

On Malaysia's Ethnic Tolerance: A Study of Two Cities

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Abstract: As emerging modernized nation, Malaysia political and social stability has become crucial elements in ensuring the national inspiration of developed nation by the year 2020 is achievable. The good atmosphere of its multiethnic relations is one of the essential key elements in maintaining its social unity and stability. Thus, inter-ethnic tolerance attitude must be one of the factors that contribute to the good atmosphere of multi-ethnic relations. Therefore, ascertaining the value of inter-ethnic tolerance is a must. In doing so, this study paper aimed to determine the level of tolerance among various ethnic groups in two different geographical areas. This study also seeks to understand the relationship between tolerance attitude and urbanization. This comparative study involved 451 respondents in selected urban and non-urban area. A quantitative approach using a set of self-administered questionnaires distributed with simple random technique is applied. Data then analysed descriptively using percentage and mean. Result shown that due to certain factors, the level of inter-ethnic tolerance in the developed and developing areas were different in certain degree. The findings thus reaffirm previous literature on urbanization and its effect. Suggestions are discussed.

Key words: National unity, ethnic relations, development, tolerance, urbanization, multi-ethnic

INTRODUCTION

Ethnic diversity is the Malaysia key demographic indicator which has made?? Malaysia a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country in Southeast Asia. This diversity also makes Malaysia a state that full of tolerance, harmony and cooperative (Case, 1996). The government inspiration with the slogan of "1Malaysia" as government's efforts in building the Malaysian nation or "Bangsa Malaysia" require holistic efforts by all parties including higher education institution to cultivate the aim. Higher Education Institutions in Malaysia as an agent of social mobilization is not left behind in explaining the diversity of ethnic identity and urbanization. Even though the economic progress, social changes and ethnicity patterns became more salient as urbanization took place with the issue of urban and non-urban became more crucial socially and politically. Often ethnic dilemma and conflict due to social and political differences (Nizah and Atoma, 2012) but one of the key important factors that may cause this problem is the effect of urbanization on peoples attitude which are often neglected.

Simmel (1905) has explained the theoretical concept that aims to study the sociology of urban and non-urban. These ecological theories suggest key elements in urbanization which also became a reference in the field of social psychology. To sum up from the above social scientists, there are three main elements that considered in measuring urbanization; that is the population size,

population density and diversity of the population. These three elements explained how a social change occurs due to a rapid urbanization process.

From the previous thesis, scholars begin to discuss the impact or effect of urbanization on tolerance or vice versa which covers the question area, district or region (Abrahamson and Carter, 1986; Carter, 2005). Scholars, mostly studied on urbanization and tolerance attitude from Western community, agree that urban society is more tolerant compared with non-urban communities (Abrahamson and Carter, 1986; Stephan and McMullin, 1982; Tuch, 1987; Williams *et al.*, 1976). However, there are differences in the studied factors which tolerance is measured with factors like; civil liberties, euthanasia, communism, homosexuality, racism and pornography (Abrahamson and Carter, 1986; Smith and Petersen, 1980; Stephan and McMullin, 1982). While this particular research examined the level of ethnic tolerance which also differ in the study of minority-majority tolerance, indigenous-immigrants as well as skin colours differences (Carter, 2005; McIntosh *et al.*, 1995; Tuch, 1987).

Locally, Mansor suggest that there are still lack of specific explanations on the impact of development (urbanization, in precise) of tolerance particularly in Malaysia. Urbanization process is often associated with the medley of ethnic relation by Furnivall (Nizah and Atoma, 2012) with common explanation that the level of migration in urban and non-urban is the determinant indicator. One of the push factors for the migration is the

establishment of education institution. Amir Hasan Dawi and Mohd Noh Dalimin believed that national integration is better promoted through structuralism via education institution with radical changes in terms inter-ethnic interaction. Not only from the aspect of education institution, Brown (2007) also add to support the argument with the importance of particular subject as a tool in creating “forced interaction” among ethnic. This argument is believed with the thesis of interaction-prejudice framework (Dovidio *et al.*, 2002; Shelton *et al.*, 2009). Several researches also found that interaction among ethnic in education institution are not far better with varies in respect of ethnicity total population. Recent empirical evidence support otherwise with the urbanites are less interact to each other as they are much more prefer of being individualist.

