

<b>TOPIC 1</b>	<b>CULTURE AND ETHNIC GROUPS IN MALAYSIA</b>
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**Synopsis**

This module aims to give exposure to students on several topics related to culture and ethnic groups in Malaysia. This includes an understanding of the concept of culture and ethnic groups. In addition, this module also discusses the characteristics of ethnic groups and demography. Knowledge about this topic is important to teachers because they have a great role in the realization of the national agenda to achieve social integration. Besides, an understanding of this topic also enables the teacher to foster positive values to increase students' awareness of the different cultures and diverse ethnic groups which will further enhance the spirit of cooperation amongst students. Therefore teachers need to equip themselves with knowledge on how to create a conducive teaching and learning environment for students from diverse ethnic groups.

**Learning Outcomes**

At the end of this unit, learners should be able to:

- 1.1. Explain concepts of culture and ethnic groups in Malaysia
- 1.2 Elaborate and present the characteristics of ethnic groups and demography in Malaysia.

<b>Topic 1.1</b>	<b>Definition and Concepts of Culture</b>
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Before we start this topic, let us reflect on the relevance of this topic with our role as a teacher in a classroom consisting of students from diverse ethnic groups and cultures. This is a common scenario in Malaysia. How would knowledge about culture and diverse ethnic groups help teachers create a conducive teaching and learning environment? May be we already have the answers to these questions based on our experience and perception respectively. However, we need to understand some basic concepts related to this topic that may help to improve our understanding.

### 1.1.1 Definition and Concept of Culture

#### Definitions and Concepts of Culture

In general, culture means the way of life. From the sociological viewpoint, the word culture is derived from the Sanskrit word *Buddhaya* which is a combination of the word *Budhi* (Sanskrit) meaning active mind and *Daya* (Malay) which means force, power and influence. The English term of culture, however, has its root from the Latin word, "colere" which means designing or doing. Besides, let us look at other definitions of culture.

"Culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society".

(Edward B. Tylor, 1871)

"Culture may be defined as the totality of the mental and physical reactions and activities that characterize the behavior of individuals composing a social group collectively and individually in relations to their natural environment, to other groups, to members of the group itself and of each individual to himself. It also rates includes the products of These activities and their role in the life of the groups ".

(Franz Boas, 1911)

"Culture is a set of intellectual and material equipment that can meet their biological and social needs in keeping with the surrounding".

(Mohd Taib Osman, 1988)

"Culture is a set of human-made objective and subjective elements that in the past have increased the probability of survival and resulted in satisfaction of the participants in an ecological niche and thus become shared among those who could communicate with each other".

- Objective - something that has a tangible form, such as agricultural tools, art works, houses, means of transportation, communication tools and so on.

- Subjective-something abstract such as norms, morals and values.

(Triandis, 1994)

"The way of life of people, including their attitudes, values, beliefs, arts, sciences, modes of perception and habits of thoughts and activity".

(Dictionary of Philosophy, 1996)

Based on the given definitions of the meaning of culture, we can conclude that there are distinct similarities in the various thoughts from different backgrounds in different epochs. In short, culture is a way of life in any society which includes belief systems, values, beliefs, art, tradition and civilization.

Next, let's look at several other aspects of the concept of culture. Based on some thoughts on universal cultural elements, Kluckhohn in his book "Universal Categories of Culture" (1953) discuss the cultural framework. Based on that, Koentjaraningrat (2002: 203-204) highlights seven cultural elements, namely:

1. Language
2. Knowledge system
3. Social organization
4. Technology systems and equipment
5. Livelihood and economic system
6. Religious system
7. Art

In other words, all the seven elements form the basis of the culture in any society. These elements are all inter-related. However, not all of these elements stand out. Different societies have certain elements that stand out and this varies from one society to another.

### **1.1.2. Characteristics of Culture**

However, there are several characteristics of culture which are similar in all societies. The characteristics are as follows:-

i) Learned – Culture is not inherited but can be learned. For example parents need to teach their children manners and dress codes, table manners and communication with the elderly.

ii) Shared - There are certain elements in a culture that is not confined to any one ethnic group, but also practiced by other ethnic groups. For example, we see in terms of clothing. Although baju kurung and kebaya are the traditional attire of the Malay community, it is also worn by other ethnic groups. Similarly, in terms of food, we find that in the context of Malaysia which is blessed with a great variety of food because of the various ethnic groups, the traditional food of a certain ethnic group, for example thosai and apom which belongs to the Indians, is also a favorite of other ethnic groups.

