VIEWS OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS TOWARD ONE MALAYSIA, ONE NATION: THE MALAYSIAN EXPERIENCE

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INTRODUCTION

This article analyses the views of university students concerning the concept of One Malaysia One Nation (1Malaysia) that was introduced by the Malaysian government in April 2009. Malaysian society, including students, have received exposure with regard to this new concept especially through print and electronic media. The younger generation, particularly students, are an invaluable national asset. The student group bears heavy responsibility towards community and national development, as Malaysia heads towards developed nation status in 2020.

Najeemah (2006) is of the opinion that the student community should understand and appreciate the meaning of unity as well as practise it, as the element of unity is the essence of the National Education Policy. This view is supported by Jayum (2005) who says that national unity is at the heart of political stability, economic development and social harmony. Generally, Malaysian citizens from various ethnic groups have a moderate attitude and realize the importance of unity, and they are open to cooperation, tolerance and accommodating of fundamental differences between ethnic groups (Jayum, 2005). In this regard, efforts to bring about understanding and mutual acceptance among students of various ethnic groups have to be stepped up. Youths need to be given opportunities to interact among themselves and this will indirectly create goodwill and prevent racism among students specifically (Asma & Pedersen, 2006; Syed Husin, 2008).

The appointment of Dato' Seri Mohd Najib Tun Abdul Razak on 3rd April 2009 to the helm of the nation has brought about certain changes. Najib introduced the 1Malaysia concept with the slogan 'People First, Performance Now'. This concept has the objective of fostering unity among the various races by having as its basis a number of core values that need to be practised by every Malaysian (*Booklet* 1Malaysia, 2009). The diversity of races in Malaysia is one of the unique factors of Malaysia plural society, but that uniqueness will be meaningless if there is no harmony and understanding within the society.

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In line with ICT development, the 1Malaysia concept has also launched is official website, namely *www.1Malaysia.com.my* that is intended to function as a platform for sharing ideas and suggestions from the people, regardless of social strata.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Malaysia is a country in the Malay archipelago with citizens made up of various ethnic groups, cultures and religions. After being free of the yoke of colonialism for half a century, Malaysia now stands tall as a country that is prosperous and is developing towards Vision 2020. Ezhar (2009) writes that although the 1969 tragedy rocked the harmonious relationship of the multi-racial population in Malaysia for a time, Malaysia has risen again to face the challenges of racism and at the same time restored itself to become a prosperous nation with political and economic stability. Beginning with the first Prime Minister of Malaysia,Tunku Abdul Rahman, up to the current government of Dato' Seri Mohd Najib, our sixth premier, Malaysia has been seen to be in a transitional phase of modernisation.

Tun Mahathir Mohamad brought eastern values based on Malay-Islamic culture into his administration that was centred around three key elements that reflected Malay characteristics, namely a return to old values and customs and Islam (Mohd Azizuddin et al., 2009). When Mahathir retired in 2003, Malaysia was headed by Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi who introduced Malaysia to Islam Hadhari. Mohd Azizuddin et al.(2009) sees Islam Hadhari as replacing the 'look east' policy introduced by Tun Mahatir, but was at the same time an extension of that policy. However, Islam Hadhari was subjected to various criticisms and opposition from many parties that questioned the suitability of this concept to be applied in Malaysia (Mohd Azizuddin et al., 2009).

In 2009 Malaysia again underwent change when Dato' Seri Mohd Najib took over the reins of government and emphasized unity among races in his 1Malaysia concept. At the beginning of his administration, it was evidently clear that he fully accepted the concept of democracy that has been practised in Malaysia all along (Mohd Azizuddin et al., 2009). In an extract from *1Malaysia Booklet* (2009), it is stated that 1Malaysia is a continuation of the development agenda; within it are the challenges that also have become the factors that will realise the aspiration of the country to become a developed nation 2020.

Broadly, 1Malaysia encompasses three main principles that can be called the three pillars of 1Malaysia that consolidate the racial unity agenda of the people. These three principles are acceptance, nationhood and social justice (*Booklet* 1Malaysia, 2009). All three principles stress the importance of unity,

tolerance, patriotism and social justice, among others, as have been prescribed in the Federal Constitution. Then there are the eight values that have been incorporated into the 1Malaysia concept. These values are: a culture of excellence, patience, humility, acceptance, loyalty, meritocracy, education and integrity (*1Malaysia Booklet* 2009). All these eight values are introduced as key factors that can further strengthen the 1Malaysia concept and act as the guideline for the programs and vision of Dato' Seri Mohd Najib from the viewpoint of the economy, politics and the way forward for the nation (Mohd Azizuddin et al., 2009).

