

**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MULTICULTURALISM AND HIGHER
EDUCATION POLICY IN MALAYSIA IN TERMS OF ETHNIC DIVERSITY
AND EQUALITY**

A Thesis by

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The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in Liberal Studies.

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DEDICATION

To my parents, Chee Kwong Fam and Yoot Chee Woo, my sisters, Qian Wen Fam, and Qian Yee Fam, and my husband, Yihao Wong for their endless love, encouragement, support and sacrifices

To all participants who willingly contribute to this thesis research

To all Malaysians who devote their heart into a better and developed Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This study attempted to examine the relationship between multiculturalism and higher education in regard to Malaysia's educational policy. Four goals were set to determine the significance between each: first, to understand the significant meaning of multiculturalism in a multiracial society; second, to differentiate the status of higher education among Malaysia's major racial ethnic groups—the Malays, Chinese, and Indians; third, to analyze the discrepancy between the terms “gender,” “race,” and “ethnicity” in regard to Malaysia's higher education policy; and fourth, to assess multicultural higher education in Malaysia.

This study consisted of a survey that utilized closed-ended questionnaires, which allows participants to freely comment about the sensitive matters that are not discussed in Malaysia. A total of 100 participants have taken part in this survey with the only control variable being that the citizenship of the participants had to be Malaysian to ensure accurate results. This study also includes the report from the Ministry of Higher Education, *Buku Quick Facts 2014*, peer-reviewed journal articles, and books as supporting resources.

Malaysia is a multicultural, multiracial, and multilingual country that is suitable to be analyzed in this research study. Racial tension, racial discrimination, negative sanctions of the educational policy toward minorities, and absence of freedom of speech are some of the major challenges confronting Malaysians. Thus, this study focuses on the significance of multiculturalism and the importance of equal educational opportunities in Malaysia regardless of ethnic diversity and equality, which cannot be ignored.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Malaysia¹ is a federal constitutional monarchy² located in the Southeast Asia. The governmental system is a replica of the British system since Malaysia was once a British colony. Malaysia is divided into East Malaysia and West Malaysia, in which it includes a total of 13 states. Malaysia is surrounded by small countries or islands such as Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Singapore, and Indonesia, which protected it from natural disasters. This was one of the reasons that contributed to the birth of Malaysia by starting as a trading port with conveniences such as location and the low risk of facing natural disasters. The main political party that has been in ruled for over 50 years since Malaysia Independence in 1957 is called UMNO³ (United Malays National Organization). Each Prime Minister until today has been a UMNO member. UMNO has been focused on emphasizing the aspirations of Malay nationalism, protecting the Malays' culture and dignity, and defending the Islam religion (Pong 1997).

Malaysia is well known for its multicultural background. According to the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA)⁴, multiculturalism is the coexistence of diverse cultures, which include racial, religious, or cultural groups, and is noticeable in language, behaviors, and thinking styles. It consists

¹ Malaysia is a federal constitutional monarchy located in Southeast Asia.

² Federal Constitutional Monarchy is a system in which the monarch acts as a non-party political head of state under a set of fundamental principles.

³ UMNO is the biggest political party in Malaysia.

⁴ IFLA is a leading international association of library organizations located in Netherlands, and established in 1971.

of three main groups of different ethnicities such as Malay, Chinese, and Indian. In late 1950s, the three ethnic groups were automatically assigned responsibilities, with political leadership roles for the Malays, business traders for the Chinese, and labor work force for the Indians. Prior to Malaysia's independence, Chinese and Indians migrated to Malaysia as business dwellers and labor workers. Thus, these two ethnic groups were the wealthiest among other ethnic groups at that time. However, unequal status of citizenship was not awarded to the Chinese and Indians because of the ethnic diversity and wealthy disparity that created the differences between the Malays and other ethnic groups. Malays were not convinced at that time that other ethnic groups were devoted into Malaysia, but for economic purposes only (Pong 1997). All of these differences led to the struggles of multicultural issues and implemented policies that eventually affected the people of all ethnic groups.

Ethnicity diversity and equality are crucial in determining the standpoint of the Malaysian people in higher education institutions since the ties between politics and ethnicity are sensitive due to the privileged class status. Article 153⁵ of the Constitution of Malaysia was created in 1957, right after Malaysia's Independence, in which it allowed the king to safeguard the Malays' special position in the country. This constitutional law caused the creation of the term, *Bumiputera*. *Bumiputera*⁶, the son of the soil, is a word often used in arguing the issue on the privilege of a citizen (Ibrahim, Muslim, Buang 2011). *Bumiputera* is created by the privileged Malay government to differentiate the status of a Malaysian citizen by ethnicity, in order to maintain the

⁵ Article 153 is one of the most controversial articles in Malaysia constitution, since it grants the king the power to safeguard the special position of Malay as *Bumiputera*.

⁶ *Bumiputera* is derived from the Sanskrit word *Bhumiputra*, which means "son of the soil". This term is used to refer to people of majority Malay ethnic group in both Malaysia and Brunei.

advantage of the dominant group. It is not used to reduce equality between among ethnic groups, but to widen the gap even further across time. This word is frequently used by political parties to ensure their race is emphasized the most, but at the same time, it raises tension between Malays, Chinese, and Indians regarding their benefits as a legal citizen of Malaysia.

According to the “Books of Facts of Malaysia”, Malays are called “the son of the soil,” and they occupy the highest population in Malaysia at 50.3%. The ethnic group with the second highest population is the Chinese at 23.8%, and the non-Malay indigenous group comes next at 11%. The smallest population is the Indians at 7.1%. In Malaysia, the multicultural society is defined as a society built with various races and people of different ethnicities. Even though the main ethnic group is Malay, the main religion is Muslim, and the main language spoken is *Bahasa Malaysia*⁷, other group identities are permitted to be used. The uniqueness of this multicultural, multiracial, and multilingual society in Malaysia is what assembles the country into a population of people who are able to live under several complicated policies and rules even though they are mostly unfavorable toward the minorities.

Ethnic bias has proved its existence by portraying the differences in multicultural issues and the effect of the higher education system among the three main ethnic groups such as the Malay, Chinese, and Indian. The affiliation between multiculturalism and higher education is inseparable when Malaysia was first formed and written in the history. Race and ethnicity are rather sensitive issues to touch on because interfering in other

⁷ *Bahasa Malaysia* is known as the Malay Language, and it is the dominant language used in Malaysia. Citizens of Malaysia are required to learn the Malay Language despite one’s ethnicity.

people's religions and beliefs is not sensible. However, race and ethnicity and how they have become a concept of identification of the Malaysian people are sensitive yet unique topics to discuss because of the diverse ethnic groups in Malaysia.

1.2 Overview about Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is widely used by scholars in determining the definition or argument of a concept that mostly relates to race, ethnicity, or class. This term consists of the ideology about the social differences between human beings and beliefs (Ibrahim, Muslim, Buang 2011). However, this term can be defined in several ways depending on a person's cultural beliefs. For instance, the Chinese view multiculturalism differently than Malays or Indians, and sometimes, ethnocentrism⁸ might occur because of the lack of knowledge about others' cultural beliefs. The term "ethnocentrism" is defined as an attitude of judging a culture exclusively based on one's own culture, particularly its race, religion, and language (Ang 2010). The absence of understanding other cultures leads to the emergence of ethnocentrism, which is completely opposite of the term that we focus on—multiculturalism.

In this paper, multiculturalism refers to the political philosophy that determines the significance of clarifying the response to cultural and racial differences. It is irrational to deny the importance of politics when discussing multiculturalism since it is indeed an agenda that is often used in politics to stir up confrontation between different racial groups. In other ways, the term "multiculturalism" can simply be defined as the combination of gender, race, ethnicity, and class that differentiate people. It is crucial that

⁸ Ethnocentrism is a term defining a person who judges other cultures based on one's own culture and beliefs.

we clearly analyze the definition of multiculturalism⁹ according to each ethnic group in order to make a connection between it and higher education, particularly in Malaysia.

Multicultural societies exist in plural forms because there are many societies in the world, such as the United States of America, Britain, Spain, Russia, China, Japan, India, Taiwan, and Malaysia, that all share the same concept of living in a society with the existence of different cultures (Abdullah, Ghaffar 2010). However, they all share the same characteristics because of the existing format of society regardless of its “multicultural form.” In order for us to be aware of the differences and the challenges of a multicultural society, recognition and acknowledgment need to be ensured with mutual respect confirmed in a society with different cultures and beliefs. It will serve as a common ground for societies to work on the unity of societies.

1.3 Overview of Malaysia’s Higher Education

Higher education in this paper refers to people who have enrolled in an institution that offers nonessential education or extra knowledge to those who seek to further their knowledge on a particular matter of interest. The Malaysian government has issued a policy, the Education Act of 1996¹⁰, for the people living in Malaysia to attend an educational institution as young as three years old. The policy is compulsory for all Malaysian citizens. The basic education that Malaysia provides for its people includes primary education and secondary education, which last for 11 years. Education other than

⁹ Multiculturalism refers to the co-existence of diverse cultures, where culture includes racial, religious, or cultural groups and is manifested in cultural assumptions and values according to the IFLA.

