

Jurnal Pendidik dan Pendidikan, Jil. 21, 149–164, 2006

PATTERNS OF SOCIAL INTERACTION BETWEEN DIFFERENT ETHNIC GROUPS IN MALAYSIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Najeemah Mohd Yusof

School of Educational Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia,
11800 USM Pulau Pinang, Malaysia

Abstract: Social interaction among students of different ethnic groups has been a major focus of study in Malaysia in recent years. Schools in Malaysia have students from a variety of ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural backgrounds. When students of a variety of backgrounds are put under one roof, there is a strong tendency to differentiate and polarize. This article will discuss the patterns of social interaction amongst students of different ethnic groups in secondary schools. A research was conducted in 15 secondary schools in Kedah and Pulau Pinang with 581 students as samples. The nature of social interaction in this study is classified according to several factors such as ethnicity, sex or gender, academic achievement, school level and the student's former primary school (feeder school) before they enrolled in the secondary school. The students were given a set of questionnaires and findings were analysed quantitatively. The findings show that students prefer to mix with others in their own ethnic group.

Abstrak: Interaksi sosial dalam kalangan pelajar pelbagai etnik di Malaysia menjadi fokus kajian dalam beberapa tahun kebelakangan ini. Sekolah-sekolah di Malaysia mempunyai pelajar daripada latar belakang etnik, bahasa dan agama yang berlainan. Apabila pelajar daripada latar belakang yang pelbagai diletakkan di bawah satu bumbung terdapat kecenderungan untuk polarisasi. Artikel ini akan membincangkan tentang pola interaksi sosial dalam kalangan pelajar pelbagai etnik di sekolah menengah. Satu kajian telah dijalankan di 15 buah sekolah menengah di Kedah dan Pulau Pinang dengan saiz sampel seramai 581 orang pelajar. Pola interaksi sosial dalam kajian ini diklasifikasikan berdasarkan etnik, jantina, pencapaian akademik, peringkat persekolahan dan sekolah asal pelajar semasa di peringkat rendah. Pelajar diberi satu set soal selidik dan data dianalisis secara kuantitatif. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa pelajar lebih gemar berinteraksi dengan kumpulan etnik masing-masing.

INTRODUCTION

A unique characteristic of our secondary schools is that the students are from three different ethnic groups namely Malay, Chinese and Indian. These three dominant ethnic groups have their own beliefs, culture, values and norms that will affect their behaviors and actions. It's a goal of Malaysian education and schooling practice to enhance social integration among these various ethnic groups beyond mere physical integration, and intends to eliminate social prejudices and discrimination. In Malaysia, the objective of nation building and forging national unity amongst the various ethnic groups ranks very high in its

educational and political agendas. In fact, national unity and integration are the cornerstone of the education policy. It was stated as our major goals of the national education policy as the following: "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".

One way to achieve these goals is to provide an opportunity for students of different ethnic groups to interact with each other. In essence, the argument holds that bringing all ethnic groups together will lead to cross-racial contact, which will lead to better understanding of other races, or ethnic groups and would promote greater social tolerance and interaction. This belief has guided much of the educational promoting school desegregation especially in the United States (US).

From the perspective of the inter-group contact theory, it was believed that continuous interactions among members of majority and minority groups would lead to improvement in relationships among them. According to Allport (1954), this expectation will have a positive result if certain conditions prevail. He has formalized the theory, stating that inter-group contact would lead to a reduced inter-group prejudice if the contact situation embodies four conditions: (1) equal status between the groups in the situation, (2) common goals, (3) no competition between the groups, and (4) authority sanction for the contact. Allport emphasizes that cooperative interracial interaction aimed at attaining shared goals must be promoted to ensure positive inter-group relations.

THE PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of inter-ethnic interaction amongst students of various ethnic groups in secondary schools in Malaysia. This study also examines factors that may influence inter-ethnic relations and also to identify patterns of social interactions amongst various ethnic groups in secondary schools.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The data from the survey was analyzed and the findings will be discussed in the subsequent order. First, its described the pattern of several items that construct the social interaction variable with referring to the particular ethnic group. Second, it will answer the question that was proposed earlier: "Is there any difference of perception among the students in relation to the social interaction in the sample schools based on the ethnicity, sex or gender, academic achievement,

school level and the student's former primary school (feeder school) before they enrolled to the secondary school?" To answer this question, several statistical analyses such as the t-test and the One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used.