iii) Has been universal - universal features exist in all human groups. For example, animal loving culture and the environment. However, these cultural practices may differ from one ethnic group to other ethnic groups due to the system of beliefs, local customs and values of a society.

iv) Inherited - This means that culture can be passed down from one generation to another generation. For example, the Malay culture in marriage customs practiced today is a legacy of the previous generation. Similarly, there are certain cultural practices adopted by other races in Malaysia like the Chinese. They have a certain tradition of prohibited colour for clothings that they need to observe during Chinese New Year and this is a tradition that has been practiced for generations.

v) Dynamic - Culture is something that is dynamic over time, context and place. As an example, we see changes in the male Sikh community in ancient times adhere to wearing turban. But with the passage of time and modernization, there have been men among the modern generation Sikh whereby wearing of turban is no longer observed.

vi) Have a symbolic elements - These elements exist in all societies based on the level of importance of the tool selected as the image or symbol. For example,

symbols such as flags, logos and symbols have specific meanings to the members of the community.

vii) The existence of worldview

Next, based on these features, culture can be categorized into two types, namely: -

- i) material culture - equipment and supplies life and economic systems.
- ii) non-material culture - religion and belief systems, knowledge and language.

As a conclusion, in terms of human psychology, culture is part of human life. Citing Matsumoto (2002) 'culture played as basic and important a role in understanding and contributing to human behavior as did any other influences on our lives, and to gradually understand its pervasive and profound influence on psychological processes in all areas of functioning.' From a different viewpoint, we also can say that culture is the production of a community in various forms, whether tangible or intangible (Noriati A.Rashid et al, 2011). Culture also refers to a way of life practiced by many people involving thought, values, beliefs, opinions, habits and way of thinking that can be inherited. Important cultural concept to compare and contrast the different societies. Thus it seems that man himself create a culture and cultural development will follow the progress of society. (Aziz Deraman, 1994)

In the context of current education, teachers have a responsibility to educate students to be cultured as required by not only society but conform to the explicit and implicit elements in the National Philosophy of Education. Thus, the teacher is responsible for understanding the diversity of cultures and groups among the students in the classroom. To realize their role, teachers need to improve their understanding of the cultural and ethnic diversity. In this regard, two major cultural roles that need to be recognized by the teachers are to build the country's image to create character and identity and to foster national consciousness and nationhood based on characteristics of spirituality, humanity and mentality (Nasrudin Yunus, Centre for General Studies, UKM).



### Stop and Reflect

“What culture is to humans is what water is to fish”( Shinobu Kitayama). To what extent do you agree with the viewpoint?

Based on your experience, discuss the concept of cultural diversity in the context of Malaysian society.

### 1.1.3 Summary

This topic has discussed important aspects such as:

- Definitions of culture from various perspectives. In general, culture means the way of life. From the point of language, the word culture is derived from the Sanskrit word Buddhaya which is a combination of the word Budhi (Sanskrit) meaning active mind and Daya” (Malay) which means force, power and influence. The English term of culture, however, has its root from the Latin word, ‘colere’ which means designing or doing. In short, culture is a way of life in any society which includes belief systems, values, art, tradition and civilization.
- Further discussion featuring seven cultural elements, namely: Language, knowledge systems, social organization, technological systems and equipment, livelihood and economic systems, religious systems and the arts.
- Characteristics of culture discussed in this module are as follows: -
  - o Learned
  - o Shared
  - o Being universal
  - o Inherited
  - o Dynamic
  - o Have a symbolic element
  - o The existence of worldview

- The teacher has to be responsible for understanding the diversity of cultures and groups among the students in the classroom. Two key roles of the teacher are to build the country's image to create character and identity, fostering national consciousness and nationhood based on characteristics of spirituality, humanity and mentality (Nasrudin Yunos (Centre for General Studies, UKM).

<b>Topic 2</b>	<b>Definition and Concept of Diverse Groups</b>
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As a teacher, have you ever thought about the importance of the concept of diverse group? How can this knowledge allow a teacher to create a harmonious environment among school children consisting of diverse groups and culture? Many questions of this kind can be asked. Evidently, all these questions show that the concept of group diversity is very much related to the responsibility of a teacher. Thus, as teachers we need to understand the meaning and concept of diverse groups in order to play effective roles in creating a harmonious and friendly teaching and learning atmosphere in the classroom. In the context of our discussion as regards to "diverse group" we need to clarify a few concepts as follows:

### **1.2.1 Ethnic**

#### **Definition of Ethnic**

The word ethnic comes from the Greek word "ethnos" meaning people. According to Shamsul (2007), in his book 'Ethnic Relations Module' ethnicity can be defined as a group of people who practise the culture that almost uniformly cover the customs, dress, language and economic activities. According to him, the concept of ethnicity has a relationship with the concept of race. Ethnic is classified through different cultures characterized by customs, family patterns, clothing, aesthetics, political orientation, economic activity and entertainment. Based on his views it can be summarised that ethnicity is a concept which categorizes groups of people based on their living system." (Marzudi Md Yunus, 2009).

