

Putting Social Integration Theories into Practice: Pupils Integration for Unity Plan (PIUP) in Malaysian Schools

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Abstract: In view of her multiethnic, multi religious and multicultural population, school curriculum (including co-curricular activities) in Malaysia is laden with elements of social integration. However implementation of social integration agenda among pupils of various races at the primary level is hampered by racial stratification of students into different types of schools. Malay students are concentrated at national schools, Chinese at national Chinese type school and Tamil at national type Tamil schools. Hence an intervention program to promote social unity among these segregated students is introduced where children of various races participate in specially designed-for-unity activities under the program. This paper seeks to explain how social integration theories were used to formulate activities designed for social integration among school pupils. The goal, objective, design of the PIUP program activities and its evaluation are deeply rooted in social integration theories namely Social Contact Theory, Cycle of Race Relation Theory and Nation-Building and Social Integration Theory. The activities which pupils participate is divided into five categories: Academic Excellence, Sports and Games, Patriotism, Cocurricular and Community Service. The level of integration promoted by these activities is evaluated under five themes or dimensions: general integration, integration through learning, patriotism and nation building, culture and custom and caring society. Through these activities it is hoped that the goal of producing a generation of Malaysian students who are knowledgeable, possessing superior spirit and personality, with high sense of unity and capable of facing challenges collectively and comprehensively will be realised.

Key words: Social integration • Pupil integration program in school

INTRODUCTION

Due to her multiethnic, multi religious and multicultural population, national integration has always been high in the Malaysian agenda. Within this diverse population, a multitude of factors at any one time may spark tension among communities. In fact, Malaysia is in “*a state of stable tension*” and the key to Malaysian survival according to Shamsul Amri [1, 2] is harmonious inter-ethnic relation. It is believed that a truly united Malaysia has to start from schools and community [3]. Ever since independence in 1957, education has been identified as a primary vehicle in promoting national integration, hence critical elements of national integration has been made as permanent features in the design of the national education system. This includes the national

language as main medium of instruction in schools, national curriculum, national examination system and national schools. The central premise of this design is students of various races study together in common schools known as national schools and thereby undergo and experience the integration process together. However this has not been attainable at primary and to a certain extent at secondary levels of education as historical, demographic and parental choice factors have combined to produce stratification among students of various races. At the primary level, Malay children mostly attend National Schools, Chinese pupils are mostly in Chinese National Type schools and Tamil pupils are mainly enrolled in Tamil National Type schools. Pockets of segregation or stratification also exist at secondary level of schooling. In urban areas there are many National Type

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Secondary schools that are mostly attended by Chinese students and in nonurban areas many schools are most attended by Malay students [4]. The existence of such stratification prompted the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOEM) to introduce an intervention program to strengthen interaction among students of various school types and races known as the *Program Rancangan Integrasi Murid Untuk Perpaduan (RIMUP)* or Pupils Integration for Unity Plan (PIUP) from 1986. The plan aims to enhance unity among multiracial students of different school types through specially designed for integration activities and produce a generation of students who are knowledgeable, possesses superior spirit and personality, with high sense of unity and capable of facing challenges collectively and comprehensively (KPM 2005a). Since its inception in 1986, PIUP has been continuously implemented under various macro education development plans including the current Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 [5].

Unity and Integration-Social Concept: The social concept of unity and integration shares many similarities. Shamsul Amri [2] describes social unity as a process of uniting the whole society and nation so that each member of the society is able to forge a common identity, values and sense of patriotism. Ahmad [6] describes social integration as a process to establish a common identity among groups within a political entity which are separated by different cultures, social practices and demographic locations. Integration, according to Jayum [7] refers to all aspects under the concept of unity. These process of unity according to Nazaruddin *et al.*, [8] can be arranged in a continuum from the lowest level of unity to the highest. At the lowest level is segregation, higher up is accommodation, followed by acculturation and assimilation and at the highest level is amalgamation. Segregation is when one ethnic group is separated from the others due to geographical location, schooling system, transportation, public facilities or as a result of government policy. Accommodation is when one ethnic group practices its way of life but at the same time acknowledge and respect the values and norms of other groups. Acculturation happens when one culture accept and adopt practices from other cultures as its own. Next is assimilation where ethnics groups of different cultures form a single group with similar cultures and identity. The highest level of integration is when cultures and races mix together to form a new race and culture [2, 8].

