

The Intermediary Effect of Nationalism on the Relationship of Religion, Values, and Culture with Unity among Pre-Service Teachers in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine the mediating effect of nationalism on the relationship of religion, value, and culture with unity among pre-service teachers in the higher learning institutions of Malaysia. A total of 230 teachers with different racial backgrounds were recruited, among whom 133 were Malays and 97 were non-Malays. The data were analyzed using SPSS 23 and AMOS 18. Nationalism has a significant yet partial mediating effect on the relationship of religion, value, and culture with unity among pre-service teachers. The MANOVA analysis revealed a significant difference in such relationship between Malay and non-Malay students. The AMOS analysis showed that culture and religion had the highest and lowest effects on nationalism and unity, respectively. These findings imply that the Ministry of Higher Learning, universities, and lecturers in Malaysia must focus on the aspects of culture, religion, values, and nationalism to enhance the unity among pre-service teachers in the country.

Keyword: Culture, national identity, nationalism, religion, unity, values

INTRODUCTION

Developing a nation state is a major concern of many countries, including Germany (Luchtenennajierg, 2010), Ukraine (Korostelina, 2013), China (Wang & He, 2014), Taiwan (Zhong, 2016), Australia (McAllister, 2018), post-Soviet nations (Letnyakov, 2016), and Scotland (Bond, 2017). These countries are inhomogeneous in terms of their traditions and cultures.

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However, an inhomogeneous and multiracial country must create and sustain a shared national identity among its people with different ethnics, languages, and religions.

As a multiracial country, Malaysia is facing significant challenges in its pursuit of a nation state. Malaysia has a complex multi-ethnic population that comprises three main ethnic groups, namely, Malays, Chinese, and Indians. Malaysia's pursuit of a nation state has been manifested in its "one nation, one identity" concept, which envisions a sovereign state where people are living in unity without segregation based on ethnic, ethnicity, religion, language, culture, territory, and other factors.

After the British decolonization, social acceptance, diversity, compromising attitudes, and social adaptation have proliferated steadily and consistently in Malaysia since the 1950s along with the increasing awareness of ethnic leaders about the importance of unity. Historically, Malaysia was formed as a result of an agreement signed on 16 September 1963, which marked the starting point of its struggle to build a nation state. The concept of nation state is rooted in the spirit of unity, which Malaysia aims to realize by the year 2020. The "Vision 2020" of Malaysia greatly depends on its struggle for unity. The strength of a country depends not only on its administration structure but also on the moral strength of its citizens. The Malaysia concept, which aligns with the articles in the Federal Constitution and the principles of Rukunegara, reflects the ambition of the country to strengthen the mutual respect, sincerity, and mutual trust among its people.

Problem Statement

The racial polarization in schools and higher learning institutions cannot be underestimated or ignored because such phenomenon can lead to negative implications for the people and the country in the future. These two institutions must not be viewed separately because they are the sub-systems of a society (Tan, 1982). Therefore, education has been used as a major tool to inculcate and sustain solidarity among the people. Specifically, solidarity and unity can be promoted through the curricula, sports, and extracurricular activities in schools. Education is also the main promoter of patriotism among the people. Therefore, the Ministry of Education (MOE) must produce "true" Malaysians with individual characteristics (Thay, 2008).

Ideal Malaysians are envisioned as individuals and communities who have high confidence and self-esteem, strongly adhere to their religion and morality, and can live as members of a caring, democratic, liberal, understanding, cultured, scientific, and united society. The MOE must inculcate these values in the minds of all Malaysians as early as their primary school years (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). The nation-building process of Malaysia mainly focuses on strengthening the solidarity and integration among its citizens, fostering their love for the arts, culture, and heritage, and integrating Islam Hadhari into their lives and ways of thinking. The Malaysian education system acts as the main platform for producing people who can defend the sovereignty of the country in the future.

Although previous studies have examined the elements of unity in Malaysia, most of these studies have focused on schools and the society, while only few have focused on students and pre-service teachers at the universities. Moreover, most of these studies have focused on social issues instead of issues on unity. For instance, Jalani et al. (2005) examined the interests of the Bumiputra youths in entrepreneurship, and Khairunesa and Azrul (2011) studied the involvement of youths in the Gerakan 4B movement. Unfortunately, these studies had ignored the effects of the environment on the attitudes of the youth toward issues related to unity, patriotism, and racial tolerance. Racial relation cannot be strengthened without the understanding and willingness of individuals to commit themselves to interracial interaction or accept racial differences. Such unwillingness may even lead to further racial segregation and polarization. Disunity may also result from the lack of patriotic values among the people who stubbornly uphold their ethnic pride and in turn jeopardize the solidarity and unity in the nation state. In other words, Malaysians still lean toward ethnocentrism instead of national identity.