Based on the Islamic view, the existence of multi-ethnic, ethnicity, race, language, color, customs, culture and so on is common. The goal is to enable man to know each other,

work together, helping each other and having mutual respect towards peace, security, prosperity and unity of mankind on this earth and this coincide with the verse of Allah in the Holy Al Qur'an interpreted as the follows:

"O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted."  
(Al-Hujurat : 13)

This shows that the social system of Islam have stated that there was a difference of race, color, language and nationality, and is seen as something that has existed in the development of human civilization. Islam has never intended to eliminate such differences, let alone put it aside. This is because there are advantages in all these differences either in giving them the opportunity to get to know each other, doing good to each other and understanding the importance of peace and harmony. As such Islam calls man towards peace and order to do good to each other as described in the interpretation of the Word of God:

"No good is there in much of their private conversation, except for those who enjoin charity or that which is right or conciliation between people. And whoever does that seeking means to the approval of Allah - then We are going to give him a great reward"  
(An-Nisa': 114)

Here it is clear that we have a great responsibility in bridging the gap between various ethnic groups and performing these responsibilities would mean that we have accomplished part of our social and religious duties.

Next, the discussion of ethnicity requires us to understand some of the concepts such as ethnicity, ethnocentrism, stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination.

**Ethnicity** refers to the sense of belonging of an ethnic group.

**Ethnocentrism** is the feeling that arises in an ethnic group where elements such as culture, values, attitudes and practice are better than the elements found in other ethnic groups. This is because members of an ethnic group use their own culture and practices as a benchmark assessment.

**Stereotype** is the general statements purporting negative impression of extravagance of the pros and cons of the nature of a particular ethnic group by another ethnic group. For example, the Malays love entertainment. This stereotype picture has negative implications and can lead to undesirable impact on unity in a plural society in Malaysia.

**Prejudice** is an implicit feelings in the hearts of the members of a particular ethnic group against another ethnic group. Usually these feelings are not based on any accurate or clear information or evidence. These feelings give rise to unreasonable dislike of an ethnic group towards other ethnic groups.

**Discrimination** is the views, thoughts and negative beliefs by one ethnic group against the other ethnic groups that influence the behavior of the negative view. Discrimination is prejudice that exists in the ethnic group. Discrimination is likely to occur when there is prejudice.

### 1.2.2. Importance of Understanding Ethnic Relations

As a teacher, you need to understand the importance of ethnic relations. This is to create an effective teaching and learning environment in your classroom and in the long term is to create a "1Malaysia". What is the importance of understanding ethnic relations? Let's examine the importance of understanding ethnic relations in the country.

- Malaysia is a multiracial country and understanding ethnic relations is important in order to avoid ethnic conflict.
- Ethnic relations is closely related to the whole social structure of society. Understanding ethnic relations provides an understanding of the degree of social and cultural pluralism.
- Ethnic relations describe the historical development and socio-economic capacity of our country.
- Ethnic relationship reflects the degree of ethnicity and source of social tensions.
- Through ethnic relations, we are able to understand the issues of prejudice and discrimination.
- Ethnic relations also helps in understanding the impact of industrialization and social change.
- Ethnic relations influence social policy and social planning of the country.

It is necessary for us to understand that the harmonious ethnic relations in our country does not depend entirely on the circumstances of goodwill between people but also between different social class groups. Ethnic relations nowadays have shaped the social system in Malaysia. However, the degree of national unity in the country is still difficult to measure. Yet, other countries see that there is harmony in ethnic relations in Malaysia. This has an impact on the sectors of tourism, industry, trade and others. Outside communities can see the political and economic stability here. These are some of the potential impacts as a result of ethnic balance and stability.

**1.2.3. Levels of Ethnic Relations**

- i) Segregation
- ii) Accommodations
- iii) Acculturation
- iv) Assimilation
- v) Amalgamation

Table 1 below summarizes the levels of ethnic relations.