¹⁰ The Education Act of 1996 was implemented by the Malaysian government to replace the Education Ordinance of 1956 and the Education Act of 1961.

that is considered an additional expense, and Malaysians are expected to afford it on their own and that is called higher education.

The people of Malaysia are able to choose between college-level education and a four-year university program, both out of their own expenses, with the exception of a group of people. This is where race/ethnicity and multiculturalism come into play in determining which group of people gets higher education for free and which does not. It is a policy that is set by the Malaysian government, and they are the ones who hold the power in controlling Malaysians' opportunities, particularly the admissions of top institutions. The government is purely in the hand of the elite Malay known as *Bumiputera*, "the son of the soil," to which the politicians repeatedly use the issues of ethnic diversity as a leverage to overpower the Malaysian people into being submissive to the educational policies that are created.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

My paper explores the relationship between multiculturalism and higher education by looking at the significant differences between each ethnic group by race and gender. The potential for ethnic bias to be mixed into higher education policy in Malaysia is crucial, since the biggest concern of Malaysians is higher education, and this issue has been highly politicized. I argue that the relationship between multiculturalism and higher education are inseparable since ethnic diversity and gender equality are concepts that intertwine with educational policies and opportunities made in Malaysia. It is crucial to demonstrate the accuracy of the relationship between multiculturalism and higher

education using a social science method. A questionnaire survey method will be conducted.

There are existing limitations and challenges because of the conservatism in the Muslim-based country. Many sensitive matters are forbidden to be freely spoken out at the risk of being arrested; thus, this study demonstrates the challenges faced by the participants in Malaysia. This study has also discovered that the reality of multiculturalism is relatively different from the assumptions determined by the government to manipulate the people of Malaysia. The nondemocratic rule of the one-party government since Malaysia's independence is not commendable, since the restriction on minorities and incitement of disharmony among racial groups have only grown stronger.

In this paper, I will discuss what the Malaysians think of the effect on the higher education system in Malaysia when the existence of ethnic diversity and gender equality are the main reasons in creating the differences among each ethnic group. This research paper will also discuss the relationship between multiculturalism and Malaysia's higher education.

1.5 Research Questions

- How do ethnic diversity and equality affect the Malaysian government's decision in educational policy making?
- How does each ethnic group view the importance of higher education in each individual's perception?

The following chapters will attempt to answer the research questions based on the questionnaires filled out by 100 anonymous Malaysian participants and other sources that support the analyses done by the social science software SPSS¹¹. This study will be further analyzed through a statistical comparison between the relationship of multiculturalism and higher education in Malaysia with 18 independent variables. Moreover, a discussion section will further discuss and answer the questions and comments left by the participants in the open-ended category. Also, this study may serve as a means for understanding the perceptions and the personal opinions of the Malaysians regarding the educational laws and policies implemented by the Malaysian government, how the Malaysian government widens the gap between ethnic groups, how higher education influences the Malaysian people, and finally, the importance of respect coexisting in a multicultural, multiracial, and multilingual society.

¹¹ SPSS stands for Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, and it is a software package used for statistical analysis. It is often used by sociologists to analyze data.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter examines the relationship between multiculturalism and Malaysia's higher education policy in terms of ethnic diversity and gender equality. By analyzing the prominent social locations on a multiracial, multilingual country that practices multiculturalism, such as Malaysia, we can see the development of Malaysia's higher education, the significant correlation between gender and higher education, the disparity between race or ethnicity and higher education, followed by the assessment of multicultural education in Malaysia. Substantial literature and prior studies on multiculturalism and higher education discourse helps to illuminate these issues.

2.1 Definition of Multiculturalism

The definition of multiculturalism, according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)¹² is:

a systematic and comprehensive response to cultural and ethnic diversity, with educational, linguistic, economic and social components and specific institutional mechanisms. Such developments, which sometimes lead to conflictual situations and tragedies such as in Bosnia¹³ and Rwanda¹⁴, which respond to it through

¹² UNESCO is a specialized agency of the United Nations. It was founded on November 16, 1945.

¹³ Bosnia is located in southeastern Europe, the northern part of the country, while the southern part is named Herzegovina.

¹⁴ Rwanda is officially named the Republic of Rwanda and is a sovereign state in central and east Africa.

different policies, which range from assimilationism¹⁵ and integrationism¹⁶ to differentialism.

Although the above is considered the standard definition of multiculturalism, the practices carried out by an individual can often be the opposite of the definition. There are many nations around the world that practice multiculturalism, however, whether or not they are practicing multiculturalism is uncertain, since it is not written in law that people are obligated to respect other cultures. In this case, Malaysia is a complicated country, given that it is often seen as not following the general rule of multiculturalism set by UNESCO, even though it is participating in the United Nations.¹⁷ The boundaries between multiculturalism and practices are indeed vague in definition.

The major instruments of the United Nations System on nondiscrimination, the rights of minorities, and the rights of indigenous people highlight the issues associated to multiculturalism, either the influential factor or the consequences. Article 27 of the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights¹⁸ states that in those states in which ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities should not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language.

¹⁵ Assimilationism is the practice or policy of encouraging the assimilation of people from all ethnic groups and cultures of origin.

¹⁶ Integrationism is an act or instance of combining people from various racial, religious, or ethnic groups.

¹⁷ United Nations is an intergovernmental organization established to promote cooperation internationally among participating countries.

¹⁸ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 1966 is a treaty/international law adopted by United Nations General Assembly. It is passed to enforce respect on freedom of life, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and freedom of assembly.

According to Inglis (1994), the emerging multiculturalism can be confusing at some points. The people of indigenous¹⁹ origins and the minorities in many countries of the world—particularly the emerging democracies in Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe—are perhaps the most critical issues in view of the fact that most people in these countries are depending on the success of Western liberals for assistance to achieve victory in multiculturalism (Inglis 1994). Multiculturalism is a term that is defined in a plurality format. Many countries in the world share the definition of multiculturalism, yet they interpret it in a different way according to their own distinct, customs, and beliefs. The apparent example that demonstrates the discrepancy between multiculturalism of different countries is the social, political, and cultural characteristics each country embraces, such as the United States and Malaysia.

Multiculturalism is a term that is widely adopted in contemporary academic and scholar discourses (Ibrahim, Muslim, Buang 2011). The issues and the challenges that indigenous people and minorities face are inappropriately described by academic scholars given that words and practices are in different dialogues. Malaysia is a multicultural country that realizes the existence of diverse cultures and beliefs in its own land; however, the lack of cultural understanding and practices led to the failure to carry out multiculturalism effectively. Therefore, the definition needs to be written into the laws and policies in a global scale, and the significance of multiculturalism should be stated clearly to be in favor of the historically oppressed minorities.

¹⁹ People of indigenous origins are a group of people who are protected by the international law because of their specific history ties to their place of origin, or their cultural and historical characteristics from other populations.

2.2 Prominent Factors in Practicing Multiculturalism

There are a variety of reasons that contribute to the practice of multiculturalism in Malaysia. Malaysia was not created to be a multicultural, multiracial, and multilingual country in the first place. The indigenous people or the so-called minorities of the country in the 21st century were once the ancestors of Malaysia. The Orang Asli²⁰ were the indigenous people of Peninsular²¹ Malaysia, with 18 Orang Asli tribes categorized according to their languages and customs. Multiculturalism only occurred after the Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus arrived in Peninsular Malaysia and opened the seaport for global trade. The geographic location of the bay in Malacca²² has successfully contributed to the birth of Malaysia, which consists of three immigrant racial groups: the Malay Muslims, the Chinese Buddhists, and the Indian Hindus. This led to the emergence of multiculturalism.

Some of the main reasons that contributed to the rise of multicultural society include geographical locations, individual customs and beliefs, and diverse socioeconomic conditions. Some people may agree on the importance of multiculturalism; however, the opposed group exists in many ways, and it often involves the issues of gender, race, and ethnicity, which will be discussed later in the thesis. Malaysia is located at a perfect location in which global trade and immigration are common, and it is one of the most prominent factors in determining the character of the people in developing multiculturalism. As Anthony Burgess states in his book *Beds in the East (1959)*, the

²⁰ Orang Asli are the indigenous people located in Peninsular Malaysia. It means “original people” in Malay language.

²¹ Peninsular Malaysia, also known as West Malaysia, is surrounded by islands. It shares a surrounding border in the north with Thailand and Singapore in the South.

²² Malacca is called the Historic State and is the third smallest state in Malaysia.

colonial reintegration through a passage refers to the three races—Malay, Chinese, and Indian.

Struggles of multiculturalism still exist in Malaysia, particularly in the battle between political power and wealth. The indigenous people known as Orang Asli are yet to be recognized and given appropriate political power. Because of the large number of Malay Muslims in the country, it is easy for this ethnic group to obtain power in politics. Regardless of the ethnic and racial tensions this process unavoidably produced, the other races are given different responsibilities to pursue the assigned tasks in favor of maintaining peace among multicultural people (Ang 2010). In recent years, multiculturalism is being advocated by the activists of human rights in Malaysia to improve the status of the indigenous people and minorities in a Muslim-majority country.

