Between Identity and Internationalisation

Vision and Reality in the Malaysian Education System

Looking East – Malaysia, a model of excellence in Multicultural Education? An examination of the influences of culture, language, ethnicity and religion on third level education in Malaysia and the lessons which can be learnt by Ireland in this context

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A thesis submitted for the qualification of Master of Arts

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March 2007

Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Master of Arts is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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Date: _7th June 2007_

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CVCP: Code of Practice on the Recruitment and Support of International Students in UK Higher Education

DES: Department of Education and Science

DVC: Deputy Vice-Chancellor

ESL: English as a Second Language

EU: European Union

HEI: Higher Education Institution

HETAC: Higher Education and Training Awards Council

ICOS: Irish Council for International Students

IEBI: International Education Board Ireland

JPA: *Jabatan Perkhidmatan Awam* is the Malaysian Public Service Department

MAPCU: Malaysian Association of Private Colleges and Universities

MARA: *Majlis Amanah Rakyat* the Council of Trust for the People offers educational programmes and sponsorship to increase the number of trained *bumiputras* into the workforce

MCA: Malaysian Chinese Association, a component of the ruling *Barisan Nasional* or National Front, primarily represents the Chinese.

MOE: Ministry of Education

MOHE: Ministry of Higher Education

MIC: Malaysian Indian Congress, part of *Barisan Nasional* of the National Front which primarily represents the Indians.

MUET: the Malaysian University English Tests

NEAC: National Economic Action Council

NDP: National Development Plan

NEP: New Economic Policy was introduced in 1970 and planned for twenty years to 1990

NCCA: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

OPP3: Third Outline Perspective Plan

SPM: *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* is the Open Certification Examination at the end of two years of upper secondary school in Malaysia

STPM: *Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia* is the two-year Higher School Certificate programme which is a pre-university requirement for public universities/private institutions

TEFL: Teaching of English as a Foreign Language

TUI: Teachers Union of Ireland

UiTM: Universiti Teknologi Mara

UKM: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

UMNO: United Malay National Organization, the dominant partner of the ruling *Barisan Nasional* or National Front, primarily represents the Malays.

UNITAR: Universiti Tun Abdul Razak

Glossary of Foreign Words

Akidah is absolute faith or belief in the oneness of Allah and everything that has been revealed by Allah

Asar is the afternoon

Bahasa translates as 'language' and is used to refer to the Malay language

Bahasa Melayu is an Austronesian language native to the Malay Peninsula, southern Thailand, Singapore and parts of Sumatra. In Malaysia, it is known as Bahasa Malaysia or Malaysian language, as it is considered more 'politically correct' and therefore belonging to *all* Malaysians. In all official documents, however, the term *Bahasa Melayu* is used.

Baju kurung is a full length skirt with a long-sleeved over blouse that reaches to mid-thigh, worn by Malay women.

Bangsa translates as race, nationality or descent.

Bangsa Malaysia translates as Malaysian race, nationality or descent. The implication is to emphasize of 'one' nationality.

Barisan Nasional is the National Front is the coalition of political parties established in 1974 to include the opposition parties and restore confidence after the 1969 race riots. It is this alliance which has dominated Malaysian politics and won all general elections up to the time of writing.

Budi means goodness, kindness (emphasized in Malay culture).

Bumiputra literally means 'sons of the soil' and theoretically applies to all indigenous peoples of Malaysia. Since the Federation (1963) it is used in political contexts to mean the Malays and the native people of Sabah and Sarawak, all of whom are eligible for special affirmative action policies.

Datok is the appeasement of tree and land spirits, an animistic ritual practiced by some members of the Malaysian Chinese community.

Datuk is a title conferred on an individual by the Federal Government, by the Governors or by the Royal Heads-of-State and loosely translates *Sir*. The wife of a *Datuk* is a *Datin*.

Deepavali is otherwise known as the Festival of Lights for Hindus.

Doa means prayer.

Doa selamat means a prayer for safety from harm.

Feng shui the science of selecting living environments, where the elements and the energies are in harmonious balance.

Guru means the teacher.

Hadis is a compilation of the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad.

Hari Raya Haji an Islamic festival marks the successful conclusion of the annual *Haj* (pilgrimage) to Mecca.

Hari Raya Puasa an Islamic festival marks the end of the month of Ramadan.

Isyak or Ishak is after dark.

Jaga air muka is amongst the Malays, saving the face of another person by delaying making a negative comment or not communicating it directly to that person.

Karma is from Sanskrit and means an act or deed. In Buddhism and Hinduism one's lifetime actions are seen as governing one's fate in one's next life.

Kampung translates as village, but has certain connotations when used in Malaysia. The phrase *balik kampung* means returning to the village, which is common for most people of rural origin who are living in the urban areas, whenever there is a feast day or holiday. The reference is primarily to the Malays who make up the majority rural community. A *kampung* mentality has been referred to by many interviewees in this thesis and refers to a closed, insular Malay mindset.

Kebangsaan means national.

Kita translates as 'we' or 'us'.

Maghrib is sunset.

Malaysia Boleh means 'Malaysia can do it' and was used as a national slogan in 2005.

Masuk Melayu translates as 'to become a Malay'.

Matrikulasi is the matriculation a pre-university programme designed to produce *bumiputra* students who will excel in professional fields in institutions of Higher Learning.

Melayu Baru is the new Malay.

Merdeka translates as independent or free and is used to name the national holiday of Malaysia on August 31st

Orang Asli refers to the indigenous people of Peninsular Malaysia who represent approximately 1% of the Malaysian population. They are also recognized as *Bumiputra* and entitled to affirmative action policies.

Pantun translates as 'quatrain' or proverb and is used by Malays to convey a message, avoiding being too direct in communicating a negative message which can result in the loss of face.

Quran is the Koran, the holy book of Islam, believed by Muslims to be composed of the revelations of Allah to Muhammad.

Ramadan refers to the month of fasting in the Muslim calendar.

Rasa means intuitive inner feeling (emphasized in Malay culture).

Rukun Negara is the national ideology devised in 1970 with the aim of fostering national integration and the evolution of a *bangsa Malaysia*. It has five principles:
1. Belief in God
2. Loyalty to King and country
3. Honour of the Constitution
4. Sovereignty of the Law
5. Courtesy and politeness

Sekolah Kebangsaan is a national school or public school run by the Ministry of Education.

Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia is the Higher School Certificate, run by the Malaysian Examination Council and accredited by Cambridge University Local Examination Syndicate of England. It is an entry requirement for non-Malays to public universities and some private university courses. It is of one and a half to two years duration.

Subuh is the dawn.

Sunnah is the practice of the prophet Muhammad, consisting of what he himself did, recommended or approved of in others.

Surau is a Muslim prayer house.

Syariah is concerned with Islamic law for Muslims contained in the Koran.

Tauhid means oneness. It means that mankind must have faith that there is no other God except Allah.

Thaipusam is a Hindu celebration associated with penance and atonement.

Universiti translates as university.

Vesak day is the birthday of Lord Buddha.

Yang di-Pertuan Agong translates as 'He who is made Supreme Ruler', and is the title given to the King of Malaysia.

Zuhur translates as midday.

Abstract

Between Identity and Internationalisation:
Vision and Reality in the Malaysian Education System.

Helen Bohan

Focusing mainly on third level education, this thesis presents a critical analysis of the Malaysian education system. It investigates to what extent the multicultural model promoted in the Government's Education Development Plan 2001-2010 (MoE 2003) has been effectively translated into reality and explains the underlying aims of the Malaysian Government's efforts, to create a unified multicultural society and to advance economically on the international stage.

Data were collected over a 14 month period of living and working in Malaysia, and consist of a combination of empirical research, namely 51 interviews with students, staff, parents and government bodies, 11 questionnaires, and classroom observations, along with references from relevant articles in local newspapers, educational journals and government documents. A qualitative analysis of the data revealed that the aspirations expressed by government policies do not always reflect the practice on the ground.

As Malaysia seeks to attract international students and international business in order to forge a modern state, and show itself as a model of excellence in multicultural society, there are tensions that exist and strategies that contradict each other. The thesis explores these areas.

With an annual expansion of approximately 10% in Higher Education Institutions (International Students in Higher Education in Ireland 2006), Ireland is experiencing a rapid expansion in the number of international students at third level. As this phenomenon is relatively new to Ireland, there appears to be no prevailing 'norms of multicultural education in Ireland' – and little guidance from the government. It would appear to be the ideal time to look around the world for models of excellence.

Drawing on the Malaysian experience, conclusions and suggestions have been outlined in the final chapter which may help Ireland deal with the issues which will inevitably arise as a result of internationalisation on an institutional level, if the development is not carefully managed.

Introduction

Background context to this study

Over the past ten to fifteen years, Ireland's educational environment has been changing quite dramatically – this has been brought about due to the great economic prosperity attracting large numbers of foreign workers to Ireland's booming economy and employment situation[1] and, to no lesser extent, to the active recruitment of international students by Irish universities, Institutes of Technology and private colleges. The International Students in Higher Education in Ireland (IEBI 2006) report states, that there were 25,319 international students studying in Higher Education Institutions in 2006, of whom 15,196 (57%) were from countries outside the EU. Amongst this group were 1,223 Malaysian students, who make up the third largest group of students from outside the EU in Ireland. The other major 'feeder countries' are the U.S.A. (4,008), China (3,465) and, increasingly, India (857 students) (ibid. 2006).

Ireland is not only facing an increase in the number of international students in tertiary level institutions, but the new wave of immigration in recent years has a major impact on primary and secondary schools also. According to the Central Statistics Office, between March 2005 and April 2006, 86,900 people immigrated to Ireland, of which 43% were nationals from the 10 new Accession States, which joined the EU on 1 May 2004. It is estimated that 26% of these immigrants were from Poland, while 7% were from Lithuania. More than half (54%) of immigrants were aged 25-44, while a further 28% were aged 15-24. Approximately 1 in 10 of the immigrants were children under the age of 15. Thus the children of foreign workers are entering the Irish education system in large numbers, as are the children of asylum seekers and refugees, whose numbers have also dramatically increased in the last decade. Therefore the Irish education system, from first to third level, needs to prepare for this multicultural mix of students in its classrooms.

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[1] In 2006 there were 160,000 foreign workers in employment in Ireland, which consisted of 8% of the workforce. From AIB report by Finfacts Team.
Source:www.finfacts.com/irelandbusinessnews/publish/article_10006142.shtml

In preparing for internationalisation in Irish education, we must examine how best to deal with an ever-increasing multicultural student population. We cannot presume that an education system such as the Irish one, which has mainly had to deal with a homogeneous student population in the past, will be able to cater for the needs of this new student body. Preparation is needed on all levels – both within educational institutions themselves and within the Department of Education and other official bodies dealing with education in Ireland. In educational institutions, academics will need to review their teaching and learning styles to ensure they cater for the new multicultural student body, 'Irish' students will need to learn to work in multicultural groups with students from all over the world, and administrative staff will be confronted with new norms of behaviour and attitudes in the student body.

The Department of Education and Science (DES), has begun the process of confronting the new multicultural student environment at *primary and post-primary* level by publishing two sets of Guidelines on Intercultural Education in the Primary School (NCCA 2005) and Intercultural Education in the Post-Primary School (NCCA 2006). This is at least a starting point, but the training of teachers on how to use these guidelines is to date, still in the processing stage. English Language Support is available to students with English as a second language for a maximum of two years upon arriving in the country. At *second* level, this English language support means using the already available teaching staff, rather than a specifically trained TEFL teacher, unless the school has a minimum of fourteen students requiring English-language support, in which case they are entitled to a full-time temporary teacher. At *third* level, institutions are left to deal with the issues themselves and little or no official attention has been given to the matter, apart from the publication of the aforementioned recent report on International Students in Higher Education in Ireland (IEBI 2006) – which provides an overview of the situation but little guidance or direction.

As Ireland enters this new era in education, it is crucial that we look beyond our shores to countries which have dealt with these phenomena before and have had to grapple with the many challenges which multicultural education presents. Much valuable research has

Outline of Chapters

Chapter One positions Malaysia in terms of geography, ideology and religion in order to better understand its ethnic composition and provide a clear understanding to the reader of the environment in which this research was conducted. It details government policies and examines the image Malaysia seeks to portray nationally and internationally.

Chapter Two outlines the methodology used for data collection and analysis. It explains the reasons for a qualitative multi-method approach to this research. It also emphasizes the significance of this author's experience of living in Malaysia in facilitating both the collection and interpretation of data.

The following *Chapters Three, Four and Five* focus on the implementation of the government policies on multicultural education and cover culture, internationalisation, language and learning styles in the Malaysian context:

Chapter Three shows how culture impacts on the different cultural groups' attitudes towards education. It highlights the implications of the different types of educational institutions with a 'one race' emphasis, whereby segregation rather than integration becomes the norm.

Multicultural theories and concepts are discussed in relation to Malaysia's education system in *Chapter Four,* which examines how some of those theories are adapted and incorporated into the education system. It illustrates how internationalisation is taking on a significant focus in Malaysia, and how it is preparing to receive overseas students from even more diverse educational backgrounds.

Language is a major issue in multicultural education in Malaysia and cannot be ignored in the exploration of the challenges they face. *Chapter Five*, therefore, focuses on language policies in Malaysia and their resonance in the various cultural groups, as the medium of instruction changes to English and the different cultures become more sensitive regarding the use of their 'own language' in education. This Chapter also examines the 'learning styles' of the Malaysian students – an area which is of huge

importance to the success of multicultural education and which needs to be carefully considered as Ireland attracts more international students.

For this author, the experience of living in a multicultural society for fourteen months was truly unique - both in terms of learning about another culture, but also in terms of developing insights into one's own culture. As Hall states:

> [...] the real job is not to understand foreign culture but to understand our own. [...] The ultimate reason for such study is to learn more about how one's own system works. The best reason for exposing oneself to foreign ways is to generate a sense of vitality and awareness – an interest in life which can come only when one lives through the shock of contrast and difference.
>
> (Hall 1990 p29)

In light of the above statement, it is clear that as Malaysia moves forward in developing policies and practices for its own multicultural education system, Ireland can also consider aspects of this Asian model of multiculturalism which might be adapted to suit its own increasingly diverse student population.

Chapter Six, the final Chapter, therefore, draws conclusions regarding multicultural policies in practice in Malaysia and examines how far they can be applied to the Irish education system, taking into consideration two very different socio-economic and educational backgrounds.

As a contribution to the body of literature which currently exists in the specific Irish education context, the thesis also hopes to provide interesting information to educationalists and policy-makers dealing with international students coming from Asia. According to the statistics, nearly 30% of non-EU students come from East Asia (notably China, Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia & Singapore) (IEBI 2006 p12). As Malaysia represents a racially mixed Asian society, some of the findings of this thesis may assist Ireland to understand the specific needs of Asian students, which are different to the needs of Irish students.