Research Questions

There were several items that made up the social interaction construct. These items are item 27 (I have been threaten by the other students whose ethnic group is...), item 32 (play in school with other students whose ethnic group is...), item 33 (study and discuss learning material with other students whose ethnic group is...), item 34 (quarrel and misunderstanding with other students whose ethnic group is...), item 35 (getting help from friend whose ethnic group is...), item 38 (lending personal things to students whose ethnic group is...) and item 43 (at school, I play with friend from ethnic group...). Respondents have to give their responds referring to three dominant ethnic groups which are Malay, Chinese and Indian. For each item, the responses were recorded on a 4-point Likert scale. The points allocated for each item were 1, 2, 3 and 4 which represent each response category of "never", "seldom", "sometimes" and "always", respectively. The discussion will be made on items 27, 33, 34 and 35.

A. Description of responses on the several items related to social interaction construct based on ethnic group

i. Students' perception of being threatened at school (item 27) according to ethnic group

A simple descriptive analysis was conducted to get the frequency of students' responses to the item (i.e., the degree of occurrence they have threatened) for each ethnic group. Tables 1–3 show the frequency count for Malay students who have been threatened by Malay, Chinese and Indian students, Tables 4–6 show the frequency count for Chinese students being threatened by Malay, Chinese and Indian students, and Tables 7–9 show the frequency count for Indian students being threatened by Malay, Chinese and Indian students.

Among the Malay students, most of them never been threatened either by their own friend from same ethnic group or other ethnic groups. However, the data revealed that Malay students have been threatened, seldom (11.1%) and sometimes (10.3%), by their own ethnic group compared to other ethnic groups.

The same pattern of responses was found among the Chinese students. More than 69.4% of the Chinese students agreed that they have never been threatened either by their own friends from same ethnic group or other ethnic groups. However,

28.0% said that they seldom or sometimes threatened by Malays at school, 25.1% seldom and sometimes being threatened by Indians. Being threatened by ethnic group was found high among Chinese students. Almost 20.4% of the Chinese students mentioned that they have been threatened either seldom or sometimes by their own ethnic group.

Among the Indian students, more than 88.6% of the Indian students have never been threatened by their own ethnic group and 84.0% have never been threatened by the Chinese. On the other hand, the Indian students reported being frequently threatened by their Malay counterparts. Meanwhile 13.3% of the Indian students reported that they were seldom threatened by the Malays, 7.6% sometimes and 6.7% always being threatened by their Malay friends in schools.

In conclusion, students being threatened in schools by other ethnic groups is still not a serious matter. However, precautions should be taken to prevent uneasiness among the students from different ethnic groups. Enhancing positive social interaction will promote understanding and cohesiveness among the students from different ethnic group.

ii. *Students' perception of quarrel and misunderstanding (item 34) according to ethnic group*

Analysis was conducted for each ethnic group referring to their perception of fighting and misunderstanding with their own friend from same ethnic group or other ethnic groups. The survey reported an interesting findings about how the Malay students view regarding fighting and misunderstanding in school with either their own ethnic group or other ethnic groups (Chinese and Indian). The analysis revealed that 36.3% of the Malay students seldom fight with their Malay friends, 19.6% sometimes and 12.2% always fighting with other Malay students. Only 31.9% reported that they never fight with their Malay friends.

For Malay students, 52.1% of them never fight or quarrel with their Chinese counterparts. However, 25.1% of Malay students reported that they seldom fight with Chinese, 15.6% reported sometimes and only 7.2% always fight or quarrel with the Chinese students.

For the response about Malay students perception towards fighting and misunderstanding with Indian students in their schools, it shows that 48.5% of Malay students never fight with their Indian counterpart. However, 31.6% reported that they seldom fight, 12.4% sometimes and 7.5% always fight with the Indian students.