The Theoretical Framework for Social Integration:

The design of PIUP has been based mainly on three theories of social integration. They are Social Contact Theory, Cycle of Race Relation Theory and Nation Building and Social Integration Theory.

Social Contact Theory: Also known as ‘Intergroup Contact Theory’. The theory explains that integration among various races in schools can be established subject to four conditions. The first condition in developing integration in school is the establishment of equal status among students. Multiracial students must feel that they have equal opportunities to achieve excellence in education. Second is the establishment of common objective, students from every community must have the same goal in strengthening the relationship between communities for the wellbeing of the country. Third is to foster cooperation between the races to achieve the same objectives, for economic, social and political stability. Finally integration efforts in schools must receive support from government institutions or non-governmental organizations for the realization of inter-ethnic relations in the country [9, 10]. In addition to Allport’s four conditions, Pettigrew [11] adds the fifth condition, time for integration, where he argued that there should be a relationship long enough in creating intimacy among students, the potential for a strong friendship, foster a sense of empathy and intimate relationship with each other in order to foster racial integration in schools. Bennet [10] explains that under this theory, integration among students is fostered through a continuum of processes beginning initially with hostilities among the students of various ethnic group (the lowest level of integration) towards being cordial and friendly (the highest integration levels). The hostility end of the continuum begins with stigma, then discrimination and ends with prejudice while the cordial and friendly level begins with tolerance, followed by respect and ends with a situation where students of various ethnic groups work together for common good.

Bennet [10] argued that this theory can be used as a guide to reduce the challenges of racial integration in schools. According Houlette *et al.*, [12] the critical time to promote racial integration is when students are in primary school. This is because during at this early stage of schooling, stereotypes and prejudiced attitudes will exist among students [13, 14] and when they reach adolescence, they will receive information and make their own assessment of racial integration in their group [15].

Therefore school environment plays a very important role in fostering integration among students of different races [16].

The Cycle of Race Relation Theory: This theory by Robert E. Park [17] explains the integration process that happens in a country when a host community incorporates new immigrant groups. He argued that race relations will go through the phases of the cycle known as the 'Race Relations'. The integration process as explained by the race relations cycle begins with the relationship (contact) phase, followed by the competition, adaptation or accommodation and assimilation phases and finally ends with amalgamation phase.

Early relationship or contact phase is established when every immigrant who go through the migration process creates an inter-ethnic relations among them. Minorities will communicate and connect with the majority. Next is the competition phase in which conflict arises between ethnic groups for resources such as economic, political and social. This is followed by the process of adjustment or accommodation where each ethnic group begins to realize and respect the norms and values of other ethnic groups but at the same time still retain their cultural life. The assimilation that follows is the process of a merger or consolidation between different ethnic groups to form a new group with the same culture and identity. Amalgamation, the final phase, According to Noor Azman [18] occurs when race and culture mix together to form a new kind of culture and race. Park [17] acknowledges that the integration process though progressive according to this theory, but it is not without barriers that may cease the progression.

Nation-Building and Social Integration Theory: Nation building and social integration theory describes the integration of various races and its main focus is to strengthen the unity of the modern state. According to Kommisrud [19] the concept of nation building is an aspect that is used to identify, describe and analyze the macro dynamics of history and sociology that produces a modern country. Lijphart [20] explains that when people are aware of the importance of nation building, then they will build intimate relationships and, in turn, enhance mutual understanding and tolerance in the society. Social integration will occur if there is social cohesion in diverse communities. Amparo [21] argues that social integration will persist in a country where there is a balance in the economy and poverty eradication among different communities. Deutsch [22] explains that the aspects of

nation building and social integration are similar but have different approaches and yet they both have the same objectives and goals of achieving national unity. There are four stages in this theory integration, at the first level there is an open and hidden obstacles in the political amalgamation, the second level is a passive society that will bring about minimal racial integration, the next level is the support from the government in improving political integration of all ethnic and cultural groups. Finally, there is political amalgamation and integration in line with the concept of assimilation of ethnic diversity. Racial integration in the Malaysian context according Chandra Muzaffar[23] to can be divided into four phases. The first phase is in the 1950s, is about the issue of citizenship and the social contract, the second phase is in the 1960s is on the issue of language and implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP), the third phase in 1970s and 1980s is about education and economic quotas and urbanization crisis and the final phase is in the 1990's until today in which religious issues so strongly influence racial integration in this country.

