

A Preliminary Analysis on the Humanity, Ethics and Cultural Aspects of the Malaysian Educational Policy

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Abstract

Educational policy plays a significant role in the development of a balanced Malaysian society which should not only possess the knowledge and skills required for the country economic development but has also the essential moral qualities desired as a good citizen. Hence, the significant elements and concerns relating to humanity, ethics and cultural aspects of the Malaysian society must be identified and accordingly addressed through the education system as it is the best formal platform for early societal development. This article aims to highlight the inclusion of humanity, ethics and cultural aspects in the Malaysian Educational Policy. The analysis covers the development of the Malaysian education system from the pre-independence days up to the development of the Malaysian Educational Policy which focused greatly on improving the education standard to cope up with the challenges accompanying the globalisation era. The impacts of addressing the humanity, ethics and cultural aspects to the development of the Malaysian society have been discussed. It is worth to note that the continuous efforts to instil the importance of humanity, ethics and culture in the society, Malaysians are expected to live a peaceful life and healthy lifestyle, not just physically but also mentally.

Keywords: Humanity; Ethics; Cultural; Malaysian Education System; Malaysian Educational Policy

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■ 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Malaysian education system is perhaps the only one of its kind in the world, reflected by the uniqueness and diversity of the Malaysian population. Malaysia is blessed with citizens from various ethnic groups, which are rich in religious and cultural values. This scenario has sprouted a distinct education system to cater for the needs of this diversity, as one of the means to promote public unity and national peace at the same time promoting the advantages of diversification. Therefore, the existence of two main school categories in the primary level of the education system in Malaysia, which are the Malay-medium National Schools and the Non-Malay-medium National-type Schools, or also known as the vernacular schools. The latter category of schools is further divided into two types of schools, Mandarin and Tamil medium. Nonetheless, entrance to all of these types of schools does not require specific racial or language ability. Meanwhile, the mainstream national secondary school level up to the tertiary education system does not differ in medium of teaching since they use either Malay or English, or both as the main medium of instruction.

Historically, the development of the Malaysian education system starts way back in the pre-independence days when the Barnes Report was released in 1951. At this time, English language was the medium of instruction in schools. The report was eventually replaced by the Razak Report 1956 and Education Ordinance 1957 that marks the early initiative of formulating the first national education system with special emphasize on having the

Malay language as the main medium of instruction in schools and an education content which is tailored to the Malaysian society and background. The development of education system in Malaysia then witnessed the release of the Rahman Talib Report, Education Act 1961, Mahathir Statement 1979 and Education Bill 1995. These progress presented significant improvement in the education system that include the existence of spiritual and disciplinary component, pre-school education as part of the national education system, enhancement of the technical and polytechnic education and contain provisions to regulate private education.

The focus on the development of the education system with immense annual budget allocated amounting to an average of 22 percent of the annual government budget (equivalent to 4% of GDP), reflects the government political will that never fails to prioritise, review and adapt the education system in line with the external changes occurring in the economy and the world at large. The National Education Philosophy, “education in Malaysia is an on-going effort towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonious, based on a firm belief in and devotion to God”, have clearly incorporates the humanity, ethics and cultural elements of the Malaysian society as the basis of the national education system. Learning from the developed world experience, Malaysia aspires to generate quality human resources which are not only competitive with high cognitive capacity but essentially, upholds a high degree of morality in order to balance the focus on the materialistic aspect to fulfil the nation’s aim to become a developed nation by 2020.

The main policy document providing the nation’s direction in the education aspect is the National Education Policy 2012 (Third Edition) which provides the big picture of the national education system, assessment and examination, teacher training and leadership education, human resource management, asset management and infrastructure as well as involvement of the private parties in education. Furthermore, there are two main strategy documents to support the mother policy, which are the National Education Blueprint 2006–2010 and the National Education Blueprint 2013–2025. The former have given dedicated efforts on providing better infrastructures and facilities in both the urban and rural areas that caters for all categories of students including pre-schools and special needs. Meanwhile, the latter strategy document with longer-term plan was established to overcome the weaknesses identified in the previous education setting, which focused on improving the education standard to cope up with the challenges accompanying the globalisation era. The over emphasized of examination oriented features of the education system was made to balance with the need to produce students with higher order thinking skills (HOTS), creative, innovative and resilient in order to have sufficient and quality supply of human capital to fit the need of the technologically advancing economy.