Chapter 1: Malaysia – A Pluralist Society

1.0 Introduction

In order to appreciate the context in which multicultural education policies in Malaysia have been developed and implemented, it is essential to have an understanding of the extent of the religious, ethnic, linguistic and racial diversity within the country. Malaysia's geography reflects this diversity as can be seen in Figure 1.1 below:

Figure 1.1 Map of Southeast Asia

(www.sociology.ohio-state.edu/cdp/my-map.jpg) (Malaysia is shaded in a lighter colour)

The Federation of Malaysia, established in 1963, comprises the long peninsular mass, which separates the Indian Ocean from the South China Sea, together with the northern quarter of Borneo. Peninsular Malaysia covers 131,573 square kilometers and is made up of eleven states: Perlis, Kedah, Penang, Perak, Selangor (with the federal capital of Kuala Lumpur), Melaka, Johor, Negeri Sembilan, Pahang, Terengganu and Kelantan. The Borneo territories are Sabah, Sarawak and the Federal Territory of the Island of Labuan, which cover roughly 198,000 sq km, but are separated from the Peninsula by over 350

kilometers. Malaysia's highly diversified ethnic mix makes it one of the world's prime examples of a multiracial society.

Unlike the United States, for example, Malaysia has never put itself forward as a society in which people are expected to give up their cultural and religious backgrounds (i.e. it has never favoured assimilationist policies, or subscribed to the ideal of the 'melting pot'). Rather it highlights its diversity as an attractive feature of Malaysian life and promotes the recognition of various cultures in its society – it officially recognizes and allows for the existence of various religions, beliefs, languages and ethnic groups within the country and outwardly strives to promote a picture of a society in which different ethnic and cultural groups exist in harmony side by side. The following extract from a publication from the Malaysian Tourist Board, shows how Malaysia uses this cultural diversity as a 'selling point' on the world stage:

> Truly Asia
> In this fascinating tropical paradise, you will be able to experience not one but a diversity of Asian cultures in one single destination, a phenomenon we take pride in. From our friendly people to our culinary delights, our festive celebrations to our incredible sights, Malaysia is indeed the unique melting pot of Asia. Be welcomed by a multicultural society. Here you will discover a delightful fusion of three of the oldest civilizations – Malay, Chinese and Indian. A pot-pourri enriched with the indigenous traditions of the Kadazans, Ibans and other ethnic communities of Sabah and Sarawak in East Malaysia. With the influence of the British, Portuguese, Dutch and Thais, Malaysians are indeed a blend of diverse cultures.

> (Tourism Malaysia Calendar of Events 2004)

This rather romanticized portrayal of Malaysia, however, represents only one side of Malaysian life – there is an undercurrent of dissatisfaction in Malaysian society which has been fuelled by government policies which have introduced preferential treatment for the *Bumiputra*[2] and resulted in perceived disadvantages for the Malaysian Chinese, who make up 25.2% of the population and the Malaysian Indians who represent 7.5% of the

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[2] *Bumiputra* literally means 'sons of the soil' and theoretically applies to all indigenous people of Malaysia. Since the Federation (1963) it is used in political contexts to mean the Malays and the native people of Sabah and Sarawak, all of whom are eligible for preferential treatment policies. (Andaya and Andaya 2001)

total population of Malaysia, which is estimated at 26.16 million (Malaysian Department of Statistics 2005). These preferential treatment policies will be discussed at a later stage in this Chapter (section 1.3) as they form a bedrock for the whole of Malaysian society and have a strong effect on education policies.

In the following sections, I will provide an overview of some of the main factors which have played a role in the development and shaping of multicultural education in Malaysia – language, religion and economics – and some of the salient issues which have arisen during this process.

1.1 Language

The national language of Malaysia is *Bahasa Melayu*[3]. However, the linguistic make-up of Malaysia is diverse – Chinese and Tamil, as well as various dialects of Chinese and some other Indian languages are spoken amongst the Chinese and Indian communities, who live mainly on peninsular Malaysia, and, due mainly to the estimated 63 ethnic groups that make up the States of Northern Borneo (Sabah, Sarawak and the island of Labuan), it is estimated that approximately 80 languages in total, are spoken throughout the whole country (Asmah 1992).

This linguistic diversity is clearly evident in the capital city of Kuala Lumpur, where languages can switch two or even three times within the same conversation from *Bahasa Melayu* to Chinese to English or Tamil. Malaysian newspapers are available in several languages, including *Bahasa Melayu,* Mandarin, Tamil, Arabic and English.

The 'national language policy' was implemented in 1967 after the Independence of Malaysia (in 1957), when British rule ended, whereby *Bahasa Melayu* was made the official language in public administration and the main medium of instruction in the

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[3] Bahasa Melayu is an Austronesian language native to the Malay Peninsula, southern Thailand, Singapore and parts of Sumatra. In Malaysia, it is known as *Bahasa Malaysia* or Malaysian language, as it is considered more 'politically correct' and therefore, belonging to *all* Malaysians (Asmah 1992). In all official documents, however, the term *Bahasa Melayu* is used, and this is how it shall be referred to throughout this thesis (Shuid & Fauzi 2001).

schools and institutions of higher learning (Shuid & Fauzi 2001).[4] This policy, however took time to implement and it was not until 1982 that *Bahasa Melayu* was fully in use at secondary level in peninsular Malaysia and Sabah, followed by Sarawak in 1990. By 1983, it had been introduced in higher education.

According to the Malaysian Ministry of Education (2003), as published in the Education Development Plan 2001-2010 (section 1.10), and in line with the Education Act of 1961 (Shuid & Fauzi 2001), Chinese or Tamil are permitted as the languages of instruction, respectively, in Chinese and Indian 'national-type'[5] primary schools. This is important in order to accommodate the Chinese and Indians, who are eager to continue using their native languages as the medium of instruction and to pass on their languages and traditions to future generations. These schools are accessible to all inhabitants of Malaysia, but naturally the Chinese-speaking schools have traditionally been predominantly attended by Malaysian Chinese, while the Tamil-speaking schools by the Malaysian Indians.

These 'national-type' schools rely however, on the support of their own communities for maintenance – between 1995 and 2000 the government through its Seventh Malaysia Plan allocated 96.5% of the primary education development budget to 'national' primary schools, which had 75% enrolment. Chinese primary schools (21% enrolment) received 2.4% of the allocation, while Tamil primary schools (3.6% enrolment) received 1% of the allocation (Malaysia 1996). The government has donated the land for these schools but generally does not contribute to maintenance, which means that most schools are built, funded and maintained by the community which they serve. The Chinese community has fought hard to maintain its schools and the Confucianist philosophy of education, wishing to retain the cultural elements of mainland China in its education system. The Indian community has greater difficulties in financing its Tamil schools and finding Tamil trained teachers. As a much smaller group, and less self-sufficient economically, they

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[4] While there is recognition of a 'standard' Malay language, which is prominent in official educational usage, there are several Malay dialects spoken throughout the different States of Malaysia (Asmah 1992).
[5] In Malaysia a distinctive term is used for schools which use Mandarin or Tamil as the medium of instruction, namely 'national-type' schools, whereby 'national schools' refers to those schools that teach through the medium of *Bahasa Melayu* (Education Development Plan. MoE 2003).

rely on lobbying funds from the Malaysian government and indeed the Chinese community in some cases, as the minority ethnic groups work together in seeking government support on several educational matters. There is, however, strong recognition for the value of education in this community and they manage to continue to exist despite financial difficulties.

In 2002, the linguistic environment changed in government primary and secondary level schools, whereby English was introduced as the medium of instruction for Mathematics, Information Technology and Science. The year 2003 marked the first year in which Mathematics and Science subjects were assessed for Grade 6, 9 and 11 public examinations at secondary level in *Bahasa Melayu* and English. This was in line with the National Report on the Development of Education, published by the Malaysian Ministry of Education (2004), which recommended an emphasis on English language education in order to improve the students' opportunities upon completion. By 2008 *all* public examinations for Mathematics, Science, Technical and Technology subjects will be in English for all primary and secondary level government and government-aided schools.

As regards third level education, English is the medium of instruction for all subjects and study programmes conducted at *private* higher educational institutions. These institutions see this as a competitive advantage for attracting students, as many students wish to perfect their English language competency in order to improve employment opportunities upon graduation. At the *public* universities, government policy since 1993 has made English the medium of instruction for courses related to science and technology at undergraduate level – although examinations continue to be held in both English and *Bahasa Melayu* in these subjects. However, Universiti Teknologi Mara, which is the university restricted to the *bumiputra* students, has been teaching all its subjects through the medium of English, since its inception in 1956. This is in order to give the indigenous people access to international communication skills and is an exception amongst the public universities in Malaysia. The reasoning behind this policy is that English is commonly used in administration and business and is seen by the Malaysian government as an international language to open doors to modern technology and skills, while

providing access to the technical and organizational knowledge of the West (Online: Multimedia Super Corridor 2006).

There are however, mixed views on the introduction of English as a medium of instruction and it has had varying degrees of acceptance by the different races. The public universities are mostly inhabited by the *bumiputras*, whose level of English is generally lower than that of the Indian and Chinese students who have had more exposure to English. Students who have high levels of English competency tend to come from English speaking homes, have greater exposure to English outside the classroom and tend to come from the higher socio-economic status group. Those with lower competence come from either rural schools where exposure to English is limited or from low socio-economic groups in urban areas (Pillay 1998).

As the *bumiputra* group is largely a rural community, they tend to be the weaker students at English language. Therefore, there is a concern amongst language educators, according to Rajah (1990), that English may further widen the socio-economic gap and re-emphasize racial identity. As the *bumiputras* make up the majority of this public university student population, this is causing some difficulties for teachers who are now required to teach through the medium of English in science and technology related faculties and whose competency in the English language may be inadequate, (as discussed in Chapter 5 section 5.1.2). It causes problems for students who are switching from *Bahasa Melayu* at secondary level to English medium in third level, and who will be competing with other students who have a higher level of competency in English (ibid.). It also leads to questions regarding the quality of graduates from the public universities, who are unable to access information through English language documentation or internet referrals, as discussed with an English teacher in one public university who stated:

> The lecturers require them to do that [use the internet] and they print out materials but regarding them reading this they cannot always understand, so they refer back to the lecture notes which are in Malay. The bulk of the notes they refer to are in Malay. If there is no choice they go into the internet and they find they cannot understand the materials on the internet.
>
> (Interviewee C.A. - 15)

This produces a large academic workforce which is unemployable in international firms, due to their poor English language communication skills. This is further explored at a later stage in Chapter 5:5.2.

1.2 Religions of Malaysia

Malaysia boasts a religiously tolerant society in which each cultural group is allowed to practise its own religion openly, as long as it does not conflict with the official religion of the country – Islam. The four main religions are: Islam (60.4% of the population), Buddhism (19.2%), Hinduism (6.3%), and Christianity (9.1%, mostly in East Malaysia) (Malaysian Statistics Handbook 2000). The major religious celebrations are recognized by the government and openly celebrated by the different communities. Each community hosts 'open-house' for other cultural groups, which basically means that they encourage and welcome people of other beliefs to participate in their religious festivals. The Malaysian calendar of cultural and religious festivals (Table 1.1) incorporates the main religious holidays of all major cultural groups being celebrated throughout Malaysia. This official calendar is a further acknowledgement by the Malaysian government of the multicultural society which it represents, and the diversity of religions in its midst – and shows once again, the complex issue of managing a society with so many diverse cultures and religions.

By recognising these celebrations as public holidays (detailed in Table 1.1 below), it is hoped to raise awareness of the three main religions and to encourage participation promoting tolerance and understanding of each others religious customs. Religious celebrations certainly make up an integral part of Malaysian society and the success of this government proposal is recognized by the population's participation in religious festivals of all ethnic backgrounds. Within the school system, however, there is differing emphasis on the various religions depending on the school type – government-aided (public) schools, which are mostly attended by the Malays tend to emphasize the teachings of Islam; Chinese and Tamil schools emphasize a more general teaching of all religions. This, along with language, is one of the main deciding factors for parents of the different ethnic groups, in their choice of schools for their children (New Straits Times 7 May 2005).

Table 1.1 - Cultural & Religious Festivals that are observed

Festivals	Culture	2005	2006
Pongal	Hindu	14 Jan	14 Jan
Thaipusam	Hindu	25 Jan	11 Feb
Spring Lantern Festival	Chinese	23 Feb	12 Feb
Maha Shivarathri	Hindu	08 Feb	26 Feb
Chap Goh Meh	Chinese	24 Feb	13 Feb
Panguni Uthiram	Hindu	25 Mac	11 Apr
Tamil New Year	Hindu	14 Apr	14 Apr
Good Friday	Christian	25 Mac	14 Apr
Birthday of Tin Hau	Chinese	01 May	20 Mac
Cheung Chau Bun Festival	Chinese	15 May	05 May
Birthday of Tam Kung	Chinese	15 May	05 May
Birthday of Lord Buddha	Buddhist	15 May	05 May
Dragon Boat Festival	Chinese	11 June	31 May
Mooncake Festival	Chinese	18 Sept	06 Oct
Vaisakthi	Sikh	14 Apr	14 Apr
Songkran Festival	Thai	13 – 15 Apr	13 – 15 Apr
Birthday of Kwan Tai	Chinese	29 Jul	19 Jul
Seven Sisters Festival	Chinese	11 Aug	31 Jul
Hungry Ghost Festival	Chinese	19 Aug	08 Aug
Monkey God Festival	Chinese	19 Sep	07 Oct
Nine Emperor Gods Festival	Chinese	02 Oct	06 Oct
Birthday of Confucius	Chinese	30 Sept	18 Oct
Guru Nanak's Birthday	Sikh	15 Nov	05 Nov
Winter Solstice	Chinese	22 Dec	22 Dec

Adapted from: Source: http://www.abcmalaysia.com/tour_malaysia/cultfest_dates.htm

In examining the religions of Malaysia, it is interesting to look at the definition of a Malay, as cited in the Federal Constitution. According to Article 160 (2): "a Malay means a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language [and] conforms to Malay custom [...]" (Federal Constitution. As at 1st December 2003).

Islam is the official religion of the country and clearly positioned as the most important factor in Malay identity. As such it is a source of solidarity amongst members of the community and a form of ethnic differentiation from non-Malays. Article 3 of the Federal Constitution however, allows for the existence of other religious communities in the State: "Islam is the religion of the Federation; but other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation" (ibid.).

More than ten million people in Malaysia are Muslims, making Islam the religion with the largest number of followers. All Malays profess Islam to the extent that the terms Islam and Malay are synonymous. The basics of Islam teaching are *akidah* and *syariah*. *Akidah* is absolute faith or belief in the oneness of Allah and everything that has been revealed by Allah. One must believe totally, body and soul, in the unity of Allah: this is called *tauhid* (oneness). It means that mankind must have faith that there is no other God except Allah. *Syariah* refers to the laws and regulations of Islam contained in the holy Quran and the Sunnah (or Hadis, the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad).

