

TOPIC 2	AWARENESS OF SOCIO-LINGUISTIC ASPECTS OF ETHNIC GROUPS
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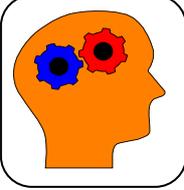
Synopsis:

This topic deals with the awareness of socio-cultural aspects of the ethnic groups in Malaysia. It will explain the basic concepts of race, society and social class. In addition, the types of belief system, language, custom and gender aspects in our multicultural society are discussed. A better understanding on the various cultures in Malaysia will be acquired by Malaysian in order to create unity among all races in the country.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Explain concepts of race, society and social class
2. Explain types of belief system, language, custom and gender practices among multicultural society in Malaysia.
3. Discuss how the understanding of various cultures in Malaysia is able to assist in the inculcation of unity among various races.

Before discussing the awareness and the importance of multiculturalism in Malaysia, it would be good if we reflect on our country which consists of diverse society (*masyarakat majmuk*) practising various cultures in the country.

	<p>Reflect: What you understand by diverse society and why it is essential for everyone in the country to understand the diverse cultures of multicultural society in Malaysia.</p> <p>Surf the internet : Why it is necessary for the teachers to understand the various cultures practiced by the multicultural Malaysians in the country?</p>
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It is believed that the understanding of various cultures and their practices will ensure national development and to create a harmonious society among the Malaysians of various races.

This topic will explore, analyse, discuss and try to compare the existence of various cultures as well their different cultural practices. The presence of multicultural practices can be analysed by studying various aspects such as: races, social structure, social class, belief system, norms and practices and emergences of gender differences.

2.1. Race

According to the population census of Malaysia in 2010, the total population in Malaysia is almost reaching 27 566,821 million. Of this, 58% of the population are Malays, 27% are Chinese and 7% are Indians. The rest of the population consists of indigenous people. (Najeemah Mohd Yusof. 2005). According to Hans Kohn (as cited in Kaelan, 2002: 212-213) the emergence of a race is related to the similarities that each individual in a group share the similar characteristics such as common language, religion, cultures, live in a similar territory, live in the same country and become a citizen.

Friedrich Hertz explains that every race consists of four core elements:

- The desire to achieve national unity consisting of social cohesion, economic, political, religious, cultural, communication, and solidarity.
- Desire to independence, excellence, individualism, originality, or uniqueness.
- The desire to stand out among the nations excel in the pursuit of honor, influence and position.
- A desire to stand out among the nations excel in the pursuit of honor, influence, and position.

In addition, there are many other definitions and meanings that can be used for further understanding. A nation in general can be defined as the union of the same origin, customs, religion, and history. While race refers to a big group of people who have moral ideals and law which is bounded by desire and one that experiences past history and stays within the territory of a country.

Other understanding and meaning of nation comprises the following:

- nation exists because of the desire to live together with a superior sense of solidarity
- race exists because of the united wish, intention or desire that emerged because of the feeling of unity between man and the environment.
- race is a cultural union and political union (Cultural and political unity).
- nation is a group of people that have the same character or nature.

However, in the context of our country, the people comprises of Malays, Chinese, Indians and others. As such we can conclude that race refers to a group of people who are originated from a common descent and practise its own customs, language, and culture.

Generally each race is considered to have a common identity and speak the same language, besides having their own religion, ideologies and culture. They are considered to have originated from the same descent. In Malaysia, every race has its own identity and culture but all races live in harmony respecting each other's religious practices and values

Reflect :



Think and discuss how teachers can produce a united *Bangsa Malaysia* among the diverse groups of people in Malaysia.

2.2 Language

Language is a communication tool used by every member in the community in any one race to communicate and interact with each other. In addition, language has also become an important medium of information shared between members of society. According to Noriati et al (2011) through language, human can adapt to the customs, attitudes, and societal rules. Thus it is easier to familiarize oneself with all forms of life.



As an educator, how can you play your roles in ensuring the successful implementation of the concept of 1 Malaysia using language?

2.3 Language Function

A language function refers to the purpose for which speech or writing is being used. Savignon(1983) describes a language function as “the use to which language is put, the purpose of an utterance rather than the particular grammatical form an utterance takes” (Savignon, 1983). By using this idea to structure teaching, the instructional focus becomes less about form and more about the meaning of an utterance. In this way, students use the language in order to fulfill a specific purpose, therefore making their speech more meaningful. It becomes a tool of communication as well as a tool for human beings to interact. Language also plays an important role in producing important work. In traditional societies, before writing came into being, language became an important

communication tool in sharing ideas, information and insights both implicitly and explicitly.

In modern society in Malaysia, language is used to unite Malaysians of all races and it has become a tool for racial unity in Malaysia. Thus, the Malay language as the official language in Malaysia is used as a language of instruction in schools. The Malay language as the national language has been able to bring all Malaysians to live in a harmonious atmosphere where mutual respect prevails among every citizen in Malaysia to interact and communicate easily. In interpersonal relationship, language has become a tool for bridging the members of society together in our country.