Putting Theory into Practice-Pupils Integration for Unity Plan (PIUP): Students by nature will find friends that have similarities in terms of ethnicity, culture and hospitality. The absence of interaction among students of different ethnicity will give rise to prejudicial attitudes that will turn to racial discrimination and conflict. Informal and formal interaction between students and teachers through curricular and co-curricular activities will raise the level of racial integration among students [10]. According to Zaid Ahmad *et al.*, [24] multi-ethnic students must co-operate, mutually respect and trust one another so that optimal integration can be achieved in this country. This practice is already implemented in the education system in Malaysia where multi-ethnic environment will enhance social interaction patterns and racial integration among students at the school. One of the multiethnic environment of cooperation among students is the Pupils Integration for Unity Plan (PIUP) (also known under the Malay acronym as RIMUP) where students of different ethnicity that are segregated or stratified in different ethnic based or ethnic majority schools are brought together to participate in activities designed to enhanced integration among them. Under the PIUP the theories of integration such as the Social Contact Theory, Cycle of Race Relation Theory and Nation-Building and Social Integration Theory are found prominent in the aim, objective and the design of activities implemented under the plan.

The PIUP aims to enhance unity among multiracial students of different school types and produce a generation of students who are knowledgeable, possess superior spirit and personality, with high sense of unity and capable of facing challenges collectively and comprehensively through their participation in specially designed for integration activities. Under PIUP different types of schools in the same district are group together, each group has students from a National School, National Type Chinese School and National Type Tamil School and thereby each group is made up of a multiethnic student's composition. These selected students will participate in activities carried out in one of the school with the help and support of the local community, government agencies and NGOs. Each school will take turn to organize PIUP activities. These activities are aimed to achieve four objectives: to promote the participation of local communities, teachers and students as well as school staff; to promote a spirit for teamwork that helps to create an atmosphere of goodwill; produce understanding and tolerance among students of different races; and to undertake PIUP activities by sharing of facilities, equipment, energy and expertise together. To achieve these set objectives, the PIUP is implemented by five specially designed-for- integration activities [25].

a) Academic Excellence: At their own school students study within their own ethnic groups. PIUP activities provides students from different ethnic groups the experience of learning together under a multiethnic environment, where integration can be promoted through academic activities and at the same time students learn to achieve academic excellence together. PIUP activities that are categorized under academic excellence includes the academic seminars, workshops on technique in answering examination questions, quizzes on nation building, arts and literature contests and short story writing competitions [26]. Through these activities pupils of various races undertake learning and problem solving together, share their knowledge and help one another. The goodwill that is formed through these activities will provide the opportunities to instill respect, understanding and tolerance among all students, as well as the spirit of achieving academic excellence together.

b) Sports and Games: Sports and games provide an excellence opportunity to promote integration for PIUP. Through sports and games pupils of various races will develop sense of team spirit, working together, understanding, tolerance and handling challenges

collectively. Under these activities students teams made up of various races participate in three categories of planned activities which includes traditional games, sports carnival and treasure hunting. Traditional games is made up traditional Malay games such as *congkak*, *batu seremban*, *pukul berapa datuk harimau*, *Malay chess and kompang*; traditional Chinese games such yo-yo, marbles, lion dance, twenty-four seasons drums and Chinese chess; and Indian games which includes *adupullattam*, *gunduvilayattu*, *kiribari* and *thayam*. Sports carnival give pupils the opportunity to form teams comprising of different races and participate in numerous team competitions, also encourages students of various races to handle challenge collectively as a team. Through these activities, students not only enjoy themselves but also able to open their minds and get a new experience of sports activities as well as increase the number of friends of different races [27].