Issues related to national identity require immediate attention. A special unit of *Utusan Malaysia* studied the general knowledge of the public in Malaysian history (*Utusan Malaysia*, 28 October 2010), and found that teenagers were oblivious about the country's history and did not even care about nationalism and other matters pertaining to the state. Therefore, how the Malaysian education system can

inculcate a single national identity among pre-service teachers needs to be examined. Formal education is the best avenue for studying and practicing national identity (Collet, 2007). In this case, educators have major roles in promoting nationalism and building a national identity among their students. Accordingly, this study aims to determine the level of national identity among pre-service teachers at the higher learning institutions in Malaysia. This study also addresses those issues related to identity and nationalism as mediators of national integration.

National Identity

Desai (2006) found a significant connection between a nation or country and its national identity. Given that identity is closely related to a reference model of developing a ethnic, nation, culture, or country, Letnyakov (2016) investigated the new nation building policies implemented in the post-Soviet era, including those policies for creating a historical narrative, establishing cultural traditions and particularist politics, actively holding post-colonial discourse, and promoting the ethnic nationalism ideology. Bond (2017) found that the national identity of Scotland was highly inclusive in several aspects of ethnic minorities and religious communities. However, very few studies have examined the national identity in Malaysia. Gabriel (2011) defined the Malaysian concept as the national culture and identity in consideration of social practices, social experiences, imagination, and expressions of the people.

Globalization has brought various challenges to the pursuit of national identity. To address these challenges, one must scientifically define the related theories. According to Wang and He (2014), national identity involves the combination of four identities, namely, institutional identity, interest identity, identity of a non-national society, and formative mechanism, which is characterized as the unity of the origin country. National identity is expressive and characterized by unity in awareness and actions, political and cultural identities, and maintenance mechanism, which in turn is characterized by emotional unity and self-indulgence. National identity has also been defined as any cultural characteristic of a society that can be shared by everybody despite their differences (Desai, 2006). Mendelsohn (2002) argued that identity could pertain to the shared quality and characteristics of a community or the self-definition of an individual. Therefore, national identity can be perceived from several aspects, including the culture, customs, morals and attitudes, religious norms and values, and economic and social activities of the society. Ramlah (2005) found that the university students in Malaysia were generally unwilling to sacrifice their lives for their country. This finding raises the question, what will happen to the future generation of teachers in Malaysia?

Religion

Religion is an important component of national identity (Dingley, 2011). This factor

is also essential in developing the identity of people in America and Europe (Kurth, 2007). Theriault and Peter (2005) and Zambeta (2000) emphasized the importance of religion in developing the identity of people from European countries. Religion played an important part in the national identity development of Greece as reflected in the country's education policies and knowledge control in the context of its education system (Zambeta, 2000). Religion is also considered a basic element of the national identity of Poland (Marody & Mandes, 2005). Although its roles have changed, religion remains crucial in the formation of national identity (Dingley, 2011). Miedema (2009) argued that religious identity was part of an individual's identity. According to the provisions in the Federal Constitution, Islam is essential in developing the Malaysian national identity (Rijal, 2010). Islam in Malaysia presents a way of inculcating healthy life, arts, and cultural values without clashing with the principles and spiritual values of Islam (Ibrahim, 2010).

National Culture

As the basis of a society's identity, culture comprises several components, including traditions, customs, beliefs, values, knowledge, and norms as practiced by a group of individuals in a society (Ennaji, 2005). Culture also refers to a set of beliefs, values, norms, customs, traditions, rituals, and ways of life that differentiate one group from another (Lee, 2003). Culture can be seen as a set of shared worldviews that

require the adjustment of one's attitudes with those of certain groups from various contexts, such as ecological (rural, urban, and sub-urban) and religious contexts (Cathy, 2008). Therefore, several developed countries, including Russia (Ennaji, 2005), Germany (Luchtenennajierg, 2010), Australia (Moran, 2011), and the United States, as well as developing countries, including Nigeria (Ikpe, 2004) and Malaysia (The National Department for Culture and Arts, 2016), are using their national culture to unite people of different ethnics.