2.4. Structure of Society Or Social Class

Community can be understood from a wide perspective. Normally, community refers to a group of individuals living together. In general, the community can be understood as a union of groups of people who interact in a particular living system (Najeemah, 2005). Sociologists define community as the people who interact in such a way as to share a common culture.

Customs are also used to determine the way people live. The cultural bond may be ethnic or racial, based on gender, or due to shared beliefs, values, and activities. Culture and society are intricately related. A culture consists of the “objects” of a society, whereas a society consists of the people who share a common culture. When the terms “culture” and “society” first acquired their current meanings, most people in the world worked and lived in small groups in the same location. Thus, culture and society is an inseparable relationship (Ramli Wan Ahmad. 2006).

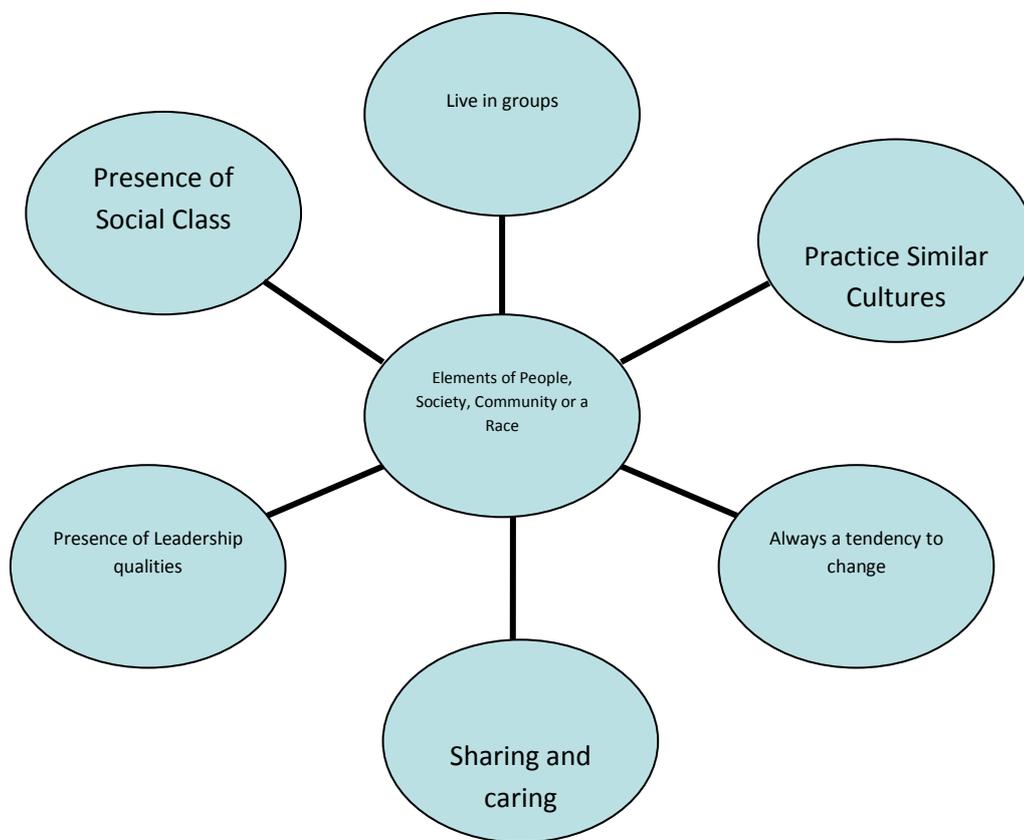
Society is classified as a group of people who are related and they perform activities collectively while living together. The importance of this kind of interaction between individuals which determines a particular pattern of life and there is a distinct communication system (Roucek and Warren, 1979).

The interaction process is wide, covering a variety of communication systems. Thus the behavior of individuals in society is determined by patterns of interaction, which is in turn is influenced by social values (Najeemah, 2005).

According to Syed Ismail & Ahmad Subki (1965) community refers to a group of people living together and they are dependent on their culture, In addition, each community has the same objective to be achieved. Most of the time, these people live together and they are interdependent in the organization. They also share a cultural heritage system which are reflected in the unique needs that existed in the lives of people.

The following diagram explains the features of a society that can be used as a guide to explore the characteristics of a particular group of people, community, society or race.

Characteristics of A Particular Group



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People, Community, Society or Race

In the above discussions about community, we should also seek to understand and discuss the concept of ethnicity. An ethnic group or ethnicity is a population of human beings whose members identify with each other, either on the basis of a presumed common genealogy or ancestry, or recognition by others as a distinct group, or by common cultural, linguistic, religious, or territorial traits. Members of an ethnic group, on the whole, claim cultural continuities over

time, although historians and anthropologists have documented that many of the cultural practices on which various ethnic groups are based are of relatively recent invention. The term is used in contrast to race, which refers to a classification of physical and genetic traits perceived as common to certain groups. Usually, ethnicity can be of the same cultural practices in which they practise the customs, dress, language and the same economic activity.



