigate and seek to understand ethnicity issues in Malaysian education policies that aim to achieve national integration; the historical focus is from 1970 until recent times. This research will analyse the ethnic challenges and influences on the production of Malaysian educational policies for national integration, related to language and curriculum issues.

As part of this research, I am interviewing a sample of relevant people. I would very much like to interview you as part of my study.

Your participation in this interview is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you do decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part in this study, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. You are free to not answer any question or questions if you choose. This will not affect the relationship you have with the researcher.

All information collected will be treated as confidential. The audio tapes and transcript will be stored securely. Individual participants will not be identified in the thesis report.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to:

- answer questions relating to the issues about ethnicity in relation to Malaysian education policies for national integration

If you have any concerns or would like to know the outcomes of this research, please contact my supervisor Professor Robert Lingard at the address below.

Thank you for considering this invitation.

HAZRI JAMIL, PhD Candidate  
 Tel: 0014 261 7281  
 E-mail: [H.Jamil@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:H.Jamil@sheffield.ac.uk)

Date: 11<sup>th</sup> May 2005



*Person to contact:*

*Should you have any questions about the research or any related matter, please contact the researcher or my supervisor*

Supervisor: Professor Robert Lingard

Tel.: +44(0)114 222 8089

Fax: +44(0)114 279 6236

E-mail: [R.Lingard@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:R.Lingard@sheffield.ac.uk)





School of Education  
Department of Educational Studies

Web Page: <http://www.shef.ac.uk/education/>

*Professor Jon Nixon, Head of School*

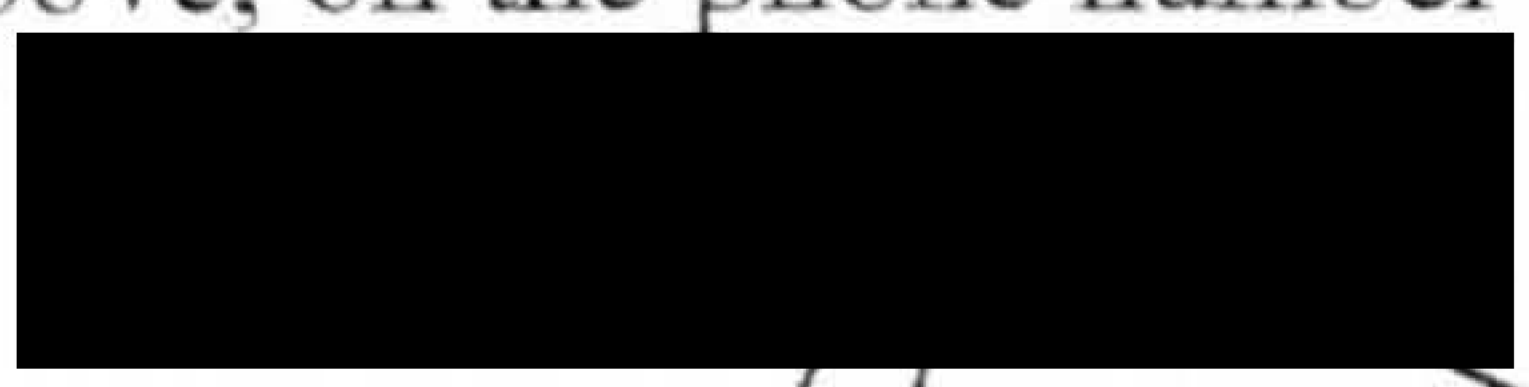
The Education Building  
388 Glossop Road  
Sheffield S10 2JA  
Switchboard: 0114 222 2000  
Answerphone: 0114 222 8116  
Fax: 0114 278 8318  
Direct Line: 0114 222