Practising Muslims pray five times a day: *Subuh* at dawn, *Zuhur* at midday, *Asar* in the afternoon, *Maghrib* at sunset, *Isyak (ishak)* after dark. People may pray in their houses or in their workplaces, mosques and *surau* (Muslim prayer house). Not all Muslims pray five times but they must be given the time and facilities to do so should they so wish.

Within primary education, 'Islamic Studies' is a compulsory subject for Muslim students, whilst non-Muslim students take part in 'Moral Studies' during these periods. 'Muslim Education' is taught at secondary level for Muslim students, 'Moral Education' takes the place of this subject for non-Muslim students (Ministry of Education 2001). This at least allows for different religions within the national school system and ensures that non-

Muslims are not forced to take part in religion classes which focus on a belief other than their own. There is controversy, however, as previously mentioned, about the extent of the influence of Islam throughout the school curriculum and school practices – indeed as recently as May 2005, Minister Dr. Lim Keng Yaik (Minister for Energy, Water and Communications, Malaysia) spoke out against what he called the excessive presence of religion in national schools. He claimed that:

> Elements of the religion have seeped into many aspects of life in national schools. Among the complaints are the numerous supplications or *doa* read during school assemblies or piped into classrooms, *doa* before class and *doa* after class, Quran reading at school functions or piped into the classrooms […]

<div align="right">(Lim K. Y. Malaysian Daily 2005)</div>

The **Chinese,** unlike the Malays, are not united in religion. Chinese religion can be a blend of religious elements from Confucian, Taoist, Buddhist and even animistic rituals (i.e. appeasement of tree and land spirits (*datok*)). Many Chinese have converted to Christianity, particularly evangelical forms, and some have become Muslims (Munan 2003).

Buddhism is one religion which has a large following amongst the Chinese community in Malaysia after Islam. Followers of Buddhism are largely from the Chinese and Thai communities. There are temple festivals such as the resident god's birthday, the full moon on the fifteenth of each month or local holidays. *Vesak* day, which is the birthday of Buddha, is celebrated with prayers in temples and Buddhist monasteries and is a public holiday in Malaysia.

Malaysian Chinese identity is therefore centered more on cultural practices than religion. Celebrations such as the 'Chinese New Year', the 'Lion Dance' as well as the 'Moon Cake Festival', which is the celebration of the autumn moon in the eight month, are some of the main cultural celebrations carried out by this group.

In forming their own schools, the Chinese wish to promote Chinese customs, language and to promote those educational values which form part of the 're-emphasis' on Chinese identity' (Kahn and Wah 1992).

The next largest group is the **Malaysian Indians**. These are mostly Tamil speakers, but since a considerable number of Indians are from Kerala, Bengal, Gujarat and the Punjab, this community is even more culturally and linguistically diverse than the Malaysian Chinese. While most are Hindus, many are Sikhs, Muslims or Christians. Malaysian Indians celebrate various religious holidays, depending on their place of origin on the subcontinent. *Deepavali* (Festival of Light) is one of the most common. It symbolizes the triumph of light over darkness, good over evil. The festival of *Thaipusam* from *Tamil Nadu* is named after the Tamil month of Thai (January/February) and is a celebration connected with penance and atonement (Information Malaysia 2002). These and similar festivals serve as the focal points for the celebration of Indian identity.

Like the Chinese, there has been an increased interest in Tamil schools for the younger generation of Malaysian Indians in order for them to obtain a literary grounding in their own culture. However, two-thirds of Tamil schools are in the rural areas and, as 79% of the Indian population lives in urban areas, many Indian Malaysians are forced to attend government schools. Traditionally the Indians worked the rubber plantations and their educational needs were catered for on the estates. Today, more have moved to urban areas seeking better employment possibilities. They are made up of a mix of laborers, as well as a professional middle class.

This brief description of the various religions represented in Malaysia gives a picture of the complexity of religion and religious issues in Malaysia. On the one hand, the government allows the three communities to openly practise their religious ceremonies and avail of Tamil, Chinese or Malay speaking schools, on the other hand there is clearly preference given to Malays and to Islam, as the national religion of the country. A further area of controversy is the *Bumiputra* laws, which allow preferential treatment and special

privileges for *bumiputras*. As this policy underpins many elements of education in Malaysia, it will be examined below in section 1.3.

1.3 Preferential Treatment

Malaysian Preferential Treatment policy is based on the ideals of the Affirmative Action policy that emerged in the USA in the 1960s as a result of efforts by the civil rights movement to force America to honour its original contract in 1776 from the Declaration of Independence, that "all men are created equal". In addition, the American Pledge of Allegiance promises "liberty and justice for all". This is a promise of equal opportunity regardless of colour, national origin, race, religion and sex. 'Positive discrimination' is the British term used for this policy or programme aimed at increasing the representation and opportunities of members of groups that have traditionally been discriminated against. The focus is generally on education, employment, government contracts, health care and social welfare.

Whereas in America 'affirmative action' still incites much debate, having been part of the social and political landscape for decades, in Malaysia 'preferential treatment' has been declared a racially sensitive issue by the authorities and is not open to public discussion (Shuid & Fauzi 2001).

1.3.1   History of Preferential Treatment Policies in Malaysia

After the Independence of Malaysia in 1957, when the Constitution was promulgated, it included a provision that after ten years *Bahasa Melayu* would be the sole official language in the country. The Alliance government[6] at the time made it clear that "an integrated language and educational policy was a key instrument in forging an integrated and united society that would be assimilated to Malay cultural traditions" (Andaya and Andaya 2001 p291). This was believed by many non-Malays to be an attempt to instigate a national education system for all the schools at the time, and as one more area for

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[6] The Alliance government was made up of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC). (Source: Andaya and Andaya 2001)

Malay special privileges. These special privileges were given to the Malays as they were perceived as the rural poor and various schemes were set up to improve their economic situation. However, the Chinese and Indians argued for ethnic equality and cultural pluralism and wanted an end to Malay special privileges and a commitment to true equality in education. The racial riots of 1969 were a result of the perceived injustices and discrimination felt in all communities, among Malays and non-Malays alike, and the long-suppressed anger and disappointment exploded into ethnic violence. This forced the Malaysian government to rethink its economic policies which resulted in the New Economic Policy in 1971 (NEP). The ultimate objective was to eradicate poverty and obliterate the identification of race with economic function or status. After much consideration and discussion, the government agreed to sharing political power with the minorities, including the Chinese and Indians, as a prerequisite to gaining independence from British rule, but introduced a policy of preferential treatment in order to narrow the gap between the *bumiputras* and the *non-bumiputras* (Shuid & Fauzi 2001). This they believed would provide 'equal opportunities for all'.

The preferential treatment of all indigenous people, namely the *bumiputras* is built into the Malaysian Constitution. The King was to safeguard the special position of the Malays:

> The *Yang di Pertuan Agong* shall exercise his functions under this Constitution and federal law in such a manner as may be necessary to safeguard the special position of the Malays and natives of any of the States of Sabah and Sarawak and to ensure the reservation for Malays and natives of any of the States of Sabah and Sarawak of such proportion as he may deem reasonable of positions in the public service (other than the public service of a State) and of scholarships, exhibitions and other similar educational or training privileges or special facilities given or accorded by the Federal Government and, when any permit or licence for the operation of any trade or business is required by federal law, then, subject to the provision of that law and this Article, of such permits and licences.

(Article 153 of the Federal Constitution (as at 1st December 2003) p134)

Bumiputra laws exist as a means of preferential treatment and some of the policies in favour of the *bumiputras* have included:

- Quotas for admission to government educational institutions (*bumiputras* were entitled to 55% of the seats at national universities). Since 2003 a 'meritocracy' system has been put in place.

- Automatic qualification for public scholarships (many of which were to prestigious universities worldwide)

- Positions in government

- Ownership in business (for companies listed on the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange, *bumiputras* must take up a minimum of 30% equity)

(Shuid & Fauzi 2001)

The private sector has not been subjected to *quotas* at tertiary level, as the government does not want to discourage private universities, as they relieve the financial burden on government to provide tertiary education for *bumiputras*. They are an important source of finance as they attract fee-paying foreign students, who bring a sizable additional source of finance to the country.

In regard to public tertiary level education, the *bumiputras* have received other privileges such as:

- The first Matriculation Centre[7] was established at Universiti Melayu in 1971 as a feeder programme for *bumiputra* students into the public university's professional degree programmes.

- In 1999 the Ministry of Education set up four of its own Matriculation Colleges. The matriculation programme is a one-year programme for *bumiputras*, in contrast to the pre-university, two-year STPM (Malaysian Higher School

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[7] Matriculation or *Matrikulasi* as it is known in Malaysia is a pre-university programme designed to produce *bumiputra* students who will excel in professional fields in institutions of higher learning. The Matriculation Division was set up in 1999 by the Ministry of Education, to oversee matriculation courses. (Source: Ministry of Education 2001).

Certificate) for the non-*bumiputras*. The former is generally considered to be an 'easier' route into third level.

- Racial quotas for entry into public education, up until the year 2003, had required a 55% *bumiputra* quota in public universities.
- The quotas for Public Services Department (JPA) scholarships to study at universities worldwide are given on the basis of the Malaysian Education Certificate (SPM). This examination is taken after two years at upper secondary school level. It is open to all students of the government schools and is a requirement for further education or entry into the job market.

(Ministry of Education 2001; Ministry of Education 2003)

It is interesting to look at a quotation from the former Prime Minister Mahathir in his book 'The Malay Dilemma' (1970), in considering the reasons behind preferential treatment of the Malays, where he states:

> The motive behind preferential treatment is not to put the Malays in a superior position, but to bring them up to the level of the non-Malays. Under the British Colonial regime it had already become obvious that not only were the Malays economically backward but they were also educationally behind. [...] the scholarships are not a manifestation of racial inequality. They are a means of breaking down the superior position of the non-Malays in the field of education. The Malays are not proud of this treatment. They are not proud of the 'privilege' of being protected by law like cripples. They would like to get rid of these privileges if they can, but they have to let pride take second place to the facts of life.

(Mahathir 1970 pp75-76)

Thirty-two years later, in 2002, one year before his retirement as Prime Minister, Mahathir announced: "I feel disappointed, because I achieved too little of my principal task of making my race a successful race, a race that is respected" (Business Week. Online 2002). He hinted at this point, that it might be time to give way to 'meritocracy', because the NEP has not created the economic advancement he had hoped for the *bumiputras*. He believed that the Malays had not taken full advantage of the opportunities

they had been given and had become lazy, exploiting situations and expecting government hand-outs (ibid.).

Since 2003, a system of meritocracy for entry into third level education has been introduced. However, there has been much dissatisfaction as figures shows favouritism for the *bumiputras* in certain disciplines.

The NEP was a partial success, in that it reduced poverty among Malays to 8% in 1995, from 50% in 1973. However, according to Bakri, a Malay doctor, who wrote 'The Malay Dilemma revisited', the preferential treatment policies of Malaysia are much more aggressive than the affirmative action programme in America. It has also been very successful in creating a sizable and stable *bumiputra* middle-class, but at what cost? He states that "Malays may become dangerously dependent on and cannot exist without these legal props and once acquired, such 'dependency syndrome' or 'subsidy mentality' is extremely difficult to eradicate" (Bakri 1999 p115). The public universities, which up to very recently operated on a quota system, and today continue to take in large numbers of *bumiputra* students through the one-year matriculation programme, produce substandard graduates, in that most of the unemployed graduates are from the public university system. As mentioned earlier, they are primarily lacking in English communication skills, which are a necessity for many private firms today.

Moreover, the original aim of the matriculation programme, as part of the preferential treatment, as an outreach programme, for bright and disadvantaged Malay students from rural schools, interested in the sciences who could spend their last two years of high school on the university campus and be taught by lecturers, has been forgotten. Today, it is the wealthier socio-economic group who are in this programme; even though it continues to be heavily subsidized by the government, as do all the public universities.

Rather than breaking down racial barriers, the preferential treatment policy has reinforced them, as Malaysia's entire society is classified by race. Mahathir recognized this, and had started to dismantle the NEP, by refusing a proposal that the private universities, mainly

serving the *non-bumiputras*, reserve 10% of their places for *bumiputras*. In 2003, he also discontinued the quota of 55% of places at national universities for the *bumiputras*.

For many successful non-Malays, the special privileges accorded to the *bumiputras* evoke a resigned acceptance. This is greatly facilitated by a steadily growing Malaysian economy. Although the government still favours *bumiputras*, non-Malays are at liberty to pursue their own social and economic interests and they are free to fund their own schools. The fact that private universities have been set up in Malaysia, allows the non-Malays places at higher level education, without having to travel abroad for costly programmes.

It will take years to dismantle the National Economic Policy, as many ethnic Malays are still dependent on it and refuse to let it go. As cited at the Johor United Malays National Organization political assembly on the 17th July 2005:

> Malay equity in the face of a more level playing field for all will also dominate the debate on the economy, just as the debate on education is likely to revolve around Umno's members' concern about 'coping in an arena minus the so-called crutch', according to supreme council member and Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar.

> (Tan *Sunday Star* 2005 p21)

There is a concern amongst the political party that 'meritocracy' will marginalize the Malays. They do not believe that they have access to the same level of educational opportunities as the other ethnic groups, as they are predominantly coming from rural communities with basic schooling and less exposure to accessing information, as well as English language, they consider their opportunities to be limited, in comparison with the urban groups.

A former financial Minister, Anwar Ibrahim, is one of the few high-profile ethnic Malays, who has openly called for the National Economic Policy to be dismantled,

"we're not going to sacrifice Malay interests, we're going to help them as we are going to help those deserving, irrespective of race" (Asia Times Online 2006).

It is clear from the above that preferential treatment has been the norm in Malaysian society for the *bumiputras* for some time and will be difficult to dismantle. The question as to whether or not this can fit into a multicultural education system – even if it is masked as 'promoting equity amongst a nation' – will be discussed in Chapter 4.

1.4 Malaysia's Economic Planning Strategy - Emphasis on Education

Since 1971, Malaysia has introduced three 'Outline Perspective Plans', which outline the broad guidelines of economic planning over the years. Throughout these plans, the emphasis has been on moving the country forward to become a developed, prosperous nation and redressing the economic imbalance in Malaysian society in order to fulfill the potential of all Malaysians (Shuid & Fauzi 2001). Education is seen as the key to providing more equal opportunities for Malaysia to be represented on the world stage and has played an important role in these Plans. The following provides a brief overview of this economic and educational 'development' in recent years.