For the Chinese, the survey revealed some findings related to fighting and misunderstanding between Chinese and Chinese students, and Chinese with Malay or Indian students. It was found that 55.1% of the Chinese students reported that they never fight with the Malay students, 28.1% seldom, 12.4% sometimes and only 4.3% fight with their Malay counterparts. On the other hand, 61.9% of the students reported they are whether seldom, sometime or always fight within same ethnic group. Only 38.9% never fight amongst themselves.

Looking to relationship among the Chinese and Indian, 61.3% of the Chinese students reported that they never fight with Indian students. Only 3.8% always fighting with Indian students, 7.5% sometimes and 27.4% reported seldom fight with their Indian counterparts.

Further analyses of the data to examine this variable referring to Indian students showed that 49.5% of Indian students never fight or quarrel with Malay students, 58.7% never fight with Chinese students and 42.7% never fight among themselves. However, the occurrence of fighting is more within Indian ethnic group itself. More than 31.1% Indian students reported that they seldom fight with their Indian friends, 15.5% sometimes and 10.7% always fight with students from similar ethnic group.

In conclusion, fighting and misunderstanding are two serious problems that should be handled properly by the school authorities. More seriously if the fighting or misunderstanding happened between ethnic groups. However, the result of this study shows that the fighting or misunderstanding occurred more within ethnic group compared to between different ethnic groups.

iii. Students' perception on studying and discussing learning material (item 33) according to ethnic group

Item 33 referred to the students' preferences to study and discuss learning materials with other students from certain ethnic group. Malay students preferred to study and discuss with their colleagues from same ethnic group. Only 1.4% reported that they never study or discuss with other Malay students, while 74.3% reported that they always do so with their Malay friends. The analysis also shows that 19.9% of Malay students sometimes and only 4.3% seldom study or discuss their learning material with their friends from same ethnic group.

When asked about their preference to study and discuss with the Chinese, 26.0% of the Malay students never choose their Chinese counterparts to study or discuss. Only 17.4% said that they always study or discuss with their Chinese friends. However, 34.7% sometimes choose Chinese to study with them and 21.9% reported seldom study with Chinese students. Meanwhile, 25.4% of

Malays students never study with Indian students and only 18.5% reported that they always study with Indian students and 30.0% sometimes. On the other hand, 26.2% of Malay students mentioned that they study and discuss their learning with their Indian colleagues.

Among the Chinese students, 14.9% of the Chinese students study with their Malay friends, but 21.8% never study with Malay students. However, 32.4% reported they sometimes study with their Malay counterparts. Within their own ethnic group, 61.1% of Chinese students always study together while only 4.2% students never study with their Chinese friends, 26.8% reported sometimes study and 7.9% seldom study with their Chinese friends. With Indian students, only 15.1% of the Chinese students always study or discuss their learning while 25.3% reported never study with the Indian students. However, 28.0% reported sometimes and 31.2% reported seldom study with their Indian counterparts.

Among the Indian students, 42.2% of the Indian students always study with Malay students, only 1.7% never, 24.5% sometimes and 17.6% seldom study with Malay students. On the other hand, 32.3% of Indian students always study with Chinese students, 28.1% sometimes and 26.0% seldom.

Within their ethnic group, similar pattern within Malays and Chinese ethnic groups are shown. The results show that most of them preferred their own ethnic group to study or discuss their learning, in which 47.5% of the Indian students always study with their Indian friends, while only 7.1% reported never study with their Indian friends and 15.2% reported seldom.

In conclusion to this findings, it was found that each ethnic group preferred to study or discuss with their colleagues within same ethnic group. They seldom or sometimes study or discuss learning with other ethnic groups.

iv. Students' perception on asking for help (item 35) according to ethnic group

Results showed that Malay students always asked for help from their Malay friends (65.1%), while only 3.6% reported they never, 6.5% seldom and 24.7% sometimes asked for help from Malay students. Meanwhile, 70.4% of the Malay students have never or seldom asked for help from Chinese and Indian. However, about 19.4% of Malay students sometimes and 10.3% always asked for help from Chinese students. On the other hand, 15.6% of Malay students sometimes and only 9.5% of Malay students always asked for help from their Indian counterparts.