However, the 1Malaysia concept introduced by the government has given rise to various opinions and perceptions from all quarters and strata of society, including students. Even though the 1Malaysia concept was introduced quite recently, all Malaysians need to understand it, as ultimately, it is they who will be the ones to ensure its success. If people fail to understand what has been envisioned by the nation's leaders, then this concept will not hold any meaning. Due to a number of constraints, not all parties will gain total exposure to the 1Malaysia concept. By the writers' reckoning, it would not be too early now to make an assessment of the effectiveness of the 1Malaysia concept although it has been introduced not too long ago. In this regard, Mohd Azizuddin et al. (2009) feels that there has been criticism that the 1Malaysia concept is merely rhetoric and has been solely created to rally the support of the people. Whether this is true or not cannot be proved as different groups of people have their own viewpoints and perception. In addressing the reaction of youths towards the 1Malaysia concept, this working paper focuses on analysing the initial perception of youths towards this concept.

Unity and integration is a challenges that needs to be achieved by students (Shaharuddin, Azman, Mazlan, 2010). Past studies by Najeemah (2006) has contributed to efforts to bring about understanding and mutual acceptance among ethnic groups. It is felt that students from different ethnic groups need to be given opportunities to interact among themselves as this would indirectly foster comradeship and prevent the occurence of racism among students.

However, according to earlier studies, what is worrying is when students start thinking that integration is not something that is important (Nagaraj et al., 2007). This has to be addressed proactively as this involves the future happiness and prosperity of the nation and it is hoped that the 1Malaysia concept introduced by Dato' Seri Mohd Najib is capable of acting as an axis to control and alter the perception of students with regard to integration and unity among races in a plural society. One interesting question also needs to be looked at here, namely, how should students confront challenges that are facing the nation now?

The focus of this research paper is to analyse early views and knowledge of students towards the 1Malaysia concept. Students were chosen as the sample for study as they are the transitional group who will be at the helm of the country's development efforts in the future. They are the ones who will continue to carry out the agenda for national growth and realise the aspirations of the country to become a developed nation by 2020. (Ezhar et al. 2006).

To obtain a clear picture of students' knowledge about 1Malaysia concept, a survey was conducted among undergraduates of University Putra Malaysia (UPM). Early observation of the writers have found that the students' knowledge was wide and extensive. The rest of the paper explains the methodology and findings of the study.

METHODOLOGY, RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section will discuss research methodology used in the study. A quantitative approach was employed using the survey method. This section will also detail out and discuss students' knowledge of 1Malaysia.

Sampling, Instruments and Data Analysis

This preliminary study used simple random sampling involving 100 respondents comprising students of various ethnics studying at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) Serdang campus. Data collection was carried out at the Sultan Abdul Samad library of UPM. A research questionnaire (containing 13 items) was utilised as the research instrument that was intended to measure the level of knowledge of students regarding 1Malaysia concept. This research instrument was tested for reliability, and yielded an alpha value exceeding 0.6 as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Cronbach Alpha Value

Item	Alpha
Knowledge level of students toward the concept of 1Malaysia (13 items)	0.896

Research data was analyzed using SPSS software 18.0. Descriptive statistics was used to determine the data distribution of students' knowledge regarding 1Malaysia concept. Inferential statistics, namely one-way ANOVA, was used to identify if there existed significant differences among students with regards to knowledge about IMalaysia, based on the variables from the profile. It needs to be stated here that the data obtained from this study cannot be generalized to the Malaysian multi-racial student population in general. This is due to the fact that this study was limited only to students of UPM.

Research Findings

Profile of Respondents

Table 2: Profile of Respondents

Profile of Respondents	n	%
Gender		
- Male	38	38.0
- Female	62	62.0
Ethnicity		
- Malay	45	45.0
- Chinese	37	37.0
- Indian	13	13.0
- Others (i.e. Sabah & Sarawak)	5	5.0
Religion		
- Islam	46	46.0
- Buddhism	24	24.0
- Christianity	17	17.0
- Hinduism	13	13.0
Place of Resident		
- Urban area	59	59.0
- Rural area	41	41.0

Information with regard to respondents' profiles is depicted in Table 2. Genderwise, 62% of the 100 respondents were female and the remaining 38% were malesand were from various ethnic and racial groups. Racewise, 45% were Malays, 37% Chinese, 13% Indians and the remaining 5% comprised other races, including bumiputeras from Sabah and Sarawak. In terms of faith, 46% were Muslims, 24% Buddhists, 17% Christians and 13% were Hindus. In terms of residential profile, 59% lived in urban areas, while 41% lived in rural areas such as villages, planned settlements and other locations that can be classified as rural.

