

# 1Malaysia: National Education Challenge and Nation Building

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**Abstract**—The main issue discussed is on the role of education system in the process of nation building as a means in uniting different community ethnics which later on, hoped to shape the future ethnic relation of this country. It is generally known that political socialization experienced by each ethnic community has given birth to a vernacular education system, separated along the ethnic line. Every community shapes their own education system based on their respective mother tongue language, however all are based on the same curriculum. As a result the role of education as a uniting force is not significantly effective. Historically, it has been shown that government efforts to unite the country education system under the wing of national education system (national school) is not that successful since every community (Chinese) will defend the existence of their community education system because they want to spur their mother tongue language. The clash between national education system and vernacular education system is the root cause of stalemate in the ethnic relation in Malaysia and it always becomes a flash point when the issue is raised. The question now is what is the best solution to enhance the national education system in multiethnic Malaysia?

**Keywords**—Political socialization, education, national unity, national school, vernacular school and 1Malaysia

## I. INTRODUCTION

**T**his paper discusses the role of Malaysian national education system in nation building, especially in achieving national unity as stated in 1Malaysia concept (Gagasan 1Malaysia), initiated by Mohd Najib Abdul Razak, the Prime Minister of Malaysia.

The education system that is the root while the stem is nation building. Foliage and fruit that is produced inform of unity that will be felt. Everything is to be strengthened through 1Malaysia concept. The question is whether national education system is capable of realizing the goal of national unity based on the history of political socialization process experienced by every race (especially the Malays and Chinese), the diversity of the existing education system, and its implications on nation building and the future of nation building.

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## II. EDUCATION AND POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION

Education and language are closely related to political socialization experienced by us. Political socialization according to Hyman [1] is a learning process based on the orientation of politics and government, starting from childhood, then adult and into old age. It is also a form of communication learned from other people throughout the stages of life until the birth of social behavior [2].

In general, Hyman [1], Almond and Verb [3], Pye [4], Rush and Althoff [2] [5], Kamvara [6], Dennis [7] and Kavanagh [8], almost unanimously agree that political socialization experienced by a person is closely related to the worldview that will become self-confidence. Belief in a country's political system will develop a culture or a way of life known as a political culture. This is because the political culture is determined or shaped by political socialization as agreed by many scholars.

Langton [9] extends the meaning of political socialization with reference to the continuity of a political culture that are handed down from generation to generation. Political socialization is able to make the norms and tradition of political institutions to be a form of belief. Hyman [1], Dawson and Prewitt [10] also associate the political socialization as process of learning through various stages of life, either informal or formal.

Informal learning and socialization process by Dawson and Prewitt [10] has relatively little difference to the socialization approach by Herskovits [11] who used the term learning as natural or nature, which is not planned and upbringing or nurture learning refers to a process design, something that is innate, born naturally, without nurtured, involving unique biological and physical environment. For example, the form, language, uses of the senses and so on. Care involves in planned learning process such as education in schools, participation in political parties, NGOs and others.

Herskovits approach somewhat is more interesting and relevant to discuss the political socialization experienced by various ethnic groups in Malaysia. The role played by agents of political socialization society, determined who will be born. In this study, the process can occur in several key agents, such as history, family, education, associations and political parties.

Political culture created by the political socialization occurs throughout human life. It centers on the belief system that involves the interaction patterns of politics and political institutions. In addition to referring to what happens in a political environment that passed, the political culture is also

related to what they believe will happen next. Beliefs can occur in various forms, empirical beliefs about the actual political life involves goals or values in political life [12].

In conclusion, the political culture is a product of history involving the political system and the individual involved, based on personal experiences and events that go through the process of political socialization [13] [14]. Political culture will be part of the overall culture of a community. It also affects their lives or behavior either consciously or not [15].

Hyman [1], Almond and Verb [3], Dawson and Prewitt [11], Dowse and Hughes [14], Dennis [16], and Kavanagh [17] put the family and school agents are the most dominant in the process of political socialization. Almond and Verb [8] emphasizes the importance of the family's role in developing the political attitudes and political behavior before the person reaches adulthood. All matters will be passed down from generation to generation [10].

Neena Sharma [19] also supports this statement. Family influence is dominant in political socialization, without denying the influence of other agents such as schools, mass media, peers, political parties and others also contributed to this process. Before Neena Sharma, other thinkers such as Wilson, Plato, Confucius, Bodin, Filmer, and Locke agree experiences of childhood is the translation of the behavior and thinking when they become adults [20]. Thus, we can conclude that the majority of political scholars reached a consensus that the family is the basic unit of agents in a study of political socialization.