In Malaysia, the National Cultural Congress in 1971 stated that the National Cultural Policy should be based on the Malay culture, on those necessary and appropriate elements in other cultures that can be accepted as part of the national culture, and on Islam. This policy guides the development of a united Malaysian nation and the promotion of its national identity at the international level (The National Department of Culture and Arts, 2016). Therefore, national culture in this study refers to pre-service teachers who take pride in their existing culture, appreciate and practice the traditions and cultures of the nation, and abide by the principle of living in unity and harmony. These teachers also tolerate living with others in the society, believe in the importance of living in understanding and cooperation, uphold moral and virtuous attitudes, and show pride in their heritage.

Values

Taylor (1985) considered people as social animals who could define, see, and find themselves through accepted values that were rooted in their culture. Each individual can also define himself/herself by interacting with his/her society. Values are expressed from emotions, which in turn enable individuals to understand the motive and actions of others and evaluate their morals and ethics. Malaysia has dedicated itself to promoting unity among its people, sustaining its democracy, creating a fair society where the wealth of the country is equally shared by the people, encouraging liberal attitudes toward various cultural traditions, and developing a progressive society with the orientation of science and modern technology (Othman et al., 2006). To achieve these ambitions, the Malaysian government inculcated 18 moral values in the moral education curriculum of schools to be practiced by students in their daily lives. These values include belief in God, responsible, independent, self-esteem, diligence, grateful, patriotic, freedom, courageous, honesty, rationality, good hearted, humble, respectful, love, cooperative, moderation, and tolerance (Document for the Standard Curriculum and Assessment for Moral Education Form 1 KSSM, 2015). In this study, values refer to those moral values that are inculcated through education and are used to promote national unity among pre-service teachers.

Nationalism

Before discussing nationalism, we should define what nation is. Ernest Renan (1823–1892) known for the statements that a nation is “a daily referendum”, and that nations are based as much on what the people jointly forget, as what they remember. Renan wrote *What is a Nation* (1882) in order to symbolize the nationalism which was born in France. Gellner (2000) defined nationalism as primarily a political principle that holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent. Gellner analyzed nationalism by a historical perspective. He saw the history of humanity culminating in the discovery of modernity, nationalism being a key functional element. Modernity, by changes in political and economic system, is tied to the popularization of education, which, in turn, is tied to the unification of language (Kenneth, 2001).

Benedict Anderson (2006) defined the nation as an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. Regardless of the actual

inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. The beginnings of an answer lie in the cultural roots of nationalism. Blank and Schmidt (2003) described nationalism and patriotism as highly specific expressions of the general concept of national identity. From this perspective, nationalism is characterized by the idealization of a nation, a feeling of national superiority, and an uncritical acceptance of national, state, and political authorities.

According to Davidov (2009), previous studies have suggested many alternatives for measuring national identity, nationalism, and constructive patriotism and for comparing these constructs across different countries using various sources of data. As shown in Figure 1, this study uses nationalism as a mediator for the effects of religion, culture, and values on achieving unity in efforts to form a national identity. Pre-service teachers in higher learning institutions were chosen as respondents because they are considered

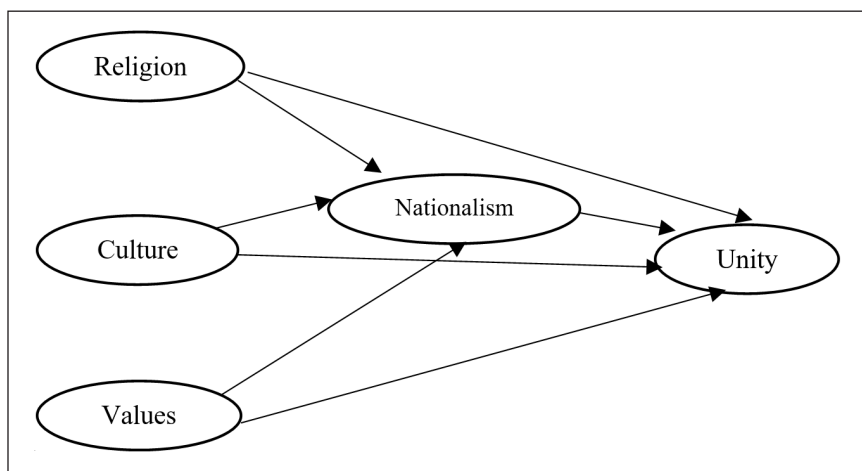


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

the future leaders of the country. Therefore, this population must have a high level of national identity to uphold the sovereignty and prosperity of the country. This study serves as a new source of information to develop highly effective programs for developing national identity, improving the national curriculum, improving the existing policies, and enacting new policies.

