

# **National Character Practices through History Education in Primary School**

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## **ABSTRACT**

National character is a rather complex issue to be discussed as we are a multiracial country and comprises of various religions, cultures and as well as languages. History Education aims to nurture and strengthen the nation spirit and promote the citizen identity as Malaysian and a part of world's citizen. This study aimed to examine the level of Malaysian national character practices through History education among primary school students in peninsular Malaysia. The national character practices that were observed is in the aspects of understanding human behaviour, causality in history, country uniqueness, patriotic citizens and democratic practices. This research survey was conducted using questionnaire instrument. Respondents were selected using stratified random sampling techniques involving 1920 pupils of 5 primary schools in peninsular Malaysia. The results of the entire constructs from pilot study are at a high validity level and hence valid to be used in actual studies. The data was analysed using SPSS version 23.0 to analyze descriptive data (mean and standard deviation). The results of the study show that the level of identity practices in terms of understanding human behaviour, homeland uniqueness, patriotic citizens and democracy practices are at moderately high levels. The national character practice in term of cause and effect in History on the other hand is at moderate level. Effective History Education is capable to implement the skill and appreciation of historical values into the soul of the student, which they will always willing to sacrifice their life to defend the nation and further strengthen the national ideology and make Malaysia a developed nation as well as embraced the principles contained in the pillars of the nation.

*Keywords : National character, History Education, Primary School Students*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Society today is often presented by the media with various news stories which threaten the harmony and integrity of the nation. This news is always closely related to the activities conducted by the youngsters, such as the dumping of babies, vandalism, bullying, school truancy, incest and all other acts which refer to moral collapse. At a glance, it all seems like a problem which only persist among the young, but if deep study were conducted, this situation is very disturbing as these are the people that will be the future pillars of the country.

History subject has a close connection with other subjects contained in its capacity to be embedded across the curriculum and is the only subject that most discuss on the aspects of

citizenship and civilization that have to be embroiled since childhood in accordance with Piaget's psychological concept. Therefore, it is important that we form and strengthen the element of self-identity education, especially for young people as a shield against what will happen in the future. Identity is often associated with loyalty and love towards the country. Equipped with the adoption of identity through the application of knowledge and the skills of history among primary school children, this effort will be capable to retain their love towards their homeland.

For Malaysia, the issue of identity is a relatively complex issue to be discussed as it comprises of people who are multi-racial that have many religions, cultures as well as languages. According to Ismail (2010), Malaysia does not adopt a fundamental assimilation which detangle the ancestral root of their race, language and culture. However, this diversity of nations, cultures and languages is not something that widens the gap in society. They practice the basis of peaceful coexistence in the diversity of races and ethnicities.

This national character should be seen from the history of the Malay civilization itself. The historical fact proves that the Malays have the supremacy in Malaya. Islam has been the pillar of the formation of a national identity which is based on the provisions contained in the Federal Constitution. This identity was not tampered by the colonists, though during hundreds of years they ruled Malaya.

In this respect, a nation with a strong identity is said to be difficult to accept external influences which are opposed to the manners and culture of the nation. The identity of a nation is the organized and dynamic beliefs, attitudes and opinions held by a nation. Individuals who have their own identity will indirectly understand who he is and take care in every of their act and behaviour to not contradict their religion, culture and customs. National character comes from a series of beliefs, grasp, understanding that can be in the form of thoughts and actions of an individual.

The formation of identity is the result of the environmental influence from individual interaction. This means that the identity of the race is the result of the combined self-concept of the members. A good environment is necessary to create a good society and good morals should also be born from themselves based on the environmental factors that can affect the habits of human life.

### **History of Education in Malaysia**

An important goal of national education policy is to create a nation identity or as a tool for the nation building. History Education can play a role as a tool towards nation building when used effectively and responsibly (Hazril, 2003). In this regard, History subject can be a medium to educate students on pure values through reflection and values gained from learning about past events. History Education aims to nurture and strengthen the spirit of the nation and our identity as a citizen of Malaysia and a citizen of the world. Through the knowledge and appreciation of the country's history and the external related history, students can understand

the condition of a society and the state as well as its relationship with the world history. This effort is aimed to create the spirit of unity and belonging towards Malaysia. History Education can also create a common memory of History as a framework for national awareness and international understanding.

History Education is an important foundation in the construction of the Malaysian nation. Studying History is not merely to gain knowledge but can be a guide and give a lesson to a nation about what has previously happened. Previous events have to be re-evaluated for the purpose of planning future changes (Hazril, 2003) as history provides many lessons related to the fall and rise of a nation. Hence, history should be a guideline for the rebuilding of the nation's position and strength. History Education has been a major vehicle in the Malaysian education system to achieve the goals stated above. What education is about to achieve in relation to nationalism is to instil a sense of patriotism into the soul of the student, the sense of readiness and the willingness to sacrifice for the nation.