According to Hyman [1], while parents are talking during their meals, the children began to form their thought patterns. Family influence plays a role in shaping their relationships with neighbors, other people, the local law and society in general. Langton [9], said that the family is the first social group to influence the life of a child. Parents and relatives were among the closest to educate and interact with them in this socialization process.

These factors were adopted by Jennings, Niemi, Chaffee, McLeod and Wackman [16]. Local scholar, Samsudin A. Rahim [21] also agreed that political socialization is how we accept the norms and values and political experience in our lives. Sometimes political socialization are influenced by parents and family members in the form of accept or reject a political party.

Neena Sharma [19] emphasizes the importance role of formal education in the socialization process. The same themes debated by Almond and Verb [3]. Formal education will differentiate between those who have learned with those who do not. Langton [9] supports this argument by saying "the school's role is to instill confidence in formal politics through conscious planning and informally through experience".

In conclusion, political socialization is very relevant in influencing one's education and education of a country. Differences in the values system and culture of ethnic communities in Malaysia. The education system must be developed and each of us must encourage each party to maintain the education system inherited. Despite the diversity in this system, it can be overcome if each ethnic community

maintained the spirit of tolerance and mutual understanding of the history of Malay polity.

### III. EDUCATION SYSTEM IN MALAYSIA

Obviously that the education system in Malaysia is quite unique and complex compared to other countries. Malaysia Concept still retains the existing education system. In achieving unity through education, Malaysia does not practice the concept of uniformity as being practiced in other countries or in other words One Language, One Nation and One Country (1 Bahasa, 1 Bangsa, 1 Negara). Malaysia is celebrating the diversity of education (unity in diversity) in the creation of one dream (imagined society).

The question is whether the implementation of this educational approach to the composition is really successful in creating a society or is it just a dream. It is better that we glance through the form of education that has been running in our country.

In general, there are several types of education in this country based on education policy and education act which has been established, namely:

- Pre-School Education (Kindergarten)
- Primary School Education
- Secondary School of Education
- Special Schools Education
- Pre-University Education
- High School Education

All these educational services are provided by the government and the private sector with different names. Only education in Primary Schools is required by law. Meanwhile, Pre-School or Kindergarten is not compulsory. Empowerment of the school at the moment is very important because this is the most important moment for teaching students to have the biggest impact.

Given the large role of education, beginning in 2004, the administrative responsibilities were split into two, namely primary education and secondary schools are run by the Ministry of Education Malaysia. Meanwhile, higher education is managed by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia. Earlier, the Ministry of Education is responsible for all.

#### A. School and vernacular schools

The Primary School, which is funded by the government, is divided into two. It is the National School and National Type School or vernacular school. The difference between the two types of schools is in the medium used. Malay language is used formally in national schools. On the other hand, Mandarin and Tamil are used as medium of instruction in the vernacular schools. Curriculum and syllabus are nearly the same in both primary schools with minor differences.

The subject of Malay language in the vernacular schools, is much easier than the syllabus of the National School. The attempts of Ministry of Education to standardize the syllabus were opposed by the Chinese Associations such as the Teachers' Federation of Chinese Schools of Malaysia (*Jiao Zong*) and the Federation of Associations of Chinese Schools Management Board of Malaysia (*Dong Zong*).

The combination of the two associations is known as Association of Teachers and School Board China (*Dong Jiao Zong*), since 1975.

The reason is, the students at the vernacular school cannot be burdened with same syllabus as the National School. SJKC students have been charged with three languages, namely Mandarin as the main, the Malay language as a second language and English as third language.

Malaysians are allowed to select the best primary education for their children. This trend is occurring for different ethnic such as Chinese and Indians. Malays mainly will send their children to national schools and religious schools. Not many people actually send their children to private schools. This may be due to the high expenses.

Ethnic groups of this country have been through a kind of disembodied education system that has been created. Such education is said to be 'strength', even though many voices have suggested a standardized educational system. However, according to the Prime Minister, uniformity of the education system will be implemented only when people are ready for it.

#### *B. Secondary Education*

After completing their studies in Primary Schools, the students would normally be placed or pursuing the Secondary School level. The majority will choose to continue their studies in a government school with minimum fees. Secondary education involves several categories of schools such as National Secondary School, National Type Secondary School, Residential Schools (SBP), Cluster Schools, Technical Schools and Islamic National School, School of Arts and Sports.