### To Whom it May Concern

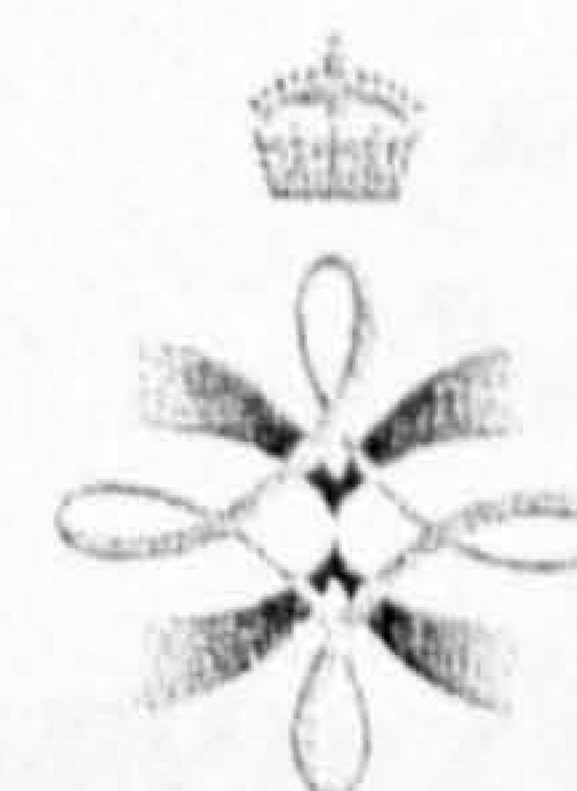
This letter is to introduce Mr Hazri Bin Jamil who is a full-time PhD student in the School of Education at The University of Sheffield in the United Kingdom. I am his supervisor and would kindly ask that you assist him in whatever ways possible in the pursuit of his PhD studies. Hazri will be collecting data for his research during 2005.

Hazri will be conducting his research within the framework of ethical requirements of The University of Sheffield and as required by the British Educational Research Association (BERA). All data collected will be dealt with in a confidential manner.

If you wish to know more about Hazri's research, I am happy to be contacted on the address above, on the phone number below or by e-mail at : [r.lingard@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:r.lingard@sheffield.ac.uk)

  
**Professor Robert Lingard**  
**Ph: +44 (0) 114 2228098**

**19 May 2005**





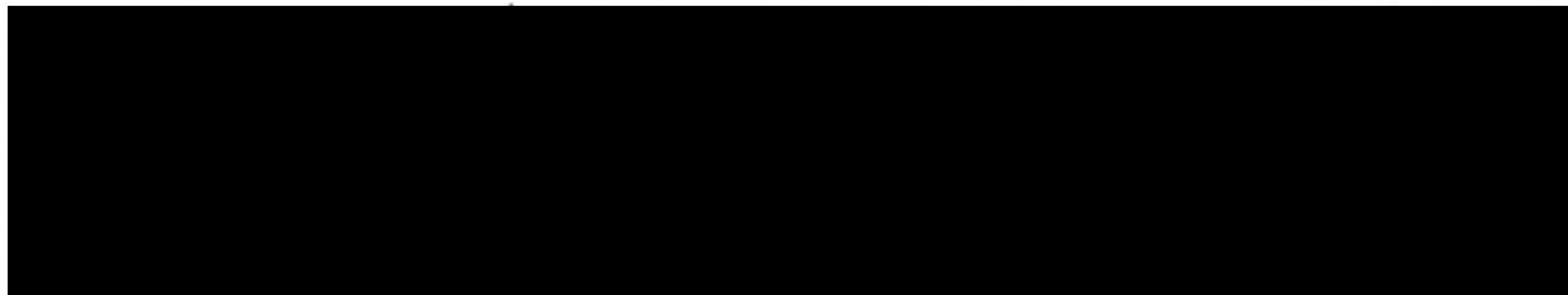


8 June 2005

**To Whom It May Concern:**

Hazri bin Jamil is a research student at the University of Sheffield in the School of Education, in his second year of study, under the supervision of Professor Bob Lingard. Mr bin Jamil intends to undertake fieldwork to support his research in the area of *'Ethnic Politics and the Challenges for Nation Building: A Study of Malaysian Educational Policy'*. I would be grateful if you could give him your full co-operation.