Among the Chinese students, 33.2% have never and 39.7% seldom asked for help from Malay students. Only 5.4% reported always and 21.7% sometimes asked

Malay students for help. Within their ethnic groups, 47.1% always and 30.4% sometimes asked for help from their Chinese colleagues. Only 5.8% never and 16.8% seldom ask for help from their Chinese friends. Chinese students also never (33.9%) and seldom (37.6%) asked for help from the Indian counterparts. Only 6.6% always and 19.9% sometimes asked for help from their Indian friends.

Among the Indian students, 23.8% of the Indian students always and 26.7% sometimes seek for help from their Malay friends. Indian students also reported that they never seek help from their Chinese counterpart (34.0%) and seldom (24.7%). However, 21.6% sometimes and 19.6% always seek for help from their Chinese friends. Within their ethnic group, more than 70.0% of the Indian students either always or sometimes seek help from their Indian friends. However, 19.2% reported never and 13.5% seldom seek for help from their Indian colleagues.

In conclusion, it was found that each ethnic group always referred to their friends from the same ethnic group when the need or seek for help. They seldom seek help from other ethnic groups. These findings show that ethnocentrism still exist among students in the secondary schools although they are studying together.

B. Perception of students of the social interaction in the sample school

Hurst (2003) argued that social interaction is a form of action with one another as a means of communication both verbally and non-verbally. These actions can have different meanings depending on where we live and what you are doing at that given time. As well, societies share many of the same meanings of different types of social interaction that other societies may not. Social interaction is present in all societies and plays a huge part in how people relate to each other, do tasks, and in general, live their lives. Hurst (2003) further clarified social interaction as the process by which people act toward or respond to one another. Such interaction involves the interplay of many factors including our perceptions, cognitions and behaviors in specific social contexts.

i. Ethnicity and social interaction

According to Hurst (2003), social interaction can be affected by several factors, such as ethnicity, gender and social class. In general, ethnicity plays a huge role because it regulates the way the environment is perceived by providing a foundation for what is right and acceptable. Ethnicity becomes a medium through which every experience is measured and thus controls what effect it has on an individual's identity. We questioned whether the ethnicity of the students would have any different in their perceptions of social interaction.

A One-Way ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the relationship between ethnic group and the social interaction mean scores from the study. The independent variable, which was the ethnicity, included three major ethnic groups in school, i.e., Malays, Chinese and Indian. The dependent variable was the mean score of social interaction items. Table 1 shows that the ANOVA was significant, where $F(2, 498) = 4.306$; $p = 0.014$.

Table 1. One-Way ANOVA

ANOVA					
SI					
	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	10.775	2	5.387	4.306	0.014
Within groups	623.028	498	1.251		
Total	633.802	500			

Follow-up tests were conducted to evaluate pair-wise differences among the means. A Tukey's honest significant difference (HSD) was used and the results of these tests are reported in Table 2. There were significant differences in the means between the Chinese and Indian ethnic groups and the Malays and Indian, but no significant differences between Malays and Chinese ethnic groups.

Table 2. The results of post-hoc pair-wise comparison

Dependent variable: St
Tukey HSD

Race/ethnic		Mean difference	Std. Error	Sig.	95% confidence	
					Lower	Upper
Malay	Chinese	0.0792	0.11136	0.757	-0.1826	0.3410
	Indian	-0.3445	0.14042	0.039	-0.6744	-0.0142
Chinese	Malay	-0.0792	0.11136	0.757	-0.3410	0.1826
	Indian	-0.4235	0.14758	0.012	-0.7704	-0.0766
Indian	Malay	0.3443	0.14042	0.039	0.0142	0.6744
	Chinese	0.4235	0.14758	0.012	0.0766	0.7704

The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

ii. *Gender and social interaction*

As argued by Hurst, gender has its effect on social interactions. However, we should investigate whether the male and female students have significant differences in their perceptions on social interactions. Table 3 shows that the females social interaction means is a little higher than male.

