

Self-Reported Multicultural Competency among Moral Education and History Education Pre-service Teachers in an educational Institution in Malaysia.

Grace Amanda Basianak Kumbong¹,
Tan Bee Piang¹

¹*Department of Moral, Civics and Character Building Studies, Faculty of Human Sciences,
Sultan Idris Education University.
email: tanbeepiang@fsk.upsi.edu.my*

Abstract: Moral Education and History Education are both part of a student's social and political socialisation in Malaysia. These two curriculum programmes aim to help each student behave in accordance with the social norms expected in Malaysia, including respecting and obeying the values of democracy and rule of law. However, teachers may have their own value judgments, so how to prepare teachers to deal with students' different value systems in a diverse classroom is a challenge for teacher programmes. Teachers with high multicultural competency feel confidence and comfortable when confronted with diverse student needs. This study aims to identify the status of multicultural competency among the Moral Education and History Education pre-service teacher in an educational institution in Malaysia. Multicultural competency among these teachers is identified based on a tripartite model comprised of three aspects: 'Awareness', 'Knowledge' and 'Acting'. The data collection methods used in this study are from the quantitative approach. 90 respondents were asked to answer a questionnaire adapted from the 'Munroe Multicultural Attitude Scale Questionnaire' (MASQUE) and 'Teacher Multicultural Attitude Survey' (TMAS). The results of this study present that the Moral Education and History Education pre-service teacher shows a higher level of multicultural awareness and knowledge; however, the results also note that these pre-service teachers acting on injustice or inequalities to be relatively low. This study suggests that the development of multicultural competency in teacher education programmes should more strongly emphasise the components of skill or demonstrating multicultural competence in future.

Keywords: multicultural competency, awareness, knowledge, skills, pre-service teacher.

1. Introduction

The educational policies in every country are created to fulfil the needs of the specific country, especially in the areas of politics, economics and socio-cultural practices. Malaysia's education system and policies strongly reflect the diversity of its people's culture and linguistic background (Yasmin & Najeemah, 2017). Since it became an independent country in 1957 and established as Malaysia (encompassing Tanah Melayu, Sabah and Sarawak) in 1963, Malaysia has continuously struggled to fulfil the need to build a competent nation and achieve its society unity ((Ting, 2014; Mustapha et al., 2009; Cheah, 2003; Brown, 2007).

One of the efforts undertaken to fulfil this objective was the introduction of the Moral Education and History subjects at various levels of education. In general, Moral Education aims to help students understand their own character development and their relationships with society, the nation, the world and nature, and especially to foster their social affiliations and commitments. It emphasises developing the student's moral thoughts, feelings and actions. At the same time, the cultivation of the national identity efforts can also be seen through teaching history. The history curriculum is based on the objective of developing the idea within each student to have pride in being Malaysian by learning the differences, and tolerating and living together in a multicultural society (Malaysia's Education Blueprint, 2013-2025). These two curriculum programmes are part of a student's socialisation to help develop student's social and political values. However, all teachers have their own social values, so during the process of teaching or evaluating the subject, each teacher must hold a fair, objective and balanced position and attitude, and be free from being influenced by their own values, so it is a challenge for teacher education training programmes to prepare teachers for diverse classrooms (Lehman 2017). Najeemah (2005) found that the knowledge and attitude toward multicultural education held by a teacher in some schools in Malaysia to be unsatisfactory. Thus, this study will present the current level of multicultural competency of the Moral Education and History Education pre-service teacher in Malaysia.