The year 1971 saw the introduction of the First Outline Perspective Plan (1971-1990). At this time, 75% of Malaysians living below the poverty line were Malays and this group was, to a large extent, still rural workers who had little or no participation in the industrial economy. The government's solution to this was the New Economic Policy (NEP), which had two main objectives:

> The first prong is to reduce and eventually eradicate poverty, by raising income levels and increasing employment opportunities for all Malaysians, irrespective of race. The second prong aims at accelerating the process of restructuring Malaysian society to correct economic imbalance, so as to reduce and eventually eliminate the identification of race and economic function.
>
> (Malaysia 1971 Second Malaysia Plan 1971-1975)

This policy specifically targeted the poorest ethnic group, the Malays, and, as already mentioned in section 1.3.1, the government introduced several programmes to provide Malays with privileged access to education, employment and economic ventures, with a target for Malay control of 30% of capital ownership, industry and commerce by 1990. It also targeted the transfer of economic power from the Chinese to the Malays.

Prime Minister Mahathir greatly expanded the number of schools and universities in the country – and enforced the policy of teaching through Malay rather than English – thus creating an unofficial barrier to the Chinese, whose competency in the language was not sufficient to allow them study through Malay. The results of the NEP were quite striking, although the target for Malay control of 30% of wealth ownership was not reached (Eight Malaysia Plan. Mid-Term Review).

Table 1.2 Restructuring under the NEP, 1970-90

		1970		**1990**	
(a) Wealth Ownership (%)	Bumiputera	2.0		20.3	
	Other Malaysians	34.6		54.6	
	Foreigners	63.4		25.1	
(b) Employment (%) of total workers in each sector	Primary sector (agriculture, mineral extraction, forest products and fishing) Bumiputera	67.6	[61.0]*	71.2	[36.7]*
	Others	32.4		28.8	
	Secondary sector (manufacturing and construction) Bumiputera	30.8	[14.6]*	48.0	[26.3]*
	Others	69.2		52.0	
	Tertiary sector (services) Bumiputera	37.9	[24.4]*	51.0	[36.9]*
	Others	62.1		49.0	

(Source: Drabble 2000 Table 10.9)

As indicated in Table 1.2 above, wealth ownership increased dramatically from 2% to over 20% for the *bumiputras*. Employment in the primary sector had a significant majority of 71.2% *bumiputra*. However numbers remained lower in the secondary sector at 48%. In the tertiary sector there was a slight majority for the *bumiputras*. Wealth ownership remained predominantly in the hands of other Malaysians and foreign companies, which continues to be a major concern for the Malaysian government.

The Second Outline Perspective Plan (1991-2000) embodied the 'National Development Policy' (NDP) and focused on productivity-driven economic growth. Under this Plan, RM 10.1 billion of 15.4% of total public development expenditure was allocated for education. Science and Technology, Research and Development and Information Technology were given priority, with the government aiming to increase the ratio of students enrolling for science-related courses compared to arts, to a ratio of 60:40. By 2003 however, this figure had not been reached, with the ratio remaining at 41:59 in favour of the arts (Push for Sciences. *Education Quarterly* 2003 p68).

Although the special privileges for the *Bumiputra* did not end with the NEP, the focus was less acute, with assistance going only to "*Bumiputra* with potential, commitment, and good track records" (The Second Outline Perspective Plan 1991-2000 p17). During this period, the government also changed the medium of instruction to English in science-related courses, in order to encourage more international research (Ministry of Education 2004 p 10).

The National Development Policy is part of a larger overall vision in Malaysia called Vision 2020, which aims at developing Malaysia into an 'industrialized nation' by 2020. The Third Outline Perspective Plan (2001-2010), marking the second phase of the realization of Vision 2020, focuses on "building a resilient competitive nation":

National unity remains the overriding goal of development and the diversities of Malaysians – ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious – will be taken into account in forging a harmonious, tolerant and dynamic society. Socio-economic development policies, which contributed to enhancing the quality of life of Malaysians, will continue to be given priority.

(Third Outline Perspective Plan, 2001-2010 p3)

The policy of preferential treatment however, continues and the government once again highlights education as being a major factor in promoting the participation of *bumiputras* in industry and professional fields. Some of the aims of the Third Outline Perspective Plan include:

- More *bumiputras* will be encouraged to establish private institutions of higher learning
- Both the private and the public institutions of higher learning are required to increase the numbers of *bumiputras* pursuing higher education, particularly in professional, management and advanced technical areas.
- The National Higher Education Fund will be increased to provide more loans to *bumiputra* students enrolled in private institutions of higher learning.
- Measures will be taken to increase enrolment of *bumiputra* students in science and technical courses as well as in management and business studies programmes.

(Online: Economic Planning Unit 2006)

This highlights once again that the Malaysian government is adamant to continue its policy of promoting the indigenous people and providing assistance to their economic and educational development. Preferential treatment is being promoted as a means of providing equal opportunities to a group that would otherwise not be able to reach their full economic or academic potential – but one would question whether this will result in more dissatisfaction amongst the non-Malays.

1.5 Conclusion

It is clear from the above that Malaysia is a complex society which is grappling with its multicultural population. On the one hand, various religious and ethnic groups are respected and officially recognized; on the other hand, the indigenous *bumiputras* receive advantages which can only serve as an annoyance to the rest of the population. As regards the multicultural education models which appear to be emerging, one would question whether the existence of 'culture-specific' schools can possibly serve to promote multicultural understanding and tolerance or if they will further enhance the segregation of these groups within the country. The government appears to have created a situation whereby the Malaysian Chinese and Malaysian Indians feel compelled to set up their own schools in order to preserve their own cultures.

In Chapter 4, the aims and goals of multicultural education will be explored and the Malaysian model further examined in this light.

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.0 Introduction

The following Chapter outlines the methodology used in conducting the research for this thesis. It details a multi-method approach to data collection, comprising insights gained from the experience of living in Malaysia, relevant documentation accessed locally, and empirical research in the form of interviews, questionnaires and classroom observations. It explains the data analysis process, namely qualitative and content analysis techniques, and the presentation of findings in this thesis.

2.1 A multi-method approach

Multiple methods of data collection and analysis were used in this research. The reasons were to be able to cross-check findings in order to compare government strategies and plans with their actual implementation on the ground. This type of methodology is referred to as 'triangulation' (Bell 2005). Cohen and Mannion (1994) explain that "multiple methods are suitable where a controversial aspect of education needs to be evaluated more fully" (p240). They suggest that multiple methods could measure and investigate factors such as "academic achievements, teaching methods, practical skills, cultural interests, social skills, interpersonal relationships, community spirit and so on" (ibid.). Laws (2003) points out that "the key to triangulation is to see the same thing from different perspectives and thus to be able to confirm or challenge the findings of one method with those of another" (p281). As this research focuses on practices affecting a multicultural society, it was appropriate and important to consider the views and educational values of the different ethnic groups in relation to these practices. This approach was aimed at obtaining as representative a range of responses as possible to fulfill the objectives of this study and to provide answers to key questions.

Considering the aims of this research - namely to examine the Malaysian model of multicultural education and to consider any aspects of this model which might be adapted

to suit Irelands diverse student population - a clear understanding of the diversity of Malaysian society as a developing nation had to be achieved. An understanding of the history of educational policies was essential, in a country which had been colonized by a British system for over 120 years - from the 1820s until Independence in 1957. In addition, empirical research involving interviews, questionnaires, classroom observations and a forum discussion group was an essential component, in order to represent the opinions of the different ethnic groups regarding the implementation of these policies on the ground.

The analytic techniques used for this research were firstly, qualitative analysis which was necessary for the analysis of secondary documentation included in the list in section 2.1.1. The basic skills required to analyze this kind of qualitative material involve collecting, classifying, ordering, synthesizing, evaluating and interpreting according to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2001). A qualitative data analysis technique can involve content analysis which according to Travers (1969): "has been defined as a multipurpose research method developed specifically for investigating a broad spectrum of problems in which the content of communication serves as a basis of inference from word counts to categorization" (as cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2001 p164). These categories are determined after inspection of the document, and cover the main areas of content. Cohen, Manion and Morrison state:

> In addition to elucidating the content of the document, the method may throw additional light on the source of the communication, its author, and on its intended recipients, those to whom the message is directed. Further, an analysis of this kind would tell us more about the social context and the kinds of factors stressed or ignored, and of the influence of political factors, for instance.

> (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2001 p165)

This form of 'internal criticism' of such data as newspaper articles, educational journals, government publications on education policies involves rigorous analysis which accommodates cross-cultural examination of Malaysian's attitudes to educational

policies. The aforementioned analytic techniques will be explained in practice in the following sections.

2.1.1 Primary and Secondary Documentation

As validity is an important key to effective research it is therefore a requirement of qualitative research. In recent times validity has taken many forms. In qualitative data "validity might be addressed through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved, the participants approached, the extent of triangulation and the disinterestedness or objectivity of the researcher" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2001 p105). Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) believe that validity is attached to accounts, not to data or methods; it is the meaning that subjects give to data and the inferences drawn from the data that are important.

Listed below are the various types of documents collected, indicating the broad range and the wide scope of many different perspectives, validating the findings of this thesis:

- Historical documentation concerning the development of the Malaysian Education System
- Malaysian Education Policies and Education Acts
- Long term Malaysian Education Development Plans
- Malaysian government documentation on the Higher Education System
- Language and religious policies concerning the Malaysian Education System
- Conference papers on the internationalisation of the Malaysian Education System and in particular, the Higher Education System
- Newspaper articles expressing the public's opinions on policy changes - including the use of the English language as a medium of instruction
- Educational magazines with articles reviewing public and private Higher Education in Malaysia
- Secondary material on understanding a Malaysian multicultural society
- Education journals with articles on the learning styles of Malaysian students

- Malaysian university journals on the use of the English language as a medium of instruction in Higher Education
- Secondary sources concerning various models of multicultural education

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2001) suggest that by using the technique of triangulation in qualitative research, different methods of inquiry yielding the same results will give more consistency to the researcher's findings. Campbell and Fiske (1959) claim that triangulation is a powerful way of demonstrating concurrent validity, particularly in qualitative research. So for example, the results of a questionnaire survey corresponding to those of an observational study of the same phenomena will add confidence to the researcher's findings.

Content analysis was used to extract the findings from newspaper articles, a technique described by Krippendorff (1980) as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context" (p20). The relevant newspaper articles were collected over a one year period, during which articles were classified under different headings, and statements issued by the public or the author were colour coded accordingly. The articles were analyzed for the writer's bias, taking into consideration sensitive issues, which became apparent as the research progressed. It is essential to recognize the role of the media in Malaysia, which, according to Abdullah and Pedersen (2003) is "to monitor events and happenings in such a way that the people being observed would know that they are being watched" (p185). With the increasing exposure to foreign media and increasing literacy in the country, it is becoming increasingly difficult for the Malaysian government to pursue its 'own brand' of broadcasting. There is a demand to be more open to external elements and to freedom of expression. Malaysians want the government to be more transparent about its plans and policies. However, the Malaysian media are also used as a means to promote national unity and racial harmony, and therefore journalists and authors are encouraged to be sensitive to the values and feelings of the various ethnic groups in the country. Abdullah and Pedersen (2003) state that the Malaysian media are seen as an instrument of endorsement and consensus of government actions. Media editors are expected to be guarded in their approach to news coverage, to

exercise a high degree of constraint, safeguard the good name of respected figures and avoid embarrassing them, or causing them to lose face in public. Therefore the relationship between the media and the government is more 'cordial' than confrontational. The newspaper articles, which have been used as references, have been analyzed with these background considerations in mind. The opinions expressed in these articles represent an image that is portrayed nationally by official authorities.

Qualitative or critical content analysis involves answering many questions concerning the type of document, what it actually says about the author of the document, and the purpose of the document. This analysis is important in not accepting documents at face value. There may be prejudice, as the author may belong to a particular political or cultural group which may influence the tone or emphasis of a paper. This was also considered in closer examination of the articles which may have been written from political perspectives or with ethnic considerations in mind.

2.1.2 Empirical research

The term empirical means "that which is verifiable by observation; and evidence, data yielding proof or strong confirmation, in probability terms, of a theory or hypothesis in a research setting" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2001 p10). Bogdan and Biklen (1992) suggest that "in qualitative research, reliability can be regarded as a fit between what researchers record as data and what actually occurs in the natural setting that is being researched, i.e. a degree of accuracy and comprehensiveness of coverage" (p48). The four types of empirical research undertaken, which consisted of – (1) Interviews, (2) Questionnaires, (3) Classroom Observations and (4) a Forum Discussion Group - contributed to ensuring 'reliability' and echo comments made earlier regarding 'triangulation'.

Each method used contributed in a unique way to the analysis and deepened the understanding of the complexities involved in Malaysia's multicultural education system:

- The interview allowed for an open discussion of many areas of concern.

- The questionnaires were influenced by the topics of discussion which arose during some interviews and were formulated accordingly. They were less restrictive because of their anonymity and the written format allowed for freedom of expression. They also accessed a larger group of participants. The use of questionnaire responses, generally have to be taken at face value, but as a response in an interview can be further developed and clarified so there are no misunderstandings. The way in which a response is made can provide information that a written response would conceal.

- Classroom observation was carried out as a follow-up to reveal whether what had been discussed at interviews and answered on questionnaires was put into practice.

- Finally, the forum discussion with a group of experienced primary school teachers, who had just completed four years of further study to qualify as secondary teachers, yielded two further perspectives, that of mature students at the university and that of experienced teachers in the Malaysian classrooms.

2.1.2.1 Interviews

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2001) maintain that the research interview may serve three purposes:

1. It may be used as the principal means of gathering information having direct bearing on the research objectives
2. It may be used to test hypotheses or to suggest new ones; or as an explanatory device to help identifiable variables and relationships
3. It may be used in conjunction with other methods in a research undertaking

(Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2001 p268)

Tuckman (1972) describes it as "providing access to what is inside a person's head, [it] makes it possible to measure what a person knows (knowledge or information), what a person likes or dislikes (values and preferences) and what a person thinks (attitudes and beliefs)" (p48).

Experiencing life in multicultural Malaysia as a foreign national, but also as an international student in a public university, afforded the author the unique experience of building contacts with the local students and academics of a public university, as well as with people from many different levels and varied walks of life in Malaysian society. It also facilitated experiencing first hand some of the issues and challenges which face such a culturally diverse student population. It allowed the privilege of interviewing both students and academics to ascertain their views and experiences of the multicultural education system. A total of 51 interviews were carried out – including 20 Malays, 17 Chinese, 11 Indian, 2 Eurasian and 1 European.

A semi-structured interview style was used, with open-ended questions, which had a number of advantages, being more flexible, allowing for more probing and depth, and the clearing up of any misunderstandings (see Appendix A – Interview Questions). This open-ended questioning helped to establish a rapport, which enabled the researcher to assess what the respondent really believes. One disadvantage of this interview technique is that it is prone to subjectivity and to bias on behalf of the interviewer, therefore great care must be taken in the subsequent analysis and interpretation. To reflect as many different perspectives on the research topic as possible, interviewees were chosen from a broad range of racial backgrounds and educational experiences as possible, including local as well as international.