Table 3. The mean and standard deviation (SD) between groups

Sex	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean
SI Male	305	8.6197	1.13420	0.06494
Female	195	8.7531	1.10345	0.07902

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate the hypothesis that there is no significance difference between male and female students means in their perception of social interactions in schools. The test was not significant, $t(498) = -1.297$; $p = 0.195$ as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. The results of the independent samples t-test

		Independent								
		Levene's equality of		t-test for						
		F	Si	T	D	Sig. (2-	Mean different	Std. different	95% interval different	
								Lower	Upper	
S	Equal variance assume	0.37	0.53	-	49	0.19	-	0.102	-	0.068
	Equal variance not assume			-	421	0.19	-	0.102	-	0.067

iii. *Academic achievement and social interaction*

A One-Way ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the relationship between three academic achievement and the social interaction score. The independent variable, that is the academic achievement, comprises of three achievement groups which is based on the UPSR result, namely high, moderate and low achievers. The dependent variable was the mean score of social interaction items. Table 5 shows that the ANOVA was significant, $F(2, 498) = 9.242$; $p = 0.000$.

Table 5. One-Way ANOVA

ANOVA					
SI					
	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	22.899	2	11.449	9.242	0.000
Within groups	579.762	468	1.239		
Total	602.661	470			

The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Follow-up tests were conducted to evaluate pair-wise differences among the means. A Tukey's HSD was used and the results of these tests, as well as the means and standard deviations for the three ethnic groups are reported in Table 6. There were significant differences in the means between the low and high achievers, and moderate with high achievers, but no significant differences between low and moderate achiever groups.

Table 6. Post-hoc pair-wise comparison between academic achievement groups

Dependent Variable: St
Tukey HSD

Race/ethnic	Mean difference	Std. Error	Sig.	95% confidence	
				Lower	Upper
Low achievers	-0.3760	0.17498	0.081	-0.7874	0.0354
	-0.6887	0.17522	0.000	-1.1006	-0.2767
Average achievers	0.3760	0.17496	0.610	-0.0354	0.7874
	-0.3126	0.10849	0.012	-0.5677	-0.0576
High achievers	0.6887	0.17522	0.000	0.2767	1.1006
	0.3126	0.10849	0.012	0.0576	0.5677

The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

iv. *Type of feeder school and social interaction*

Children attending the secondary schools usually come from different primary schools, that is, national type, Chinese national type and Tamil national type primary schools. They are studying together and following the same curriculum and the medium of instruction. The question raised here whether students, which come from different feeder school, have different perception towards the social interaction in school?

A One-Way ANOVA was conducted to assess the relationship between type of feeder school and the social interaction score. The independent variable, that is the type of feeder school, comprises of three type of primary schools, namely national type, Chinese national type and Tamil national type primary schools and others (maybe from religious school). The dependent variable was the mean score of social interaction items. Table 8 shows that the ANOVA was significant, $F(3, 497) = 5.525; p = 0.001$.

Table 8. A one-way ANOVA between feeder schools and social interaction mean score

ANOVA					
SI					
	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	20.454	3	6.818	5.525	0.001
Within groups	613.348	497	1.234		
Total	633.802	500			

Follow-up tests were conducted to evaluate pair-wise differences among the means. A Tukey's HSD was used and the results are reported in Table 9. There were significant differences in the means between the national type primary school and Chinese national type primary school but no significant differences between national type primary school with Tamil national type primary school and others.

Table 9. Post-hoc pair-wise comparison between type of feeder schools and social interaction

Dependent variable: St
Tukey HSD

Types of primary school	Mean difference	Std. error	Sig.	95% confidence		
				Lower	Upper	
NS	CS	0.4666	0.12287	0.001	0.1499	0.7833
	TS	-0.2669	0.31331	0.828	-1.0746	0.5407
	others	-0.6021	0.78758	0.870	-2.6323	1.4281
CS	NS	-0.4666	0.12287	0.001	-0.7833	-0.1499
	TS	-0.7335	0.32680	0.113	-0.5759	0.1089
	others	-1.0687	0.79304	0.533	-3.1129	0.9756
TS	NS	0.2669	0.31331	0.829	-0.5407	1.0746
	CS	0.7335	0.32680	0.113	-0.1089	1.5759
	others	-0.3352	0.84379	0.979	-2.5102	1.8399
Others	NS	0.6021	0.78758	0.870	-1.4281	2.6323
	CS	1.0687	0.79304	0.533	-0.9756	3.1129
	TS	0.3352	0.84379	0.979	-1.8399	2.5102

The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

v. *Forms and social interactions*

It's worth to examine whether students in different forms have different perceptions towards social interaction in schools. To evaluate this, a One-Way ANOVA was conducted to assess the relationship between students' forms and

social interactions. The independent variable was the forms that the students are now attending while the dependent variable was the mean score of social interaction items. Table 10 shows that the ANOVA was significant, $F(3, 497) = 5.525$; $p = 0.001$.