**Table 1: The levels of the Ethnic Relations**  
 (Source: Nasrudin Yunos: Centre for General Studies, UKM)

<b>SEGREGATION</b>	Practice of separating people of different races, classes, or ethnic groups,
<b>ACCOMODATION</b>	Conscious of cultural difference but live harmoniously
<b>ACCULTURATION</b>	The minority accepts the culture of the dominant group making necessary adjustments to social situations to prevent or reduce conflict.
<b>ASSIMILATION</b>	The process of reducing the boundary whereby the minority incooperate elements of the dominant group’s culture & traits, but at the same time maintain their own distinctive ethnic & cultural identities

**AMALGAMATION**

Forming a new cluster through mixed marriages

Based on insights related to ethnic groups that we have discussed, it can be concluded that ethnicity is a group of people/individuals based on mutual respect and a common activity with a view to develop their ethnic group. Indeed, knowledge about ethnic is very useful for teachers and it should not stop as a superficial understanding of the explicit aspects as the more significant aspect is the implicit elements such as values and spirituality. In addition, elements such as prejudice, discrimination and prejudice should be avoided in order to achieve unity among the various ethnic groups.

**Activity**

1. Based on your experience, reflect on the levels of ethnic relations in the context of the plural society in Malaysia.
2. Relate your reflection with the existence of ethnicity, ethnocentricim, stereotype, prejudice dan discrimination.

**1.2.4. Clusters****Definition of Clusters**

Smith (1945) defines clusters as a unit consisting of a number of organisms having collective perceptions about their union and have the ability to do and behave the same way within their group. Supporting these views is the definition given by Stogdill (1959) which states that the group is an open interaction system where the interaction pattern is determined by the structure of a particular system. Next, a more detailed explanation given by Mills (1967) who mentioned that the group is a unit consisting of two or more individuals who work or have contact to achieve a certain purpose and that considers cooperation between groups as something meaningful. The definition given by Forsyth (1983) also meets the definition that was presented earlier. According to Forsyth (1983) cluster is two or more individuals who influence each other through social interaction.

**1.2.5. Category and Function of Groups**

Based on the ideas that were presented above, the diversity of groups within the scope of our discussion can be interpreted from several perspectives. First, the group in a society can be classified into two groups, namely formal and informal. Formal group means group established by an organization with a set task to achieve organizational goals. Informal group can be categorized based on several aspects as follows:

Table 2: Categories and Functions of Clusters

No	Categories of Clusters	Functions of Clusters
1.	Task based	group executing a responsibility based on a certain work together for the purpose of completing the task
2.	Interest based	group of individuals who work together to achieve a specific target / niche.
3.	Friendship based	group of individuals with similar characteristics and have life goals, wishes and lifestyles which are mutually agreed

There's probably other categories that can be added besides those that have been categorized in Table 1 above. Can you identify other categories of clusters? Your effort to find the information may be much easier if you are aware that cluster formation is influenced by several factors. Can you list the factors that influence the formation of the group? For the purpose of our discussion here are some factors that have been identified: -

- Harmony (security guarantees)
- Status (tribute)
- Self-esteem (feeling of self-worth)
- Strength (building inner greatness)



Gather information from the nearest library or by surfing the internet for relevant information related to categories of clusters and factors influencing its formation besides those categories mentioned in Table 2. Based on your reading, answer the following questions:

Based on discussions with partners/members of your group, complete the following table with information related to the diversity of the Malaysian community in Malaysia.

**Table 3 : Categories and Functions of Clusters**

No	Categories of Clusters	Functions of Clusters	Factors Influencing the Formation of Clusters
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			

**1.2.6. Types and Demographic Groups**

"Demography" was first used by Guillard (1885). The term "Demography" originates from the word "demos" and "grafein". "Demos" means people or people in an area, while "grafein" means describe or write about something. Based on the understanding, demography means "writing about people or people in a location". Demographic group can be defined as the statistical analysis of the number and composition of the population in a certain location (Syed Ismail et al, 2010).