Customs and beliefs also contribute to the development of multiculturalism in Malaysia, such as Malay Islam, Chinese Buddhism, and Indian Hinduism. Because of several decades of conflict and tension among the three main ethnic groups in Malaysia, many people have forgotten the meaning of multiculturalism and is only thriving to stay out of conflicts involving race and ethnicity issues. According to Gudeman (2002), Malaysia has established a goal in creating a successful multicultural society composed of three individual racial groups that are initially distrustful and isolated from each other. However, because of individual group's customs and beliefs, each distinct ethnic group has difficulties in fully understanding other racial groups. Although educational achievements and economic growth has shown otherwise, Malaysia is still at the brink of destructive ethnic violence (Gudeman 2002).

Socioeconomic condition is also a significant reason that influences the success or failure of multiculturalism in Malaysia. According to Saari, Dietzenbacher, and Los (2000), the social accounting matrix (SAM) for Malaysia is designed to serve as a comprehensive database for the quantitative analysis of the income distribution across ethnic groups in Malaysia in the rural and urban areas. Malaysia has its own way of controlling the socioeconomic condition of its people. The distribution of labor is written as a policy by the government in 1971 to act as an affirmative action program for the people to follow, which is called the New Economic Policy (NEP)²³. This policy was implemented because of racial riots in May 1969.

The May 1969 racial riot was also called the May 13 incident whereby many Chinese were killed by Malays due to the argument about inequality of wealth between the *Bumiputera* and the non-*Bumiputera*. After the incident, the government issued NEP in order to achieve proper segregation of wealth between all citizens in Malaysia. NEP was intended to eliminate any identification of race due to economic purposes. However, the government used it as a reason to allow all *Bumiputera* to be able to maintain their privileged status in Malaysia by giving priority to them on matters that are related to wealth. Thus, the ethnic prejudices in a multiracial society such as Malaysia could be seen through the example of the racial riot²⁴ in May 1969. This issue is exacerbated by economic disparities among different ethnic groups (Saari, Dietzenbacher, & Los 2000).

²³ New Economic Policy (NEP) is established by the National Operation Council (NOC) in 1971 to enforce affirmative action after the racial riots in May 1969.

²⁴ Racial riots in 13 May 1969 is also called the 13 May incident whereby many Malaysians have died, and mostly Chinese Malaysians. It is also known as the Sino-Malay sectarian violence, and it happened in Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia.

According to Lee and Khalid (2012), the Malaysian constitution provided social contract among various races since independence to protect the special privileges given to the Malays. To that, NEP is created. NEP is developed to construct a more gender egalitarian and socially harmonious society according to UMNO since the racial riot in May 1969. The purpose of this policy is to eliminate inequalities among ethnic groups and at the same time, increase economic growth and the restructuring of the society.

One of the main points in NEP is to eliminate social inequity and promote racial unity through education (Malakolunthu 2009). In terms of making it a success without creating any argument among racial groups, an ethnic quota system was implemented to ensure the Public Higher Education Institutions (Public HEIs) include the ratio of ethnic distribution in the Malaysian population. This policy is to ensure all ethnic groups are not marginalized based on factors such as socioeconomic status, races, and religions. However, the NEP policy has its flaws in recent decades since the government has continuously increased the benefits toward the *Bumiputera*. The privilege to choose higher-income professions, the complimentary subsidy in monetary forms given to the Malays, and the preferential admissions into public institutions provided to the Malays has been the factors that contributed to the failure of the NEP. Therefore, the admissions into private higher education institutions are often carried out by the minorities such as the Chinese and Indians, while public higher education institutions mostly consisted of Malays. The ethnic division and unequal distribution among higher education institutions is wider across time.

2.3 The Definition and the Development of Malaysia's Higher Education

Higher education has gradually become the popular contemporary trend in the world's societies, transforming from an elite's privilege to a worldwide phenomenon for more human beings. Higher education is an institution for people of all generations to acquire extra knowledge to excel in the society since knowledge is recognized as the most important resource to proceed further in this civilization (Sohail & Daud 2009). Organizations and elite companies evaluate all of their employees according to their achievements in higher-learning institutions. As time goes by, the higher education system assists students in achieving knowledge and at the same time gaining first-hand learning skills to be prepared to participate in society. According to Petrides and Nodine (2003), knowledge management is a term for students to become skilled at the theory and application parts of learning to be accepted in the field of education.

Higher-learning has become a major goal and achievement of the Malaysian people, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, and class. The significance can be seen through the education system in Malaysia, starting from the mandatory elementary and secondary education to the higher-learning institutions. Malaysia is a developing country that has both private and public universities in which public universities are completely free of charge for its citizens. According to Sohail and Daud (2009), Malaysia has twelve universities and six university colleges in the public sector, while there are eleven private universities and eleven university colleges for the private sector. Because the population in Malaysia is increasing every year, the demand and need to proceed to higher-learning institutions have also increased tremendously at the same time. The introduction of

private universities and colleges is the result of the Education Act Amendment in 1995, followed by the Private Higher Education Act in 1996 (Sohail & Daud 2009).

The world is gradually realizing the importance of the relationship between knowledge and economy as well as the impact that education can have on an individual and society. Therefore, an emphasis on a “knowledge-based economy” was developed, and ever since, the world has been striving toward achieving this potential. According to the Ninth Malaysian Plan (2006–2010)²⁵, Malaysian government has placed its priority on increasing the accessibility to higher education to create a skilled and knowledgeable labor force that would prolong economic growth and sustain a knowledge-based economy. Knowledge is the transition that a developing country such as Malaysia can make to obtain greater economic growth.

NEP’s main purpose, as stated previously in the text, was to ensure the majority populations in public universities belonged to the *Bumiputera*. Thus, it explains the fact that 80% of all admitted into public universities are Malays even though they possess the minimum requirements for admission. Four out of five scholarships were awarded to Malays under NEP (Pong 1997). The existence of private universities and colleges has successfully supplemented the shortage of public universities, especially for the non-*Bumiputera*. In Malaysia, educational achievement does not guarantee a spot in the public universities; however, race and ethnicity do play a vital role in manipulating the admissions system of Malaysia’s higher education.

²⁵ Ninth Malaysian Plan (2006-2010) allocates national budget in regards to all economic sectors in Malaysia. It is the national blueprint established by the Economic Planning Unit and the Finance Ministry of Malaysia.

2.4 The Correlation between Gender and Higher Education

Malaysia has gone through various stages of transformation and development in many variables that involve the growth and the decline of socioeconomic conditions, the conservative political culture, the outstanding achievement in education, and the process of realizing more equality in society. Among all the social inequalities, gender inequality is the least severe in contemporary Malaysia. Nevertheless, this quality is only applicable to the education sector and the employment sector. The connection between gender and higher education is as strong as other Asian countries in which there are a great number of women's participation in science and engineering (Mellstrom 2009).

Malaysia does not discourage women joining popular “masculine” fields like engineering and computer science. According to Mellstrom (2009), the involvement of women in science and technology at the higher education level is illustrated by the cultural context of gender embedded in shaping the improvement of socioeconomic development of the country. In developing countries such as Malaysia, Vietnam, and Philippines, the division of labor is often balanced out by gender to achieve rapid transformation of its economies unlike in developed countries such as the United States in which fewer women are seemed to participate in the more “masculine” fields (Salminen-Karlsson 1999). However, according to World Bank Report in 2002, females who were STEM students in higher education institutions declined drastically when stepped into industry. Gender imbalance is still yet an issue in male-dominated industries even though the admission rate of higher education is somewhat similar between male and female ratio.

According to the 2002 estimates, 65% of the students at the School of Computer Science at Universiti Sains Malaysia²⁶ (USM) are composed of women (Salminen-Karlsson 1999). Many of the professionals, such as doctors, lawyers, and professors, are composed of women, in which women constitute over 49.8% of the total number. There are also a high percentage of women with master's and doctoral degrees. A substantial portion of the population include women's involvement in higher education, particularly in the supposedly "masculine" fields, is a great step forward for a developing country, such as Malaysia, to pursue a more steady and prosperous economy. Although gender equality is more guaranteed in the education and employment sectors in which women enjoy similar opportunities as men, the cultural and ethnic disparity in the rights of women still exist in a conservative Muslim-majority country. Women are still considered the vulnerable group in Malaysia when the issues touch on cultural, religious beliefs and traditional customs.

2.5 The Disparity between Race/Ethnicity and Higher Education

After the independence of Malaysia in 1957, three official racial ethnic groups are determined by the government as Malay, Chinese, and Indian in which the government consists of only Malay Muslims who are viewed as the *Bumiputera* in the country. According to Gudeman (2002), *Bumiputera* are predominantly Malay Muslims of rural and urban areas who are privileged to benefit from the assistance of the government in both economical and social issues, which also include education, money assistance, and employment advantage. Three of these factors are interrelated in favor of the people who

²⁶ Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) is the University of Science, Malaysia in Malay Language. It is a public university in Malaysia with three campuses on different locations.

hold the title of *Bumiputera*. The disparity between race or ethnicity and higher education is rather immense because of the inequality induced by the government to distinguish the importance of the term *Bumiputera*.