Knowledge of Students Regarding the 1Malaysia Concept

The knowledge of respondents regarding the 1Malaysia concept was measured using the Likert Scale namely: Very Informed (5), Informed (4), Not sure (3) Do not know (2.) Do not know at all (1). To describe overall knowledge level, the total mean score was calculated and divided by the number of items to obtain an overall mean reading. Research findings in Table 3 show that the mean score for respondents' knowledge was 3.6823 (SP=0.60507). Generally, research findings indicate that the level of respondents' knowledge of 1Malaysia is high and shows that they have a good fundamental understanding of 1Malaysia even though this concept has only recently been introduced.

Table 3: Distribution of Mean Determinants of Respondents' Knowledge Level

Level	Mean
Low	1.000-2.333
Moderate	2.334-3.667
High	3.668-5.000

Distribution of Respondents' Mean Knowledge about the 1Malaysia Concept

The respondents' knowledge of 1Malaysia was measured using the Likert Scale namely: Very Informed (5), Informed (4), Not sure (3) Do not know (2.) Do not know at all (1). findings show that there are eight variables that denote high respondent knowledge (Informed) of 1Malaysia. All of these eight variables are at levels of 3.668-5.000. Among the highest of these variables are statements pertaining to 1Malaysia:

Very informed about 1 Malaysia

'1Malaysia concept was introduced by Dato' Seri Mohd Najib Tun Hj Abd Razak'	:	mean=4.300
'1Malaysia is a concept for enhancing unity among multi-racial Malaysians'	:	mean=4.1600
'The slogan 'People First, Performance Now' is the theme for 1 Malaysia concept'	:	mean =4.0700

Informed about 1 Malaysia

Findings show that overall, respondents basically knew about the 1Malaysia concept and its slogan. There were five variables that showed moderate mean level, that is, at levels of 2.334-3.667.

Weak knowledge about 1 Malaysia

The lowest mean scores were:

'The 1Malaysia concept is a continuation of Islam Hadhari'	:	mean=2.9600
'The 1Malaysia concept does not nullify the special rights of the Malays as enshrined in the Federal Constitution'	:	mean=2.8600

With regard to the above, respondents did not have knowledge or were not sure of these statements that were put to them. The reaction of respondents to these two variables shows highlights that there exist a few weaknesses that need to be rectified in the framework so that the understanding of the people regarding the 1Malaysia concept is increased.

Variation in Students' Knowledge of 1Malaysia based on Gender

TheT-test was used to determine if there existed significant differences in knowledge between the genders. Research findings show that there does exist significant variation in knowledge level between the genders regarding the 1Malaysia concept, where the value of $p<0.05$ (refer to Table 4).

Table 4: T-test on difference in knowledge
among students based on gender

Profile	n	Mean	Value-t	Sig.
Gender				
- Female	62	3.7754	-1.995	0.049*
- Male	38	3.5304		

*sig. at level .05

Research findings show that the mean score of respondents' knowledge vary according to gender. The mean knowledge score for females is higher at 3.7754, compared to the male respondents' score of 3.5304. This shows that female respondents have a higher level of knowledge of the 1Malaysia concept compared with male respondents. This means that gender differences play a role in level of knowledge with regard to 1Malaysia concept.

It is a well-known fact that the number of female students in institutions of higher learning in Malaysia is higher than that of males and these findings seem to corroborate this phenomenon Based on the writers' experience as lecturers in institutions of higher learning, the focus and concentration of female students in academic learning is better than that of male students. Thus it is not surprising that these research findings show that the level of knowledge of female respondents is better in matters that are conceptual and intellectual in nature, such as the recently introduced 1Malaysia concept. If seen from the perspective of mean levels, the scores of female respondents are at a high level (3.668-5.000) while that of the male students are at moderate level (2.334-3.667).

Difference in Knowledge Level regarding the 1Malaysia Concept based on Ethnicity

Table 5 shows the mean readings for knowledge among students about the 1Malaysia concept based on difference in ethncity. Findings indicate that the 'Others' category obtained the highest score of 4.2154. This category included respondents who are bumiputeras from Sabah and Sarawak and also various sub-ethnic indigenous groups such as the Orang Asli, Iban, Kadazan, Dusun, Bajau, Melanau and others. This indicates that this group has accepted the 1Malaysia concept well. The bumiputera community of Sabah and Sarawak also have undergone a process of assimilation and acculturation so it was not difficult for them to interact and receive new national strategies such as the 1Malaysia concept. The Malay ethnic group which is the majority ethnic group in this study, has the second highest mean score of 3.8940 for knowledge and it is a generally known fact that the Malay community is the majority ethnic group in Peninsula Malaysia. Next, the Chinese ethnic group has the third highest score with a mean of 3.6805), while the Indian ethnic group has a mean score of 3.3534.