Table 10. A One-Way ANOVA

ANOVA					
SI					
	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	21.116	3	7.039	5.710	0.001
Within groups	612.686	497	1.233		
Total	633.802	500			

Table 11. Multiple comparison

Dependent variable: St
Tukey HSD

Forms	Mean difference	Std. error	Sig.	95% confidence	
				Lower	Upper
Form 1 Form 2	-0.4613	0.1698	0.003	-0.8975	-0.5027
Form 1 Form 4	-0.4246	0.1100	0.001	-0.7072	-0.1420
Form 1 Form 5	-0.2912	0.1993	0.461	-0.8034	0.2209
Form 2 Form 1	0.4613	0.1698	0.033	0.2503	0.8975
Form 2 Form 4	665.02	0.1676	0.996	-0.3940	0.4673
Form 2 Form 5	0.1700	0.2361	0.889	-0.4365	0.7765
Form 4 Form 1	0.4246	0.1100	0.001	0.1420	0.7072
Form 4 Form 2	665.02	0.1676	0.996	-0.4673	0.3940
Form 4 Form 5	0.1334	0.1975	0.906	-0.3740	0.6407
Form 5 Form 1	0.2912	0.1993	0.461	-0.2209	0.8034
Form 5 Form 2	-0.1700	0.2361	0.689	-0.7765	0.4365
Form 5 Form 4	-0.1334	0.1975	0.906	-0.6407	0.3740
LSD Form 2	-0.4613	0.1698	0.007	-0.7949	-0.1276
Form 1 Form 4	-0.4246	0.1100	0.000	-0.6408	-0.2085
Form 1 Form 5	-0.2912	0.1993	0.145	-0.6829	0.1004
LSD Form 1	0.4613	0.1698	0.007	0.1276	0.7949
Form 2 Form 4	665.02	0.1676	0.827	-0.2827	0.3660
Form 2 Form 5	0.1700	0.2361	0.472	-0.2938	0.6339
LSD Form 1	0.4246	0.1100	0.000	0.2085	0.6408
Form 4 Form 2	665.02	0.1676	0.827	-0.3660	0.2927
Form 4 Form 5	0.1334	0.1975	0.500	-0.2536	0.5214
LSD Form 1	0.2912	0.1993	0.145	-0.1004	0.6829
Form 5 Form 2	-0.1700	0.2361	0.472	-0.6339	0.2938
Form 5 Form 4	-0.1334	0.1975	0.500	-0.5214	0.2546

The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

A follow-up tests were conducted to evaluate pair-wise differences among the means. A Tukey's HSD was used and the result of the test as well as the means and standard deviations are reported in Table 11. There were significant differences in the means between Form 1 and Form 2, and Form 1 and Form 4 but no significant differences between Form 1 and Form 5.

CONCLUSION

In this section the nature of social interaction that exists in the secondary schools that had been chosen as a sample in this study will be discussed. The study revealed some interesting findings, which are:

- i. Each ethnic group reported other ethnic group had threatened them but it still not a serious matter. It seldom happened in school. However, precaution should be taken to prevent uneasiness among students from different ethnic groups. Enhancing positive social interaction will promote understanding and cohesiveness among the students from different ethnic group.
- ii. Fighting and misunderstanding occurred frequently more within ethnic group compared to between different ethnic groups. However, there were sometimes fighting or misunderstanding in school between ethnic groups.
- iii. Each ethnic group preferred to study or discuss with their colleagues within the same ethnic group. They seldom or sometimes study or discuss learning with other ethnic groups.
- iv. Each ethnic groups always referred to their friends from the same ethnic group when they need or seek for help. They seldom ask for help from other ethnic groups. This finding showed that ethnocentrism still exist among students in the secondary schools although they were studying together.
- v. There was a significant difference between the ethnic groups in their perception of social interaction in school. The significant difference was found between Malay and Indian, and Indian and Chinese ethnic group.
- vi. Gender has no affect to the social interaction in school. There was no significant difference between boys and girls regarding their perception of social interaction.