The scope of demography is as follows:

- i. Structure of the population
- ii. Total population

iii. Composition (age, religion, race, gender)

iv. Process of population

v. Death

vi. Migration

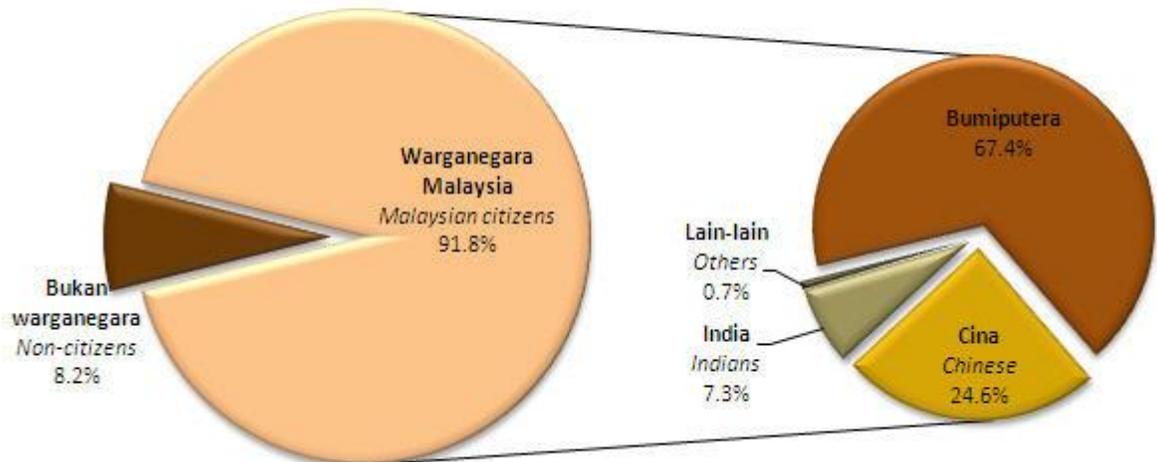
vii. Marriage

viii. Changes in social status

Demographic groups in Malaysia consists of many races, nationalities and religions. The indigenous people who are considered to be the original inhabitants of Malaysia are the Malay, Dayak, Iban, Kadazan, Kadazan Dusun in Sabah and Sarawak. The ethnic groups in Malaysia are the Malays, Chinese and Indians. Percentage distribution of population according to race in Malaysia can be seen in Figure 1 are quoted from Chart 7 as follows: -

Carta 7: Taburan peratus penduduk mengikut kumpulan etnik, Malaysia, 2010  
 Chart 7: Percentage distribution of the population by ethnic group, Malaysia, 2010

Source :Banci Penduduk dan Perumahan(2010)



Based on Figure 1 (Chart 7), the total population of Malaysia was 28.3 million of which 91.8 percent are citizens and 8.2 percent non-citizen. Citizens of Malaysia consist of Bumiputera ethnic group (67.4%), Chinese (24.6%), India (7.3%) and others (0.7%). Among the citizens of Malaysia, Malay is the main ethnic groups in Peninsular Malaysia, namely 63.1 percent. Iban constituted 30.3 per cent of the total citizens in Sarawak, while the Kadazan / Dusun records 24.5 per cent in the state.

Next, we look at the distribution of the population in Malaysia according to religion based on population statistics of 2010 as contained in Figure 2 (Chart 12) below.

**Carta 12: Taburan peratus penduduk mengikut agama, Malaysia, 2010**  
 Chart 12: Percentage distribution of the population by religion, Malaysia, 2010

Source :Banci Penduduk dan Perumahan(2010)