Table 5: Mean scores for knowledge according to ethnicity

Profile	Mean	N	%
Ethnic groups			
- Others (i.e. Sabah & Sarawak)	4.2154	5	5
- Malay	3.8940	45	45
- Chinese	3.6805	37	37
- Indian	3.3534	13	13

Overall, all the ethnic groups possess a high knowledge index of the 1Malaysia concept (with mean scores 3.668-5.000) except for the Indian ethnic group, which has a moderate knowledge level (2.334-3.667). What is interesting is

that the mean scores of 'Others', Malays and Chinese ethnicities are higher than that of the Indian ethnic group. The possibility exists that they are less interested in knowing about 1Malaysia or of understanding it, or it could be that they are less exposed to programmes with 1Malaysia themes in their localities. It could also be that they feel that the 1Malaysia concept does not bring any changes to their lives or their families' socio-economic status or standard of living.

Subsequently, the one-way Anova test was used to see whether there was a significant difference in knowledge among respondents based on ethnicity. The outcome of the one-way Anova test is presented in Table 6. The findings show that there is a significant variation in knowledge based on differences in ethnicity (p<0.01). In other words, the Malay, Chinese, Indian and 'Others', ethnic groups each have different levels of understanding of the 1Malaysia concept.

Table 6: One-way Anova Test of difference in knowledge based on ethnicity

Profile	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Ethnic					
- between groups	7.440	3	2.480	8.265	.000**
- In groups	28.805	96	0.300		
Total	36.244	99			

**sig. at level .01

Implications and Recommendations

It is hoped that this research is able to give an accurate picture of the views and knowledge level of students regarding the 1Malaysia concept. Research findings indicate that the knowledge level of students regarding the 1Malaysia concept is high. However, effort needs to be stepped up to increase awareness and appreciation of the younger generation towards the 1Malaysia concept and in this process, to forge closer unity among the various races in Malaysia. It is also hoped that this research will give rise to fresh ideas among all relevant parties in efforts to further increase the knowledge of Malaysian citizens of the 1Malaysia concept. This will certainly help bridge the gap among races, religions and cultures. Programmes such as exhibitions, carnivals and expos need to be planned for both rural and urban areas. Focus also has to be given to the younger generation, specifically students and teenagers as they are still in the formative stage of development.

Besides that, this study also can increase awareness among Malaysians of the diversity of races that exists in Malaysia, apart from the three main races - the Malays, Chinese and Indians. The opinions and perceptions of other minority races also need to be considered as they too play a role in ensuring the success of 1Malaysia. In order to realise the 1Malaysia concept, focusing on relevant target groups is of utmost importance and dissemination efforts need to be targeted at the ethnic non-Malay groups such as the Chinese, Indians, Orang Asli and other minority ethnic groups. The 1Malaysia Booklet also needs to be translated into Mandarin, Tamil and other mother tongues so that it can be easily understood by all layers of society, particularly those who are not well versed in the Malay language. When knowledge of the population increases, this would also indirectly alter the perception of society and become more positive towards the 1Malaysia concept.

Conclusion

Initial research findings show that students have a moderately high level of knowledge of the 1Malaysia concept (mean=36823). There are many factors that contribute to this high level of knowledge among respondents and these include education, co-curricular activities, clubs and college activities. Research findings via the T-test highlight significant differences between profiles of gender and place of residence. Male and female respondents have differing levels of knowledge about the 1Malaysia concept. The one-way ANOVA test also depicts a significant difference in knowledge (p<0.01) among respondents of different ethnicities. What is interesting is that the 'Others' ethnic group has the highest mean score for knowledge, followed by the Malay and Chinese ethnic groups while the Indian ethnic group has been found to have a moderate level of knowledge.

In conclusion, the 1Malaysia concept that was introduced by our Prime Minister aiming at harmony as a foundation for a united society, needs to be given the support and involvement of all parties (*Booklet* 1Malaysia, 2009). Based on early findings, it is found that there still are many members of the community who still have inadequate exposure to the 1Malaysia concept and this could lead to the creation of negative perceptions about this concept. This is unfortunate considering that this concept is not merely a political slogan to attract the attention of the public, rather, it is an action plan that is capable of giving benefits to society and ensure the progress of the people as a whole. The theme of 'People First, Performance Now' will become a slogan that can be realised in the lives of the people because the people have now become mature and wise enough to evaluate the state of the country. They want

leadership that has the interests of the people at heart and is capable of giving priority to the people in all matters. People nowadays do not merely hunger for physical progress but also for the kind of progress that is able to give peace and happiness in their hearts and their everyday lives.

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