Any information given to Mr bin Jamil will be treated in confidence. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact myself, as Head of Research Degrees on [j.wellington@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:j.wellington@sheffield.ac.uk) or telephone on the above number, or Professor Lingard by email on [r.lingard@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:r.lingard@sheffield.ac.uk).



Professor Jerry Wellington  
Head of Research Degrees





**CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN INTERVIEW**



**THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD**

**School of Education  
Department of Educational Studies**

Web Page: <http://www.shef.ac.uk/education/>

*Professor John Nixon, Head of School*

The Education Building  
388 Glossop Road  
Sheffield S10 2JA  
Switchboard: +44(0)114 222 2000  
Answerphone: +44(0)114 222 8116  
Fax: +44(0)114 278 8318  
Direct Line: +44(0)114 222

**Name of Researcher:** HAZRI JAMIL

*e-mail: H.Jamil@sheffield.ac.uk*

**Research Title:** ETHNIC CHALLENGES OF NATION BUILDING: A STUDY OF MALAYSIAN EDUCATION POLICY FOR NATIONAL INTEGRATION (1970 TO PRESENT).

**CONSENT FORM**

**Consent for Participation in Interview Research**

	Yes	No
• I agree to voluntarily participate in this interview and give my consent freely.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I have read and understand the explanation of the research provided to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I understand that the research will be conducted in accordance with the Information Sheet.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in the thesis using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I understand that all information collected will remain secure to the researcher	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I consent to the audio-taping of this interview	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I understand that I have opportunity to review the written transcript of the interview and to delete any portion I feel does not reflect the veracity of the interview	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I understand I can withdraw from the interview at any time, and do not have to give any reason for withdrawing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I have been given a copy of this consent form	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Print Name: .....

Signature: .....

Date: .....



**Interview guide/ aide mémoire**

Estimated times: 2 hours

Introduction

Introduce self, express gratitude and thanks for agreeing to give time.

Introduce study, aims and objectives of the study.

Assurance of confidentiality – prior approval if publish or disseminate.

Obtain information about interviewee.

**A. Education for national integration**

- As you know, one of the aims of Malaysian education system is to foster national integration amongst children from difference ethnic groups in school. How do you regard this role of education in Malaysia? Do you think policies/programmes produced by the state and implemented in the schools actually promote national integration?
- How successful has the education system in Malaysia been at integrating children from different ethnic backgrounds?
- In order to promote the idea of national integration through the education system, the government has produced various programmes in the school system such as: a common curriculum, common examination, Integrated School Project in 1985 and Vision School in 1997. What is your opinion about these kinds of programmes? (*Probe*)
- There are challenges towards the production of these policies around ethnicity issues. What is your view of these issues? (*Probe*)
- What sort of programmes do you think the government should develop to foster the idea of national integration amongst children in school?



## **B. Vernacular School System**

- What do you think about the vernacular school in our education system? (*Probe*)
- Does it fit with the aim of national integration for building the Malaysian nation? If so, how?
- Do you see it aligned with the national interest for national integration or might it contributed to ethnic segregation? How and why?

### Special question for Chinese interviewees

- What are the important factors that encourage many Chinese's parents to send their children to Chinese schools? (*Probe*)

## **C. Language Issues**

- Issues on the national language as the medium of instruction in the school system
  - What is your view about the ultimate objective of the national education policy in Malaysia to use Bahasa Malaysia as the medium of instruction in all educational institutions to unite the nation? (*Probe*)
  - What are the ethnic challenges regarding language policy (Malay language as the medium of instruction and English for Teaching Mathematics and Science (ETeMS)) in our education system? (*Probe*)
  - Do you think that the ethnic challenges to those policies have influenced the process of policy production and implementation? How? (*Probe*)
  - What is your stand on mother-tongue education?
  - What is your view of the implementation of Pupils' Own Language (POL) in the school system? To what extent did you think it meet minority groups' interest?
  - Should the government reconsider the choice of language as the medium of instruction in the school system? Why?