After the May 1969 racial riots, NEP was created by the government to reduce the discrepancy of wealth between the *Bumiputera* and the non-*Bumiputera*. This movement has not only enhanced the differences between ethnic groups but it also increased the tension among every ethnic group in Malaysia. Higher education is viewed as the most important method of reconstructing the society; thus, several improvements that benefit the rural *Bumiputera* have been established (Moris, Yaacob, Wood 2004). The improvements such as scholarships and special assistance in the form of tuition and funds are provided to the rural Malay students in which most opportunities related toward professional and high-profile occupations are given to the *Bumiputera*. This inequitable policy has caused many protests, riots, and tensions among the ethnic groups disadvantaged by the situation (Ibrahim, Muslim, Buang 2011).

According to Nakamura (2012), the affirmative action that favors the *Bumiputera* community has instigated tensions between racial ethnic groups, especially the Chinese community who is among the wealthiest racial group in Malaysia. The action implemented by the government has forced Malaysians who are not Malays to also view Malay language as the dominant language in the country, and they are obligated by law to learn it. The Chinese and Indian communities followed by the indigenous people are estranged by the government in several ways, such as the implementation of the Malay language, the discrimination against the non-*Bumiputera* in education and employment, and the restrictions of the non-*Bumiputera* into certain professions (Ibrahim, Muslim,

Buang 2011). These policies have caused the non-*Bumiputera* to resent the government, predominantly the Chinese community, in which they protest against the dissatisfaction of the affirmative action policy (Gudeman 2002). The non-*Bumiputera* are not given the choice of becoming doctors, engineers, pharmacists, and lawyers as often as the *Bumiputera* at the higher education level, even though the discrepancy between the academic achievement of the two groups are significant. Even if a *Bumiputera* has lower, unsatisfactory grades compared to a non-*Bumiputera*, the preference is still toward the *Bumiputera* despite the consequences. The evidently biased action has not only led to the ethnic tension between *Bumiputera* and non-*Bumiputera*, the quality of education has declined followed by the downturn of the economy because of people's demoralization by the ethnically-biased policy, particularly the non-Malays (Ibrahim, Muslim, Buang 2011).

2.6 The Assessment of Multicultural Education in Malaysia

I have stated a few of the related topics defining the definition of multiculturalism, higher education, and their relationship to one another; however, the combination of the two concepts can be explained in a different way. According to Tiedt P. L. and Tiedt I. M. (2011), the general limitation in defining multicultural education is that

multicultural education is comprehensive and fundamental to all educational endeavors. Advocates of education that is multicultural are consistent in the respect for diversity and individual differences based on the understanding of the nature of human differences. The diversity and differences are the concept's central ingredient.

Multicultural education shares a key concept in which the diversity of an individual is the main concern for restructuring the idea of differences. According to Abdullah and Ghaffar (2010), five characteristics—content integration, prejudice reduction, knowledge construction, equity pedagogy, and empowering school culture—are commonly shared in schools with multicultural perception. These five characteristics are applied by expanding the knowledge and experiences of diverse groups, assisting students in developing positive approaches toward others of all races and ethnicities, creating beliefs based on one's cultural biographies, using strategies to reach higher achievements for all races, and finally, examining schools' policies and its effect to a student's discipline and academic achievements. The idea of multicultural education is to unite students of all races and ethnicities in a safe and encouraging learning environment without any necessary conflicts. However, Malaysia's multicultural education, to some extent, can be defined as unique.

Malaysian multicultural society is characterized by three main ethnic groups, explicitly Malays, Chinese, and Indians, in which each group shares exclusive lifestyles and values. These three groups of people have to learn to understand one another's belief system and merge them into an agreed education system (Malakolunthu 2009). The commitment that people have to share in living and learning together in an educational environment is encouraged to enable students from a young age to respond to the contributions positively and equally. Malaysia's multicultural education is, however, divided into three types of schools, which are called the vernacular schools. The division of school types has caused students to understand the significance of diversity among races as well as the differences.

Even though Malaysians realized the existence of ethnic bias, there are little to none actions that can be done in order to eliminate the inequalities that are present in the multicultural-education system, because of the authoritarian and yet conservative political party that controls over every policy in Malaysia. This phenomenon has only gotten worse when students reached the higher education level. The gap among students has become wider because of the failure of multicultural education. Students of different races, particularly the minorities, have realized the unfair treatment given to them by the government. Multicultural education in Malaysia will only be successful if the education system can provide similar opportunities for all students regardless of races and ethnicities (Abdullah & Ghaffar 2010). Vision 2020 persuades Malaysian people of diverse backgrounds to unite and share the same destiny.

Vision 2020²⁷ is a Malaysian ideal created by former Prime Minister, Mahathir bin Mohamad in order to create a nation of self-sufficient industrialized country by the year 2020. This goal is set as an encouragement towards the people of Malaysia to unite as a whole, so to achieve the title of developed country in the year 2020. This vision came with nine challenges that Malaysia has to overcome in order to achieve it, in which it included the message of the establishment of One Malaysia, and the need to create an economically, psychologically, and morally ethical society that focused on science and technology. However, a revision was set by the current Prime Minister, Najib Tun Razak about the Vision 2020, because of the issues circling ethnic groups, cultural disparity, and economic reform. The goal was believed to be delayed to the year 2030.

²⁷ Vision 2020 is known as Wawasan 2020 in Malay Language. It is a Malaysian ideal created by the previous Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad during the Sixth Malaysian Plan in 1991. The goal of Vision 2020 is for Malaysia to become a fully institutionalized country (developed country) in 2020.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sampling Method

A quantitative analysis is used to analyze the attitudes of Malaysian students in private institutions about multiculturalism and higher education system in Malaysia, and to examine whether these attitudes vary by race and gender. Moreover, personal thoughts on multiculturalism and multicultural educational policies are explicated by providing additional columns to the participants, so that they are allowed to freely comment on some questions regarding the matters previously stated.

The sampling method used was a survey/questionnaire method also known as a survey sampling method. This survey method was conducted with closed-ended questions. A total of 18 questions in a questionnaire format were handed out to the participants, whereby all of the questions were exhaustive and mutually exclusive and all participants were required to answer. On the other hand, 8 out of 18 questions were provided with additional optional columns for the participants to comment freely. A snowball sampling method²⁸ was used in conducting this research to ensure sufficient participants for this survey. All of the questions were designed to analyze the personal thoughts of the participants on multiculturalism and Malaysia's higher education. The

²⁸ Snowball Sampling Method is a non-probability sampling technique used to recruit participants among their acquaintances.

*Buku Quick Facts 2014*²⁹ was used to assess and compare data and obtain further inquiries regarding Malaysia educational statistics.

3.2 Sample Selection

A total of 100 participants have been invited to fill out the questionnaire. All of the 100 participants were either students or lecturers enrolled in a private institution. The participants' email addresses were gathered with the assistance of a friend who was enrolled in a private institution as well. Both consent form and the questionnaire were handed out to the participants electronically. The questionnaire was distributed among Malaysians only since the research topic involves Malaysia-related information and required in-depth thoughts from Malaysians.

3.3 Data Collection

3.3.1 Closed-Ended Questionnaires

This set of closed-ended questionnaires was answered by the participants to get to know their perception and personal thoughts on multiculturalism and Malaysia's higher education. This set of questionnaire consisted of 18 closed-ended questions that are closed ended and eight questions that are provided additional columns for the participants to offer their personal thoughts voluntarily. All the participants were currently either the dominant or the marginalized group of the higher education system in Malaysia. Their perspectives on multiculturalism and Malaysia's higher education system, particularly on

²⁹ *Buku Quick Facts 2014* is a statistical analysis on education in Malaysia by the Educational Planning and Research Division, Ministry of Education, to accurately provide data on schools, enrollment of students, and teachers from primary, secondary and post-secondary levels.

Malaysia's Ministry of Education and the current government's political stance, were interpreted and analyzed.

This set of questions was asked in an informal setting, and the method was paper format and internet-survey format. The participants were asked to complete the questionnaire in an environment without the aid of any researcher. The identities of the participants are strictly confidential and anonymous to allow an unbiased research data collection. The set of questionnaire contains sensitive questions related to the current government in which it might cause racial tensions if it was not handled properly. Therefore, this set of questionnaires was strictly used for research purposes only. A set of raw data consists of 100 participants was entered manually into a statistical software known as SPSS to analyze the data accurately. The SPSS statistical software was further analyzed and was laid out in a table format and a graphic data.

3.3.2 Brief Overview of the Questionnaire

As mentioned above, a total of 18 questions were handed out to the participants to analyze if gender, race, and ethnicity in Malaysia affect its higher education based on the concept of multiculturalism. The participants' identities were completely anonymous. They were only asked about their gender, age, race/ethnicity, marriage status, education status, occupation, major, political stands, income, and personal thoughts. The level of measurement for 16 out of 18 questions is nominal, while only one question each was at ordinal and interval/ratio level. The question that is at ordinal level is "What is your thought on Malaysia's higher education system?", while the question with interval/ratio

level is the age group. The level of measurements for all of the variables can be found at the Appendix section of the paper.

3.3.3 Other Sources Used

Buku Quick Facts 2014, which is a Malaysia Educational Statistics conducted by the Educational Planning and Research Division of the Ministry of Education, was reviewed and analyzed to support the research findings of the SPSS data. One of the other important resources used was the *Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi Malaysia*³⁰ 2010 provided by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia as a compilation of national statistical data of all higher education institutions. The data compiled in the book was analyzed and used to understand both the similarities and differences in my research findings shown in SPSS.