This contrary account pave to a question of if urbanites are less interact, then how about their tolerance attitude? Will they be more or less tolerant? If so, then previous studies of those urbanites are more tolerant need to be re-examined. Therefore, this research is useful in obtaining an explanation of the level of tolerance among ethnic with geographical and urbanization status difference, in Malaysia particular. For a preliminary examination, this research will compare and contrast between two selected areas for further verification. Therefore, this study is an attempt to ascertain the level of tolerance among respondents in two different areas of study that define by geographical and urbanization status. Further, it also seeks to understand the relationship between tolerance attitude and urbanization.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopted a quantitative method using a set of questionnaire which designed from the model by Mansor (2005) with certain adjustment according to the needs of this particular study. A total of 75 questions asked covering the aspect demographics, tolerance attitude issues on ethnic relations. However, for this specific article only 34 questions were examined on the respondents’ attitude on issues of ethnic tolerance relations in Malaysia and they are required to answer all questions by providing a selection of the best answer using Likert scale of 5 which 1 is the least and 5 is the best. While the language used the questionnaire is Bahasa Melayu because it status as official and communication language in Malaysia. A total of 451 questionnaires were distributed at two locations in the Klang Valley and in East Peninsular Malaysia which both represent the urban and non-urban status of geographical areas based on the states rate of urbanization (DOSM,

2010). Respondents are selected using simple random technique and distributed equally with 222 respondents in urban and 229 in non-urban area. Data then analyzed descriptively using percentages and average (mean). Determination of scale measurement for tolerance index was adapted by Mohamad Zaini which measured the level of unity in Pulau Pinang in his previous study. This is crucial since, there is no available universal measurement being used in determined the level of ethnic tolerance in Malaysia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the average score for all questions in urban and non-urban areas of 3.54 and 3.50. There is almost no significant difference between these two areas. However, in some detail aspects, the differences score between the two are observed. For example, in the question that relevant to respondent’s attitude whether they have a problem intermingle socially with friends of different religions and ethnic groups which the result showed that urbanites are more tolerant with mean score at 4.10 while non-urban respondents scored mean of 3.96. This finding is consistent with the fact that the ethnic, cultural and religion does not become a encumbrance to their daily activities at least for the urbanites. This can be understood that urbanites are more tolerant than the non-urban respondents. This result is synonymous with previous literature as reported by Carter *et al.* (2005), Huggins and Debies-Carl (2014) and Nizah and Atoma (2012).

On the contrary account, result also showed that ethnical behaviour and ethnocentrism are still became the contributing factor for level of tolerance either in urban and non urban areas. Racial polarization still occurs in both locations. This is evidenced by the findings in the statement of “I (respondents) prefer my own ethnic language when communicate with individuals of the same ethnic” with the low mean score of 2.14 and 2.15 for urban and non-urban respondents, respectively. This finding is further supported by several other result from the questionnaire including tendency level of social mixture based on own ethnic as compared to inter-ethnic with urban respondents scored mean of 2.83 while non-urban scored at 2.80. In addition to that respondents also found to be reacted less tolerant as more likely to interact in the economic activities (in buying and selling) on the premises belongs to same ethnicity and found to be prefer

Table 1: Total average score for all questions

Status of area	Scores
Urban	3.54
Non-urban	3.50

to held group discussions with their fellow ethnics. This finding are synonymous with earlier study by Mohd Rizal Mohd Said and Thay Cheow Yin.

The similar trends found on the matters that related to the tendency of respondents to have a sit next to the same ethnic groups on the lecture hall or lab. This specific trend also reflected on outside class activities with a less tolerant score due to non inter-ethnic mixture. Therefore, either it is an official or non-official activities, the racial polarization is still exist, and thus prove that the level of tolerance shown by respondents in both areas have not been entirely satisfactory and must be enhanced. Literature that supported structural-institution framework must be revisited.