### **National Character Practices**

The word is derived from two words, namely national and character. National means matters related to nation, about nation. While the character refers to traits (characteristics) that distinguish oneself from another (National Dictionary, 2007). After these two words combined to be national character, it means the unique or special characters either in term of custom, language, culture and religion that can be the core and emblematic of the personality of an individual or a nation. Identity means the inherent characteristics or original of a person or a nation that forms the identity as well as the character of the nation. According to Wan Mohamad (2010), national character refers to the true or original identity of a person who is not only seen in the outward appearance, but also includes the values that they hold. It also refers to a national character that is still intact with customary values, culture, religion, race and nation.

The formation of the characters and features of an individual or a nation is influenced by myriad factors including nature, environment, historical experience and belief. However, the most important and dominant factor is belief or religion. Religion gives people a clear and comprehensive view of themselves, creator and nature as well as their position and role in the universe (Ahmad Mohamad, 2009). The identity of a nation refers to the characteristics that distinguish a human group from another human group and the sense of belonging of the individuals in the group.

### **Research Objectives**

The purpose of this study is to examine the level of national character practices in terms of understanding human behaviour, causality in history, homeland uniqueness, patriotic citizens and democratic practices among primary school students in peninsular Malaysia.

## METHODOLOGY

This survey study uses descriptive method through the use of 7 Likert scale questionnaires as a research instrument. The study consists of 34 items involving four main constructs: 4 items for demography, understanding human behaviour (5 items), causality in history (5 items), homeland uniqueness (5 items), patriotic citizens (7 items) and democratic practices (7 items). The questionnaire was adapted from several previous studies and was referred to 3 experts in this field. A sample of 1920 respondents was selected used a stratified random system involving Year 5 students from primary schools in Peninsular Malaysia. Data analysis using SPSS version 23.0 which refers to only descriptive analysis.

**Table 1 : Mean Score Interpretation**

Scale Range	Interpretation
1.00 – 1.80	Low
1.81 – 2.60	Moderately Low
2.61 – 3.40	Moderate
3.41 – 4.20	Moderately High
4.21 – 5.00	High

Source : Jamil Ahmad (2003)

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study involved 1920 Year 5 students in primary schools in peninsular Malaysia with division according to the north, east, central and south zones. The demographic profile of the research is presented in detail as follows.

**Table 2 : Respondents Demographic Profile**

Profile	Demography	Frequency	Percentage
District	Temerloh	240	12.5
	Kuantan	240	12.5
	Kuala Pilah	240	12.5
	Seremban	240	12.5
	Ipoh	240	12.5
	Kuala Kangsar	240	12.5
	Kajang	240	12.5
	Shah Alam	240	12.5
	Total	1920	100.0
Gender	Male	800	41.7
	Female	1120	58.3
	Total	1920	100.0
Ethnic	Malay	900	46.9
	Chinese	580	30.2
	Indian	440	22.9
	Total	1920	100.0
Zone	North	480	25.0
	East	480	25.0
	South	480	25.0
	Central	480	25.0
	Total	1920	100.0

Based on table 2 above, the demographics of the four zones which the east zone is represented by Temerloh and Kuantan, the southern zone represented by Kuala Pilah and Seremban, the northern zone represented by Ipoh and Kuala Kangsar and the central zone is represented by Kajang and Shah Alam involving 480 respondents from each zone. This study involved 800 male students and 1120 female students. For ethnicity, there are 46.9% Malays ethnic, 30.2% Chinese ethnic and 22.9% Indian ethnic.

**Table 3 : The Level of Malaysian Citizens National Character Practice for the Aspects of Understanding Human Behaviour**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
I can tell you in detail about the process of human development	3.58	1.07	Moderately High
I can explain my family's genealogy in 3 generations	3.68	1.17	Moderately High
The symbols and figures of the previous struggle described by teachers and exhibited in textbooks can enhance the spirit of patriotism and pride towards the country	3.92	1.23	Moderately High
Through learning about homeland uniqueness I can appreciate other races	3.92	1.12	Moderately High
I know the picture of the previous Prime Minister of Malaysia	3.45	1.45	Moderately High
Here is the images of the local heroes who fight for the country	3.23	1.58	Moderate
I can explain why these figures fought against the British	3.46	1.20	Moderately High
Based on the picture below about the Japanese colonisation in Malaya, I can understand in detail why they are against Japan	3.48	1.20	Moderately High
I fully understand the features of the Federal Constitution such as Islam as the National Religion of the Federation, Malay language as the National Language, Position of Malay Sultan and Citizenship	3.55	0.75	Moderately High
I fully understand the Independence of the Federation of Malaya as a result of the people of Malaya negotiations with British led by Tuanku Abdul Rahman, representatives of the Malay Sultan and representatives of the Chinese and Indians	3.73	1.07	Moderately High
Overall Mean	3.60	0.72	Moderately High