The semi-structured interview allowed for the elaboration of any necessary points raised during the course of the interview but also gave structure to the course of the questioning as Morrison states:

> The framing of questions for a semi-structured interview will also need to consider *prompts* and *probes*. Prompts enable the interviewer to clarify topics or questions, whilst probes enable the interviewer to ask respondents to extend, elaborate, add to, provide detail or, clarify or qualify their response, thereby addressing richness, depth of response, comprehensiveness and honesty that are some of the hallmarks of successful interviewing.

(Morrison 1993 p66)

This interview technique provided sufficient open-endedness for further elaboration by the interviewer and the interviewee. The questions are written down, but the exact sequence and wording does not have to be followed with each respondent. This technique proved very rewarding, as many interviewees were eager to discuss several issues further, particularly in regard to educational provisions for the different races. In order to maximize the confidentiality of the interviewees on certain sensitive issues, every effort was made to preserve anonymity. Individual names are replaced by a coded list of the individuals, indicating the ethnicity of the person, their status as an academic, student or parent, the institution they are participating in, and the faculty where they are working/studying (see Appendix B).

As the primary aim of the interviews was to examine how the education system catered for the different ethnic groups, individuals were interviewed with different perspectives either because of their ethnicity or their status as academics, students, parents or government officials. These involved 18 academics, 22 third level students, 5 parents, 2 education agents for international students and 4 Ministry of Education officials. As the interviewees were also racially mixed, I carried out interviews mostly on a one to one basis, although I decided to use group interviews for the student groups. If the group was of one racial background, this seemed to allow for more open responses, as the racially mixed groups were more hesitant in voicing their opinions. In spite of the students studying together within the same faculties, there appeared to be a code of silence, preventing them from expressing their educational concerns in an open manner. This is highlighted throughout the thesis by the use of quotations from some of the interviewees. All interviews were recorded and transcribed and colour coding was used to identify primary themes (see Appendices D & E). Bell (2005) states that using colour coding to identify recurring themes "allows you to 'cluster' key issues in your data and allows you to take steps towards 'drawing conclusions' " (p214). The interviewing of academics and students also allowed for different perspectives concerning how they were catered for as a multicultural group and the attitudes of fellow students/academics alike.

Group interviews can bring together people with varied opinions or as representatives of different collectivities, however it has disadvantages "in allowing personal matters to emerge" according to Watts and Ebbutt (1987), as the dynamic of a group denies access to this sort of data. This is particularly relevant in a racially mixed group where sensitive questions concerning the different entrance requirements for students to public universities, according to race were asked. Students for example, were not willing to speak openly in front of their peers concerning this matter if the group was racially mixed.

Other issues that arose were in the case of the social hierarchical positions of those interviewed "for the interview is not simply a data collection situation but a social and frequently a political situation" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2001 p122). In some cases where those interviewed were in senior positions and of Malay race there was a tendency to side on the government's position with regard to policies in place, whereas those of other racial groups were more critical.

The key issues arising from the findings of the thesis are explored in the ensuing Chapters, where excerpts from the data collected are interwoven throughout.

2.1.2.2 Questionnaires

Bell (1999) suggests that a questionnaire can only be designed after all the preliminary work on planning, consulting and deciding exactly what needs to be investigated has been completed. Having reviewed the options available, I decided to use pilot questionnaires as an additional methodology to support information acquired at interviews. A small number of pilot questionnaires was distributed to two different groups: (1) postgraduate students (former primary school teachers) of mixed race who had just graduated as teachers of English and (2) Chinese students who were finishing their first year (TESL) at university. The pilot questionnaires were used as a preliminary step to forum group interviews and classroom observations in the area of student learning styles. The students filled out a questionnaire, designed to determine the Malaysian students learning

preferences (see Appendix C – Student Learning Style Pilot Questionnaire) prior to the class group being observed.

The questions concerning students' learning styles at third level addressed the learning and teaching styles used during the primary and secondary school years and highlighted any major adaptations necessary for third level. There were questions on classroom participation and teacher-student expectations, as well as students' study patterns, involving either groups or individuals. Finally, questions were asked concerning the use and the level of English as the medium of instruction at third level. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2001) suggest that "if a site-specific case study is required then qualitative, less structured, word-based and open-ended questionnaires may be more appropriate as they can capture the specificity of a particular situation" (pp247-248). As the sample was relatively small, the less structured and more open word-based questionnaire set the agenda but did not presuppose the nature of the response. The type of question used was mixed, consisting of 'open-ended' questions in order to invite an honest, personal comment from the respondents, as well as questions involving the ticking of boxes. This allowed for collecting both the necessary factual information concerning study habits and also the student's opinions regarding English language as the medium of instruction.

The findings can be summarized as the following:

Group 1 – (M.S. C.S. I.S. - 18) Postgraduate students (primary teachers) who had just completed further studies as TESL students reported that:

1. Interactive lectures and tutorials were the most effective style of learning, but it was subjective to the individual lecturer, as to whether this was encouraged or not
2. The Postgraduate students would exchange notes and ideas and work in groups in order to better understand a topic
3. They studied predominantly at home
4. The times of learning varied
5. Some lecturers expected the students to accept what they taught without questioning
6. There was little contact with lecturers outside of class time

7. The course was conducted in English and also in *Bahasa Melayu* for certain modules of the TESL course

8. In tutorials students were awarded 10% of the overall mark to encourage active participation

Group 2 - (C.S - 20) Chinese Undergraduate students who had completed their first year as TESL students:

1. Once again interactive lectures or small tutorials were considered a more beneficial styles of learning

2. However, the undergraduate students were more hesitant in asking questions

3. Participation depended on the lecturer encouraging them

4. They would exchange notes and work together predominantly in groups of friends

5. They mostly studied in their hostel rooms

6. Their study times varied

7. The course was taught in English and in *Bahasa Melayu* depending on the course module

8. Only some lecturers encouraged questions to be asked (predominantly those lecturers who had trained overseas according to the students)

The primary task of analysis of the pilot questionnaires included colour coding each answer in order to highlight the responses and trends regarding the learning styles of third level students, academics teaching styles and the use of English as a medium of instruction (cf. Chapter 5). As the questionnaire was used as a preliminary to classroom observation and forum group interviews, areas of concern mentioned by students were taken note of as guidelines during the observation period and during the forum group discussions.

2.1.2.3 Classroom Observation

Observational data, according to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2001) "are attractive as they afford the researcher the opportunity to gather 'live' data from 'live' situations" (p305). Patton (1990) says that "the researcher is given the opportunity to look at what is

taking place *in situ* rather than at second hand" (pp203-205). Direct observation over a period of five hours in three different classrooms followed the interviews with academics and students and the completion of learning styles questionnaires by the students. Observation is considered to be more reliable than an interview because it can verify if people "do what they say they do, or behave in the way they claim to behave" (Bell 1999 p156). It can also reveal characteristics of groups or individuals, which other methods could not reveal (ibid.).

Three different class groups from the same public university, in different faculties and comprising of different races, were used to improve the reliability of the data through multiple perspectives. Having interviewed students and teachers, the three classes were conducted as normal and were observed with no prerequisite framework from the observer. Teaching behaviour and student interaction were amongst the primary concerns for observation in focusing on learning styles in the multicultural classroom. Guidelines for classroom observation at third level were considered through referencing Light and Cox (2001). The observation was carried out for the purpose of watching the *behaviour* of the students who had previously been interviewed and had filled in questionnaires.

As I wished to be unobtrusive in the classroom activity I was seated at the back of the room, where students were unable to see me. The lecturers took on very different roles in each scenario, one observed student's presentations and followed them up with commentary and feedback; the second gave a lesson and then followed this with a question and answer session revising difficulties students had in the previous lesson, and the third was a mixed lesson, commencing with an informative introduction to a new topic and followed by some group activity and discussion.

The following issues arise in relation to the findings of classroom observation:
- Frequent 'code-switching' from English to *Bahasa Melayu* was observed in the medical lesson and in the master class. Wherever there was uncertainty there was a reliance on the use of *Bahasa Melayu* for a clear explanation, among both students and teachers alike. For the researcher, parts of the class could not be

comprehended. It is questionable as to whether this is a normal occurrence or was increased due to this researcher's presence. The practice of 'code-switching' was however, mentioned by one academic as the classroom norm for certain groups.

- The seating arrangements of the students tended to be in separate racial groups and this included group work activities.

- All three teachers had postgraduate qualifications from foreign universities and their style of teaching was quite interactive, which some students appeared to find a little disconcerting, indicating a mismatch between the teachers teaching styles and learners learning styles, and as a result did not participate actively in classroom activities.

- The fact of having a native English speaker in the classroom may have inhibited those students who were less competent and unsure of their English language competence.

2.1.2.4 Forum Discussion Group

A questionnaire was also given to a group of four teachers, who had re-trained from the primary to the secondary school sector. This was a preliminary exercise to the discussion group. These teachers had just completed four more years of university education as mature students. They represented the three main ethnic groups of Malaysia – the Malays, the Chinese and the Indians. The purpose of the questionnaire was to instigate a focused discussion, but from the perspective of mature students, who already had several years work experience in a classroom environment. As mature students, the experience at university was, in their opinion, completely different to that of a student of school-leaving age. These students could also appreciate the perspective of the teacher regarding learning styles, as they had been in teaching positions themselves. The forum discussion allowed for further input concerning student learning styles which were the norm at schools, and the training received at pre-university level and university level and it opened the discussion further.

A weakness of the forum group discussion can be the influence of strong personalities. This demanded "keeping the strong personalities in line" and drawing out information

from the more silent members. Laws (2003) suggests that one way might be to do a periodic check in order to discover whether all group members are in agreement with statements being made, on the lines of 'Is that what everyone thinks?' Classroom observation also showed how those same personalities participated in class and how they were incorporated by the lecturer to benefit general class discussion.

All four types of empirical research complimented each other in many ways as explained above and were more of a positive attribute than a negative one.

2.2 Conclusion

This Chapter has outlined the methodology used in conducting the research for this thesis – explaining the various types of data collected and the analysis techniques. The experience of living in Malaysia was essential in order to access multiple local sources and references, and to develop a better understanding of the various ethnic groups in this society.

In the multi-method approach the Chapter has illustrated the advantages and limitations of the various forms of data collected. The findings revealed the value of using these, as they complimented each other and filled in the loopholes.

One further consideration in accessing data in a foreign country is the time and protocol requirements for accessing information which need to be carefully taken into consideration, so that there is a realistic expectation on the part of the researcher, as to what resources are available for the study. This will undoubtedly influence the end result of the research. As a foreign student interviewing local individuals, some cultural limitations were also evident in the hesitancy and caution of some interviewees and difficulties in getting frank opinions from particular groups, as self-image and 'face' is of ultimate importance in this Asian society. The issue of 'face' as described by Ting-Toomey (1988) is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 relating to the cultures of Malaysia.

The findings will be presented in the different Chapters interwoven with the findings from the secondary material, including quotations and excerpts. The following Chapters will focus on culture, multicultural norms, language policies and learning styles and will draw on the findings from both the primary and secondary research data, which is interwoven with the material in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, in order to develop the main issues of concern. It is essential to understand that the Malaysian government's agenda is to create a Malaysian identity and develop a modern state. There are parallels with the present day Irish context where a rapidly increasing multicultural society has raised questions as to how Irish identity may change in the future. Consequently, the close examination of the Malaysian system and the challenges it is attempting to deal with, presented in this thesis, provides much food for thought and lessons in recognising how a multicultural society develops a common identity while recognising its multicultural groups and celebrating its diversity.

Chapter 3: The Meaning of Culture

3.0 Introduction

As education is so closely integrated into the culture of a society, it is crucial to examine the concept of culture - and Malaysian culture in particular - in order to interpret educational policies and practices and the main cultural groups' reactions to them in this multicultural nation.

This Chapter will firstly examine the meaning of culture and its complexities and how it influences people's behaviour and expectations. Malaysian culture (or rather cultures) with its own system of values and beliefs will then be discussed. In interpreting Malaysian culture the aspect of 'face' will also be incorporated as it is a significant part of this Asian culture. By outlining the importance of culture and the main characteristics of the different cultural groups in Malaysia in Chapter 3, the groundwork is laid for a detailed discussion in Chapter 4 of how different cultural groups interpret government educational policies and practices.

3.1 The Meaning of Culture

Culture is a term that has been used in a large variety of contexts and interpreted in uncountable ways. One of the well-known anthropological definitions has been given by Kluckhohn and he states:

> Culture consists of patterned ways of thinking, feeling and reacting, acquired and transmitted mainly by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values.
>
> (Kluckhohn 1951 p86)

Hofstede (2003) interprets culture as the "collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another" (p9). He

interprets the mind as representing the head, heart and hands – that is for thinking, feeling and acting, with consequences for beliefs, attitudes and skills. Kluckhohn (1951) affirms that culture, in this sense, includes systems of values as a core element.

The 'onion analogy' used by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2002 pp21-22) can be drawn upon to further explain these 'value' systems. They define culture as consisting of layers, like an onion – the outer, middle and the core. The outer layer is represented by *explicit* culture, artifacts and products. This is the observable reality of the language, food, buildings, houses, monuments, markets, fashions and art. They are the 'symbols' of a deeper layer of culture. The middle layer is represented by the *norms and values* of an individual group. *Norms* are the mutual sense a group has of what is 'right' and 'wrong'. Norms can develop on a formal level as written laws, and on an informal level as social control. *Values* determine the definition of 'good' and 'bad' and relate to the ideals shared by the group. A culture is relatively stable when the norms reflect the values of the group. While the norms give us a feeling of 'this is how I normally should behave', values give us a feeling of 'this is how I aspire or desire to behave'. Finally, the core layer represents the core of human existence and the *basic assumptions* that people strive to survive by organizing themselves to deal most effectively with their environments. This is the core meaning of life for the members of each culture.

Culture is considered by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2002) as being "beneath awareness in the sense that no one bothers to verbalise it, yet it forms the roots of action" (p24). It is man-made and passed on, so that people can meet, think about themselves and face the outer world in a meaningful way. Geertz (1973) explains that culture is the means by which people "communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about attitudes towards life. Culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action" (p39). It is therefore the essence of how we think and act, yet something which we are often unaware of.

Hall (1990) claims that "culture controls behavior in deep and persisting ways, many of which are outside of awareness and therefore beyond conscious control of the individual"

(p25). He treats culture as a form of communication. One main aspect of communication is the way in which people read meaning into what others do. Language is, according to Hall (1990), "the most technical of the message systems" (p28) but there are other ways in which people communicate that "either reinforce or deny what they have said with words" (ibid.). It is therefore, in learning to understand the 'out-of-awareness' aspects of communication, that we begin to understand the mental processes of others.