**D. Educational concepts and strategies for national integration in the Malaysian education system**

- How do you think the Malaysian education system in school can meet:
  - The need for national integration (*probe*)
  - The various interests of different ethnic groups (*probe*), and
  - The interests of the nation in the context of globalisation (*probe*)
- What kind of national identity should we promote to the younger generation in schools in order to develop the nation which is united, integrated and just? (*Probe*)

*Thank you for your informative answers to my questions. Is there anything about the topic we have discussed that you would like to make some further comments on?*





UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

**PUSAT BAHASA DAN TERJEMAHAN**  
CENTRE FOR LANGUAGES AND TRANSLATION

**APPENDIX H**

August 25, 2005

To Whom It May Concern:

**Re : Confirmation of Translation of Interview Transcripts**

With regards to the above matter, I have checked the translation from Bahasa Malaysia to English of the interview transcripts provided by Mr. Hazri bin Jamil.

The English translation is correct and reflects the true content in Bahasa Malaysia.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,



**(DR. MOHAMAD JAFRE ZAINOL ABIDIN)**

Deputy Director

Centre of Languages and Translation

Universiti Sains Malaysia

DJZA/nhr-en hazri jamil



**LETTER TO ECONOMIC PLANNING UNIT**



**THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD**

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**School of Education  
Department of Educational Studies**

Web Page: <http://www.shef.ac.uk/education/>

*Professor John Nixon, Head of School*

The Education Building  
388 Glossop Road  
Sheffield S10 2JA  
Switchboard: +44(0)114 222 2000  
Fax: +44(0)114 279 6236  
Direct Line: +44(0)114 222 8083  
E-mail: [c.m.gafney@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:c.m.gafney@sheffield.ac.uk)

11 May 2005

The Director General  
Economic Planning Unit  
Block B5 & B6  
Federal Government Administrative Centre  
62502 PUTRAJAYA, MALAYSIA

Dear Sir/Madam,

***Application to Conduct Research in the Education Ministry and National Archive  
Malaysia***

---

I hereby refer to the above reference and would like to inform you that I would like to have your approval to conduct a PhD research project titled:

**Ethnic Challenges of Nation Building: A Study of Malaysian Education  
Policy for National Integration (1970 to Present)**

Attached herewith:

- a. EPU Research form 1 (3 copies)
- b. Research proposal (2 copies)
- c. A Photostat copy of passport
- d. A Photostat copy of identity card
- e. Introduction letter from University of Sheffield and Supervisor
- f. Proposal approval from Proposal Committee, School of Education, University of Sheffield
- g. Approval to conduct a research from Research Ethics Committee, School of Education, University of Sheffield

Thank you for your attention and assistance.