For students who can afford normally they will choose to study in private secondary schools. As well as private primary schools, private secondary schools involving the International School, Private School and Religious School. For students who fail in the Malay language after his graduation from primary school level, they are required to enter the transition class for a year or remove class. Normally, the majority of those who fail comes from the Chinese National Type Schools (SJKC) or Tamil (SJKT).

#### *C. Residential Schools (SBP)*

Boarding schools are selective schools for students who obtained excellent results in examinations, particularly rural students. Why do the majority of children in SBP are from Malays origin, should be viewed in historical context? According to the Ministry of Education, the history of SBP began in 1890, when R.O. Winsted was the deputy and later became the Director of Education, Malaya. The Selangor Royal School was established as the first move to produce Malay elites from the palaces and princes, through the English medium education. In 1894, the school was closed for renovation and was reborn, which to this day has known as the Malay College (MCKK) [22]. To date the total number of SBP across the country are of 59 units. The majority of those who are studying in the SBP are the Malays and natives of rural areas who excell in academics.

#### *D. MARA Junior Science College (MRSM)*

The next category of residential school is the MARA Junior Science College (MRSM) managed by the Council of Trust for Indigenous People (MARA). At first, the existence of MRSM is controversial as it was only reserved for the Malays and natives only.

In 2002, the government has decided to allocate a quota of 10 percent to non-natives in the Mara Junior Science Colleges (MRSM) and Matriculation Programme. According to Deputy Minister of Education at that time, the decision is in no way intended to affect the educational interests of the Malays. Instead, it is aimed to foster the spirit of genuine cooperation between the races to maintain peace of this country. People are asked to see the matter positively without taking any reckless action against it. Neglecting certain people from access to education will only expose the country to a further racism.

Government allows recommendations in improving education quality, but wants it to be in the long term benefits. The decision was made to produce indigenous people of excellence and being able to socialize and compete with other nations in the globalization era. This is to the fact that the most outstanding graduate from MRSM are good only in academics but poor in socializing with others, in addition to failing to master the English language. Quota of 10 percent is not a new issue as it was proposed by former Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, when the idea of MRSM was agreed by the government [23].

MRSM provide a superior education system based on science and technology for students with potential in these areas to encourage and assist students, especially in rural areas participate actively in economic development. The existence of MRSM will always be an argument to justify the existence of vernacular schools. However, the openness of the government has clearly indicated how the social cohesion that occurs.

#### *E. Technical and Vocational Secondary School*

Vocational-oriented public education in Malaysia began with the inception Trade School (School of Commerce) for craft education in 1926 in Kuala Lumpur. After the Trade School was well received, the school expanded to Ipoh, Johor Bahru in 1931 and Penang in 1932. This school basically teaches basic carpentry, engine repair, electrical wiring and building construction. Duration of course is also offered for three years [24].

In 1960, the government has abolished the examination to enter secondary school or known as the Secondary School Admission Examination of Malaya (MSSEE-Malayan Secondary School Entrance Examination). The effect of this repeal, there is an increasing demand for children's schooling from parents. Finally in 1965, a comprehensive education was introduced. All students will receive general education and vocational emphasis is also given in industrial, commercial, agricultural or domestic science. In 1967, the Vocational Secondary School has replaced the Trade School and the School of Rural Extension [24].

Technical and Vocational Education provides the opportunity for students who have a potential in science and technology education to meet manpower needs in the field of industry.

The program is offered to allow the potential students to become semi-professionals in various technical fields and engineering. This preparation is very important in realizing Vision 2020, which wants to make Malaysia a developed nation.

According to Siti and Nor Azizah Masipiah [25], vocational education is more important in an era of economic and social development. In every country there is emerging needs of professional and semi professional force in order to ensure continuity of development. They are the core of development.

#### *F. Private School*

Private educational institutions are generally comprised of two main categories which are divided by level of education offered. Private Education Institutions such as private schools, international schools, kindergartens, centers of expertise include language center, tuition center, computer training center, technical center and trade center is under the supervision and responsibility of the Ministry of Education Malaysia.

Operations of private educational institutions are fully funded by the private sector. However, the establishment and registration process, management and operation of private educational institutions are subject to the Education Act 1996.

The second category is a private institution of higher education consisting of college-class educational institutions, colleges and universities under the control of the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia.

In short two main categories of institutions is made up of Private Educational Institutions under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and the Private Higher Educational Institutions (IPTs) under the supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education.

All educational institutions must be registered with the relevant Ministry before allowed to operate.