This concept of culture as social interaction, or meaningful communication, presupposes common ways of processing information among the people interacting. Each participator must have a connected system of meanings and a shared definition of a situation in order to communicate successfully (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 2002). Unless there is an understanding of how cultures function around us, it is difficult to facilitate a pluralist society. As stated by Hall (1990) "we must never assume that we are fully aware of what we communicate to someone else" (p29). He believes that culture hides more that it reveals. For Hall the best reason to study another culture is to generate a sense of vitality and awareness about oneself. It is one of the "most effective ways to learn about oneself by taking seriously the culture of others. It forces you to pay attention to those details of life which differentiate them from you" (ibid. p31).

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2002) state "that in every culture a limited number of general, universally shared human problems need to be solved. One culture can be distinguished from another by the specific solution it chooses for those problems" (p26). Therefore a functioning multicultural society is a society within which members of one cultural group communicate with members of other groups without either person losing integrity. Abdullah and Pedersen (2003) present this as 'contextual understanding' (p225), as human behaviour has to be interpreted in its socio-cultural context.

Bullivant (1989) proposes three basic environments which affect the survival of the group in a multicultural society. Firstly, the *geographical environment* or physical habitat which includes a variety of natural features that the social group adapts to or modifies through its technology:

[...] this constitutes the tools and scientific knowledge used to achieve practical results [...] a modern society like the United States, with a sophisticated technology, can modify its geographical environment almost at will. [...] a technologically underdeveloped society is more heavily constrained by the difficulties posed by its geographical environment.

(Bullivant (1989) cited in Banks and Mc Gee Banks 1989 p28)

Secondly, there is the *social environment,* whereby the social group as a whole must interact with its neighbours who may make up another social group. An important part of culture is made up of all the customs and rules which allow this social interaction to take place smoothly. Thirdly, there is the *metaphysical environment,* which is not seen, but the belief that life is governed by a higher order such as a god or gods or indeed, other supernatural entities. This can have a strong influence on people's lives within any social group. In living together in a pluralistic society, Bullivant therefore emphasizes that it is essential to share the knowledge of the different groups' approaches to surviving within its environment. Tolerance and respect for another social group's survival programmes are essential ingredients of intercultural understanding.

All social groups face different survival problems and have to adapt to many kinds of environments. In most pluralist societies, there are different kinds of subgroups, each of which draws on its own survival programs in adapting to its environments. The most common subgroups are: social class, ethnicity, race and possibly gender. This kind of society is often referred to as 'multicultural', which implies it is made up of 'many cultures'. The concept of the group is essential to understanding this social system that carries a culture. Theodorson & Theodorson (1969) state that "A group is a collectivity of persons who share an identity, a feeling of unity. A group is also a social system that has a social structure of interrelated roles" (p13). Sociologists believe that knowledge about the group is important in understanding the behaviour of the individual, as group norms shape the behavioral patterns of the individual in adapting to their physical, social and metaphysical environments. Goodman and Marx (1982) believe that "Such factors as shared religion, nationality, age, sex, marital status and education have proved to be important determinants of what people believe, feel, and do" (p7). Therefore, an

individual can be a member of several groups at one time, as demonstrated in the table below, in which Banks and Mc Gee Banks (2004) explain multiple group membership:
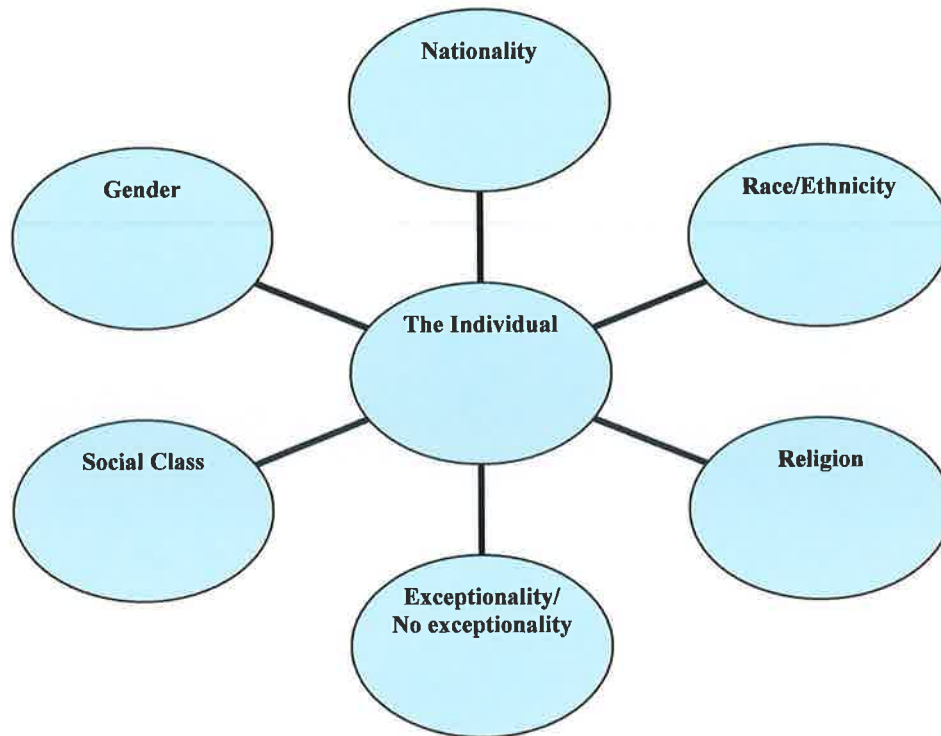
Figure 3.1 Multiple Group Memberships

Source: Banks & McGee Banks 2004 p14

In relating this model to Malaysia, individuals can be a member of different groups, for example: a Chinese can be Malaysian by nationality, Chinese by race, Buddhist by religion, male or female, of middle class standing and of gifted ability. There are shared factors amongst *all* cultural groups determining how the group acts, feels and thinks.

So, people in a multicultural society are members of these subgroups making up the society, each of which is programmed by its own subculture. These subgroups also overlap and interpenetrate each other, so people do not belong exclusively to one subgroup, but have to move in and out of several 'action systems' (Parsons 1966) every day and use the appropriate cultural programme belonging to each. They must also participate in the action systems in the public domain of the wider society. According to Parsons the methods of taking care of the groups' concerns are put into operation by

institutional agencies or 'action systems'. For example schools, colleges and universities are the major kind of 'action systems' we use to educate the young. As people can have strong emotional feelings towards the values of the subgroup to which they belong, this can sometimes lead to tensions developing between two or more subgroups. If and when such a situation occurs, to preserve harmony it may be necessary for the common legal system shared by all groups to impose laws that will ensure that conflict does not develop. It is clearly a difficult balance in any multicultural society and therefore to promote intercultural understanding is of prime importance.

In considering this, it is important to remember that culture is not just made up of any 'one' element but is a complex series of activities interrelated in many ways, with activities which have origins in the past. It is not a static feature of society, but is constantly changing in response to the circumstances in which the society finds itself.

In order to create a framework for the meaning of culture in relation to Malaysian society the following aspects of culture, highlighted by Abdullah and Pedersen (2003), are taken into particular consideration:

- Culture is the consideration given to a social group's shared system of knowledge and conceived beliefs
- The explicit values of the social group expressed through language, food, buildings and artifacts are an essential part of culture
- Culture is the values of the group in how they interpret group behaviour
- Culture effects how the group communicates this knowledge, conceptions and values through its signs and symbols
- Culture decides how the social group has evolved from the past and is constantly adapting to the present environment in which it survives
- The knowledge and conceptions the group anticipates in its cultural programme is to cope with future problems

In the following sections I will be showing how these cultural traits relate to Malaysia's multicultural groups in order to comprehend the similarities and differences which make up this diverse society.

3.2 The Cultures of Malaysia

A culture must be transmitted to each new generation of children if the social group is not to collapse and be absorbed into another society or indeed disappear altogether. The key to cultural transmission is the language of the social group. Language is a system of signs and symbols by which knowledge and meanings are passed on to everyone within the group, as well as to each new generation (Ovando 2004 cited in Banks & Mc Gee Banks 2004 pp289-290). Languages play a significant role in Malaysia, as each cultural group strives to keep its own language alive through education, as well as through cultural practices. The emphasis of *Bahasa Melayu* in the government schools, and Mandarin and Tamil in the vernacular schools as the languages of instruction is a primary example of how the government is seeking to accommodate a multicultural society. The six main Chinese dialects and the languages spoken by the Indians, including Tamil and English, as well as the languages of the 63 ethnic groups of Borneo, making up the 80 languages (Asmah 1992) of the whole country, are supported through cultural and social activities, as these groups hold on to their dialectical or geographical origins.

The three main cultural groups, as well as the ethnic groups of Sabah and Sarawak, including the *Orang Asli* of Peninsular Malaysia, are all distinctive through their cultural habits, beliefs and languages. The main cultural groups are today fourth and fifth generation Malaysian and have therefore, adopted Malaysian 'cultural habits' whilst maintaining the cultural habits of their own particular ethnic groups through education and the promotion of customs, norms and languages. It has been the Malaysian government's approach to allow, at least on the surface, for each cultural group to live side-by-side, promoting the groups' cultural habits, beliefs and languages.

Malaysia's system of values is quite complex and has gone through many different processes of diffusion and acculturation, beginning with Hindu culture and followed by Islamic and Western influences. The Malays in particular, have been influenced by Islamic values. The Chinese and Indians as migrant races have brought along their own religious beliefs and cultural traditions, enriching the multicultural elements of Malaysia. The many ethnic groups of Sabah and Sarawak also bring even more varied cultural

habits and beliefs to this mosaic of cultures. However, amongst these main groups and including the smaller ethnic groups from West Malaysia are some common assumptions that can be made in order "to describe the culture of a group of people in the way they relate with nature, with people and with their god(s)" (Abdullah and Pedersen 2003 p63).

Some of the common assumptions shared by all of the cultural groups in Malaysia include a common group affiliation of being a collectivist society of *kita* (we), in which people from birth onwards tend to identify with family, community or organization. This group affiliation provides an identity, through their core values of respect for parents, friends, relatives and teachers, as well as for the value they hold for harmony in life, for religious beliefs and the significance of 'shame'. Members of this group are concerned about 'face-saving', they speak in a language of relationships, and trust is assumed by virtue of membership of the group (Abdullah and Pedersen 2003).

Malaysia is recognized as a developing country, with a vision of being a fully developed industrialized nation by the year 2020. Bullivant's (1989) three basic environments which affect the survival of the social group are interesting to consider in the context of Malaysian identity and internationalisation. Firstly, *the physical habitat* of Malaysia is changing rapidly with this fast developing economy, and each cultural group must deal with these changes accordingly. This change in pace has an impact on the values, attitudes and movements of Malaysians who have yet to get used to the rapid industrial and technological changes that are happening in the country (Abdullah and Pedersen 2003). There are many stark contrasts, including the urban-rural divide, and an increasing emphasis on the identities of the *bumiputra* and the *non-bumiputra* groups.

All social groups are able to exercise choices about how they will adapt to environmental pressures, but the range of choices depends on the level of economic, technical and social development of the group in question. Choices of *adaptational styles* also reflect the group's value orientations or world views. In Malaysia the divide between urban and rural has become more acute, with rapid advancement on all levels, taking place in the urban areas, which is also determined by the racial groups living in these areas.

Secondly, the *social environment* is seen to be changing, with each social group placing greater emphasis on its own ethnic community and causes. In the area of education the emphasis on 'own language' as a medium of instruction through the vernacular schools is one example of how the different cultural groups communicate their cultural beliefs through an action system or an institution which is necessary for maintaining a groups life concerns.

As regards the *metaphysical environment,* Malaysian people - in common with most Asian cultures - believe that it important to live in harmony with nature and co-exist with it. The Malays hold social ceremonies of *doa selamat,* prayers seeking blessings to ensure smooth tiding if starting on a new project. The Chinese seek harmony with the environment by practising *feng shui* – the science of selecting living environments where the elements and the energies are in harmonious balance, thereby bringing good life to those who reside in it. The Indians consult their temple priests and gurus when planning major events in their lives such as weddings, births and naming their children.

As can be seen by the above practices, 'harmony' is a core value for all Malaysians, who recognize its importance in protecting and preserving relationships and tolerance towards one another. Harmony is placed above 'openness' and 'saying it as it is', if there is a risk that saying what they really think will embarrass or offend another person or cause disharmony in any way. Members of a community group tend to use 'face saving' techniques rather than confronting a problem directly, in order to maintain harmony of relationships in the group. Within all of the ethnic groups, relationships take precedence over other forms of transactions and enactments.

In relating the layers of culture to Malaysia, termed by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2002) as the 'onion analogy', the 'outer layer' or 'explicit culture' reflects the multicultural groups and their ethnic origins through places of worship such as the mosques, temples and churches, the code of dress, the architectural styles and the many types of food. The 'middle layer' for most Malaysians is the recognition of the 'polite system' of address, according to the values and norms of each ethnic group. They make

up the revered values of respect for elders, and include 'shame and face' as important considerations, as they influence the ways Malaysians establish rapport and understanding with others. The 'core layer', the most basic value people strive for, is survival and this common core value for all Malaysians of harmony, along with a spirit of teamwork, is an essential element of their survival (Abdullah and Pedersen 2003).

In looking at the cultural value system of each of the three main groups, Abdullah and Pedersen (2003) identify the following aspects as crucial points in understanding the traits of each of the different groups before examining their attitudes to educational practices in Malaysia.