c) Patriotic and Nation Building: Developing a sense of one country and one Malaysian nation is a critical part in nation building in a multiethnic and multi religious population. Under PIUP pupils of various races who study in separate schools are brought together to take part in patriotic and nation building activities that are meant to instill love for the country and appreciation for the heritage of the nation. Among the activities carried out are national day celebration and parade, patriotic songs competition, national ideology club, flag campaign, heritage campaign, national historic trail and history quiz. By taking part in these activities together, pupils also learn to appreciate the sacrifice and contribution of various races in the struggle for independence and realize the importance of unity for the future of the nation [28].

d) Co-Curricular Activities: Each school organizes its own co-curricular or extracurricular activities, under PIUP co-curricular activities are specially planned and organized to promote integration among students of various races. Co-curricular activities under PIUP are divide under three categories namely, cultural activities, national and cultural celebrations and camping and tours. Under cultural activities category, the PIUP organizer may choose from a range of activities which include cultural carnival, courtesy week, cultural show, ethnic food carnival, ethnic music carnival and ethnic fashion show. Activities under national and cultural celebration category includes EidulFitr, Deepavali, Christmas, Gawai, Pesta Keamatan and Chinese New Year celebrations. Activities such as unity camp and learning tours are organized

under the camping and tours category [28]. Through these activities PIUP promotes a sense of integration through the appreciation of different culture and practices [29]. When students discuss and interact on the cultural aspects of each other in a live environment then they will have a better understanding and respect for their colleagues who have different culture [30]. Basic knowledge and experience in knowing the types of food, festivals, fashion and culture of various ethnic groups will create awareness among students that there are similarities and differences in all races [30].

e) Community Service: The spirit of unity among pupils of various races and from different schools can also be inculcated through community service activities. Under PIUP program, community service activities also involve local government and NGO agencies. School pupils with the participation of these agencies undertake community service activities which include various types of voluntary works, visits to elderly and orphans homes, cleaning public facilities and recreation places, greening the earth campaign, recycling projects, raising community awareness about the threats of dengue fever and undertake project such as raising funds for children with special needs and etc. Through these activities pupils will also foster the spirit of volunteerism, care for the environment as well as empathy and sympathy for those who are less privileged and inculcate grateful attitude for what they already have in their lives. Such spirit and characters are important for future Malaysians especially when there is a need for them to handle challenges collectively [31]

Measure of Integration: Based on [25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 31] and [4], these five activities formed five dimensions of integration among students. The first dimension is general integration which is a measure of integration among students of different races in six general aspects of integration namely, interaction, intimacy, cooperation, tolerance, respect and good intention. Second is integration through learning, which is a measure of integration among students while they are undergoing leaning together during PIUP activities. The measure of integration under this dimension includes the aspects of sharing knowledge and experience, cooperation, mutual aid, mutually increasing interest in learning, improving learning skills and creativity between students of various races. Third is integration through patriotism and nation building, which is comprised of 12 aspects; how to foster the spirit of unity, names of national independence

fighters, names of national leaders, contribution to independence, contribution to the national unity, national principles, values, customs, patriotic songs, patriotic work and independence day celebration. The fourth dimension of integration under PIUP is culture and custom integration. The level of integration under this dimension is measured by nine aspects; the ability of students to play traditional games, dance traditional dance, sing traditional songs, play traditional instruments, name traditional dress, name of ethnic handicrafts, food, celebrated days and customs of different races. Fifth and final is integration towards a caring society. The measure of integration towards a caring society among students of various races is measured in six aspects which includes collaborative spirit, community service and willingness to help, social responsibility, concern and care for the environment.

Summary: Racial integration is a top agenda in Malaysian schools. Through this paper, it is explained how social integration theories were put into practice within the design of school social integration program named as Pupils Integration for Unity Plan (PIUP) which is aimed at negating the effect racial stratification among pupils at different types of racially based schools. The Social Contact Theory helps design the program through its concepts of social contact and the conditions required for the promotion of social contact, the Cycle Of Race Relation helps guide the phases of integration and the Nation-Building and Social Integration Theory shapes the focus of the program that is to strengthen the unity of the modern state of Malaysia. The application of these theories into the PIUP program produced five dimensions or themes of integration which can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the program: general integration, integration through learning, patriotism and nation building, culture and custom and caring society.

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