Based on the above discussion, the objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To determine significant differences in the religion, culture, values, nationalism, and unity among pre-service teachers in Malaysia based on their ethnic backgrounds.
2. To determine the mediating effects of nationalism on the relationship of religion, culture, and values with unity among pre-service teachers in Malaysia.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sample

The respondents were chosen from a population of undergraduate students from the Faculty of Education, University of Malaya using the simple random sampling technique. Undergraduate students in Faculty Education was chosen because they are future educators who play important role in educating the nation. A total of 230 respondents were selected based on their program (Islamic Education, Counseling, Teaching English as Second Language, Early Childhood Education, Science Education and Chinese Language Education) in the real study. In this regard, Patton (1990) stated

that there were no rules in determining the sample size but preferred a big sample for research surveys using a questionnaire. Sudman (1976) asserted that a minimum of 100 elements were required for each major group or subgroup in a sample.

Instrument of Study

Questionnaires constructs of religion, culture, values, nationalism, and unity were used to check the personal identities of the respondents. The questionnaire was developed by researchers and divided into five parts (religion, culture, values, nationalism and unity). The researchers constructed the instruments used to measure these variables and consulted experts to verify the instrument items. Questionnaire validity test was conducted to strengthen language use and improve clarity and item content. The experts facilitated instrument development and the reliability test of each item (Gay & Airasian, 2003). Questionnaire reliability was evaluated through a pilot study involving 150 undergraduate students in Faculty of Education, University of Malaya.

Religion Scale. After getting the approval from four experts and improved the questionnaire based on the recommendations of experts, total of 29 items was determined to measure the religion. A 10-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 10 ('strongly agree') was employed to measure the religion scale. The reliability value of religion scales exceeded the 0.70 desirable standard (0.73).

Culture Scale. The culture scale involved 30 items. A 10-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 10 ('strongly agree') was employed to measure the culture scale. The reliability value of culture scales is 0.85.

Values Scale. The values scale involved 38 items. A 10-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 10 ('strongly agree') was employed to measure the values scale. The reliability value of value scales is 0.81.

Nationalism Scale. The nationalism scale involved 36 items. A 10-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 10 ('strongly agree') was employed to measure the nationalism scale. The reliability value of nationalism scales is 0.86.

Unity Scale. The unity scale involved 36 items. A 10-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 10 ('strongly agree') was employed to measure the unity scale. The reliability value of unity scales is 0.75.

Data Analysis

Structural equation modeling (SEM), confirmation factor analysis (CFA), and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) were employed to determine the latent variables. The validity and reliability of the items in measuring the latent variables, namely, religion, culture, values, nationalism, and unity, were also tested. Descriptive statistics, MANOVA, and reliability analysis were

also applied in addition to CFA and EFA. The data were divided into two equal groups. EFA with Varimax rotation was used in the first group, and the analysis results showed an interrelationship among the factors. Given that a large number of factors is needed to explain the types and interrelationship among the existing factors, CFA was then applied in the second group. The structural factors were determined by EFA and approved by CFA (Sencan, 2005). The reliability of the instrument was evaluated based on the Cronbach's alpha values of its items.

For the first objective, MANOVA was applied to examine whether the Malay and non-Malay students differed in terms of religion, culture, values, nationalism, and unity. SEM analysis was then performed to determine whether nationalism mediated the relationship of religion, culture, and values with the unity of these pre-service teachers. The equation of the coefficient in SEM was estimated using AMOS 18. A chi-square test was performed to test some measures, including comparative fit index (CFI), goodness-of-fit index (GFI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), were used to assess the suitability of the models. Zainuddin Awang (2012) suggested that at least one type of index equivalence test from the absolute fit index (Chisq, GFI, and RMSEA), incremental fit index (AGFI, CFI, and TLI), and parsimonious fit (Chisq/df) should be used.