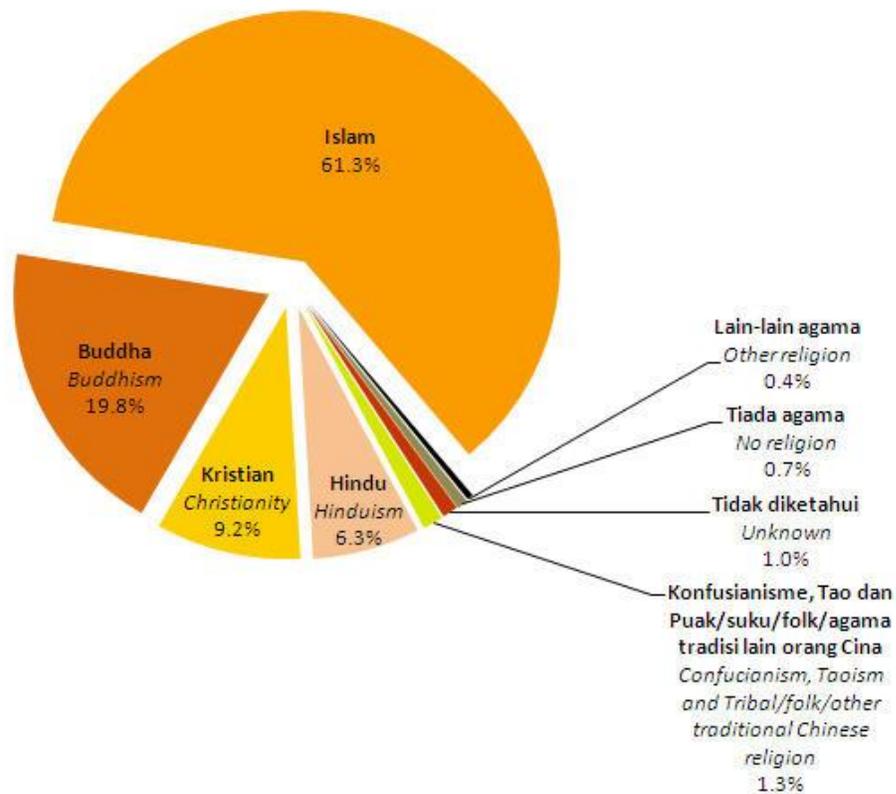


Figure 2 (Chart 12) above shows that Islam is the most widely professed religion in Malaysia, with the proportion of 61.3 per cent. However, as a multi-racial country, other religions practised are Buddhism (19.8%), Christians (9.2%) and Hinduism (6.3%).



Stop and Reflect

**What do you think are the effects of the 13<sup>th</sup> May 1969 incident on the racial relations in Malaysia? Discuss steps taken by teachers to avoid such incident.**

Based on the discussion as regard to the ratio of the population according to race and ethnic groups in Malaysia, it is clear that the population of Malaysia consists of many ethnic groups of all faiths and cultures. Hence, Malaysia has a major responsibility to unite the people of various ethnic groups. Such effort should be undertaken jointly by all parties including the teachers. To achieve this effort, teachers need to understand students and implement teaching and learning strategies which are appropriate to student comprising of various cultures and ethnic groups in the class. Next, teacher should always think of ways, not only to share knowledge on the subject matter with the students, but also play significant role as a mediator to realize of the national agenda, that is unity and social integration through the creation of culture-friendly teaching and learning environment. As a member of the Malaysian society comprising of various ethnic groups, we should avoid prejudice, stereotypes, racism and discrimination in order to promote harmony and national unity.

On the other hand, the concept of accommodation should serve as a guide in establishing ethnic relations in Malaysia. In addition, teachers also need to be sensitive to the concept of ethnicity which is a very practical way to create unity and cooperation among students. At the same time we must remember that the concept of unity which has its foundations from one's thoughts and self-awareness is the best way compared to

actions taken without self-awareness or thinking. It is a long journey but it will not be realized as long as we, as Malaysians think as "*A Bangsa Malaysia*" (Marzudi Md Yunus, 2009). In this context, the teacher has a great responsibility which could be partly achieved during the teaching and learning process. A more detailed description of the role of the teacher will be discussed in Topic 5.

### 1.2.8 Summary

This topic discusses important aspects such as:

- Ethnicity is a concept of categorizing groups of people based on living system practiced by a group of people (Marzudi Md Yunus, 2009).
- In Islam, the existence of multi-ethnic, ethnicity, race, language, color, customs, culture and so on is common and is a blessing that motivate people to become acquainted, cooperating with one another, enhancing mutual assistance and respect towards peace, safety, well-being, prosperity and unity of mankind on this earth as mentioned in the Holy Al-Quran (Surah Al Hujarat).
- Groups in a society can be classified into two, namely formal and informal. Formal group means group established by an organization with a task set to achieve organizational goals. Informal group can be categorized based on a number of aspects that were discussed.
- The formation of clusters is influenced by factors that have been identified as follows: -
  - Peace (security guarantees)
  - Status (tribute)
  - Self-esteem (feeling self-worth)
  - Strength (build inner greatness)

The term demography originates from the word "demos" and "grafein". "Demos" means people or people in an area, while "grafein" means describe or write about something. Based on the definitions given, the term demography means "writing about people or people in a location". Demographic group can be defined as the statistical analysis of the number and composition of the population of a certain location (Syed Ismail et al, 2010).

- Demographic groups in Malaysia consist of many races, nationalities and religions. Indigenous people who are considered to be the original people of Malaysia are Malay, Dayak, Iban, Kadazan, Kadazan Dusun in Sabah and Sarawak. Ethnic groups in West Malaysia are the Malays, Chinese and Indians.
- Malaysia has a major responsibility to unite the people of various ethnic groups and effort to accomplish this task should be undertaken by all parties including the teachers.

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