Apart from the above mentioned major policy documents, there are other specific policies established to support the main policy. Such commitment include policies to “Uphold Bahasa Malaysia and to Strengthen the English Language (MBMMBI)” and the “One Student One Sport (1M1S)”. All of these concerted efforts are none other established to produce Malaysian citizens with high attributes, knowledgeable, skilful, and competent, instilled with ethical values that will support significantly the national economic development, and the most crucial, in a manner that is sustainable, responsive to the societal well-being as well as the environmental needs.

It is therefore fitting for the following sections of this article to be discussing on the issues of humanity, ethics and cultures and a preliminary analysis of the educational policy in the Malaysian context. After identifying important development of the societies through the examination of societal issues and education system, it is thus subsequently relevant to establish important linkages of addressing humanity, ethics and culture issues in the development of the Malaysian Society.

■2.0 HUMANITY, ETHICS AND CULTURE ISSUES

The progress in science, technology and innovation (STI) have transformed our way of lives which simultaneously altered the dimensions of humanity, ethics and culture all over the world in two somewhat extreme aspects, the positive and the negative effects. The world has become borderless and diverse societies have become closer, in the sense that means of communication and transportation is widely accessible, easier, quicker and cheaper.

Undeniably, one of the mega impacts of STI in the Information Age is the Internet (Castells, 2014). As at 31 December 2017, there are almost 3.96 billion of Internet users across the globe with a penetration rate of 51.8 percent of the world population (Internet World Stats). Hence, the Internet as a networking infrastructure has provided us with the ease of communication, access and storage of information worldwide, tremendously benefiting all sectors of the modern society, which comprises the government, industry, education and the general public. The service industry that also include the public sector have been able to increase efficiency not only through cost reduction but also offering better service via shorter waiting times, wide transmission of information,

and reduction of monopolistic activity that benefit the clients and customers (Bradley et al., 2014). As the world becomes paperless thanks to emails, social medias, electronic and cloud storage, information also travels in great speed. Researchers, students and the civil society benefited tremendously out of this scenario since there is almost no limitation to data and information. Besides that, planning, decision-makings, control and evaluation practices by communities and organizational leaders can also be made efficiently through easier communication channels (Berisha-Shaqiri, 2015; OECD, 2016). Until today, the application of Internet is overwhelming and has not stopped advancing, as more and more usage of Internet being discovered.

According to the Internet Society, there is no absolute central control of the Internet application, which is a matter of fact the main reason for the Internet technology to advance rapidly. Consequently, there are negative aspects of the Internet as the public becomes more acquainted to the technology. The existence of different parties with diverse intentions is unavoidable, thus impacting the humanity, ethics and culture of the world societies. In this interconnected world, humans not only learn from the supposedly safe and conducive environment of our homes, schools and other learning institutions, but humans also learn from the World Wide Web. In the old days, parents were often worried about peer negative pressures but today, children can have access to unlimited information through the Web which are now easily reachable through computers, tablets and even phones with minimal parental control (Alghamdi, 2016; Cho & Cheon, 2005; Kabakci, Odabasi, & Coklar, 2008). Thus, without appropriate instilled moral values that are inculcated through religious and cultural principles, it is not just children, but the general humanity can be undoubtedly influenced. As a consequence, lifestyles are also altered. The fashion and lifestyle industry for instance, tries to promote their products through the display of ideal meaning of beauty, luxury and perfection. Aggressive advertising through the electronic and social medias has unquestionably the ability to influence consumers trend these day. Hence, the result of overspending consumers (Aboujaoude, 2012), high debts and material pressure, which sometimes lead to stress and glitches in important relationships. The situation if not remedied can also lead to other serious social problems like alcoholism and drugs misuse to briefly solve life issues. To the most extreme, suicide cases increases due to financial and relationship burdens. Besides that, the vast entertainment opportunities accessible via the Internet, makes people idle and lazy to go outdoors and practice healthy lifestyle through sports and recreational activities, thus the increase of obesity problems and other health issues. Accordingly, the creation of Internet, which was for the noble purpose to enhance communication, has immensely affect humanity at large. Furthermore, with the geographical positioning system (GPS) in place, the movement and identity confidentiality of human is almost impossible.