According to Zainuddin Awang (2012), RMSEA determines the likelihood for the chi-square test to reject a model with a large

number of samples and tests the equivalence of the model with the population within the CFA. The RMSEA value of the model was less than 0.08, which was within the acceptable range of <1.00 . GFI was used to assess the compatibility of a model with an independent model when the parameter was set to 0. The set value in this study exceeded 0.90. CFI was used to compare the existing model with an independent model. The CFI value in this study was greater than 0.90, which indicated that the latent variables in the model were not correlated. The normed chi-square test showed the ratio of chi-square with degrees of freedom, which is also known as the relative chi-square. The proposed value was less than 5, and a lower chi-square value indicates an improved compatibility. The model was checked to ensure that the hypothesized model matched the obtained data. Hair et al. (2010) stated that the value of the loading factor should exceed 0.60. This study followed the statement of Wang and Holcome (2010), who suggested that the loading factor should exceed 0.35.

A Sobel test was performed to test for the direct or indirect effect of the independent variables on the mediator or on the dependent variables b or ab (Preacher et al., 2007). The importance of indirect effect ab was tested based on the ratio between coefficient ab and the standard errors. The test yielded a z -value. The standard error coefficient ab (sab) was calculated based on the Aroian version of the Sobel test as recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986).

If the z -value in the absolute value is >1.96 or at the level of statistics z (p -value) <0.05 , then the indirect effect of the independent variable on the dependent variables through a mediator is significant at 0.05 (Preacher & Hayes, 2004).

RESULTS

EFA

EFA was employed to confirm the index scale for the identity of the respondents. However, researchers should conduct two important tests, namely, the Keiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett’s tests, beforehand. The KMO value was equal to 0.88, which exceeded the threshold value of 0.50, thereby indicating that the sample size was sufficiently large. However, the Bartlett’s test returned a significant value ($\chi^2(406)=7016.13$), $p<0.05$, which indicated that several sub-scales were related and that the data were compatible enough for the EFA. The EFA results produced five factors with eigenvalues of more than 1 (1.04, 1.34, 2.46, 2.65, and 5.06) and explained 44% of the variance. These eigenvalues were computed as the total of all variances that explained each factor. Therefore, only those factors with variances of more than 1 were accepted. The dimensions in the scale for identity demonstrated strong and positive relationships, with values ranging between 0.73 and 0.76. The factorial equation was obtained from the EFA results. However, the CFA should be used instead of EFA when determining the value or goodness of the data.

CFA

Analysis factor authentication has an important role in confirming and evaluating the reliability of a measurement in many social science studies (Harrington, 2009). The traditional acceptance criteria of the chi-square are shown by a significant result. The relative chi-square value should range between 1 and 5 while the TLI, CFI, and GFI values should range between 0 and 1 to achieve a compatibility model. However, the RMSEA value should not exceed 0.08 in order to be accepted by the data (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004). According to Awang (2012), an RMSEA value ranging between 0 and 1 is still acceptable. Four items were excluded from the instrument for testing the involvement of students because their loading factors were below 0.4 (Hashim & Sani, 2008). The CFA with the fit index and the chi-square test that showed the significant chi-square of the model both produced favorable and significant results (Kline, 2005), where chi-square/df=4.54, CFI=0.91, GFI=0.93, and RMSEA=0.07. These results also indicate the favorable fitness of the model. The CFA results reveal that all items have loading factors exceeding 0.5. These items were retained to determine the intermediary effects of nationalism on the relationship of religion, culture, and value with unity among pre-service teachers in Malaysia.

Differences among Religion, Values, Nationalism, and Unity based on Ethnic

A MANOVA analysis was performed to identify the differences in the religion, values,

nationalism, and unity of the respondents based on their ethnic. The researchers divided the ethnic into two categories, namely Malay and non-Malay due to shortage number of Chinese and Indian students to participant in this research and could not proceed by using parametric Inference statistical analysis.

The similarity of variance was determined by the homogeneity of the variance-covariance matrix, which was tested by conducting Box's M test. A significant difference was observed between the dependent and independent variables in terms of their variance-covariance with $F=8.32$ and $p<0.001$, which indicates that the dependent variables of variance-covariance are inhomogeneous across the independent variables. However, a MANOVA test was still conducted to test for the differences among the very large number of respondents in this study (Pallant, 2011). Wilks' Lambda test showed a significant difference among these students in terms of their religion, culture, values, nationalism, and unity [Wilks' $\lambda=0.74$, $F(1, 228)=16.18$, $p<0.05$]. Table 1 shows these differences in detail.