Descriptive analysis in table 3 shows that the practice of national character for the aspect of understanding human behaviour as a whole is at moderate high. The item with the highest mean is the item " The symbols and figures of the previous struggle described by teachers and exhibited in textbooks can enhance the spirit of patriotism and pride towards the country " and the item "Through learning about homeland uniqueness I can appreciate other races". However, items related to the images of the local heroes who fight for the country have

the lowest means and are at only a moderate level. Marwick (1985) describes history education will enable the community to identify their identity and self-orient themselves to understand the racial relationship in the past, because through empathic training conducted by teachers (Ashby & Lee, 1987), human behaviour will be easy to understand and evaluated to allow students to remember past historical events (Andreeti, 1993).

**Table 4 : The Level of Malaysian Citizens' Identity Practices on the Aspect of Causality in History**

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Here is the images of the local heroes who fight for the country	3.23	1.58	Moderate
I can explain why these figures fought against the British	3.46	1.20	Moderately High
Based on the picture below about the Japanese colonisation in Malaya, I can understand in detail why they are against Japan	3.23	0.93	Moderate
I fully understand the features of the Federal Constitution such as Islam as the National Religion of the Federation, Malay language as the National Language, Position of Malay Sultan and Citizenship	3.55	0.75	Moderately High
I fully understand the Independence of the Federation of Malaya as a result of the people of Malaya negotiations with British led by Tuanku Abdul Rahman, representatives of the Malay Sultan and representatives of the Chinese and Indians	3.44	0.79	Moderately High
Overall Mean	3.38	0.69	Moderate

The descriptive analysis in table 4 shows that the national character practice in the aspect of causality in history is at a moderate level. The item with the highest mean is the item " I fully understand the features of the Federal Constitution such as Islam as the National Religion of the Federation, Malay language as the National Language, Position of Malay Sultan and Citizenship " and followed by the item " I can explain why these figures fought against the British ". For Aminudin Baki (1953), History education allows students to evaluate the past experiences and take the lessons for the future use. This view is in line with Fadzillah (1992) and Brandom (2001) who see the needs for these values to be absorbed in the younger generation as they will inherit the nation's tradition and vision. Furthermore, History education is also seen as the basis for strengthening citizenship elements.

Based on the above discussion, it shows that primary school pupils show interest and are motivated in learning history subject. This is an important factor that can facilitate the teachers' roles in implementing national character among pupils in the teaching and learning process in the classroom. Motivation in learning is very crucial to improve knowledge, skills and appreciation of history. This study is in line with a study conducted by Fatma (2011) which stated history teachers with high competency are those who able to enhance their students'

motivation and interest in learning history subject. This is due to majority of Malaysian students are not motivated in learning history. This finding is also supported by Anuar Ahmad, Siti Haishah & Nur Atiqah (2009) that noted motivation as one of the important factors that contribute to improving students' interest and their knowledge in history learning.

**Table 5 : The Level of Identity Practice among Malaysian Citizens' on the Aspect of Uniqueness of the Country**

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Through learning History I fully understand the characteristics and cultures of other race / ethnic groups in Malaysia	3.72	1.01	Moderately High
Through the learning of the uniqueness of the country, it makes me easy to interact with other ethnic / races	3.59	1.32	Moderately High
I am always proud to communicate using National Language in various situations	4.17	2.53	Moderately High
Through learning the History of other cultures I have always think good of them	3.90	1.08	Moderately High
Historical relics such as Batu Bersurat in Kuala Berang, Chandi Lembah Bujang and others make it easy to understand the historical heritage of the past and the present	4.21	1.00	High
Overall Mean	3.92	0.79	Moderately High

The descriptive analysis in table 5 shows that the overall identity of the uniqueness of the country is at moderate high level. Items with the highest mean were item " Historical relics such as Batu Bersurat in Kuala Berang, Chandi Lembah Bujang and others make it easy to understand the historical heritage of the past and the present " and are at a high level. However, the item " through the learning of the uniqueness of the country, it makes me easy to interact with other ethnic / races " has the lowest mean and is only at moderate high level. This is further reinforced by Borko (1996) who believe that History education is capable to provide an understanding on the differences in skin color, religious and cultural that exist. He believes that students need to be exposed to national identity, patriotism and responsibility as American citizens. This statement was agreed by Benitez (1995) who found that History education in America could instil a patriotic spirit and increase the support towards government. For Bar-Tal (1993), the awareness about historical heritage and important past events will help create a sense of belonging and loyalty towards the country.