History and Moral Education in Malaysia

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic society, according to the 2010's statistic data, Malaysian citizens are a mix of ethnic groups: Bumiputera (indigenous) (67.4%), Chinese (24.6%), Indians (7.3%) and Others (0.7%). Among Malaysian citizens, Malays are the predominant ethnic group in Peninsular Malaysia constituting 63.1%. The Ibans constitute 30.3% of the total in Sarawak, while Kadazan/Dusun make up 24.5% in Sabah (Population Distribution and Basic Demographic Characteristic Report, 2010). As a multicultural country, Malaysia has always been proud of its cultural diversity, people and background differences (Blum, 2014). However, tension between the ethnicities still exist (Tan et al., 2018), with the threat of racism the main disruptor of unity and harmony in Malaysia (Majzub, Hashim & Johannes, 2011). Following Hamdan, Ghafar & Che Ghani (2010), the most effective way to better comprehend and respect the vast array of everything that comprises culture is through education, such as through the Moral Education and History subjects.

The Moral Education and History subjects are intimately interrelated to the vision of Malaysia becoming a culturally united nation. It accords with one of the Minister of Education's main objective for Moral Education, which is to *Enhance understanding and cooperation by sustaining a peaceful and harmonious life in a democratic Malaysia* (Ministry of Education, 2000; Tan et al., 2018)

Moral Education plays a major role in contributing to the quality of society by amplifying the moral identity of its people and their ability to form an ethical point of view, allowing people to play valuable roles within society (Frisancho & Delgado, 2018). Moral Education's main goal is to cultivate national identity and unity among the citizenry, with the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (Preschool to Post-Secondary Education) stating that "Moral Education for non-Muslim students will be strengthened through a greater focus on understanding values related to unity and fostering good relations among students". Tan et al (2018) found Moral Education to be an effort developed by the Malaysian government to build the nation.

On the other hand, the History curriculum in Malaysia emphasises unity and social harmony. Its aim is to provide a comprehensive understanding of Malaysian nation's history, with educational policy makers believing in the idea that historical memory provided by history is able to create national awareness (Abdul Razaq Ahmad et al, 2010). As stated by Malaysia's Education Blueprint, "specific modules to teach appreciation and understanding of the different groups in Malaysia are embedded in civics and history curriculum" (Malaysia's Education Blueprint, 2013-2025 p3-21). The Secondary Schools History Curriculum Standard (2015) states that history is one of the core subjects that is compulsory for all Form 1 to Form 5 students. Rashid Rahim states that there are four kinds of value that can be transmitted to student through history education to nurture the spirit of unity in diversity among students from diverse ethnic and cultural groups: (1) individual values, (2) political values, (3) social and community values and (4) intellectual values (Abdul Razaq Ahmada et al, 2010).

In summary, History and Moral Education teaching in Malaysia aims to transmit values such as unity, harmony and patriotism. In a diverse culture, in order to avoid these two subjects being considered a potential source of brainwashing, it is necessary for teachers to have a high degree of multicultural competency, as such competency to help students develop positive attitudes toward different races and ethnicities in society.

2. Research questions and objectives

In order to understand the status of teacher education programmes preparing teachers for diversity, this study aims to find out pre-service teachers' multicultural competency, namely the components of awareness, knowledge and Acting (skill) in multicultural competency. The specific research questions in this study are:

1. What are the Moral Education and History Education pre-service teachers' level of awareness of multicultural competency?
2. What are the Moral Education and History Education pre-service teachers' level of knowledge of multicultural competency?
3. What are the Moral Education and History Education pre-service teachers' level of acting of multicultural competency?

Multicultural competency

One of the earliest scholars in the multicultural field was James A. Banks. Banks developed a conceptual model that identified an action plan to guide teachers in a multicultural class setting. Banks & Banks (1997) suggested very much needed curriculum changes, including the integration of content, knowledge development, equal pedagogy, decreased prejudice and an empowered school's culture. The concept of cultural competence was originally closely related to psychology counselling and the health care profession. However, since awareness about the importance of multicultural education has begun to grow, the development of cultural competence among teachers has attracted increasing attention (Yang & Montgomery, 2011). Multicultural competency is the ability to join an action or form a situation that maximises the optimal development of an individual or even individual systems (Sue & Sue, 2008). According to Sue (2001), these skills are developed through the inquisition of awareness, knowledge and skills needed by an individual to help them work effectively in society.