Educational institutions that fall into this category offer education from pre-school, elementary school to secondary level.

The types of private educational institutions in categories that need to be registered with the Ministry of Education include:

- Private preschool pre-school follow the National Curriculum Ministry of Education Malaysia.
- Primary and secondary schools follow the National Curriculum and the private and the proposed assessment.
- Primary and Secondary Schools to attend private religious National Curriculum.
- Private schools that follow the Chinese Ministry of Education guidelines.
- Expat School.
- International School.
- Tuition Centre, which provides educational assistance to students according to the National Curriculum.

Although private schools are monitored and controlled by the two ministries that have been mentioned, their operations could not be avoided from one dominated by racial and ethnic languages involved.

#### *G. Chinese Private Schools*

After completing his studies at the Chinese National Type Schools, some Chinese students will study in Chinese Independent Secondary Schools. At this private school, the students will sit for the examination standards, known as Certificate Examination (Unified Examination Certificate / UEC). Some students in this school also sit for the SPM as private candidates.

UEC program is run by *Dong Zong, Jiao Zong* and *Dong Jiao Zong*. UEC certificate is not recognized by the Malaysian Government for not adhering to the curriculum and the conditions stipulated by the Ministry of Education. This certificate does not qualify them for admission to public universities in Malaysia. However, this certificate is recognized as university entry qualifications in some other countries such as Singapore, Australia, Taiwan, China and some European countries.

Chinese Private School issues often controversial because of associations such as the *Dong Jiao Zong Chinese* continue to urge the Malaysian government to recognize this certificate. This problem can be solved if they comply with the curriculum and conditions laid down by the government of Malaysia. Nevertheless, in recent years, due to political pressure, the government to recognize the spirit was high, with some conditions may apply.

#### *H. Religious Schools*

The existence of religious schools should not be compare with other schools. Related matters are the jurisdiction of the state religion and the Malay Rulers and the position of Islam as the religion of the federation. Generally, there are two types religious schools, ie Primary Islamic School (SRA) and Secondary Islamic schools (SMA).

*In general, the objectives of Islamic School are:*

- To achieve excellence in curricular.
- To produce students who practice moral behavior.
- Develop new generation of students as an exemplary leader
- To produce students who have the fortitude to face the cultural challenges that are in conflict with Islamic values.
- To prepare students to contribute effectively to meet the needs of the nation and the ummah [26]

Religious schools are for those who are Muslims only. Some have claimed that religious schools are also a source of racial problems because the students here are not exposed to students from other nations or religions, just as the vernacular schools.

Islamic education is a must. In the Islamic context, the question of human capital development appears focused on two main aspects of spiritual and physical aspects. Passages of the Quran stressed the creation of man from the land of the original creation of the seminal fluid despised. Therefore, people are the components of the incident from the soil, the

need for people to meet the physical demands such as food, clothing and shelter.

Abdullah Ishak [27] states for the ideal Islamic generation, need a careful planning through a strong education and it should start with the education system is more pleasing to God is based on the Quran and Sunnah. In other words, human resource development for human capital in accordance with Islamic reference is through Islamic education.

#### *I. Vision School*

Composition of the education system has prompted the government to introduce the Vision School (Wawasan School). Some public schools that share the same facility in a school are known as the Vision School. The establishment of the Vision School is to promote closer interaction between the races. However, most Chinese and Indian schools have objected to it because they believed that would restrict the use of mother tongue in school.

Vision schools are primary schools with the concept of studying together in the same area regardless of race or religion. Under this concept, two or three different primary streams will be placed in the same area. Each school will have its own building which can be connected to each other by using link-ways. Aims and objectives of the Vision School

- To create unity among students of different races and backgrounds.
- To foster the spirit of integration among students from various schools.
- To produce a generation that has the properties of high tolerance and understanding in order to create a united nation.
- To encourage maximum interaction between all school staffs through the sharing of school facilities and the implementation of other activities at school.

At present, there are a number of Vision School Complex which has been operating such as the Wawasan Pekan Baru School Complex, Parit Buntar, Perak. Wawasan Taman Aman School Complex, Alor Setar, Kedah, Wawasan Tasik Permai School Complex, Pulau Pinang, Wawasan USJ 15 School Complex, Subang Jaya, Selangor and Wawasan Pundut School Complex, Seri Manjung, Perak.

#### *J. Special Education Schools*

Special Education School is meant for students with visual and hearing impaired or disabled persons. It was created in the ordinary day schools of primary and secondary schools and secondary technical/vocational school where teaching and learning approach is in isolation and semi-inclusive.