Table 1 shows significant differences in the religion [$F=78.80$, $p<0.05$], culture [$F=14.57$, $p<0.05$], values [$F=45.24$, $p<0.05$], nationalism [$F=25.21$, $p<0.05$], and unity [$F=29.28$, $p<0.05$] of the respondents. The Malay respondents received higher mean scores for religion, culture, values, nationalism, and unity than the non-Malays.

Intermediary Effect of Nationalism on the Relationship of Religion, Culture and Values with Unity. Figure 2 shows

Table 1
Differences in the religion, culture, values, nationalism, and unity of respondents with different ethnic backgrounds

Teachers Perception	Ethnic backgrounds	N	Mean	SD	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Religion	Malay	133	9.47	0.67	71.54	1	71.54	78.80	0.00
	Not Malay	97	8.34	1.24					
Culture	Malay	133	9.21	0.87	13.84	1	13.84	14.57	0.00
	Not Malay	97	8.71	1.11					
Values	Malay	133	9.56	0.58	26.59	1	26.59	45.24	0.00
	Not Malay	97	8.87	0.97					
Nationalism	Malay	133	9.22	0.83	26.46	1	26.46	25.21	0.00
	Not Malay	97	8.54	1.25					
Unity	Malay	133	9.31	0.80	30.30	1	30.30	29.28	0.00
	Not Malay	97	8.57	1.26					

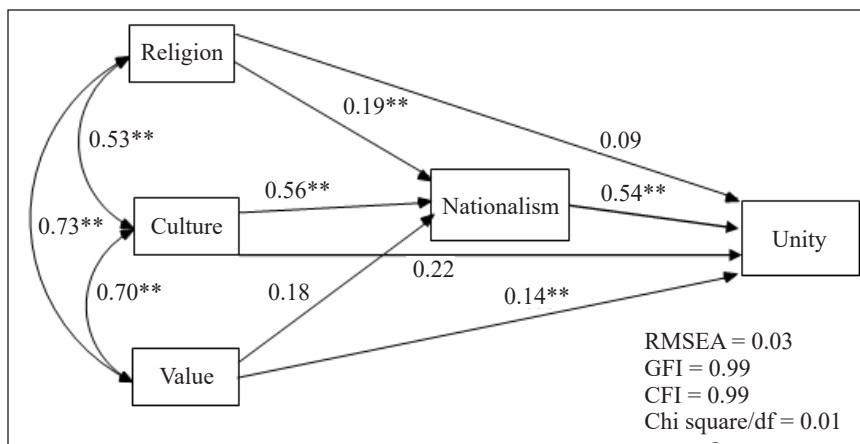


Figure 2. Contribution of religion, culture, and values on nationalism and unity

the contributions of religion, culture, and values on nationalism and unity. The SEM analysis results show that the model and the data of the sample have compatible index values with chi-square/df=0.00, RMSEA=0.06, $p < 0.05$, GFI=0.99, and CFI=0.99. The evaluation value generally shows the compatibility of the model with the data of the sample as well as the evaluation on each coefficient, while the coefficient path shows the significant

relationship between the specified variables. Among the three elements, culture has the greatest direct influence on nationalism ($\beta=0.56$, $p < 0.05$), followed by religion ($\beta=0.19$, $p < 0.05$) and values ($\beta=0.18$, $p < 0.05$). Culture ($\beta=0.22$, $p < 0.05$), values ($\beta=0.14$, $p < 0.05$), and religion ($\beta=0.09$, $p < 0.05$) also have direct effects on unity. The analysis results show that culture, moral values, and religion indirectly and positively affect unity through nationalism,

which suggests that these factors have significant roles in enhancing nationalism. In turn, nationalism has an intermediary effect on the relationship of culture, values, and religion with unity ($\beta=0.54, p<0.05$). Culture has an indirect insignificant effect on unity ($E_d=0.22, p<0.05$), but has an indirect significant effect on unity through nationalism ($E_i=0.31, p<0.05$). Value and religion have direct significant ($E_d=0.14, p<0.05$; $E_d=0.09, p<0.05$ respectively)

and indirect insignificant effects through nationalism ($E_i=0.10, p<0.05$; $E_i=0.11, p<0.00$ respectively) on unity.