**Table 6 : The level of National Character Practice among Malaysians for the aspect of Patriotic Citizens**

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Learning about the Day of Independence events in History subject enhances my sense of pride as a Malaysian	3.89	1.18	Moderately High
I often and always stand up with full spirit when singing "National Anthem" song anywhere	4.26	0.92	High
Here are the symbols of the states in Malaysia	4.04	1.99	Moderately High
The King system taught in the History subject can increase my respect for the concept of the Constitutional Monarchy	3.96	1.04	Moderately High
I feel very proud to be born in Malaysia	4.22	1.06	High
I often participate in Independence Day celebrations whether at school, state or national level	3.93	1.13	Moderately High
I always fly the <i>Jalur Gemilang</i> flag in celebration of the Independence Month at home or at my school	4.15	1.00	Moderately High
Overall Mean	4.07	0.68	Moderately High

The descriptive analysis in table 6 shows the national character of the patriotism as a whole in the moderately high level. Items with the highest mean are "I often and always stand up with full spirit when singing "Negaraku" song anywhere" and are at a high level. However, the item "learning about the Day of Independence events in History subject enhances my sense of pride as a Malaysian " has the lowest mean and is at moderate level. History education is important in determining the pattern of citizens that wanted to be born in country (Haydn et al., 2001). The development of History education in Malaysia shows that History has become a bridge towards the achievement of the goal above which are fostering the loyalty towards the country and identity as Malaysian and world citizen. It is considered important in the curriculum as a key element to build a united citizen that loves the nation.



**Table 7 : The Level of Malaysians’ National Character Practice on the Aspect of Democratic Practices in Malaysia**

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
I fully understand the election process held in Malaysia	3.35	0.99	Moderate
I recognize some of the political party symbols below as a democratic system in Malaysia	3.79	1.25	Moderately High
Giving opinions rationally and openly is one of the democracy features in our country	3.35	0.89	Moderate
I understand all the links of following symbol with the democratic system in Malaysia	3.53	0.82	Moderately High
I understand the roles and the characteristics of the Democratic Parliament system in our country	3.46	0.82	Moderately High
I can understand and explain the King selection process in Malaysia	3.85	1.23	Moderately High
Having learned the subject related to democracy has led me to understand and respect the country administration system	3.99	1.19	Moderately High
Overall Mean	3.62	0.60	Moderately High

The descriptive analysis in table 7 shows the national character practice for the aspect of democratic practice as a whole is at the moderate level. The item with the highest mean is " Having learned the subject related to democracy has led me to understand and respect the country administration system " and is at moderate level and followed by the item " I can understand and explain the King selection process in Malaysia". Abdul Shukor (2003) states that students should be given a deep understanding on the developmental process of a society and their country.

### **CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY**

This study has successfully identified the factors of teaching methods that greatly impact the national character behavior among pupils. Among the aspects are teachers need to always train the pupils to sing the national anthem with full spirit and respect prior to the classroom learning process. This can improve the pupils’ appreciation in history and to build the sense of love for the country. Other than that, teachers are ought to apply symbols related to the nation’s history as well as the warriors because learners at early stage are more attracted to learning through the use of symbols rather than verbal learning. The findings of the study also imply that democracy system in this country is been comprehended by the pupils even though they are at early stage of schooling system. Hence, teachers should expose the pupils more aspects on democracy system using simple way and do not underestimate their abilities in understanding the subject.

### **CONCLUSION**

Effective History Education will be capable to apply the skills and appreciation of historical values to the soul of the student, who is always willing to sacrifice their life to defend the nation and to further strengthen the national ideology and make Malaysia a developed nation and to

embrace the principles contained in the National Pillars. ICPS reflects the state's aspirations as well as the ideology. History subject is very dominant to produce people with high civic consciousness, pride and responsibility as citizens and have a nationalistic nature towards their country. With the ICPS History subject, it can help teachers to prepare and implement teaching and learning activities effectively. The appreciation of the patriotic spirit, citizenship, civic and patriotism values can be realized by the students based on the topics in the content standards and the standards of learning clearly reveal the government's assertiveness to ensure that today's generation will not be History-illiterate in addition to produce students who are balanced in term of intellectual, spiritual, emotional, physical, and preparing them with the globalization tide based on 21<sup>st</sup> century knowledge. Understanding local history can enhance the spirit of love towards the nation and understanding the struggle of the nation, thereby nurturing the unity and spirit of the patriotism in the younger generation. However, to ensure the successful transformation of the curriculum, it requires a comprehensive commitment from all parties including policy makers, implementers, curriculum managers, parents as well as stakeholders. Otherwise, this new curriculum will not have a positive impact and the goals outlined will not be met. Therefore, the Ministry of Education will continuously review the curriculum to ensure the implementation of curriculum in schools will equip the students with the knowledge, skills and values to meet the current and future challenges and lead to the adoption of patriotic spirit and nation building which underlies the future of the nation.

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