Yours sincerely,

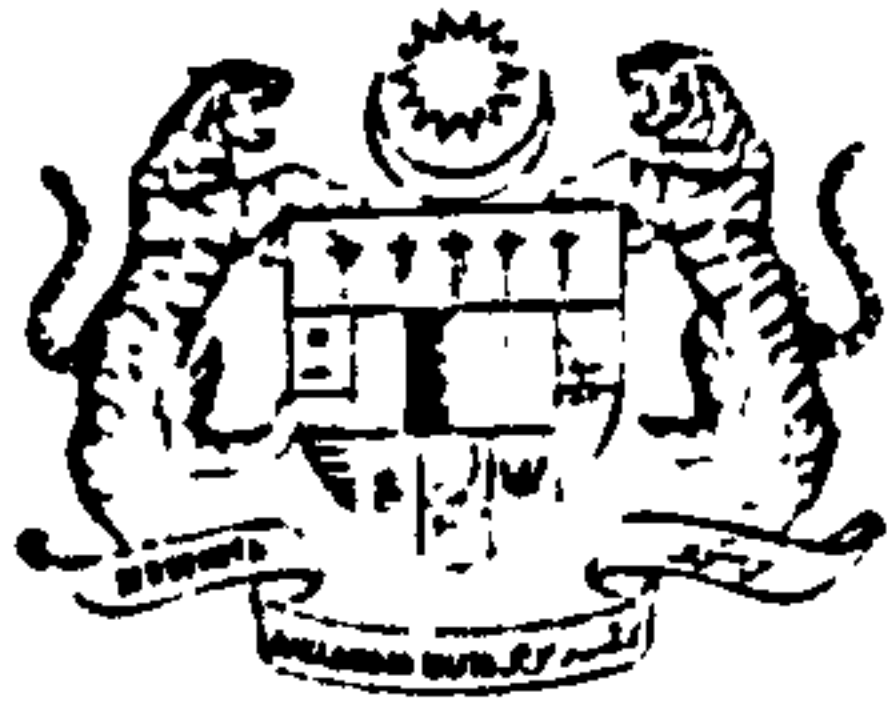
**HAZRI BIN JAMIL**, PhD Student  
University of Sheffield  
School of Education  
Department of Educational Studies  
The Education Building  
388 Glossop Road



Sheffield S10 2JA, United Kingdom

c.c. Secretary General, Educational Planning, Research and Policy Division  
Ministry of Education, Level 2-4, Block E8  
Federal Government Administrative Centre, 62604 PUTRAJAYA.





UNIT PERANCANG EKONOMI  
Economic Planning Unit  
JABATAN PERDANA MENTERI  
Prime Minister's Department  
BLOK B5 & B6,  
PUSAT PENTADBIRAN KERAJAAN PERSEKUTUAN  
62502 PUTRAJAYA  
MALAYSIA

APPENDIX J

Telefon: 88883333  
Fax: 603-88883798

Ruj. Tuan:

Your Ref.:

Ruj. Kami:

Our Ref.:

UPE: 40/200/19/1368

Tarikh:

Date:

4 August 2005

Hazri bin Jamil  
4 Town Street  
Tinsley Sheffield  
S91UG United Kingdom

### APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN MALAYSIA

With reference to your application dated 1 June 2005, I am pleased to inform you that your application to conduct research in Malaysia has been approved by the **Research Promotion and Co-Ordination Committee, Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister's Department**. The details of the approval are as follows:

Researcher's name: **HAZRI BIN JAMIL**

Passport No. / I. C No: **680616-01-5019**

Nationality : **MALAYSIA**

Title of Research : **"EDUCATION POLICY FOR NATION BUILDING: A STUDY OF MALAYSIAN EDUCATION POLICY 1970-2004"**

Period of Research Approved: **TWO MONTHS**

2. Please collect your Research Pass in person from the Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister's Department, Parcel B, Level 4 Block B5, Federal Government Administrative Centre, 62502 Putrajaya and bring along two (2) passport size photographs. You also required to comply with the rules and regulations stipulated from time to time by the agencies with which you have dealings in the conduct of your research.

3. I would like to draw your attention to the undertaking signed by you that you will submit without cost to the Economic Planning Unit the following documents:

- a) A brief summary of your research findings on completion of your research and before you leave Malaysia; and




- b) Three (3) copies of your final dissertation/publication.
4. Lastly, please submit a copy of your preliminary and final report directly to the State Government where you carried out your research.