A Sobel test was performed to see the mediating effect of nationalism on the relationship of culture, values, and religion with unity. Table 2 shows that nationalism significantly mediates the relationship of culture ($z=7.73, p<0.05$), religion ($z=3.45, p<0.05$), and values ($z=2.74, p<0.05$) with unity.

Table 2

Sobel test results on the mediating effect of nationalism on the relationship of culture, values, and religion with unity

				z	p	
		Mediator				
Religion	→	Nationalism	→	Unity	3.45	0.00
Culture	→	Nationalism	→	Unity	7.73	0.00
Value	→	Nationalism	→	Unity	2.74	0.00

DISCUSSION

The Malay and non-Malay pre-service teachers in the study have entirely different religions, cultures, and values. Given that all Malays respondents are Muslims based on the Federal Constitution Act 3, they are homogeneous in terms of their culture and values. By contrast, the non-Malay sample includes Chinese, Indians, and bumiputra from Sabah and Sarawak with different religions, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Sikhism, and Atheism (The Ministry of Culture, Arts, and Heritage, Malaysia, 2006). Therefore, the pre-service teachers in this group are heterogeneous and have different cultures that influence their values in life. The MANOVA analysis shows that the Malays scored higher than

the non-Malays in all aspects of religion, culture, values, nationalism, and unity. Article 11 of the Malaysian Constitution states that Islam is the official religion of the country. Accordingly, Islam is the pillar of the nationalism and national culture of Malaysia. However, the non-Malays in the country are free to practice their own religions and cultures.

National identity, nationhood, and citizenship are closely intertwined with the notions of values, ethics, and traditions, which are all based on the interactions between the past and the present (Malik, 2006). 1Malaysia aims to enhance the concept of unity in diversity, which has always been considered the best hope for the future generations of Malaysians

(Ibrahim, 2010). Accordingly, studies from western countries, such as Russia, find that restructuring the policies and approaches of various institutions can strengthen ethnocultural diversity and build a new concept of national community. These aspects are interrelated in terms of their goals to realize multicultural constitutional patriotism (Codagnone & Filippov, 2000).

The AMOS analysis results show that religion, culture, and values have direct and indirect effects on nationalism and unity. Culture is the most important factor that significantly affects nationalism and unity either directly or indirectly. Such effect may be attributed to three factors. First, multiculturalism is widely accepted and preferred by people of various ethnics in Malaysia. All of these ethnics are allowed to maintain, embrace, and inherit their own cultures. Therefore, they are very happy and comfortable in embracing and taking pride in their own cultural heritage. These results echo those of studies from other countries, such as Russia (Ennaji, 2005), Germany (Luchtenennajierg, 2010), Australia (Moran, 2011), the United States, and Nigeria (Ikpe, 2004), which all use national culture as a means to unite their people.

Second, by guiding the lives of people from all communities, religion motivates individuals to get along with one another regardless of their ethnics. By respecting and tolerating other religions, people attempt to create a society where they can all live in harmony and peace. People in Malaysia are free to embrace unique ways of life according to their religions. Malaysians have high tolerance for people with different

religious backgrounds by allowing them to build their places of worship, celebrate their religious festivals, and hold religious ceremonies as long as they do not disturb the people outside of their religion (Talib et al., 2010). Therefore, nationalism can be achieved by understanding and respecting the religions of others.

Third, values are formed by the religious beliefs and daily positive practices of individuals in their workplace, homes, and public places. Values encourage people from different communities to get along well with others in a friendly, accommodating, and collaborative manner. Othman et al. (2006) found that religious beliefs affect the daily lives of people. They also found that students in Malaysia generally had medium to high levels of values and had high levels of appreciation for gratitude, patriotism, and respect, with the other values receiving only a moderate level of appreciation.

However, the values used in this study only pertained to those factors with stronger direct effects on national unity compared with religion because these values must be universal and applicable across all ethnics. Moral values are instilled to all Malaysians through the moral education subject being taught since primary schools. Students are encouraged to emulate and practice good values as an appreciation of their personality and demonstrate qualities of good citizenship by focusing on issues related to life and identity construction (Rahim, 2001). In other words, a united Malaysia can be achieved by inculcating moral values among the students in the country.

Religion does not have a direct effect on unity because each religion has unique beliefs and practices. For instance, Islam and Christianity believe in one God, but Buddhists and Hindus believe in many gods, goddesses, or deities. Given these significant differences, people from different religions cannot easily arrive to a common understanding, thereby weakening their relationships. Certain religious practices in Malaysia can cause conflicts, but the positive values being emphasized in all religions, including respect, tolerance, and cooperation, can forge strong relationships among people regardless of their ethnic. According to Rahim et al. (2011), these conflicts can be solved by holding dialogues among people from different religions. The parties involved in these dialogues must observe a set of ethics to help Malaysia build a nation state.