In groups discuss what you understand about the following aspects:

Ethnic	
Ethnicity	
Ethnocentric	
Ethnocentrism	

Next, let us discuss the meaning of social class. Social class refers to the status or position of one group in the social hierarchy that reflects whether one group was in the upper class, middle or lower class. During the age of the Malacca Sultanate, the Malay society is divided into two groups, that is the government and the citizens. The government consists of the King, *Bangsawan*, Speaker, and Headman. Meanwhile, the citizens consist of ordinary people.

Questions to ponder:

- With the help of graphic organisers, compare and contrast the social arrangement of traditional society with modern society of today.
- Discuss the responsibilities *Sultan*, *Bendahara*, *Temenggung* and *Laksamana* in the Malacca government

Among Malaysians of various races, the social system of each group has distinguished social positions. Surf the internet for the various social classes based on the information given below to understand cultural diversity amongst Malaysians.

PENINSULAR MALAYSIA	SABAH	SARAWAK
Malay	Kadazan-Dusun	Iban
Cina	Bajau	Bidayuh
India	Murut	Melanau
Serani	Bisayah	Orang Ulu
Punjabi	Kedayan	Kayan
Orang Asli	Lotud	Bisayah
	Dumpas	Kedayan
	Rungus	Kelabit
	Sulu	Kenyah

2.4 Custom and Rituals

Custom of people are the rules and norms that are and have been in practice by a group of people through many generations. It is considered very important to every society and we have to respect people's customs. Malay community considered it to be very important and are bound to every practices in all situations related to eating, tradition and custom of engagement and marriage, and birth. Practising and adherence to customs are increasingly important to the Malay community.

Apart from the Malays, the Chinese, Indian, Punjabi and others adhere to their customs respectively. In addition to Peninsular Malaysia, the people in Sabah and Sarawak also hold strongly to their customs. In addition, indigenous people in the country also practise their customs and their practices can be strongly felt in certain ceremonies such as birth, marriage and death.

In Malaysia, there are various customs among the various races and these customs are still being practised since ancient times till today by the Malays, Indians and Chinese. Custom practised by each race is still relevant, understood and accepted. This shows that our country is rich in diverse traditions, and foreigner who visited our country are impressed by the lifestyle and level of unity among Malaysians. Custom practices of Malaysian community can be seen based on the existence of various ethnic groups practicing different custom.

As an educator who is responsible, one needs to understand the custom of Malaysian society in order to become agents of change ensuring that Malaysians live harmoniously and respecting each other’s custom. Custom of Malaysians in our country are as follows:

- Malay Custom
- Chinese Custom
- Indian Custom
- Punjabi Custom
- Eurasian Custom
- Custom of ethnic groups in Sarawak
- Custom of ethnic groups in Sabah
- Custom of Orang Asli

Custom and Practices	CUSTOM AND RITUALS OF MALAYSIANS				
	Malays	Chinese	Indians	Punjabis	Eurasian
Birth					
Marriage proposal					
Engagement					
Seventh months of Pregnancy					

Death					
Custom	CUSTOMS AND RITUALS OF ETHNIC GROUPS FROM SABAH DAN SARAWAK				
	Sabah		Sarawak		
Child birth					
Marriage Proposal					
Marriage					
Seventh months of pregnancy					
Death					

2.5 Belief system

Belief is a state or habit of mind in which trust or confidence is placed in some person or thing. In the context of religion, belief is part of the core of moral development. For Muslims, the belief is usually related to *akidah* and faith. Below are some of the beliefs that are still being practised by various races in Malaysia.

Take a moment to think and collect information related to the beliefs and taboos of Malaysian society based on the table below.

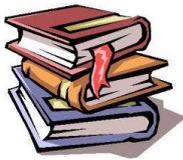
	Malays	Chinese	Indians
Belief Systems			
Superstitions and Taboos			

2.6 Conclusion

Understanding the existence of various cultures among the Malaysian community is important to teachers. Understanding of culture among various ethnic groups in Malaysia can help teachers to develop friendly relationships among school children. Teachers as social agents can play an important role to build a progressive and prosperous Malaysia. Solidarity and cooperation among the races are very important toward the success of Vision 2020 and the concept of 1 Malaysia. Teachers can be role models among the pupils in the school to promote tolerance and cooperation in the formation of a Greater Malaysia.

Topics For Discussion:

1. Discuss how teachers can develop cooperation and unity among school children to create a harmonious atmosphere among pupils from different ethnic groups.
2. As an educator, suggest some of the school activities that can promote cooperation and unity among the various ethnic pupils

**References:**

Refer to the list of books for further reading

Brint, S.(1998). *Schools and Societies*.New York:Pine Forge Press.

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