Malay cultural values

- Islam influences every aspect of Malay identity and cultural solidarity
- The socio-cultural system is hierarchical and relationship-oriented
- The *kampung* (village) is very much a social unit of Malay society; it can be in an urban or rural setting and involves a community with social and cultural considerations
- Relationships are based on harmony and empathy for others and communication can be verbal or non-verbal
- As communication is not so direct, it is important for Malays to 'tune in' to the inner feelings and sensitivities of others in order to 'save face'
- A true understanding of interpersonal relationships with other members of the group and preventing 'shame' is essential
- Shame has to do with maintaining 'status' in the eyes of others
- In this hierarchical society, status of the family and 'saving face' are essential to preserve
- Malays remain as a group with an affinity for nature and rural life

(adapted from Abdullah and Pedersen 2003)

Malaysian Chinese cultural values

- Distinct dialects, customs and social practices make up a network of clans for each of the individual dialect groups
- Malaysian Chinese emphasize a 'common Chinese culture'
- There is a move towards a more 'modern westernized' model amongst this community, due to their exposure to an English-type education and their tendency towards foreign tertiary level qualifications
- There is a high-regard for education as part of the Confucian philosophy and way of life
- There remains a belief that competition is necessary for survival and improvement
- The Chinese in Malaysia retain their indigenous names and mother tongue unlike in other southeast Asian countries where they have assimilated
- It is believed that harmony and peace are significant values in order to become prosperous
- Chinese parents are today concerned with inculcating and reinforcing traditional values among the young so as not to forget their cultural roots (including Mandarin language lessons for their children)
- Neither individual-based like 'western' societies nor group-based like the Malays, they focus on the nature of relations with all other groups, including their own clans in order to prosper
- Networking both in their personal and business dealings secures favours to pursue their own cultural groups' interests
- Chinese place loyalty to the family above the organization
- Clans encourage their children's educational pursuits, often with financial incentives, as knowledge is considered the key to power and authority
- Face is important as it is consistent with preserving the image and social standing of their family members
- They have the most varied form of religious beliefs and believe in moderation rather than rigid adherence to any one conviction

(adapted from Abdullah and Pedersen 2003)

Malaysian Indian cultural values

- Tamil Indians in Malaysia are noted for their strong work ethic and ability to think and adapt quickly
- They are strong believers in traditions and the past with a comprehensive system of duties, morals and religious observance
- Fate plays a dominant role and time controls man, not the other way around
- Hindus worship many gods and they manifest their belief by going to temple and using visible adornments on their bodies
- Indians are more vocal and articulate in demanding justice and rights for suppressed members of society when compared with the other ethnic groups
- They are more direct and confrontational in the workplace with an assertive approach and take a no-nonsense approach in the way they discipline subordinates
- Hindus in particular revere art, music and dance as expressions of spiritual experience and business is not only a livelihood, it is a service to man and God
- Leaders are treated with respect as is the teacher, whose actions are not questioned and whose authority is unchallenged
- Face is given to those who are higher in the social hierarchy
- The family unit is the most important social unit
- Humility and modesty are the noblest virtues for Hindu Indians

(adapted from Abdullah and Pedersen 2003)

Common cultural characteristics:

From the above characteristics identified by Abdullah and Pedersen, the following common traits are identified between all three groups:

1. **Importance of Harmony** - Harmonious relationships must be maintained, children do not challenge their parents, students do not argue with their teachers and subordinates obey their superiors
2. **Face** - Indirect communication is used as a face-saving device
3. **Hierarchy** - Hierarchical relationships recognize the significance of status which influences communication in every aspect of life

4. **Collectivism** - The rights of the individual have different interpretations in Malaysia as this group-oriented culture believes that rights go hand in hand with duties and responsibilities to one's family, community and society at large

5. **Group Harmony** - Being too expressive of one's views can make it difficult to work in a group as the harmony of the group is crucial

6. **Status** - Hierarchical relationships in schools can create problems as learners tend to be passive, thereby stifling creativity and independence of mind

7. **Language** - The language used (whether Malay, Mandarin, Tamil or English) determines the level at which an issue is discussed and code-switching is often used in discourse between the multicultural groups (cf. Chapter 5)

Differentiating cultural characteristics:

The cultural group values which differentiate the groups are

1. Religion impacts strongly on all aspects of Malay life to the extent that it dictates day to day living and business practices. The Malaysian Chinese are more likely to adapt their religion to their behaviour and needs, with religion playing a supportive role. Hindus worship many gods and there is a guardian deity for every aspect of life.

2. Muslims share a faith which transcends all other loyalties – family, tribal and national. The family unit is the most important factor in the life of both the Chinese and Indians.

3. Policy and decision-making are influenced strongly by Malay cultural and Islamic factors and showing a preference for western culture over local indigenous symbols of identity can alienate Malays amongst their own cultural group. The Chinese are considered to have a more 'modern' and 'westernized' approach to work and business. The Indians believe that good *karma*, combined with their fear of god, preordain actions and consequences.

4. The Malays treat fatalism as being unchangeable and final. The Chinese believe their fate is negotiable if they make the appropriate sacrifices to the gods. The Hindu Indians believe their destiny stems from a person's thoughts and actions and his future existence is determined by his present actions.

5. The Chinese have a basic belief that people are inherently motivated by self-interest and avoidance of social chaos depends on external sanctions and getting along with one's associates. The Hindu Indians form groups or cliques in the workplace to enhance their feeling of belonging and consider strength is gained through unity. The Malays consider working together without friction, thus ensuring good relationships in the group, as more important than focusing on completing a task.

The Malays, Chinese, Indians and other cultural groups have been able to work together in a careful balance of power, which Shamsul Amri (1998) termed as a form of "stable tension" (p225). While this balance of power has given Malaysia the distinctive appearance of a harmonious multicultural society, on the surface, it needs careful attention for continued stability. The creation of a *bangsa Malaysia*[8] remains a national challenge amongst Malaysians as political groups have focused on communally sensitive issues and tended to be aligned with one or other ethnic group. As a result, many non-political issues such as religion and language, which are considered so controversial that they are forbidden by law unlike in other countries, are politically sensitive in Malaysia. The four topics which have been forbidden by the Sedition Act (1960) include: Special Malay rights (preferential treatment policies), language issues, the sultanate system and non-Malay citizenship. These have been labeled as 'sensitive' and should not be openly discussed. They were enforced by the government in the interest of security and public order. A person "deemed to be a threat to security can be detained without trial" according to the Sedition Act (Shuid & Fauzi 2001 p53). Regardless of ethnic groups, Malaysians recognize that they need to be sensitive to the differences at many levels – religious, cultural, dress and food observances. This tacit understanding of common grounds increases their sense of belonging to a larger national group and enhances their relations with others.

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[8] *Bangsa Malaysia* translates as Malaysian race, nationality or descent. The implication being to emphasize 'one' nationality.

3.3 Conclusion

As can be seen from the above, culture is hugely complex in how it influences our thought patterns, behaviours, expectations, and in how we communicate with each other and interpret each other's cultural patterns.

From examining culture in Malaysia, it has become evident that there are three definite cultural groups that wish to preserve their cultural identities and that they take active steps to ensure that this takes place. This can be seen, for example in their fervent pursuit of an education system which allows the *non-bumiputras* to cultivate their language, customs and culture, as was discussed in Chapter One.

It is clear that the government has a very challenging task in attempting to implement a system of multicultural education which provides a unifying force in society, and also takes into consideration the many cultural traits of the three main cultural groups in Malaysia, which are obviously of prime importance to the population of this country.

The Malaysian multicultural flavour has contributed to a unique blend of symbols, rituals, values and way of life, with each ethnic group possessing its own distinct culture, religion, language, food and dress. Malaysia's approach to managing this cultural diversity is to allow all the ethnic groups to preserve their traditions. As discussed in section 3.2 there are common shared values to be recognized in Malaysian cultures which have been examined by researchers, namely:

- Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2002) who have examined 'group harmony' which is a core value within Malaysian society.
- Hofstede (2003) has studied the 'collectivist society' and the significance of the group relates directly to these Malaysian cultural groups
- Hall (1990) has researched communication both 'explicit' and 'implicit', which relates to the emphasis Malaysian's place on respect for each other, along with an 'implicit' understanding of the importance of not bringing shame

- Bullivant's (1989) framework of the 'three basic environments': geographical, social and metaphysical are all reflected and emphasized amongst Malaysian's common core values
- Kluckhohn's (1951) analysis of culture as a patterned way of thinking, acquired and transmitted by symbols, includes a 'system of values' as a core concern for all groups, reflecting the Malaysian value system

From a collectivist background, Malaysians regardless of ethnicity are similar in their core values of respect for elders, harmony, relationships, religion and shame. They are more group-oriented and 'face-saving', whereby a language of relationships and trust is assumed by virtue of membership of the group.

Chapter 4 will examine in detail the educational policies which the Malaysian government has put in place to try and unify a country with such diverse cultural groupings. In considering the cultural elements discussed in Chapter 3, it is crucial to ask if the Malaysian government is taking the correct course of action and if they are or should be focusing on the cultural *similarities* of these groups in establishing a multicultural system of education, rather than enforcing a *bangsa Malaysia* policy, which appears to have led to segregation of the groups in the past. Such educational policies as the creating of the vernacular schools in order to maintain language and the cultural group's traditions and customs, have placed more emphasis on the 'differences' of the groups rather than the 'similarities'. It diminishes the opportunities for *all* Malaysians to learn the languages of Malaysia, by isolating cultural groups into Chinese, Indian or Malay schools. The attitudes of these groups to the policies which have been implemented and the reaction to the way in which the government has or has not recognized the cultural groups' needs, will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Multicultural Education

4.0 Introduction

The aim of this Chapter is to provide a clear understanding of the aims and goals of multicultural education by examining the theories and concepts given by multiculturalists such as Banks & Banks (1993, 2004), Baptiste (1979), Bennett (1990), Garcia (1982), Gay (1988, 1991, 1992), Grant (1977), Nieto (1992) and Sleeter and Grant (1988), with a view to providing a framework for examining the models which are in place in the Malaysian system.

As Malaysia is internationalizing its tertiary level institutions – and hence attempting to attract more international students - an outline will be given of further developments taking place within the private and public institutions in adapting the models in place to suit an even more culturally diverse group of students.

4.1 What is Multicultural Education?

Multicultural education is a concept which is quite loose in that there is no 'one model' which suits all of the individual countries' education systems. Definitions of multicultural education[9] vary, as some definitions focus on the cultural characteristics of diverse groups, while others emphasize social problems, political power, and the reallocation of economic resources. Other definitions limit multicultural education to characteristics of local schools, and still others provide directions for school reform in all settings regardless of their characteristics. The goals of these diverse types of multicultural education, range from bringing more information about various groups to textbooks, to combating racism, to restructuring the entire school enterprise and reforming society to make school more culturally unbiased, accepting and balanced. Each country has its own unique history, its own ethnic make-up, its own languages of instruction, as well as diverse religious groupings, all of which impact on the education system of the nation

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[9] Multiculturalists such as Baptiste (1979), Bennett (1990), Grant (1977), Nieto (1992), Parekh (1986), and Frazier (1977) define multicultural education in many ways as stated further on in Section 4.1.

and on the policies that are put in place. Therefore, when planning a multicultural education programme, several different models may be referred to in order to suit the variety of demands of any one nation.

Multicultural education is constantly evolving and diversifying, from the earliest forms of multicultural education and the social conditions which gave rise to them, up until the present day. Banks (1981), one of the pioneers of multicultural education, examines schools as social systems and grounds his conceptualization of multicultural education in the idea of educational equity. Advocates of multicultural education believe that the opportunity to have an education is the basic right of every human being. This idea originated in the civil rights movement in the 1960s in the United States and has since grown in strength. It is concerned with recognizing the diversity of learner groups, so that each culture may be acknowledged with its own social group's habits and traditions, languages and customs, religions and beliefs:

> Multicultural education is an idea, an educational reform movement, and a process whose major goal is to change the structure of educational institutions so that male and female students, exceptional students, and students who are members of diverse racial, ethnic, language and cultural groups will have an equal chance to achieve academically in school. It is necessary to conceptualize the school as a social system in order to implement multicultural education successfully. Each major variable in the school, such as its culture, its power relationships, the curriculum and materials, and the attitudes and beliefs of the staff, must be changed in ways that will allow the school to promote educational equality for students from diverse groups.

> (Banks & Mc Gee Banks 2004 p1)

One key factor to emphasize in multicultural education, according to Banks & Banks (2004) on the other hand, is the fact that "multicultural education involves changes in the total school or educational environment; it is not limited to curricular changes" (p4). Banks & Banks (1993) also state that "this is an ongoing process that requires long term investments of time and effort as well as carefully planned and monitored actions" (p2). The school or institution is seen therefore, as a social system (or 'action system' the term

used by Parsons (1966) and mentioned earlier in Chapter 3:3.1) which is made up of a multitude of variables and factors, such as school culture and hidden curriculum, learning styles of the school, languages and dialects of the school, community participation and input, counselling programmes, assessment and testing procedures, instructional materials, formalized curriculum and courses of study, teaching styles and strategies, school staff attitudes, perceptions, beliefs and actions, and finally school policies and politics. In order to sustain an effective multicultural school environment, Banks & Banks (2004) believe that changes must continuously take place in each of these areas. This is the broader school reform, which involves increasing educational equity for a range of cultural, ethnic and economic groups.

Other multiculturalists define multicultural education by emphasizing various elements for example:

- Baptiste (1979) defines multicultural education as institutionalizing a philosophy of cultural pluralism within the educational system that is grounded in principles of equality, mutual respect, acceptance and understanding, and moral commitment to social justice. This corresponds to Malaysia's National Education Policy, which is further developed in section 4.2 of this Chapter.

- Bennett (1990) defines multicultural education as an approach to teaching and learning based upon democratic values that foster cultural pluralism in its most comprehensive form as a commitment to achieving educational equality, developing curricula that build understanding about ethnic groups, and combating oppressive practices. Malaysia's *Rukun Negara* or national ideology was devised with the intention of promoting democratic values to foster cultural pluralism.

- Grant (1977b) states that multicultural education is a humanistic concept based on the strength of diversity, human rights, social justice, and alternative lifestyles for all people, it is necessary for a quality education and includes all efforts to make the full range of cultures available to students; it views a culturally pluralistic society as a positive force and welcomes differences as vehicles for better

understanding the global society. This is not necessarily reflected by Malaysian students as discussed throughout section 4.2.1 of this Chapter.

- Grant (1977a) also sees multicultural education as involving the establishment of policies and practices that show respect for cultural diversity through educational philosophy, staffing composition and hierarchy, instructional materials, curricula and evaluation procedures. One area which is not representative of Malaysia's cultural diversity is the staffing of public universities, as seen by comments from senior academics in section 4.2.

- Nieto (1992) understands multicultural education as being a comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students that challenges all forms of discrimination, permeates instruction and interpersonal relations in the classroom, and advances the democratic principles of social justice. This would contrast with the Malaysian students and academics views of a 'fair' public university system as further developed in sections 4.2.1.2 and 4.2.2.3.

- Parekh (1986) defines multicultural education as an education free of inherited biases, with freedom to explore other perspectives and cultures, inspired by the goal of making children sensitive to the plurality of the ways of life, different modes of analyzing experiences and ideas, and ways of looking at history found throughout the world. Malaysia's separated school system and divisive public and private third level system may contradict this cultural sensitivity.

These various definitions have several points in common, as it is generally agreed that multicultural education programmes should include ethnic identities, cultural pluralism, correcting the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities, and other socio-political problems which stem from long histories of oppression. Multicultural education is seen as a philosophy, a methodology for educational reform and a set of specific content areas within instructional programmes. The action taken in schools to achieve

multicultural education should reflect the race, language, ethnicity, habits and customs of all cultural groups.

In order to promote a comprehensive understanding of cultural groups, Gay (1994) states that a variety of methods and a composite of various areas of scholarship, including the humanities, arts, social sciences, history, politics and science is necessary. Gay says that this "requires modifications in an educational system that has been governed with a mono-cultural orientation based on Eurocentric, middle class cultural norms" (ibid. p4). It is therefore essential to understand the concept of the social group, as discussed in Chapter 3:3.1, which carries a culture which must be catered for in this multicultural education programme. A diversity of race, culture, ethnicity, social class, religion, language and national origin are fundamental features of interpersonal interactions and community structures. However, in the more formal aspects of society, such as institutional policies, practices and power allocation, Anglo-centric and middleclass cultural values predominate. Most school structures and procedures are grounded in mainstream cultural conceptions of law, order, reason and rationality. Multicultural education as stated by Gay is "needed to help reverse these trends and attitudes by teaching youth about culturally different groups and by providing opportunities for individuals from diverse backgrounds to learn, live and work together" (ibid. p5). Multiculturalists value diversity, and agree that the specific content, structures, and practices employed in achieving multicultural education will differ depending on the setting. Gay (ibid) states that educators will find it useful to develop their own definitions of multicultural education within the general boundaries to fit their specific needs, rather than imposing a universal structure to implement multicultural education.