3.4 Research Ethics

During the process of the survey, it was important to understand the meaning of confidentiality to protect the identities of the participants. Even though this survey was plainly in a questionnaire format, the questions consisted of sensitive information that requires the full disclosure of the entire research. The participants were given a completely safe environment to voice out their opinions freely without the fear of any form of retribution. Researchers were obligated to strict confidentiality to ensure the privacy of each individual. Malaysia is a conservative Muslim country where freedom of speech is not effectively observed. It became the responsibility of the researchers to

³⁰ *Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi Malaysia* is also known as Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia in Malay Language. It is responsible for determining and constructing the policies and laws on higher education in Malaysia.

provide a safe environment for the participants to fully commit to the questionnaire, knowing that there would be no consequences.

In order to protect the participants' identities, an IRB review was applied and approval from IRB was received prior to conducting the survey. IRB stands for Institutional Review Board, which is responsible for the safety and rights of the people who participated in a survey. During the IRB application process, consent form and potential risks were assessed by the IRB when human subjects were involved. Consent form was created to allow participants to understand the full disclosure of their identities and to safeguard their opinions while participating in the survey. Also, consent form was handed out to the participants to avoid any conflicts in future outcomes. Participants were advised to participate in this survey voluntarily. No forcible actions were used during the survey process.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the information gathered about the personal perceptions of the Malaysian participants from various scholarly articles and research questionnaires, this study identifies the relationship between multiculturalism and Malaysia's higher education based on each participants' opinions from different ethnic groups. It includes factors such as gender, race/ethnicity, class, income, educational policy, and the influence of the Malaysian government.

The diversity of the participants assures more accurate results, since the study is analyzing multiculturalism in Malaysia. The comments of the participants written in the questionnaires will be further analyzed and discussed in five individual parts, such as the distinction between gender and field of study, the significance of education in future career prospects, the importance of higher education, the relationship between multiculturalism and educational policy, and the effect of Malaysian government's policy on a multiracial society.

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Descriptive Statistics

The following table presents descriptive statistics for all 18 variables for this sample of 100 participants. This descriptive statistic demonstrates the percentages, mean and standard deviation of all variables.

Table 1 shows the breakdown of the data collected. Forty-seven percent of the participants are male, while fifty-three percent of the participants are female. A total of 81% of Chinese ethnic groups have participated in this survey, while other ethnic groups covered a total of 19%. The ratio for race/ethnicity variable is 10 Malay participants, 81 Chinese participants, and 9 Indian participants. The diversity of the participants are relatively small since the coverage of participants are mostly focused on private higher education institutions rather than public institutions with over 70% of Malay ethnic groups. The Indian ethnic group is among the smallest ratio in enrolling into higher education institution, which results into the disparity shown in table 1.

The data collected shows that only 7% of the sample supports the current government, while 46 % are opposed to it. This is mainly due to the fact that the majority of the sample is the minorities who are treated unequally. These results affected the following variables, such as the thought of Malaysia's higher education system, the practice of multiculturalism in Malaysia, and the effect of multiculturalism on higher education choices. Only 6 % of the sample thinks that the Malaysia's higher education system is good. More than 40% of the sample thinks that Malaysia's higher education system is less than average.

As for the choices on higher education, as much as 69% of the sample thinks that ethnic diversity affects an individual's choices in choosing a higher education institution in regards to ethnicity. This can be explained by 75% of the sample who do not think that the educational policy in Malaysia is fair to their ethnic groups. Ninety-three percent of the participants agree to the significance of higher education, which also relates to the importance of future career prospects.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for All Variables (N=100)

Variables	N	Percent	Mean	S.D.
Total Participants	100			
<i>Gender</i>				
Male	47	47%		
Female	53	53%		
<i>Total</i>		100%		
<i>Age</i>			20.18	0.86899
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>				
Malay	10	10%		
Chinese	81	81%		
Indian	9	9%		
<i>Total</i>		100%		
<i>Marriage Status</i>				
Married	7	7%		
In a Relationship	38	38%		
Single	55	55%		
Divorce	0	0%		
<i>Total</i>		100%		
<i>Education Status</i>				
Just Graduated from High School	5	5%	2.69	0.66203
Diploma/Two-year College	27	27%		
Bachelor Student	62	62%		
Master's Student	6	6%		
PhD Student	0	0%		
<i>Total</i>		100%		
<i>Sponsorship/Income</i>				
Parents	65	65%		
Personal	16	16%		
Scholarship	19	19%		
<i>Total</i>		100%		
<i>Major of Study</i>				
Performing and Fine Arts	0	0%		
Education	0	0%		
Health Profession	22	22%		
Business	19	19%		
Engineering	26	26%		
Humanities/Social Sciences	10	10%		
Other	23	23%		
<i>Total</i>		100%		
<i>Political stands</i>				
Supportive of Current Government	7	7%		
Oppose Current Government	46	46%		

Table 1 (continued)

Variables	N	Percent	Mean	S.D.
Nonpartisan/Neutral	47	47%		
<i>Total</i>		100%		
<i>Thought about Malaysia's Education System</i>			3.37	0.63014
Best	0	0%		
Good	6	6%		
Moderate	53	53%		
Bad	39	39%		
Worst	2	2%		
<i>Total</i>		100%		
<i>Thought on Multiculturalism in Malaysia</i>				
Good	56	56%		
Bad	44	44%		
<i>Total</i>		100%		
<i>Relationship between Gender and Choice of Major</i>				
Yes	21	21%		
No	79	79%		
<i>Total</i>		100%		
<i>Education determine Career Prospects</i>				
Yes	88	88%		
No	12	12%		
<i>Total</i>		100%		
<i>Is HE Important?</i>				
Yes	93	93%		
No	7	7%		
<i>Total</i>		100%		
<i>Does multiculturalism affect choice in HE?</i>				
Yes	69	69%		
No	31	31%		
<i>Total</i>		100%		
<i>Is EP fair to your ethnic group?</i>				
Yes	25	25%		
No	75	75%		
<i>Total</i>		100%		
<i>Does EP on Gender affect choice of majors?</i>				
Yes	24	24%		
No	76	76%		
<i>Total</i>		100%		
<i>Does EP on Race/Ethnicity affect choice of majors?</i>				
Yes	37	37%		
No	63	63%		

Table 1 (continued)

Variables	N	Percent	Mean	S.D.
<i>Total</i>		100%		
<i>Does EP on Class affect choice of majors?</i>				
Yes	44	44%		
No	56	56%		
<i>Total</i>		100%		

Notes:

¹HE: Higher Education

²EP: Educational Policy

However, the opportunities to be admitted into higher education institution are not in the hands of the people, particularly in the public institutions. These two are inseparable variables since better education and knowledge will result in better future outcomes, which might include wealth and class status.

4.1.2 Bivariate by Gender

Table 2 demonstrates the gender differences across all variables. A chi-square analytical method is used to determine the association between gender and each variable, while a t-test is used to determine the mean differences, standard deviation and the significant value for ordinal and interval variables such as the age group, the education status and the opinions on Malaysia's higher education system. Next, statistical test is achieved by using Pearson Chi-Square statistical analysis while a significance level of $p \leq 0.05$ is used.

Table 2: Bivariate by Gender

	Male		Female		Test Value	Sig
	Mean/Percentage	S.D.	Mean/Percentage	S.D.		
Age	20.213	(.954)	20.151	(.794)	.727	b
Race/Ethnicity					.263	a
Malay	8.500		11.300			
Chinese	83.000		79.200			
Indian	85.000		9.400			
Marriage Status					.751	a
Married	8.500		5.700			
In a Relationship	34.000		41.500			
Single	57.400		52.800			
Education Status	2.638	(.641)	2.736	(.684)	.465	b
Sponsorship/Income					.711	a
Parents	68.100		62.300			
Personal	12.800		18.900			
Scholarship	19.100		18.900			
Study Major					3.263	a
Health Profession	17.000		26.400			
Business	14.900		22.600			
Engineering	31.900		20.800			
Humanities/Social Science	10.600		9.400			
Other	25.500		20.800			
Political Stands					.153	a
Supportive	6.400		7.500			
Oppose	44.700		47.200			
Nonpartisan	48.900		45.300			
Malaysia's Higher Education System	3.404	(.648)	3.339	(.618)	.611	b
Multiculturalism					5.256	* a
Good	68.100		45.300			
Bad	31.900		54.700			

Table 2 (continued)

	Male		Female		Test Value	Sig
	Mean/Percentage	S.D.	Mean/Percentage	S.D.		
Choices of Majors					1.098	a
Yes	25.500		17.000			
No	74.500		83.000			
Future Prospects					.049	a
Yes	87.200		88.700			
No	12.800		11.300			
Importance of Higher Education					1.803	a
Yes	89.400		96.200			
No	10.600		3.800			
Choices of Higher Education on Race/Ethnicity					.061	a
Yes	70.200		67.900			
No	29.800		32.100			
Equality of Educational Policy					.017	a
Yes	23.400		24.500			
No	76.600		75.500			
Educational Policy on Gender					.005	a
Yes	27.700		28.300			
No	72.300		71.700			
Educational Policy on Race/Ethnicity					1.979	a
Yes	29.800		43.300			
No	70.200		56.600			
Educational Policy on Class					.017	a
Yes	44.700		43.400			
No	55.300		56.600			

Statistical Test run: a) Pearson Chi-Square b) T-Test

*** $p \leq 0.001$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; * $p \leq 0.05$

From Table 2, the only outcome variable that shows significant difference is the personal opinions on multiculturalism in Malaysia, with a test statistic of 5.256, and a significant value of 0.001, $p \leq 0.05$. Males, with a 68.1%, are more likely to believe that

Multiculturalism is a good thing in Malaysia. Fifty-six participants from Table 1 expressed their personal thoughts on believing that multiculturalism in Malaysia was practiced correctly, while 44 of them thought otherwise. The chi-square analytical method shows that there is a significant difference on how gender influences an individual's opinions on the practice of multiculturalism in Malaysia.