Another major development of modern society is the urban transportation sector (Thynell, 2011). Today, people can afford to travel and be outside of their comfort zones in short durations via air and rail transportation. In most parts of the world, air transportation is no longer monopolistic in nature or controlled by the government linked company, but now customers have wider range of choice. There is not only availability of local cheap flights but flight tickets provided by other carriers around the world can easily be purchased via online by everyone. Therefore, the cost to commute becomes more competitive with cheaper price, more frequent, safer and quality air travel. Besides air, the rail systems have also advances in developed nations such as in the European Union, Japan and Singapore. China has also developed the high-speed rail systems, which actually beats the Japanese technology with its latest invention Shanghai Maglev, the world's first high-speed commercial magnetic hovering line. The use of both efficient air transportation and high-speed rail systems all over the world has significantly decreased travel time and has transformed the world society and economy. Hence, it is common nowadays for individuals to travel frequently at greater distance for work, school or leisure. This situation does foster greater relationship of the world leaders, knowledge and the common society. Nonetheless, the increased movement of people around the globe subsequently (unintentionally most of the times) altered cultures. For instance, through marriages and other social influences via informal relationships such as companionships, gatherings and tourist activities.

At the same time, the influxes of migrants or refugees from least developed countries to developed or developing economies have also greatly changes humanity. This situation becomes more alerting when migrants are staying illegal in foreign countries, hence the increase in crime rate due to unemployment, consequently rising issues of safety and security due to lack of control from authorities. Furthermore, this problem is augmented when the countries border control are weak and compromised. Furthermore, there is also the increase risk of disease outbreak through virus and bacteria when people frequently travel in large scale. Thus, humanity is at stake when formerly diseases which origins and normally occurs in certain parts of the world, can be easily spread elsewhere (Gushulak & MacPherson, 2004; Saker, Lee, Cannito, & Gilmore, 2004).

On the other hand, the mass production happening in the manufacturing and agriculture sectors has increased livelihoods due to the growth of profitable firms, employment opportunities, consumer and food products. Hence, societies not only benefit from increased income and other employment advantages but also

enjoy arrays of alternative and substitutes products. While the market is filled with variety of products from both local and foreign producers, at the other corner, small local businesses starts to lose due to stiff competition pressures from multinational firms. These small businesses cannot compete in the pricing or standardization of products due to their small scale of production. If the economy lets the market to decide indefinitely, what and how to sell, small businesses will face difficulties to survive. However, due to the Internet technology, creative small businesses can still survive the globalization wave at the moment, because they have the option to no longer conduct businesses in a traditional way that requires physical stores and staffing. The other negative impact of mass production is indeed the environmental pollution caused by untreated wastes from factories, large-scale pesticide use and natural habitat destruction (Tilman et al., 2001).

The above discussions have illustrated how technological progress presents substantial changes to humanity. Apart from that, there are other aspects of technological progress that have changed societal beliefs such as the medical and biotechnology sector. The introduction of substitutes of internal human organ or the alteration of genetics in plants and crops to increase production have spurred debates as to what is should or not to be implemented? So much like biological weapons or weapons of mass destruction, the progression of biotechnology and even other types of technological advancement has the potential to be misused and would eventually affects humanity, ethics and culture of societies aversely.

■3.0 ANALYSIS OF THE MALAYSIAN EDUCATIONAL POLICY

The current Malaysian Educational Policy (Third Edition) was developed under the purview of the Ministry of Education and publicized in 2012 is a comprehensive policy document, which covers the provision of education beginning 4 years of age up to 19 years of age. There are four (4) objectives of the policy, which are to produce loyal and united Malaysian; to develop pious, noble, knowledgeable, skillful and prosperous individual; to provide human resources for the development of the country; and to provide education opportunity to all Malaysian citizens. Furthermore, the policy is supported with the development of Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013-2025), which have in detail laid out implementation strategies to further enhance the outcomes of the national education system.

All programs offered under the government education system are governed by the Ministry of Education that include basic school programs which are preschool (age 4 to 6), primary school (age 7 to 12) and secondary school (age 13 to 17). All of these basic school programs adopt a standard national curriculum, which is respectively known as National Preschool Curriculum Standard, Primary School Standard Curriculum, and Secondary School Integrated Curriculum. In accordance to school status and performance, some of these schools can be further categorized into distinctive programs such as Cluster School of Excellence, High Achievement School and Boarding Schools. In addition, there are schools which are established for students in specific fields such as the Technical and Vocational School, Religious Schools, Sports School, Arts School and Young Prisoners. Besides that, special programs are also available for the less fortunate such as the long-term hospitalized students, disabled persons and indigenous people. Throughout the curriculum, adequate presence of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) is apparent in all stages of the education system.

The government has also encouraged the private sector to compliment the national education system through private institutions, which are not required to adopt the national curriculum. However, like other education entities in Malaysia, private institutions are also governed by the Education Act 1996 (Act 550). This Act has made it compulsory for parents to enrol their children for six years of primary education. The numerous programs developed for all types of students provided tremendous opportunity for Malaysians to obtain basic education. Furthermore, education in the primary and secondary levels is available for free in government schools. As a developing country, provision of free education is necessary to build foundation of knowledgeable citizens that would be contributing significantly to the economy. The awareness on the importance of learning from the early phase of life will promote the culture of long-life learning, which is essential for a knowledge-based economy.