All primary schools for special education follow the academic stream. The facilities provided at the primary level, including dormitories and meals are free of charge. Pupils with Special Education Integration Programme can follow the national curriculum or an alternative curriculum. Penang Special Education Federal Secondary School Penang offers vocational elective subjects (MPV) and Shah Alam Vocational Special Education Secondary School Shah offer Malaysian Skills Certificate.

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#### *L. Pre- University Education*

After sitting for the Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM), students can decide on whether to study in Form 6 matriculation, or taking diploma in various educational institutes such as polytechnics. If they choose to pursue their studies in the Sixth Form, they will sit for Malaysian Higher School Certificate (STPM) that takes about two years.

Besides that, students can apply for permission to join the matriculation program that takes about one or two years. Since 2006, 30 percent of all students to matriculation are given programme that lasted for two years. 90 percent of matriculation places are allocated to the Malays and the natives.

Matriculation was introduced after a public university admission quotas based on race was repealed. 70 percent of the critical courses students such as from medicine, pharmacy, dentistry and law are the matriculation students. Some students receive pre-university education at private colleges. They may choose a diploma, A-Level, Canadian Matriculation Programme or similar courses from other countries.

The government claimed that university admission is based on meritocracy, but there are countless other pre-university programme without a standard for comparison. Matriculation Programme is a preparatory program for Malays and natives to enable them to pursue degrees in science, technology and accounting. Previously matriculation program was conducted by several institutions of Higher Learning (IPTA) for over 30 years in various manner and pattern of implementation. The result of this program has produced many scholars and skilled natives in the professional sectors.

#### *M. Higher Education Institutions*

Institutions of Higher Education can be divided into the Public Institutions of Higher Learning (IPTA) and the Private Institutions of Higher Learning (IPTS). There are 20 Public Institutions of Higher Learning (IPTA) and 32 Private Institutions of Higher Learning (IPTS). This does not include other colleges that are not listed by the Ministry of Higher Education, which is categorized as other approved Institutions [28].

Of the 20 universities, some universities are dominated by Muslims, and natives of Sabah and Sarawak such as Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, International Islamic University and others. The establishment of universities is in line with the Constitution which places special privilege to Islam as the religion of the federation and the Malay special rights, as well as the existence of religious schools and MRSM (MARA Science Lower College). Admission to other universities is based on merits (see item 3 (1), item 12 (2), and 153).

However, the existence of IPTAs are offset by the existence of public colleges run by the private sector, NGOs and political parties that are mostly owned.

#### IV. NATIONAL EDUCATION AND CHALLENGES

Diversity of the education system as defined above, have close social cohesion in the country, especially in terms of language and curriculum. So far, the diversity is not causing problems for the country's education system. However, controversy is inevitable, especially between the national education with vernacular education. It is also a challenge to the 1Malaysia concept.

The issue of vernacular schools in Malaysian education system has never completed, and often become controversial. The majority of Chinese who are represented by *Dong Jiao Zong* says the existence of vernacular schools for decades have never resulted in racial polarization, but instead has enhanced its competitiveness internationally. The existence of vernacular schools is said to have never affect national unity. *Dong Jiao Zong* asked the government to be open in providing equal treatment to schools of different streams to strengthen unity and national development. They also argued that, if the polarization is at issue, how about the existence of religious schools, MRSM, and UiTM? Don't these academic institutions also comprise a majority of one race only?

In searching for these claims and positions, three essential pillars of Chinese politics must be understood together. The first pillar is the defending of Chinese education. It involves 1293 National Type Chinese Primary School (SJJC), 78 National Type Chinese Secondary Schools and 60 Chinese Independent School across the country [29]. Of course the number of schools increases from year to year. According to MCA (INSAP) research bodies, Chinese education struggled by the Chinese is similar to the struggle to uphold Islam by the Malays.

The second pillar is to defend the Chinese newspaper publishing which involves six daily newspapers in the Peninsular and 8 in Sabah and Sarawak. Chinese language daily newspaper is the most abundant in the market compared to newspapers in other languages, including Malay newspapers. Why Malay newspaper is not read by non-Malays, we need to answer it ourselves.

Meanwhile, the third pillar is to defend the Chinese associations (Huatuan). It Involves more than 8000 associations, such as associations of synagogue, tribe (clan) and the language, politics and education associations, business

associations and trade. The most influential association are not of political parties but the association of language and education, such as *Hua Zong*, *Dong Zong* and *Dong Jiao Zong*.