Multiculturalism is a term that involves ethnic diversity and equality, which affects how a male or a female might be treated differently in Malaysia. These include cultural issues, custom issues and religious beliefs. Multicultural issues affect an individual, both males and females distinctively.

4.1.3 Bivariate by Race/Ethnicity

Table 3 demonstrates differences by race and ethnicity across key variables. A Pearson chi-square is determined to achieve the appropriate statistical significance test on nominal variables, while an ANOVA is used to determine both ordinal and interval variables.

From Table 3, there are three outcome variables that show strong significant differences with the predictor variable, race/ethnicity, and they are "political stands", "importance of higher education", and "equality of educational policy towards each ethnic group". There are significant differences between race/ethnicity and political stands with a test statistic of 19.872, and a significant level of 0.001, $p < 0.001$. This results show that ethnicity plays a major role in affecting an individual's support on the current government. Only 3.7% of the Chinese ethnic group is supportive of the current government. This might be influenced by the policy making of the authoritarian government that favors over the benefits of *Bumiputera*, which in turn eliminate many

non-*Bumiputera* supporters. For example, Chinese students who have scored straight A's are not guaranteed a spot in popular courses such as medical fields, while *Bumiputera* who scored lower than average are given a spot in medical field by the government. This obvious disparity stops most Chinese Malaysians in supporting the bias government.

Another outcome variable that shows significant differences is the importance of higher education among different ethnic groups. Table 3 shows strong significant differences between race/ethnicity and importance of higher education, with a test statistics of 10.868, and a significant level of 0.004, $p \leq 0.001$. This results show that different ethnic groups view the importance of higher education differently. For example, 95.1% of the Chinese ethnic group believes that higher education is important, mostly because of the inequality of treatment between ethnic groups caused by the governmental education policy of Malaysia. This situation happens due to most Chinese ethnic individuals are bound by family pride, reputation and wealth, which they think higher education, is the key towards these achievements, but the government's policy has become obstacles for them.

Next, there are strong significant differences between race/ethnicity and the equality of educational policy on each ethnic group, with a test statistic of 19.347, and a significant level of 0.001, $p \leq 0.001$. The results show that each ethnic group believes that equality is not practiced in the governmental educational policy, and that the educational policy is unfair towards their own ethnic group.

Table 3: Bivariate by Race/Ethnicity

	Malay		Chinese		Indian		Test Value	Sig
	Mean/Percentage	S.D.	Mean/Percentage	S.D.	Mean/Percentage	S.D.		
Age	20.100	(.738)	20.210	(.876)	20.000	(1.000)	.757	a
Gender							.263	b
Male	40.000		48.100		44.400			
Female	60.000		51.900		55.600			
Marriage Status							1.332	b
Married	10.000		6.200		11.100			
In a Relationship	50.000		37.000		33.300			
Single	40.000		56.800		55.600			
Education Status	2.700	(.675)	2.728	(.671)	2.333	(.500)	.238	a
Sponsorship/Income							.817	b
Parents	70.000		64.200		66.700			
Personal	10.000		16.000		22.200			
Scholarship	20.000		19.800		11.100			
Study Major							6.307	b
Health Profession	30.000		19.800		33.300			
Business	10.000		18.500		33.300			
Engineering	40.000		24.700		22.200			
Humanities/Social Science	0.000		12.300		0.000			
Other	20.000		24.700		11.100			
Political Stands							19.872	*** b
Supportive	40.000		3.700		0.000			
Oppose	30.000		49.400		33.300			
Nonpartisan	30.000		46.900		66.700			
Malaysia's Higher Education System	3.100	(.316)	3.420	(.668)	3.222	(.441)	.244	a
Multiculturalism							.769	b
Good	50.000		58.000		44.400			
Bad	50.000		42.000		55.600			
Choices of Majors							.609	b
Yes	20.000		22.200		11.100			
No	80.000		77.800		88.900			
Future Prospects							1.562	b
Yes	100.000		86.400		88.900			
No	0.000		13.600		11.100			
Importance of Higher Education							10.868	*** b
Yes	100.000		95.100		66.700			
No	0.000		4.900		33.300			
Choices of Higher Education on Race/Ethnicity							5.690	b
Yes	100.000		64.200		77.800			
No	0.000		35.800		22.200			

Table 3 (continued)

	Malay		Chinese		Indian		Test Value	Sig
	Mean/Percentage	S.D.	Mean/Percentage	S.D.	Mean/Percentage	S.D.		
Equality of Educational Policy							19.347	*** b
Yes	80.000		18.500		11.100			
No	20.000		81.500		88.900			
Educational Policy on Gender							3.880	b
Yes	20.000		25.900		55.600			
No	80.000		74.100		44.400			
Educational Policy on Race/Ethnicity							.938	b
Yes	40.000		38.300		22.200			
No	60.000		61.700		77.800			
Educational Policy on Class							.573	b
Yes	40.000		43.200		55.600			
No	60.000		56.800		44.400			

Statistical Test run: a) ANOVA (Scheffé Post Hoc Test) b) Pearson Chi-Square

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

For example, as much as 80% of the Malay ethnic group agrees that the governmental policy is in favor of their ethnic group; while 81.5% of the Chinese ethnic group disagrees that they are treated equally in educational policy made by the government. 88.9% of the Indian ethnic group supports the inequality treatment projected by the government. The huge differences in equality between each ethnic group have contributed to the strong significant test value shown in Table 3. Many Malaysian students' opportunities are not assessed by their academic performances, but by their distinct ethnic groups. Each ethnic group is judged by a scale of ethnicity and class status. Thus, educational policy is created and implemented according to the benefits of the *Bumiputera* rather than the Malaysia citizens.

4.2 Limitations and Challenges

This study focuses on the personal opinions of the participants, which consist of both students and working people in Malaysia. The questionnaires were limited to

Malaysians only to achieve accurate data. Although complete instructions were given to the participants, the chances of inaccuracy still exist since the research findings depend only on the chosen participants. These research findings produce a general overview about the perspectives on multiculturalism and Malaysia's higher education; however, they do not represent the whole population of Malaysia. Therefore, the research findings may not be relevant to every Malaysian.

The other challenges faced while conducting this research was the location of the researcher and the participants. Not being physically present in Malaysia to conduct the survey really limited the scope of participants for this research. The survey had to be carried out with the assistance of my friend, and at the same time, the survey was also carried out via internet for most people's convenience. Another limitation was the control of the entire research. The inability to be present in Malaysia at the time the research was conducted had limited the chances of choosing the desirable group of participants. This resulted in slow responses from the person in charge because of personal workloads and busy schedules. However, the completed survey questionnaires were finally collected.

4.3 Area for Further Research

The limitations of the research stated above has restricted the research findings from being more precise because of the number of participants and the challenges of facilitating the location and the environment in which the survey was conducted. This thesis/research paper can serve as a starting point for researchers to do further in-depth research by widening the scope of participants and focus on its control variables.

Malaysia is a Muslim-based country that is conservative in which the research can only

be conducted with extra precaution to avoid any conflicts between the school authorities and the participants.

The process of research has failed to widen its scope to include more Muslim Malaysians because of the fear of being arrested by authorities regarding its sensitive questions. The Malaysian government has restricted students in public institutions from involving in protests or discussions that are related to political issues. Students who do not obey the rules may result in the risk of being expelled. Thus, private institutions are chosen for this research in order to create a safe environment for the participants. Future researchers can start to involve the Malay Muslim community in doing this research to achieve better accuracy in analyzing multiculturalism in Malaysia's higher education.

4.4 Discussions

In the following discussion, several in-depth topics are analyzed and further discussed in regard to the comments given by the participants, which can be correlated with the SPSS tables analyzed above.

4.4.1 The Distinction between Gender and Choice of Majors

The Ministry of Higher Education in Malaysia acknowledges the dimension of multicultural education in the form of gender and the choice of major a student chooses (Abdullah & Ghaffar 2010). In the SPSS table, 79 participants disagree that gender influences their choice in majors, while only 21 of them agree. The variance between the two is significantly wide in which it shows the lack of proof on dissimilarity between the two variables—gender and choice of major. In a developing country such as Malaysia, the trend of higher education and the societal norms about women's roles cannot be

compared with the United States, since there are more women than men who choose science or mathematics as their majors with a ratio of 15 males to 11 females (Mellstrom 2009).