Sue et al. (1982) developed a tripartite model analysing multicultural competency. Even though this model was developed for counsellors, it has been widely used to study teachers' multicultural competency. Day-Vines (2000) applied this model as a conceptual framework to refer to the teacher's ethical responsibility towards African American students with a disability. A teacher who is competent in the multicultural will better understand multicultural issues, have enough knowledge about diversity in the general population and be able to fully utilise their developed knowledge and understanding to increase their teaching skills while interacting with both student and their parents. Thus, for the purpose of this study, the researcher used the tripartite model as the foundation for this study.

Banks (1995) explains the importance of education in the form of multicultural competency constructs, which is comprised of three constructs. The first construct is awareness, which concerns the view that ethnic plurality is a growing reality in society that will affect the lives of the younger generation. Based on Sue et al. (1982) tripartite model, multicultural awareness can be divided into two elements, namely attitude and beliefs. Bevacqua, Johnson, Kim & Wood (1996) note that a specific element, attitude, should be given special attention to ensure that a teacher's attitude can lead to their success when conducting multicultural education. Multicultural competency comprises of an individual's attitudes and beliefs, which is why they are so important when developing multicultural awareness. A teacher with an open attitude indicates their greater ability to accept the various cultural backgrounds of their students (Polat&Barka, 2012).

The second construct is the knowledge component. An individual will receive knowledge and beliefs about ethnic and cultural groups through various ways. In order to possess a high degree of multicultural competency, a teacher needs to be cognizant of cultural plurality. Wide knowledge encapsulating various multicultural aspects in a classroom setting will give many benefits to the teacher when preparing the teaching and learning experiences (Howe &Lisi, 2018). The knowledge dimensions including the understanding of social structure for example, gender, race, class, religion, language, sexual orientation and other exceptional qualities (Polat&Barka, 2012).

The last construct is the skill construct. The teacher's skills can be seen through the actions they use to take control of a multicultural classroom. The acting skills dimension consists of actions that are comprised of the teacher's psychomotor in which the development of these dimensions can only be learnt through real life experiences and not from books (Russo & Talbert-Johnson, 1997). Thus, the teacher should work together with the parents and society to fully understand the structure of their student's family (Gay, 1993; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Multicultural education

In multicultural education, the definitions of culture refer to the "values, traditions, social relationships, and worldviews created, shared, and transformed by a group of people" (Sandra Nieto, 2004). For years, different definitions have been given to define the concept of Multicultural Education. Gay (1994) defined multicultural education as a philosophy that emphasises pluralist culture or the curriculum approach based on ethnic study or the democratic integration process in schools. Traditional educational goals ensure that a student's socialisation occur by making sure that they accept the existing ideology and regulations within a particular country or society. However, multicultural education allows all students to be proud of their own gender and social class, and their ethnic, racial or cultural characteristics in the learning process, therefore, "appreciation, respect, equality, and mutual coexistence, must be consciously constructed in the classrooms" (Domnwachukwu, 2010).

p.168). Leeman (2003) found that the main objective of multicultural education was to learn how to live together in peace within a multicultural vicinity. Schools, as an institution, have a very strong potential to improve the connection between multicultural and ethnic groups by reducing the prejudices and ethnocentricity through the school programme (Goldsmith, 2004).

Multicultural education in Malaysia

Individuals begin to assimilate culture from birth. Every child responds to their direct experiences and interpret the reality of life where these experiences are usually rooted in the patterns of their personal life. The teacher and students are also members of a community group with their own culture. Both parties bring their own value system into the classroom, which makes awareness of diversity by the teacher particularly important when teaching.