Since time immemorial the government has never denied the right of non-Malays to get education in their mother tongue. In fact, many among Malay children study in the Chinese National Type Schools (SJJC) to learn the Chinese language and culture. It is a credit to the Malay students, being able to master other languages.

*Dong Jiao Zong* claimed SJJC does not cause racial polarization, but instead has improved our competitiveness. According to some research done by researchers, Chinese students of National Schools education and English education are easier to mix with Malays compared with students of vernacular schools.

The Kuala Lumpur Chinese School Teachers Association urges the Chinese Schools Teacher's Association in other states to support their action by submitting a "Memorandum of the Federation of Malaya Education". This support led to the establishment of *Jiao Zong* on December 25, 1951. They wanted that Chinese, Tamil, English and Malay be given the same treatment and listed as the official language. Chinese education should be recognised as one of the streams in national education.

The question is, whether the true diversity of the education system will help building a united nation as dream by the 1Malaysia concept? 1Malaysia desired by the government is to build awareness and understanding among all Malaysian citizens that stability and peace and living harmoniously is required. It will not come just like that unless there is an awareness of history in understanding the meaning of why the constitution was made in that way and the purpose it was built for the guidance of all. Constitutional spirit among the younger generation is essential and applying the Pillars of Spirit is the best way to create a long-lasting and effective harmony [30].

#### V. EDUCATION AND NATION BUILDING

Commitment and compromise by the government towards national education system is high. Not forgetting the vernacular schools. The question is, whether it helps in nation building? Prior to 1996, there was the Education Act 1961 Section 21 (1B), which empowered the education minister to close or to abolish vernacular schools. This Act greatly feared by the Chinese associations. They have appealed and urged the government to repeal this act. On the basis of a compromise, in 1995, the Minister of Education at the time took the bold decision to fulfill the aspirations of the Chinese by withdrawing the power or those provisions when presenting the new Education Act in 1996 that is softer [31].

Education Act 1996 which was introduced is still not agreed upon by the Chinese. They noted, amendments made to the 1961 Education Act in 1996 has worked out a problem with the repeal of Section 21 (1) (b), but creates new problems with the addition of Section 17 (1). According to them Section 17

(1) has given new powers to the Minister of Education to force the use of Malay as the main medium in the vernacular school.

Their arguments said that the previous act only prevents the usage of mother tongue as the main medium at primary level, but now the new Act allows the ministry to prevent, from pre-school education to the education beyond the secondary level. According to Section 28 of the new Act, only state-owned vernacular schools or schools that is given "special permission" by the Minister of Education, which may be exempt from the provisions of Section 17 (1).

In fact, the 1996 Education Act, also known as Act 550 is 'softer' than the repealed Education Act 1961. In general, the 1996 Education Act has produced a new law on education for the purpose of implementing national education policy which is based on the National Education Philosophy. Goals such as those listed by the National Education Philosophy are to be achieved through a National Education System, which provides the national language as the main medium, the National Curriculum and common examinations. Education provided by this Act is comprehensive in scope and will meet the needs of the country, as well as national unity through cultural, social, economic and political development [32].

According to Khoo Kay Kim, today's education system must meet the requirements of 1Malaysia. Various education systems will not help people understand the idea. Children are separated since childhood. Therefore it is difficult for them to cooperate with each other when they grow up. Vernacular schools were originally established to allow the Chinese and Indian to learn the origin of their country. But today since they have become citizens of Malaysia, such a situation should not need to exist. Kay Kim was very disappointed with some of those who defended this race-based school.

The Chinese are afraid of a policy that could jeopardize their interests. Chinese organizations have not agreed with government policies as feared that it would result in their native languages and cultures become vanished. They want the Chinese language is also being certified as an official language as English and Malay. As a result, around the 1960's, they launched a campaign to establish the Merdeka University, using Mandarin as the medium.

Former Director General of Education, Wan Mohd Zahid Wan Mohd Nordin also gave a similar comment. Clearly, the Chinese must put national interests above ethnic interests. This does not mean that every ethnic will have to forget their origin, but the national interest should precede the others. Just like in America, the various ethnic groups living in the country are proud of themselves as Americans [33].

Liok Ee Tan [34], the issue of Chinese education is the most sensitive issue in Malaysian politics since the Chinese are very concerned about their identity. This has been the struggle of Dong Jiao Zong over the years before and after the country gained independence. For them, Chinese schools must be maintained for the formation of Chinese identity [35]. Elaborating further, the Chinese press, Shin Chew Daily praised the efforts made by these Chinese associations. Their perseverance, which have been successful throughout British colonial rule and atrocities of the Japanese army, has led to the

establishment of 1,300 vernacular schools and 60 Chinese National High School.