Gender is a universal term to differentiate the possible gender roles imposed on each individual based on their appearances and sexes. However, gender should be neither a limiting factor nor a stigma on what a person can achieve. As shown in table 1, the discrepancy between gender and field of study is smaller in which 15 male participants to 11 female participants major in engineering. According to Mellstrom (2009), gender and technology studies need to be examined as a pattern of masculinity and femininity in a cross-cultural perspective.

According to the data analyzed in SPSS, gender equality is a factor that defines the results given by the participants. There were 79 participants who consider the importance of gender equality as stated in their comments in the questionnaire. Their perspectives are almost equivalent, as gender equality is the process of growing and learning. They view gender inequality as sexist mainly because Malaysians are not taught to treat one another differently based on gender but more on race, which will be discussed in later sections. Based on a comment by one participant, occupations should not be distinguished according to gender but on personal interest. This participant defined the importance of stereotypes and freedom to choose, which is lacking in Malaysia. The high involvement of females in science, technology, engineering, mathematics (STEM) departments has undoubtedly proven the contribution of relative optimism about the relationship between gender and fields of major in Malaysia (Mellstrom 2009).

According to another participant, gender plays less of a role in the educational decisions of Malaysians. Regardless of gender, human beings are similar. From the interpretation of Table 2, it is safe to state that Malaysians are aware of their gender rights. People tend to determine their choice of majors based on several factors, such as personal perceptions on freedom, the open-mindedness of an individual, and earning potential of particular fields. Therefore, 79% of the participants are open-minded about gender equality and the existence of stereotypes. According to Kramer and Lehman (1990), the predominance of men is regarded as a norm in the field of technology, particularly in the developing countries. The equipment and facilities are built according to male qualities, regardless of the number of women's participants.

4.4.2 The Significance of Education in Future Career Prospects

Higher education has a significant relationship with income level, particularly in Asian countries where employers highly focus on academic performances. The data analyzed in table 1 based on the questionnaire shows similarity in which 88 out of 100 participants agree that higher education determine future career prospects in terms of income and opportunities. Malaysia adopts a British-based educational system³¹ in which academic performances are the main priority in choosing the top students, because education is heavily emphasized rather than extracurricular activities. Malaysians are trained at a young age to only focus on academic performances, given that it will soon determine an individual's college admissions, future career prospects, and income level.

³¹ British-based education system is a system carried out during the British rule before the independence of Malaysia. Thus, this education system is still maintained.

According to Ball and Chik (2001), income has become the vital outcome variable for the Malaysians since it helps influence the economic growth of the society. The productivity and contributions of Malaysians will contribute to the economic market in producing more job opportunities that will elevate the income level and standard of living. In recent years, the admission in higher education has increased tremendously because of the increase of population and the public's awareness of the relationship between knowledge and future success. In the Malaysian context, job satisfaction is also an important factor that affects the enrollment in higher education (Morris, Yaacob, Wood 2004). Job satisfaction is derived as having harmonious relationship with colleagues and having a healthy work environment, which in turn produces great productivity and effectiveness. However, some of the participants in this research show mixed opinions on the relationship between higher education and future career prospects.

Based on the comments of one participant, certain job markets in Malaysia are too limited, and some suffer because of the oversupply of graduates. Health professionals, particularly doctors and pharmacists, have the highest popularity among Malaysians. In 1980, doctors have not become a profession with too many graduates, since their training was controlled meticulously by the government. However, the quality of doctors has deteriorated because of the lack of control by the government, which resulted in an oversupply of doctors in Malaysia in the recent years. Most doctors are suffering from lack of job opportunities, and most of them are buried in huge student loans. The unfortunate factor regarding Malaysian-trained medical doctors is the inability to work in

foreign countries, due to the inconsistencies in medical skills, according to the Malaysian Medical Association (MMA)³².

Oversupply of medical-school graduates is one of the factors that might influence an individual's future career prospect despite the level of higher education. Another factor that also influences future opportunities is the average income level for each profession. Based on the opinion of another participant, the difference between the average incomes for each profession is relatively huge. In short, the income distribution is biased regardless of the level of higher education. The education and research jobs are the perfect example in explaining the biased income distribution despite the level of education one received. According to Ball and Chik (2001), higher education only determines the guarantee of a future job opportunity. Unfortunately, income level is incomparable with the amount of higher education a person achieves in diverse fields of studies. The comparison between an engineering professor and a sociology professor proves it.

4.4.3 The Importance of Higher Education

As mentioned above, higher education is important in achieving future career success. In Malaysia, higher education has achieved high enrollment rate in both public and private sectors. According to Mellstrom (2009), the distribution between higher education in public and private institutions are huge in numbers. In the distributed questionnaire research data, 93% of the participants agree that higher education is important, because it contributes to many factors later in one's life. Knowledge provides

³² Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) is a government subdivision that enforces quality of professional services among trained medical doctors and associates.

a form of mobility that allows people to work and conduct business globally. During the process of learning, an individual allows oneself to receive information, which leads to widening thoughts and analytical skills. The worldview of an individual widens. Among the participating individuals in the survey, a great percentage of them believe that educational level is linked to the prestige and fortune of a family.

As one participant explains, education is important because it increases the status of a family, as it resulted in higher income and entry into prestigious professions—education is for the family. The statement shows the importance of higher education not only in the employment field but also the significance of family pride, especially in a Chinese family. In order to achieve great success, an individual carries a burden of family pride based on educational achievement, since the importance of higher education is somehow distorted. Based on the opinions given by some of the participants in the survey, they achieve success only to maintain and enhance family reputation despite the hardship they might go through in the process of higher education.

4.4.4 The Relationship between Multiculturalism and Educational Policy

The statistical comparison produced by SPSS determines the relationship among gender, race, and ethnicity and how it affects Malaysians on their choices in higher education. The results show a nonparallel outcome in which 69% of the participants agree that multiculturalism is a factor in influencing their fields of study in higher education based on Table 1. Because of the discrepancy between race and ethnicity among Malaysians, many people try to avoid conflict by not voicing their disapproval of the apparent unequal treatment, particularly among minorities. According to Gudeman

(2002), freedom of speech is forbidden in Malaysia, which resulted in incongruity between the multicultural societies. The Malaysian government continues to use affirmative action to protect the *Bumiputera* in all sorts of issues, including the educational attainment of the privileged Malays.

Based on the comments listed by the participants in the survey, the terms “favorability” and “cultural preferences” are widely used in describing the current higher education. Even though in general Malaysians are said to be given the chance to decide on their interests of study at a higher education level, some races obviously need to work harder to be given the majors they have chosen. This statement only applies to the students who have chosen public universities. Private institutions do not seem to have any favorability toward anyone since they rely on tuition of the students and private donations. However, only minority students who have chosen the public institutions are given minimal choices by the government, because favorability is only applicable to the *Bumiputera*. Therefore, many working-class families are forced to send their children into public institutions even though they are aware of the inequality between *Bumiputera* and *non-Bumiputera*. According to Gudeman (2002), Chinese and Indian students continue to struggle against ethnic bias in college admissions and advocate for the freedom to choose their fields of study, as Malaysia remains multicultural with a Malay majority.

As mentioned in the previous statement, the question of fairness of the educational policy on various ethnic groups is also an important factor in describing the Malaysia’s higher education system. One participant suggested that the higher education system favors the Malays by offering them a higher quota than other races in admitting

students into public institutions, resulting in grievances of minority students. This causes the emergence of a group of intelligent but poor minority students to give up their studies, because of the failure to get into the public universities due to the unfair quota system. The sociological studies of social mobility identify race and ethnicity as important factors in school achievement (Pong 1997). The mostly used explanation is the socioeconomic status (SES), in which class status unintentionally causes the success of an individual regardless of its educational status (Saari, Dietzenbacher, and Los 2000). But as we have seen, ethnic identity also plays a key role in admissions into certain fields of study in Malaysian public universities.

4.4.5 The Effect of Malaysian Government's Policy on a Multiracial Society

According to table 1, which analyzes the relationship between an individual's political point of view and perceptions on Malaysia's education system, as many as 46% of the participants opposed the current government, while 47% of the participants are nonpartisan. Based on the educational policy of the government, who has been in power for 59 years since Malaysia's independence, minorities have been suffering from unreasonable treatment despite being legal citizens (Ball & Chik 2001). The Malaysian Government Policy has reinstated a law, called the NEP in order to tighten the wealth gap between the *Bumiputera* and the non-*Bumiputera*. Educational policy is one of the policies that have created constant conflict between ethnic groups because of the unfair treatment.

In the year 1995, as many as 60,000 Malaysians were enrolled in foreign institutions (Ball & Chik 2001). Majority of the students are from the Chinese community

because of the socioeconomic status and the unjust policy reinforced by the government to protect Malay's privileged status. However, the government's educational policy also involves sending many *Bumiputera* students to overseas institutions to reduce the educational gap between the Malays and the minorities, especially the Chinese (Ball & Chik 2001). Therefore, the government has been supporting many less qualified *Bumiputera* students to overseas institutions, while many qualified non-*Bumiputera* students are either forced to study in local institutions or not given any chances to acquire further education. This policy has only exacerbated the tension among ethnic groups in Malaysia.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated how ethnic diversity and equality serve as major roles in affecting Malaysian's governmental decision in educational policy making that eventually causes the disparity among ethnic groups in Malaysia. Also, this paper examines the importance of higher education in each individual's perception based on different ethnic groups. These research questions define some key concepts on the relationship between multiculturalism in Malaysia and the negative effects of the government's ethnic biased educational policies.