The results of this study echo the situation in Pakistan. The Pakistani government uses school curriculum and academic experiences to understand their Pakistani identity. The complex relationship among education, religion, and national identity can lead to conflicts between “essentialist” collective identity and single collective identity as a characteristic of a collective citizenship (Durrani, 2010). Similar studies conducted abroad, such as in the United States (Dingley, 2013; Kurth, 2007), Europe (Therault & Peter, 2005; Zambeta, 2000), Canada (Collet, 2007) and United States (Ikpe, 2004), highlight the importance of religion in establishing the identity of the people.

Nationalism has been proven as an effective tool for achieving national unity and uniting the people in Malaysia. Nationalism also acts as an effective mediator in measuring the sense of belonging of individuals from the emotional aspect as recommended by Fossum (2011). This finding supports the suggestion of Davidov (2009) to use the constructs of national identity, nationalism, and constructive patriotism in many countries, including Canada, Great Britain, and Spain (Guibernau, 2006). These findings can be used as reference for a comparative study on national identity. Pre-service teachers greatly contribute to the achievement of the 1Malaysia concept by inculcating nationalism among their students. Multiculturalism must be integrated into the academic curricula to help these teachers promote nationalism and unity. These teachers must also develop positive attitudes toward multicultural education because they are responsible for promoting the ideas of coexistence, peace, mutual respect, and mutual acceptance of the identity and heritage of others to prevent the disintegration of the country (Yilmaz, 2016).

Contribution of the study in Malaysian context is to fill in the gap of previous studies on the elements of unity in Malaysia that rarely have focused on pre-service teachers at the universities. Finding showed that the Malay pre-service teachers have higher degree of religion, culture, values, nationalism, and unity than the non-Malays. Therefore, awareness of the importance needs to be enhanced among the non-Malays

by conducting more workshops or training regarding the above topic.

This study underscores the importance of education in developing and producing the nation state of Malaysia based on its national culture, religion, and values as well as through its National Education Policy (Rodzi, 2009). By interacting with individuals from varying sociocultural, religious, and ethnic backgrounds, people learn to understand, accept, and embrace their differences. In this way, Malaysia creates a shared set of experiences and goals for building its future. These shared experiences and aspirations reflect the country's goal to establish a common national identity and foster unity among its people.

On the other hand, the findings also showed culture has the greatest direct influence on nationalism, followed by religion and values. Culture, values and religion also have direct and indirect effects on unity. In turn, nationalism has an intermediary effect on the relationship of culture, values, and religion with unity. Hence this add new findings to the field and the Ministry of Higher Education may focus on the above elements in the effort to inculcate the unity among the pre-service teachers.

The Malaysian education system must produce youths who all dream of a brighter future for Malaysia (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Therefore, the Ministry of Higher Education, universities, and faculties in Malaysia must promote the unity among the pre-service teachers in

the country. These teachers must hold positive attitudes and goodwill toward other ethnics for them to promote national unity in schools. Students must also proactively practice the religions, cultures, and values of Malaysia when interacting with people of other ethnics.

CONCLUSION

Education is the best medium for students to learn, practice, and establish the identity of their countries. In this study, pre-service teachers act as the main agents who inculcate the concept of national identity among their students. They positively view religion, culture, and values as key elements in building a united Malaysian nation. Nationalism is an important mediator that catalyzes the process of national solidarity. Therefore, higher learning institutions must adopt proactive measures to ensure that these three aspects are emphasized in the national education curriculum and to help the nation building process as shown in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2015 (2013) run smoothly and achieve its goals.

There are a number of gaps on unity from our findings and would benefit from further research, including evaluation to extend the model we have developed here. In-depth exploration of how pre-service teachers committed to embrace ethnic tolerance and unity and, nationalism is an important mediator to inculcate integration. Further research might develop, for example, training module with strategies in inculcating unity. Other variables can be explored to robustly capture the

impact and outcomes of language, religion and knowledge in molding the national integration. It would also be helpful to capture qualitatively the experiences and perspectives of the pre-service teachers who have had mixed or negative experiences in the topic of our research.

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