In Malaysia, the idea of multicultural education has attracted the attention of scholars across different fields. Yasmin Ahmad and Najeemah Mohd Yusof (2015) studied the status of multicultural competency among multi-ethnic teachers in secondary schools in Malaysia, presenting that Indian teachers had higher multicultural competency than Malay and Chinese teachers. The level of multicultural competency of male teachers was also higher than female teachers. Senior teachers also were found to have higher multicultural competency than junior teachers. Yasmin Ahmad and Najeemah Mohd Yusof (2017) also found that, based on the perspective of school leaders, that teachers lacked experience of cultural diversity when practicing multicultural teaching and that teachers had difficulties to accepting and adapting to a multi-ethnic school environment. Melissa Ng Lee Yen Abdullah and Anna Christina Abdullah (2018) conducted a study exploring Malaysian pre-school teacher training and attitudes towards multicultural education, finding that the respondents were positive about the multicultural education training they received. However, they also doubted whether pre-service teachers correctly understood the concept of multiculturalism.

However, few studies investigate the status of pre-service social science teacher's multicultural competency, which is very important because this field is related to a student's social and political values, especially the history and moral education subjects.

3. Methodology

This study uses quantitative methods to obtain information concerning the multicultural competency status of the respondents involved. A questionnaire was adapted based on the Munroe Multicultural Attitude Scale Questionnaire (MASQUE) and Teacher Multicultural Attitude Survey (TMAS) to achieve the objective of this study. This study was conducted in an educational institution in Malaysia with 90 students who were chosen according to criteria the researchers deemed suitable in accordance with the research objectives

4. Participants

The respondents comprised of 39 Moral Education students and 51 History Education students. All the students had undergone a teacher training programme and were in their eighth semester or above.

5. Procedure

For this study, the researchers asked the participants to answer a questionnaire that is adapted from the Munroe Multicultural Attitude Scale Questionnaire (MASQUE) and Teacher Multicultural Attitude Survey (TMAS). We gathered the participants in a room at an agreed time, date and place, with all the participants in the room together to complete the questionnaire. Before answering the questionnaire, the researchers gave a simple introduction to the research and also brief instructions regarding the procedure on how to answer the given questions. The data collected were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 23 software, with the researcher conducting a statistical descriptive analysis to identify the respondents' level of multicultural awareness, knowledge and acting.

MASQUE and TMAS

MASQUE consists of 18 items based on Banks' approach. The questionnaire was divided into three sections: knowledge, care and act. For the first (knowledge) and second (care) section, they consisted of 7 items and 6 items, respectively. The remaining act domain consisted of 5 items (Munroe & Pearson, 2006). TMAS consisted of 20 items. The researcher chose this instrument to answer questions regarding the awareness element based on the tripartite model that weren't included in the MASQUE instrument.

6. Results

For this section, the researcher tabulated the data based on the category stated in the instrument. For each category, the researcher compiled the total mean scores for four groups: History teacher trainee, Moral Education teacher trainee, male teacher trainee and female teacher trainee.

Table 1 Knowledge category

Item	History Education	Moral Education	Male	Female
I know that racism exists.	4.92	5.29	4.70	5.19
I know that social barriers exist.	4.85	4.84	4.55	4.93
I understand religious beliefs differ.	5.71	5.47	5.35	5.69
I understand sexual preferences may differ.	4.58	5.32	5.10	4.83
I understand that gender-based inequities exist.	4.88	4.92	4.50	5.01
I accept the fact that languages other than Malay are spoken.	5.48	5.50	5.25	5.56
I do not understand why people of	3.76	3.42	3.17	3.77

other cultures act differently.

Total Mean Score	34.18	34.76	32.62	34.98
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Based on the results in Table 1, Moral Education pre-service teachers have a higher total mean score ($M= 34.76$) for all items in the Knowledge category than History Education pre-service teachers ($M= 34.16$). Female pre-service teachers also had a higher score ($M= 34.98$) than male pre-service teachers ($M= 32.2$). The participant had a rather good mean score for almost all items in this category except for the item “I do not understand why people of other cultures act differently”, which had the lowest score among all the items.