ATTENTION

This letter is only to inform you the status of your application and cannot be used as a research pass.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

  
(MUNIRAH ABD. MANAN)  
b.p. Ketua Pengarah,  
Unit Perancang Ekonomi,  
(Seksyen Ekonomi Makro)  
Email: munirah@epu.jpm.my  
Tel: 88882809/2818/2827

C.c:

Pengarah  
Bahagian Perancangan Penyelidikan & Dasar Pendidikan  
Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia  
Aras 1-4, Blok E8  
Kompleks Kerajaan Parcel E  
Pusat Pentadbiran Kerajaan Persekutuan  
**62604 Putrajaya**  
(u.p: Dr. Amir Mohd Salleh@Saleh) (Ruj. Tuan: KP(BPPP)603/008 (09))

Ketua Pengarah,  
Arkib Negara Malaysia,  
Jalan Duta,  
**50568 Kuala Lumpur.**  
(u.p: En. Zaldin Mohd Noor) (Ruj. Tuan: ANM.386/6 Jld.19(46))

Pengarah,  
Institut Pengurusan Penyelidikan dan Perundingan  
Universiti Malaya,  
C 313, Bangunan IPS,  
**50603 Kuala Lumpur.**  
(u.p: Prof. Dr. Muhamad Rasat Muhamad)



APPENDIX L

ENROLMENT IN GOVERNMENT AND GOVERNMENT-ASSISTED PRIMARY SCHOOL IN MALAYSIA AS OF 30TH JUNE 2002

Year	National School			National Type (Chinese)				National Type (Tamil)				Total		
	Male	Female	Total	%	Male	Female	Total	%	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Pre-school	14731	13960	28691	96.9	268	250	518	1.8	193	193	386	1.3	14403	29595
Year 1	198278	187861	386139	74.8	58770	54704	113474	22.0	8073	8281	16354	3.2	265121	515967
Year 2	194760	184661	379421	75.5	55346	52054	107400	21.4	7725	7775	15500	3.1	257831	502321
Year 3	195166	184709	379875	75.7	55127	51598	106725	21.3	7741	7597	15338	3.1	258034	501938
Year 4	194834	184453	379287	76.3	52859	49639	102498	20.6	7371	7641	15012	3.0	255064	496797
Year 5	185087	176453	361540	76.2	50791	47192	97983	20.7	7233	7472	14705	3.1	243111	474228
Year 6	181239	171167	352406	75.5	51476	48827	100303	21.5	6818	7004	13822	3.0	239533	466531
Total	1164095	1103264	2267359	75.9	324637	304264	628901	21.1	45154	45963	91117	3.1	1533886	2987377

Source: Ministry of Education (2002), Malaysian Educational Statistical 2002, Education Planning, Research and Development, Ministry of Education, Malaysia



## Malaysian 1986, 1990 and 1995 General Election Results

Table 1: Percentage of Parliamentary Seats and Votes Comparison with Ruling Party and opposition Parties.

Political Party/ Year	Ruling Party (National Front)	Opposition Parties	Vote for National Front/opposition parties	Total number of seat
1986	148 (84%)	29 (16%)	55.8 / 44.2	177
1990	127 (71%)	53 (29%)	51.9/ 48.1	180
1995	162 (84%)	30 (16%)	65.0 /35.0	192

Table 2: Parliamentary Seats based on Political Parties

Political Party / Year	Ruling Party (National Front)	PAS	DAP	S46	BEBAS (non- political party)	PBS (Sabah United Party)
1986	148 (84%)	1 (0.6%)	24 (13%)	-	4 (2.4%)	-
1990	127 (71%)	7 (3.8%)	20(11%)	8(4.3%)	4(2.2%)	14(7.7%)
1995	162 (84%)	7 (3.8%)	9 (4.8%)	6 (3.2%)	-	8 (4.2%)

Source: Report on Malaysia General Election 1986, prepared by Election Commission Malaysia, printed by Inventra Print Sdn Bhd. for Government Printer, Kuala Lumpur; Report on Malaysia General Election 1990, prepared by Election Commission Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur: Government Printer; Report on Malaysia General Election 1995, prepared by Election Commission Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur: Government Printer; Zakaria Hj. Ahmad (1989), Malaysia: Quasi Democracy in a Divided Society, in Larry Diamond, Juan Linz and Seymour Martin Lipset (eds), *Democracy on Developing Countries, Asia*, p. 258.