- vii. Academic achievement did affect social interaction in schools. Students of high achievement show significant differences compared to students with low and moderate academic performance on their perception to social interaction in schools.
- viii. Feeder schools also showed significant difference to social interaction between national type and Chinese national type primary school.
- ix. Student from different forms also showed significant differences to social interaction in school. The significant difference was found between Form 1 and Form 2 students, and Form 1 and Form 4 students.

The typical picture in schools emerging from interviews with students and from our observation was one in which tended to be determined far more by the duration of time in school. Form 4 students seem to be well mixed racially compared to Form 1 students. According to Driedger, Giles and Taylor (1976), the longer the contact the better the relationship between ethnic groups. This seemed true from the findings. It was obvious that the degree of mixing between students of different ethnicities in a school is positively connected with duration of contact. This is appropriate with the contact theory of Allport (1954), that is contact and perceived social climate tend to reinforce interaction.

From the findings, students from the same ethnic group expressed favourable attitude among their own group. This finding is similar to Hallinan and Teixeira (1987) where whites preferred their own group. The evidence given is that of social values, salience of between group differences and better understanding. This was also congruent with the findings discussed earlier. Own group members are identified with and the liked to the extent that they possess resources to satisfy one's need (Gottfried, 1974). Likewise other group members are seen mainly as individuals who are belonging to a different group. Mixing is more on the same ethnic group because they possess the same ethnic background (Turner & Vaughan, 1978).

Assimilated attitudes exert a more subtle, yet discernible, influence on children's preferences. In this study, students show same race preference in choosing friends. Rotheram and Phinney (1983) stressed that children develop expectations of how members of their own group interact, and in mixed settings, how other groups will react to certain situations. These stylistic differences can be a source of social discomfort and wariness, which rather than consciously formed preferences, may be a factor in the increasing ethnic cleavage in schools (Schofield, 1981).

Another aspect that is related to interaction found in the study was students who are academically good mixed well. According to Biaggio (1969), academically good students have the ability to socialize well and know the difference that exist between groups. These students mix well as shown in the study.

In general, the relationship between students depends to some extent on the degree of match between their profiles. It is predicted that in areas in which there is similarity between groups there will be compatibility, whereas in areas in which norms or rules differ, there will tend to be cross-ethnic conflict. However, the degree of cross-ethnic conflict in the research was not too critical except for bullying and stereotyping. This will be modulated by each group's awareness of social norms of the other group. Responses from students demonstrate that they are aware of the behaviour of the other group.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allport, G. W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- _____. (1971). *The nature of prejudice*. Cambridge: Addison-Wesley.
- Biaggio, A. (1969). Internalized versus externalized guilt: A cross cultural study. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 78, 147–149.
- Driedger, L., Giles, W., and Taylor, S. (1976). Ethnic self-identity: A comparison of in-group evaluation. *Sociometry*, 39, 131–141.
- Gottfried, A. W. (1974). Influence of social power. *Psychological Reports*, 34, 1147–1150.
- Hallinan, M. T., and Teixeira, W. (1987). Classroom racial composition and children's friendship. *Sociology of Education*, 51, 270–282.
- Husrt, J. (2003). *Social interaction*. Retrieved October 25, 2004, from http://research2.csci.educ.ubc/soc100/conceptmap/terms/social_interaction.php/.
- Malaysia. (1990). *Mid-term Review of Seventh Malaysian Plan*. Kuala Lumpur: Government Press.
- Rotheram, M. J., and Phinney, J. (1983). Intercultural Attitude and behaviour of children. Paper presented at the Meeting of the *Society for Intercultural Evaluation, Training and Research*, San Germignano, Italy.

Najeemah Mohd Yusof

Schofield, J. W. (1981). *The development of children's friendship*. New York: Academic Press.

Turner, J., and Vaughan, R. (1978). *Social categorization and social discrimination in minimal group paradigm*. New York: Free Press.