5.1 Struggles to Unite as One Malaysia

The people of Malaysia are united by heart, but the reality of the society and the inequality existing between ethnic groups have always been a barrier between them. In Malaysia, there are three major racial ethnic groups consisting of Malays, Chinese, and Indians. The NEP is created by the government to protect the privileged status of the Malay majority-the *Bumiputera*. This action started several decades ago, which resulted into the tensions among ethnic groups because of the inequality.

Multiculturalism has never been an easy concept to deal with, especially in a Muslim majority country like Malaysia in which most governmental departments are 90% occupied by Malay Muslims. For instance, the prime minister of Malaysia can only be elected by an individual of Malay-Muslim descent. This law has been one of the factors leading to the failure of Malaysia's unity. In recent decades, the ruling government is recognized as the mastermind in creating the chaos and ethnic strife among the

Malaysians. Although the current Prime Minister Najib Razak has constantly emphasized the success of Malaysian citizens uniting as One Malaysia³³, the truth is manipulated by the authoritarian government. Malaysians are educated in an environment that is divided along ethnic lines.

According to Ang (2010), multiculturalism circulates globally in one global meaning, but it acquires specific meanings, which differ in different local circumstances. Although multiculturalism is a global concept stated by the United Nations, the implementation of this concept strictly depends on the government's execution of laws and policies. The method used determines the future of a country. Based on table 1, only 7% of the sample is supportive of the current government, which leads to the questionable leadership of the government. Malaysians start to question the inappropriate educational policies and leadership of the government that leads to a dysfunctional multiracial society. For instance, the Malaysian government continuously neglects the benefits of the minorities by emphasizing the privilege of the *Bumiputera* and the difference in treatment between the *Bumiputera* and the non-*Bumiputera*. Also, the government has loosened up the laws, allowing foreigners such as Bangladeshi Muslims to become Malaysian citizens, further augmenting the demographic dominance of the Muslim majority.

In this study, higher education is strongly related to multiculturalism, because it is the government that implements the educational policies in Malaysia. It is also the government that creates differences in the treatment of different ethnic groups. The

³³ One Malaysia also known as *Satu Malaysia* in Malay language, is created by the current Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak to emphasize national unity and ethnic harmony on September 16, 2010. It is an ongoing project sponsored by his ruling party UMNO.

struggles of the Malaysians in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, and class have caused the imbalance of higher education among ethnic groups. For instance, 81% of my collected research samples state that the educational policy implemented by the government is unfair to minority groups. The government has restricted minority students from choosing their majors freely despite academic performances, which has created resentment among minorities and caused them to question the capability of the government to lead a multiracial country. Unless racial discrimination is eliminated in the government's educational policies, Malaysia could never be fully united as "One" Malaysia.

5.2 Implementation of Laws and Policies

Malaysia, a multicultural, multilingual, and multiracial country, is also a developing country where there are still many flaws needed to be fixed. The Malaysian government is recognized to be one of the major factors contributing to the failure of economic growth, the lack of unity between ethnic groups, and the malfunction in maintaining the quality of education. All of these factors are because of the government's inexperienced leadership in creating and implementing fair and just laws and policies. The gap between rich and poor are still large, which resulted in imbalanced economic growth.

Corruption has been a leading factor that caused the collapse of the economy in recent decades. The government has openly supported corruption in favor of the protection of the *Bumiputera*. For instance, in a recent court case, the opposition leader

Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim³⁴ is jailed because of a false accusation of sodomy. The judgment is delivered by the Supreme Court and the federal court in favor of the corrupted government UMNO. Although Malaysia is declared a democratic country, the failure to make democratic decisions shows otherwise, especially at the level of the Supreme Court and the federal court system. This in turn proves the inequality in the society that is exacerbated by the government's discriminatory policies.

The government has not been able to create a more united country but a more dysfunctional society since Malaysia's independence. Common benefits are distributed unevenly between ethnic groups, which happened to be the major reason behind creating the instability of the society. Freedom of speech is not encouraged and somewhat restricted in the conservative Muslim-based country. All of these factors lead to the distorted concept of multiculturalism even though Malaysia is one of the largest multicultural societies in the world. Vision 2020 is a goal set by the government in past decades to create stable economic growth with multiculturalism. However, the relationship between multiculturalism and Malaysia's higher education policies are disintegrated because of the practice of cultural assumptions, social inequity, and explicit discrimination (Aziz, Salleh, & Ribu 2010).

The key to creating a more advanced economy is to develop a fair and equal educational system, which provides standard procedures for its people to progress and excel regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, and class. For this reason, higher education institutions in Malaysia have victimized Malaysian minorities and limited their

³⁴ Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim is the leader of the Malaysian opposition party. He is the founder and leader of Parti Keadilan Rakyat. He was once the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia. He was currently in jail for false accusation by UMNO of sodomy charges.

opportunities to excel, which in turn contributed to a lack of economic growth, particularly among the minority groups. If the government does not change their attitude about the diversity of the people and focus on the importance of a united multicultural society toward economic growth, the situation among ethnic groups would only get worse, especially in the higher education level in which minorities have limited options for choosing majors of their choice in the public university system.

5.3 What's Next?

There are certain suggestions that could promote multiculturalism in Malaysia and boost the equal opportunities in the higher education policies. They are as follows:

- The first suggestion is to change the current ruling government to ensure fair and equal opportunities to all racial ethnic groups. The ruling party has been in power for over 50 years, which leads to greed and corruption in the political elite. A more diversified group of open-minded younger generation of politicians should replace the conservative, close-minded ruling party to promote stability and progress in Malaysia's multicultural society.
- The second is to combat corruption by having a fair justice system in Malaysia. It is crucial that the judges from the Supreme Court and federal courts should clear themselves out from ties with the government to prevent any conflicts of interest. The judicial system, including departments that relate to the justice system, should steer clear of party politics and corruption to maintain equality and fairness.
- The third proposal is the encouragement of the freedom of speech among the people of Malaysia. The younger generation has started to voice their opinions

about the government via the social media; however, the response from the government has been to terrorize the people by inflicting punishment. Freedom to speak out is one of the main factors that could promote success of multiculturalism.

- The fourth suggestion is to alter the educational policies for higher education institutions, especially the public institutions that are controlled by the government. The policy was initially written to increase educational attainment among the Malays to reduce economic inequality, and that now the Malays have comparable higher educational attainment, such policies should be discontinued. Equal opportunities should be given to students according to their academic performances.
- The final and the most important suggestion is the modification of the status quo of the term *Bumiputera*. The terms *Bumiputera* and *non-Bumiputera* need to be eliminated in order to completely scrape off the one-sided privileges given only to the Malay majority. No citizen in Malaysia should be forfeited the equal rights and privileges of a citizen.

All the above suggestions are fundamental in fulfilling the promise of “multiculturalism” in Malaysia through higher education policies implemented by the government. However, these suggestions would only be successful if the whole nation is involved in the process of revolutionizing the structure of the country. In the interpretation of the data collected, many participants have shown indication of change. The need to transform Malaysia into a country that provides equal opportunities to all races is relatively strong. If the younger generation is slowly making progress in change,

Malaysia can soon be united as a whole nation regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and religion.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE: SURVEY QUESTIONS FOR MALAYSIANS

1. Gender
 - Male
 - Female
2. Age
 - _____
3. Race/Ethnicity
 - Malay
 - Chinese
 - Indian
4. Marriage Status
 - Married
 - In a Relationship
 - Single
 - Divorce
5. Education Status
 - Just Graduated High school
 - Diploma/2-year College
 - Bachelor Student
 - Master's Student
 - PhD Student
6. Sponsorship/Income
 - Parents
 - Personal
 - Scholarship
7. Study Major
 - Performing & Fine Arts
 - Education
 - Health Profession
 - Business
 - Engineering
 - Humanities/Social Science
 - Other

APPENDIX (continued)

8. Political Stands
 - Supportive of Current Government
 - Oppose of Current Government
 - Nonpartisan/Neutral
9. What is your thought about Malaysia's Education System?
 - Best
 - Good
 - Moderate
 - Bad
 - Worst
10. What are your personal thoughts on multiculturalism in Malaysia?
 - Good
 - Bad
11. Do you think that Science/Math/Engineering is for males, and Art/Humanities/Social Science major is for females to study?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Why?
12. Do you think that education determine your future career prospect (income, opportunity)?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Why?
13. Do you think that higher education is important?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Why?
14. Do you think that gender, race and ethnicity affect Malaysian students on their choices in higher education?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Why?
15. Is the educational policy of Malaysian government for higher education fair to your ethnic group?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Why?

APPENDIX (continued)

16. Does the educational policy of Malaysian government on gender affect your choice of majors?
_Yes
_No
Why?
17. Does the educational policy of Malaysian government on race/ethnicity affect your choice of majors?
_Yes
_No
Why?
18. Does the educational policy of Malaysian government on class affect your choice of majors?
_Yes
_No
Why?