According to the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2035 Annual Report 2016, the enrolment rate in preschools for children aged 5+ was at 92.1%, primary schools have recorded an enrolment rate of 97.2%, while lower secondary and upper secondary schools recorded 95% and 85.8% respectively. This involves registration of 4,732,783 students in 7,772 primary schools and 2,407 secondary schools in the country. This is a meaningful achievement in the primary and lower secondary schools. However, more efforts need to be aimed at increasing the participation of students in the upper secondary education, as fulfilment of skilled human resources in the country will be jeopardized if this issue is not resolved. The same report informed that the high-risk group of school dropouts is associated with low family income of RM1,500 per month.

Apart from that, the Malaysian Educational Policy has also laid out strategic planning and implementation for the standard evaluation of students, school performance assessment, development of teachers' teaching skills and the support system. The focus of student's assessment is through centralized formal examination, where beginning primary school, students are exposed to higher order thinking skills which are tested through written examinations and limited school-based or practical assessment.

The major important outcome of the education system is indeed to produce competent human capital that have the capacity to contribute to the nation through professional employment or successful entrepreneurship, able to adapt to the challenges of globalization and equipped with essential life skills. In the modern world, life skills are important to balance the excessive focus on material and wealth acquisition or status. Hence, the education system have made it a requirement for all students to be involved in at least one sport activity at school and other interest-based co-curricular activity to promote healthy and active lifestyle. At the same time, students are trained in the application of Information and Communication Technology to keep them abreast with basic knowledge in the area.

To sustain and improve national unity in diversity of a multiracial country, the school is the best platform to instil respect and understanding of different races, culture and religious values. Therefore, all national schools uses the Malay Language as the main medium of instruction, English as the second language while vernacular schools, either uses Mandarin or Tamil as the medium of instruction, while Malay Language and English is a compulsory subject to be taught. This strategy benefited especially the Malaysians in the rural areas that are not prepared to adopt English as the main medium of instruction. The government compromised on permitting the existence of vernacular schools and their mother language to sustain racial harmony and their heritage. Besides that, the introduction of the subject of History in schools is welcomed to further strengthen racial ties and appreciation of the nation's peaceful independence. Informal school programs such as activities with the local society and expansion of co-curricular activities are also promoted in school to expose students to good deeds. It was found that according to a study conducted by the Ministry of Education, the unity index of teachers and students was considered reasonably high at 6.6 (Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2035 Annual Report 2016). However, further efforts still need to be carried out to inculcate high tolerance of differences in Malaysia's multiracial society that actually contributes to national excellence.

It can be established that the Government have set high standards for the national education system to be at par with the standard of education in the developed countries. The comprehensive development of curricular and co-curricular programs gives the needed exposure and opportunity for students to excel and develop their full potential at an early age. Malaysia is on the right path and is striving to achieve greater excellence in this sector as obviously seen by the Annual Reports of Malaysia Education Blueprint which have identified strengths and weaknesses of the system, subsequently triggers corrective actions to improve the situation. The notions of the whole school approach and community-based learning are important in this regard.

■4.0 THE IMPACT OF ADDRESSING HUMANITY, ETHICS AND CULTURAL ASPECTS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF MALAYSIAN SOCIETY

'Humanity is an activity of the heart, which requires emotional engagement in the lives of other people' (Broom, 2010). It can therefore be understood that by addressing humanity, individuals will care for each other in the community or society and avoid selfish acts that can destroy current relationships or the future needs. The concept of community was popularized by Dewey (1916), as the existence of common awareness on the rights and obligations by collective individuals. It includes the concern on the environment, societal well-being and justice.

In Malaysia, the basis of development of the Malaysian Society is embedded in the National Principles, or better known as Rukunegara, which was formed in 1970 to reunite the multiracial people of the country after the incidence of severe racial riot on 13 May 1969. Rukunegara comprises of five national principles, which are Belief in God; Loyalty to the King and Country; The Supremacy of the Constitution; The Rule of Law; and Courtesy and Morality. The establishment of these principles provided clear conscious to the Malaysian society of what comprises a good citizen. The concept of unity through Rukunegara is introduced to the Malaysian at the earliest stage of life, which is at the primary education level. Hence, school children have been exposed to these principles throughout their national school experience. Even though Islam is the official religion of Malaysia, children are all taught to be respectful of other race and religion. This effort of the government fostered harmonious society and mutual understanding among societies of different cultural background. According to Olssen (2006), the community is 'thin' because it is able to adapt to diversity and can exists simultaneously in different layers of societies, at the same time the development of individuals and enrichment of societies are not compromised. In

other words, societies can be moulded accordingly to local cultural practices and beliefs, which can be facilitated effectively by the government especially through the education system beginning from the early phase of life.