Their history is not the same as those encountered by other people, full of bends and challenges. Often pressed in many uncertainties. They marched without turning back. Now they are in a comfortable position and had achieved much success. Through endless contributions from various parties, it has become significant in the history of education. Today, there are about 640,000 students studying in the Chinese National Type School. Nearly one-tenth or 60 thousand of whom are non-Chinese students.

In a study conducted by Yeok Kim Yew [36] and Leo Suryadinata [37] on the education of the Chinese community, some findings about the attitudes and opinions of Chinese people (students) was obtained. There is a difference in attitude (perception) of Chinese students from Chinese education background with Chinese students who receive education in English. Chinese students with English-educated are easier to mix with other races and thus, simplify the process of national integration. Whereas it is otherwise in students with Chinese education background. The situation got worse when there are racial based political parties who make their influence spread to family and educational institutions. When this socialization process occurs, then, according to Funston [38], every ethnicity will champion the interests of their people, especially in matters related to language, education and culture.

According to Haris Md Jadi [39], language is a complicated issue in a multi-racial society because it can be a barrier to the integration of racial and ethnic group if every different ethnic groups want maintenance of their languages as a tool to convey their cultural and social values.

Although his argument is not a strong basis in measuring the effectiveness of national integration, but somehow or rather the existing system has resulted in interaction gaps between races to become loose. With the existence of race-based schools such as the Chinese and Tamil schools as they hinder unity. The government should establish only one type of national school and the appearance should be able to attract the Chinese and Indians. Ramon admitted, national schools have many advantages. Apart from a variety of facilities, beautiful building and the teachers are enough; it can also improve the country's education.

This was confirmed by a study conducted by a lecturer at Universiti Utara Malaysia for students who are Malay, Chinese and Indians. Many students have high racial sentiments. Polarization in the campus environment is quite disturbing. Despite the interaction, students prefer to hang out with their own in all respects [40]. All this happened due to the socialization process experienced prior to our campus life.

The question is, what sort of education as can be achieve with 1Malaysia? As stated by Sidek Baba [31], education in Malaysia today has to go through a transformation process that is planned to realize the aspirations of 1Malaysia. Examination orientation alone should not be a priority in education. Co-curricular and extracurricular activities should be strengthened so that identity formation and team work can flourish among

pupils, students and college students. It means that our education system is to produce individuals with not only high technology (high-tech) savvy but must be balanced with a touch of humanity (high-touch) to progress, to be constructive with high ethics.

According to Sidek Baba [31] again, there is a fear among the Malays and Muslims that their constitutional rights were denied through claims in various ways. At the same time, the non-Malays feel that justice should be wide open space among them. Therefore, awareness should be available in Malaysia among the lucky ones and able to enjoy the prosperity that there are economic, social and education responsibility among the rich towards the poor, the advanced towards the still backward, those with high purchasing power on the poor in all our communities.

## VI. NATION BUILDING: REALITY OR ILLUSION

The concept of Malaysia adheres to the concept of unity in diversity. This expression is now sweet being heard. However, for those who study, the academic facts continue to hide in the interest of politics.

In Malaysia, diversity continues to be regarded as a strength. During the Merlimau election nomination, Malacca 106 Chinese NGOs under the auspices of Dong Lian (Chinese organizations which have a close relationship with Dong Zong and Dong Jiao Zong) put four election demand (suqiu). Electoral support is said to depend on the extent the Chinese demand can be met?

Among the claims are: first, equal treatment of national schools and vernacular schools. Second, the government must recognize the Unified Examination Certificate (UEC). Third, the government must assist five Chinese National High School in Malacca and lastly to return the citizenship of a Chinese nationalists, the late Mr Lim Lian Geok withdrawn in 1961 [41].

Many people do not know Lian Geok and his relevance to the vernacular education. Lian Geok, who died in 1985, is considered the most deserving fighters to the Chinese, especially as the head of *Dong Jiao Zong*. Each year they will remember the struggle and the celebration of his service without fail. Struggle to defend the existence of vernacular schools is his holy war, and survival. Anyone who read his biography will be impressed. And the struggle to uphold the spirit of Chinese education has never run out. Lian Geok put the language and race agenda in the first place, so had to forego the luxury of life. Sacred words of Lian Geok which continues to be holding the Chinese are: "the Chinese must send their children to Chinese schools. Chinese school is like the life and soul. If the Chinese want to make sure they are Chinese, there is no other way except for the Chinese school. This is very important in order to maintain the Chinese identity, love the Chinese, Chinese culture, Chinese language, proud to be Chinese, and more importantly know the origin or root of the Chinese" [41].