On the interaction aspects, result showed that respondents do not think ethnic differences hindered their communication. This can observed though mean score of inter-ethnic communication at 3.87 and 3.86 of urban and non-urban, respectively. While in terms of their inter-ethnic relationship awareness, mean score of 3.89 and 3.90 of urban and non-urban, respectively, showed a high level of inter-ethnic awareness. Recent study of Nazri Muslim and Mansor Mohd Noor also supported the notion of awareness and acknowledgement of ethnic differences among Malaysian students are very satisfactory but it does not signify the level of their tolerance attitudes. This can be viewed by different trends of score in terms of sports activities where respondents in non-urban area are higher than urban respondents with 3.97 and 3.89 accordingly. This can understand as in previous literature that agreed on urbanites is considered to be more individualist where sports activities may not involved their social commitment.

In the light of food, other ethnic cooking the food and celebrating other ethnic cultural festival are found to be tolerated. Both respondents of researched area do not significantly differ. But in terms of religious festival, the significant difference toleration may be observed with non-urban respondents scored higher scale than the urbanites. In this case, both respondent groups were equally able to differentiate between cultural festival with religious celebrations, in where the findings for religious festivals slightly lower than cultural celebrations. This findings are similar with study conducted by Nazri Muslim and Mansor Mohd Noor which confirmed with religious sensitivity that need to be considered for future national tolerance programs.

Index of ethnic tolerance in Fig. 1 above showed a slight difference between urban and non-urban inter-ethnic tolerance. This figure is an adjustment from index published by Mohamad Zaini. In sum, urban respondents scored at 3.54 from total questions while

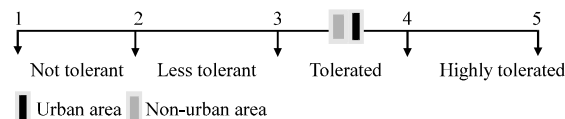


Fig. 1: Index of ethnic tolerance

non-urban respondents cumulatively scored at 3.5. It can conclude that both areas showed a satisfactory level of ethnic tolerance with urban respondents shows a slight difference. Despite the differences shown are small but this finding is significant because the magnitude tolerance among ethnic based on their current area status of urbanization are differ. It can be address that urbanization does have an effect on tolerance attitude which correspond to the previous literature on urbanization and tolerance. However, the level of magnitude tolerances of ethnic for both areas is good.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study showed that some aspects that must be given serious attention and encouragement to make better inter ethnic relationship. Some of the recommendations include in the aspects of interaction that is authorities should draw up programs and activities that consider the balanced population among ethnic. Based on the findings of this particular study, respondents of various ethnic groups are more likely to interact with their fellow ethnic, respectively. This finding are not much difference with previous literature that acknowledge the importance of balanced population and thus may reduced the racial polarization in universities, particularly.

Secondly, on the aspect of managing national development which are must not set aside the aspect of language as Malay language is constitutionally the official language of the nation; a profound understanding on inter-ethnic relationship and its importance to the nation or even on the institution-structuralism framework of only one kind of primary and secondary education system. Result shows that due to sociological factors, it leads to the racial polarization in universities. And because of that data in this study also showed that inter-ethnic dialogue is often considered as threaten to the ethnic sensitivities.

Thirdly, the results of this study also suggest urbanization process certainly does affect the attitudes of tolerance among ethnic. This finding is supported by study of Muslim and Noor (2014) that college or university students who reside in urban areas have a high inter-ethnic tolerance level. Because tolerance is much

more influenced with situation and environment, a justice and equality, socially balanced urbanization and manageable inter-ethnic contact and interaction must be the principle and this is the way forward for Malaysia. With the worlds became more globalized, interconnected and well-informed, tolerance became more salient and important feature and attitudes in managing national stability and harmony. As Walzer emphasized, "toleration makes difference possible, difference makes toleration necessary".

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