Table 2 Care Category

Item	History Education	Moral Education	Male	Female
I am sensitive to respecting religious differences.	4.92	4.18	3.40	4.96
I am sensitive to differing expressions of ethnicity.	5.12	4.53	3.95	5.13
I am emotionally concerned about racial inequality.	5.13	4.92	4.70	5.14
I am sensitive toward people of every financial status.	4.98	4.37	4.20	4.87
I am not sensitive to language uses other than Malay.	5.04	3.69	2.56	5.06
A person’s social status does not affect how I care about people.	5.23	5.26	4.85	5.36
Total Mean Score	30.42	26.95	23.66	30.52

For the Care category, History Education pre-service teachers scored a higher mean score ($M=30.42$) than Moral Education pre-service teachers ($M=26.95$). Female pre-service teachers had a higher score ($M=30.52$) than male pre-service teachers ($M=23.66$). All participants had a good mean score for almost all items except for item “I am not sensitive to language uses other than Malay”, with Moral Education pre-service teachers only scoring $M=3.69$ and male pre-service teachers $M=2.56$.

Table 3 Act Category

Item	History	Moral Education	Male	Female
I do not act to stop racism.	4.37	3.92	4.00	4.25
I actively challenge gender inequities.	2.50	4.29	4.35	2.94
I do not actively respond to contest religious prejudice.	4.32	4.42	4.20	4.38
I respectfully help others to offset language barriers that prevent communication.	4.85	5.03	4.55	5.03
I do not take action when witnessing bias based on people's preferred sexual orientation.	4.74	3.50	4.44	4.29
Total Mean Score	20.78	21.16	21.54	20.89

Table 3 shows that for the Act category, Moral Education pre-service teachers had a higher mean score (M=21.16.42) than History Education pre-service teachers (M=20.78). Male pre-service teachers had a higher score (M=21.54) than female pre-service teachers (M=20.89). Compared to the Knowledge and Care categories, all items in the Act category had lower mean scores.

Table 4 Awareness category

Item	History Education	Moral Education	Male	Female
I find teaching a culturally diverse student group rewarding.	5.12	4.79	4.55	5.10
Teaching methods need to be adapted to meet the needs of a culturally diverse student group.	5.31	5.24	4.80	5.41
Sometimes I think that there is too much emphasis placed on multicultural awareness and training for teachers.	3.73	3.32	3.35	3.61
Teachers have the responsibility to be aware of their students' cultural background.	5.44	5.47	5.10	5.56
I frequently invite extended family members (e.g., cousins, grandparents, godparents) to attend parent-teacher conferences.	4.02	4.50	4.00	4.29
It is not the teacher's responsibility	4.54	3.71	3.95	4.26

to encourage pride in one's culture.				
As classrooms become more culturally diverse, the teacher's job becomes increasingly challenging.	4.98	4.71	4.55	4.96
I believe the teacher's role needs to be redefined to address the needs of students from culturally different backgrounds.	5.04	4.68	4.65	4.96
When dealing with bilingual students, some teachers may misinterpret different communication styles as behavioural problems.	4.37	4.47	4.10	4.50
As classrooms become more culturally diverse, the teacher's job becomes increasingly rewarding.	4.75	4.97	4.35	4.99
I can learn a great deal from students with culturally different backgrounds.	5.40	5.71	5.30	5.60
Multicultural training for teachers is unnecessary.	4.46	4.21	3.70	4.54
In order to be an effective teacher, one needs to be aware of cultural differences present in the classroom.	5.35	5.42	4.90	5.51
Multicultural awareness training can help me work more effectively with a diverse student population.	4.85	5.39	4.75	5.17
Students should learn to communicate in Malay only.	4.38	3.84	3.90	4.23
(Today's curriculum gives undue importance to multiculturalism and diversity.)	3.54	3.39	3.05	3.60
I am aware of the diversity of cultural backgrounds of the students I am working with.	5.23	5.18	5.00	5.27
Regardless of the makeup of my class, it is important for students to be aware of multicultural diversity.	5.37	5.21	5.05	5.37
Being multiculturally aware is not relevant for the students.	3.92	4.68	4.20	4.26
Teaching students about cultural diversity will only create conflict in the classroom.	4.27	4.08	3.75	4.31
Total Mean Score	94.07	92.97	87.00	95.50