Indeed, at times there does exist some degree of tension between races in the nation, but fortunately national leaders and head of societies have played their role as intermediaries to promote peace. As a continuous effort to promote peace, it is also necessary for the government to consistently address the aspect of humanity, ethical and cultural aspect in the education system to promote the sense of citizenship. The development of citizenship in students is represented by the values of humanity centred on element of care to face the challenges of multicultural societies (Broom, 2010). Broom concluded that through the focus of humanity in the education system, students would be able to develop their intelligence by learning of knowledge and critical thinking skills, embracing the elements of care, understanding, and kindness. All of these values are certainly learned best as demonstrated by the teachers and the school environment that provides opportunities for students to be involved in activities to foster moral principles of humanity.

The dynamic progress of science and technology have changed the concept of humanity as new areas of knowledge and its application are explored, and humanity becomes more reliance on technology to perform its functions. Hence, the inculcation of ethical values in humanity is essential to create clear conscious of what is right and wrong. This is certainly made easier through the comprehension of the fundamental values in religious beliefs by societies. Human actions in experimenting science and technology have to be limited though ethical guides as to ensure the continuity of proper existence of living things. The advancement of biotechnology sector for instance, must be progressed with consideration of future impacts on the health and safety issues. The drive should not be purely to reap profits and revenues by businesses but to also assess the potential negative impacts of such progress. Apart from having the government to devise rules and regulations to protect the public interest, the society must correspondingly be civic minded and not be solely driven by greed. At the same time, the availability of unlimited information through the information communication technology further demonstrates the need for high level of ethics and cultural basis among the society. Individuals need to voluntarily learn how to filter false, intimidating, improper and abusive information available via the Internet.

It is therefore mandatory for aspects of humanity, ethics and cultural to be incorporated in the development of Malaysian society. Progressing as a developed country soon, Malaysia has to safeguard its economic development, environment and limited resources through the creation of societies with quality attributes that values national development in a holistic manner. This is in line with the concept of sustainable development, which focuses on the fulfilment of needs of the present without compromising the future generation's needs. This also revolves around matters to fight corruption, crime and discrimination effectively, in order to bring economic and political stability through transparent and good governance. There are a number of government machineries that are entrusted to enforce the implementation of ethical and civic behaviours, such as the Royal Malaysia Police, Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission and National Audit Department.

It is also worthy to note that through the continuous efforts to instil the importance of humanity, ethics and culture in the society, Malaysians are expected to live a peaceful life and healthy lifestyle, not just physically but also mentally. This needs to be validated as presented by certain indicators such as the minimal level of crime rates, corruption cases, AIDs patients, problem drug users and suicidal cases in the country.

■ 5.0 CONCLUSION

The course of history has enriched Malaysia's cultural roots. Accordingly, Malaysians have chosen the path to celebrate diversity rather than homogeneity. Thus, the government has always been sensitive and proactive to matters relating to the aspects of humanity, ethics and cultural values in the society. In order to minimize dissatisfactions in a diversified society, various policy instruments have been implemented to safeguard all public interest and contribute to the improvement of the socio-economic wellbeing. Certainly, public order, security and safety are important elements of a stable country apart from executing consistent effort in developing the nation's economy. Furthermore, the government closely monitors the income distribution of the society to ensure racial harmony. In support to these government economic and social agendas, the education system is certainly the best platform to foster peace in the nation. The enculturation of good moral values through religious and cultural beliefs in Malaysia's education system have strengthened the sense of belongingness and appreciativeness among the multicultural societies. Social stability is undeniably the foundation of any nation's economic growth and sustainability.

Undoubtedly, educational policy does play a significant role in the development of a balanced Malaysian society which not only possesses the required knowledge and skills for the country economic development but

have also the essential ethical behaviours. Accordingly, the school environment is significant in shaping the nation's future society. Therefore, schools are not only the platform of providing knowledge but also important to inculcate common ethical and cultural values. Subsequently, schools and classrooms atmosphere, which include teachers behaviours and effective management are significant aspects that need to be organized to ensure sufficient and vital social values are conveyed through them to the children (Allodi, 2007).

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