True patriot according to Geok Lian is not just flying the flag at independence, but those who sacrificed for truth, justice

and equality. For Lian Geok, he was a patriot. His struggle inspired the majority of Chinese society today, especially in education issues. No wonder, then the President of MCA by using reverse psychology have challenge the People's Alliance led government to take graduate UEC as an officer or employee of the government under them, and then urge Umno to increase the school and recognize the vernacular schools involved. If Pakatan Rakyat bow down to this challenge, it will be a precedent. However, PR is not able to do so because these aspects are subject to federal law. DAP is quick to return the nails so that the MCA and Gerakan asking the federal government to press (UMNO) to recognize and take UEC graduates in the public sector [41].

The latest, the Ministry of Education has agreed to recognize the UEC graduates for admission to college provided they must have a credit in SPM including Bahasa Malaysia and English. *Jiao Zong* is against this decision alleging that it is inconsistent with the promised that the president of MCA in December 2010 before had made that the candidate of UEC will be accepted in the college if they get 4 credits, one Malay and three credits in UEC subjects without having to sit for SPM subjects. This is the dilemma of the national education system.

The same incident occurred as reported by Sin Chew, in SJKC Hau Lim, Muar, Johor. The Chinese Association urged the Malay language teachers who do not master the Mandarin language to be transferred immediately. They want the Malay Language teachers must master the Mandarin as well. Malay Language teachers there is said to have sought help from the Chinese students to translate the Malay subjects taught into Mandarin. The question is, what is the duty of a Malaysian citizen towards the national language as clearly enshrined in the constitution?

Another concern of the *Dong Jiao Zong* is about a handful of Chinese parents and students who have started taking action against the mandatory Mandarin subjects in SPM as happened at one school in the state. If left unchecked, the future of Mandarin and SJKC will be significantly affected. Apparently, they never worried when their children failed the Malay language, but they are very worried if their children do not take the Mandarin subject. Then they urged the government to recognize the UEC. Is this action justified? In the opinion of the author, the voice of this Chinese new generation should be heard. A society that is too chauvinist will not get us anywhere. It is not being argued in an academic atmosphere, but often politicized. For example, threats and demands continue to be made. Novel *Interlok* case is a clear example. Four National Laureate Holders (not including the novelist) defended this work as academic. This novel is meant to be viewed from the perspective of literary field of expertise, not to be politicized or seen from other angle [42].

Not least, the novel also criticizes Malays as a lazy race. Malays accept it as it is. There was no protest made. The author believes, if stereotypes are referred to other races, of course, they would not be very happy. The act of the Indians, who opposed the novel *Interlok* which is of 40 years old, without a strong argument, has invited the discomfort of the



Malays. As a result, the combination of 138 Malay NGOs under the auspices of the Malay Consultative Council (MCC) recently, vowed not to provide support to the Indian leaders from various parties in any election after this. MCC is of the opinion that the Indian leaders and activists have been distorted and managed to persuade the government to bow to intimidation and pressure in addressing the controversial novel *Interlok* [42].

This is what we call a one sided win. Although the government does not accept the extreme claims in full, which is so that the novel *Interlok* be banned as a school reference text, but they still won. This is because their strategy is to claim to the very extreme, they knew the government will not agree to in full, nevertheless, the government would provide a little or agree in part. Giving in a little or some of it was actually a victory in their absolute [42].

## VII. CONCLUSION

Through the above discussion, it is clear that education plays a dominant role in the process of nation building. Education policy that has been developed and practiced for so long has been shaping the society of Malaysia. Is it really a strength or vice versa? Many have argued that this diversity is a strength or a unity in diversity. On one hand, it is a strength for each race can practice their own way of life. However, they also have to think of the weakness, taking into account the experience by other countries.

British Prime Minister David Cameron said in a statement on "multi-culturalism" which has been the policy of the country that it has failed in nation building. He said too much freedom being accorded to various cultures and their separate way of life does not work into Britons desired shape of community. The culture includes the law and existing regulations. Now, those who want to live in Britain are urged to respect the culture of the British (the majority), known in history as the "broad view" or liberal. The British Government is acting to pursue those who live beyond the period allowed for raising a lot of problems [43].

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