Table 4 above shows the mean score result for Awareness category. As Table 4 shows, History Education pre service teacher show a higher total mean score ($M=94.07$) than Moral Education pre-service teacher trainee ($M=92.97$). The result also finds that female pre-service teacher show higher mean score ($M=95.50$) than male pre-service teacher trainee ($M=87.00$).

7. Discussion

Multicultural competency is an important element for a teacher conducting a teaching and learning process for students from various cultural backgrounds. There are three important dimensions in this research, namely 'Aware', 'Knowledge' and 'Skill of acting', which are adapted from Sue et al.'s (1982) tripartite model. These three dimensions have become the benchmark to measure pre-service teachers' multicultural competency level. The results show a high level of multicultural awareness among the Moral Education and History Education students. The researcher concludes that the reason for this result is due to history education involving more exposure to cultural plurality in Malaysia. In Malaysia, history subjects elucidate the formation and development of Malaysia's plural society. Tan Ai Hoon (1997) notes that history subjects in Malaysia often lean towards creating unity and national identity, aiming to integrate the various cultures present in Malaysian society. Hence, the History Education pre-service teacher has in-depth awareness of the cultural differences that exist in relation to the social, economic and political aspects of Malaysian society. Secondly, concerning the multicultural knowledge level, all of the respondents show a high level of multicultural knowledge, especially the female respondents and the Moral Education pre-service teachers. Moral Education pre-service teachers have better exposure to multicultural knowledge through one of the subjects, "Multicultural Education", offered by the Moral Education teacher programme. This subject provides a range of information on cultural backgrounds and knowledge to Moral Education pre-service teachers. Multicultural knowledge is very important, influencing both a teacher's beliefs and their attitude towards their students (Horn, 2003). Moule (2012) also states that teachers lacking general knowledge about their students' unique cultures will face difficulties when teaching students from different cultures in school. Thirdly, multicultural skills are very important when fully applying multicultural awareness and knowledge in a real life situation. The classroom is a place where a teacher can understand the significance of the multicultural education notion. In this research, all of the respondents had a lower mean score for multicultural skills than multicultural awareness and knowledge. This result may show that there is a gap between knowledge and action in multicultural education among these pre-service teachers. As Yasmin & Najeemah (2017) state, Malaysian teachers lacking experience towards multicultural diversity can lead to them finding it hard to practice multicultural teaching. It is important to bridge the gap between knowledge and action through real life multicultural experiences.

8. Conclusion

As important actors in education, teachers play a critical role in effectively managing diversity in schools and classrooms. High multicultural competency can lead to multicultural efficacy. Multicultural efficacy is an educator's confidence to teach in a multicultural climate (Sarraj, Carter & Burley, 2015). Therefore, it is very important for teachers to increase their multicultural competency level to become a highly efficient educator.

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual society, however, multicultural competency among teachers has not received enough attention in teacher education training programmes in Malaysia. This study clearly highlights the level of multicultural awareness, knowledge and skills among Moral Education and History Education pre-service teachers. In summary, teachers should have high multicultural competency to ensure a smooth teaching and learning process within a various ethnic and cultural background classroom setting. Multicultural awareness in Malaysia is currently insufficient. Thus, teachers should seek to

develop their multicultural competency and improve their level of sensitivity towards other's beliefs, values and cultural perspectives.

9. References

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