Gay (ibid.) concludes that when the schooling process operates on one cultural model, to the exclusion of all others, cultural socialization becomes problematic in education, "as attempts to comply may lead to cultural adaptation, marginality, alienation and isolation" (p8). The culture of the school, and the ethnic groups making up the student population, are major issues in planning educational programmes and practices.

Sleeter and Grant (1988) and Grant & Sleeter (1993) reviewed published literature on how multicultural education is conceptualized and found four common approaches, to which they themselves added a fifth:

1. The teaching of culturally different students in order to fit into mainstream society

2. A human relations approach that emphasizes diverse peoples living together harmoniously

3. The single group studies approach, which concentrates on developing awareness, respect and acceptance of one group at a time

4. A focus on reducing prejudice, providing equal opportunities and social justice for all groups and combating the effects of inequitable power distribution on ethnic or cultural groups

5. Education that is multicultural and social re-constructionist and teaches students to become analytical, critical thinkers and social reformers committed to redistribution of power and other resources among diverse groups.

(Grant & Sleeter 1993 and Sleeter & Grant 1988)

The above concepts of multicultural education are considered in the next section, in relation to the policies and practices of Malaysia.

4.2 The concepts of multicultural education in Malaysia

Many of Malaysia's problems relate to the nature of relations between the social, ethnic, linguistic and religious groups, which have been formed under social, cultural and political circumstances throughout the nation's history. Such important issues as democracy, human rights, citizenship education, nationalism, social conflict, identity problems and ethnicity, power relations and diverse local responses, form part of the complexities of nations made up of various groups and cultures. Diverse groups and cultures that would like to co-exist peacefully have to deal with those complex issues. As part of a regional workshop on multicultural education organized in 2003 by the Department of Anthropology at the University of Indonesia, it was cited in the introductory speech that: "Multiculturalism does not simply mean numerical plurality of different cultures, but rather a society that creates, guarantees, and encourages spaces,

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within which different communities are able to grow at their own pace" (University of Indonesia 2003). It was also stated that the creation of a multicultural environment can only be achieved through a combination of practices in recruitment, faculty and staff development, pedagogy, curriculum development as well as the development and maintenance of the necessary structure, organizational values, and culture – mirroring the ideas of Banks & Mc Gee Banks (2004), as quoted earlier.

Malaysia's National Education Policy is deeply rooted in its National Philosophy of Education (1996) which was developed by the Ministry of Education (Act 550). The Education Acts to date have all been based on this philosophy, which reflects the definition of multicultural education as described by Baptiste (1979) in section 4.1. The Malaysian National Philosophy of Education is expressed as follows:

> Education in Malaysia is an ongoing effort towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonious, based on a firm belief in and devotion to God. Such an effort is designed to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable and competent, who possess high moral standards, and who are responsible and capable of achieving a high level of personal well-being able to contribute to the betterment of the family, the society and the nation at large.
>
> (Education Development Plan 2001-2010 p4)

The Education Development Plan 2001-2010 explains how this is to be carried:

> [...] the above policy is to be executed through a national system of education which provides for the national language to be the main medium of instruction, a national curriculum and common examinations; the education provided being varied and comprehensive in scope and which will satisfy the needs of the nation as well as promote national unity through cultural, social, economic, and political development in accordance with the principles of *Rukun Negara*[10].
>
> (ibid.)

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[10] The *Rukun Negara* or national ideology was introduced on 31 August 1970 by the National Legislative Council with the aim of fostering national integration in the wake of the 13 May 1969 communal unrest. It was devised with the intention of building a common Malaysian identity or *Bangsa Malaysia*. (Source: Shuid & Fauzi 2001 p80)

These government aims relate to what Gay (1994) calls "the psychological underpinnings of multicultural education with an emphasis on developing greater self-understanding, positive self-concepts and pride in one's ethnic identity" (p12) and she states that "the personal development of students contributes to their general social, academic and intellectual success" (ibid.). These are the *aims* of the Malaysian multicultural education system, the following will examine how these have been put into practice.

Before considering the primary focus of this thesis, that of *tertiary* level multicultural education, it is important to look at the focus of the general Malaysian education system, which aims to emphasize 'citizenship education' and encourage a *bangsa Malaysia* with the aim of achieving national unity. Rahim and Rashid state that:

> [...] citizenship behavior is defined in terms of the role, responsibility and commitment of the individual towards the 'Malaysian' way of life which places great emphasis on unity, harmony, tolerance, cooperation, moderation, public spiritedness, integrity and so on.

> (Rahim and Rashid 2002 p48)

After decolonization, nation-building was a critical task for the new political leadership and this involved not only establishing their economic viability but constructing a strong and viable state through the incorporation of these diverse groups. This process of nation building is considered by Kamrava (1993) as aiming to encourage support for the government and for the political regime as: "through the educational system, third world governments try to socialize children and students into the official political culture and to familiarize them with political norms that are supportive of the regime" (pp157-8). Bernstein (1971) maintains that every culturally pluralist society tries to obtain access to a form of education that best suits their needs, and that the uneven distribution of knowledge is seen as one of the ways by which some individuals and sub-groups within a society maintain their power and control over others. Bernstein states that: "how a society selects, classifies, distributes, transmits and evaluates the educational knowledge it considers to be public, reflects both the distribution of power and the principles of social control" (p47). In Malaysia, this was voiced by parents who are concerned about the

'overly Islamic' nature of some government schools. Dr Shamsul the Director of the Institute of the Malay World and Civilisation at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia says that this will "create an environment where non-Malays feel that they are being assimilated, making parents averse to national schools" (Chow K. H. *New Straits Times* 2005).

Another society concerned with citizenship education is South Africa, mirroring an example of Bernstein's (1971) uneven distribution of knowledge within its education system, which from the period 1910-1994 had maintained hegemony of whites over blacks through its language policy, recognising English and Dutch as the sole official languages with no mention of indigenous African languages. However, the new multilingual policy in the National Education Policy Act (Act 27 of 1996), promotes the use of more than one official language as the language of instruction, and the offering of additional languages as subjects. The former Minister of Education (statement of 14 July 1997) explained that: "being multilingual should be a defining characteristic of being South African" and "that it presupposes a more fluid relationship between languages and culture than is generally understood in the Euro centric model" and "accepts a priori that there is no contradiction in a multicultural society between a core of common cultural traits, beliefs, practices etc., and particular sectional or communal cultures"(Chick 2000). In practice, according to Chick (ibid.), having carried out fieldwork in six schools in the Durban metropolitan area in 1999, it was found that overwhelmingly students were having to negotiate their identities within an English-only discourse. This, according to Auerbach (1993), contends that the English-only discourse is an example of covert ideological control since though "it has come to be justified in pedagogical terms... it rests on unexamined assumptions, originates in the political agenda of the dominant group, and serves to reinforce existing relations of power" (p12).

According to Inglis (1995) the multiculturalist approach to policies accepts the potential and legitimacy of ethnic minorities' cultural and social distinctiveness. The multiculturalism model envisages that individuals and groups can be fully incorporated into the society without either losing their distinctiveness or being denied full

participation. This process of full participation, Inglis (ibid.) says, is the key to the absence of ethnic conflict. In order to achieve this goal of full participation, she says that:

> The state plays an active role of sponsoring institutional change which may extend from the restructuring of mainstream institutions to the support of parallel institutions. These parallel institutions are integral to the society in contrast to the marginalized status of the parallel institutional structures associated with differentialist model.
>
> (Inglis 1995 p17)

However, whilst national unity and nation building are increasingly emphasized by the Malaysian government, each individual race is in fact more keen to protect its own interests, rather than focus on the national interest. As cited in the New Straits Times on August 22nd, 2004, the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi: "today gently reminded the various race-based Barisan-Nasional component parties to stick to the 'rules of the game' – giving priority to national rather than communal interests" (p1).

The government primary and secondary level schools have the explicit aim of creating and inculcating a Malaysian identity amongst all students. The following elements are in place in order to promote national identity:

- Firstly, such school based routines as raising the national flag, singing the national anthem and reciting the national oath are considered part of instilling a national identity.

This type of 'nationalization' of education is considered part of the Malaysianization process and, according to Birch:

> In addition to their language and educational policies, national governments also pursue a variety of tactics designed to minimize the political effects of ethnic and religious cleavages within society and thus to strengthen the authority of the government. One obvious initiative is the creation of symbols and national identity. Flags, anthems and uniforms all serve this purpose.
>
> (Birch 1993 p21)

- Secondly, there is a national curriculum for all, with varying degrees of reference to the ethno-cultural diversity.

However, present day Muslim scholars attempt to 'Islamize' the curriculum, as they consider secular religion a barrier between the traditional interpretation and differentiation of worldly and religious knowledge (Bakri 2003).

- Thirdly, the language policy states that *Bahasa Melayu* is the main medium of instruction in all national primary and secondary schools, with English for maths, science and technology subjects.

As part of the Ministry's Education Development Plan 2001-2010 to encourage more students to attend government schools the aim is "to foster national unity by introducing Mandarin and Tamil in National Schools" (pp1-2). Koh Soo Ling, an Associate Professor of the Universiti Teknologi Mara, Shah Alam stated that "[…] the teaching of additional languages will, besides promoting economic benefits, certainly enlarge young people's cultural heritage and educate them on intercultural dialogue along with the teaching of Chinese and Tamil as elective subjects […]" (*New Sunday Times* 29 May 2005 p22). This would certainly relate to Parekh's definition of constructing a multicultural national identity through:

> An education free of biases, with freedom to explore other perspectives and cultures, inspired by the goal of making children sensitive to the plurality of the ways of life, different modes of analyzing experiences and ideas, and ways of looking at history found throughout the world.
>
> (Parekh 1986 pp26-27)

Amongst the concerns of parents wishing to educate their children in their 'own' languages is the following: "If you don't know the language, you will not know the culture. Many parents who send their children to national-type schools are concerned for the survival of their community's culture" (Chow *New Straits Times* 2005 p4), according to Prof. Datuk Dr Shamsul, the Director of the Institute of the Malay World and

Civilisation at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. The national-type schools are considered mono-ethnic in nature, as they are predominantly Malay, Chinese or Indian but with a national curriculum and a common syllabus. Here there are conflicting concerns as the government tries to promote unity by introducing Tamil and Mandarin into the schools, as elective subjects for *all* cultures to learn. However, it seems that those who are most concerned with learning these languages are the Chinese and Indians themselves, as indicated by the mono-ethnic schools which they attend in growing numbers, in order to promote their 'own' cultural interests. One Chinese parent stated: "I think the Chinese have come to realize that Mandarin, extra Chinese language class, is important" (Interviewee C.P. - 11). There are exceptions however - Deputy Minister Datuk M. Kayveas (an Indian), for example, has enrolled his daughters in a Chinese school "I want my daughters to learn Mandarin. They speak English at home. They have a tutor for them to learn Tamil" (Chow *New Straits Times* 2005). His children are however a minority in this school, but Kayveas has a preference for the vernacular curriculum of the Chinese schools, 'as do 90% of Chinese parents' according to the *New Straits Times* (ibid.). Another Indian parent interviewed, whose wife is Chinese, decided that for their daughter:

> There was no way we were going to put her into the national school system. So we enrolled her from Primary One in a Chinese school. That decision was made on two very simple points: one is the language, because we wanted her to have Mandarin as a language and [secondly] the Chinese school system still works. It is a much [more] disciplined system – harsh, but I think harsh works…very, very disciplined. They have a shortage of teachers as well, but the teachers that do go in are still motivated. […]. Looking at her and looking at her cousins who are in the national school system, [we have] not a day of regret at all.
>
> (Interviewee I.P. - 13)

There are some strong opinions concerning the 'type' of education that parents want for their children, with culture as one important factor, language in particular, as well as the belief in a 'good education system or approach'.

A comparison is useful here again with the South African model of multilingualism and its aim to create a common identity, the South African National Education Policy Act's (Act 27 - 1996) new multilingual policy requires the promotion of multilingualism, through which, according to Professor Chick (2000) at the University of Natal, South Africa "gives respect for the cultural assumptions and values implicit in them" (p31). Fieldwork carried out by Chick and a team of researchers in 1999, on six newly integrated schools in post-apartheid South Africa presented evidence that there was poor evidence of multilingualism in these desegregated schools. It was found that in former white and Indian schools, participants were in fact expected to communicate in English by the school authorities. Zulu, which is spoken by 98% of the seven million Africans in Kwa Zulu-Natal, was rejected except in the Zulu lessons. Various reasons were given for the use of English by the different school principals, including, "using English as a means of reconciling rival ethnic groups" and "they need English for economic advancement" and as "the appropriate choice in prestigious domains such as in the classroom" (Chick ibid.). Zulu, on the other hand, is represented as potentially divisive and appropriate for non-prestigious domains. This discourse therefore reinforces the notion of South Africa's national identity as exclusive, hegemonic and conflicted.

There are comparisons to be made between the South African situation and Malaysia with regards to the separation of students who attend schools for language and cultural purposes. Many of the *non-bumiputra* students feel that *Bahasa Melayu* is imposed as the medium of instruction with little or no promotion of their 'own' languages. Malaysia is introducing the choice of studying the vernacular languages in schools, but to date "the perennial shortage of qualified language teachers" (Chow *New Straits Times* 2005 p4), is a significant problem.

This problem is extending to third level as those students who wish to receive an education in Chinese are attending the Chinese university or applying to study in China, resulting in further segregation of future Malaysians who would not have exposure to Chinese language or culture at school.

Lessons could also be learnt from examining the British system which, despite its diversity of cultures, has continued to be governed by a 'Eurocentric curriculum' and has even called for 'a curriculum of recognition' which has included courses like Black, Irish, South Asian and women's studies according to Gundara (1996 pp27-28). Such courses have, however, been under-resourced and hence marginalized, "which have led to demands for Afro-centric or Islamo-centric knowledge to counteract Eurocentrism" (Gundara 2000 p72).

A further aspect impacting on the attitudes of third level students in Malaysia is the fact that Malay government schools are predominantly in the rural areas. Expectations for these students tend to be lowered, as the better students are given the opportunity to enter government academic schools, leaving the underachievers in the rural setting. There is segregation between the rural and urban Malays and this gap continues through to university level, where students remain in what are referred to as *kampung*[11] groups.

One Chinese academic working in the national university stated:

> But it is also to bear in mind that this is a public university and the students who come here from the rural area start forming their own *kampung*, they have their own collective societies and things like that.
>
> (Interviewee C.A. - 15)

The implication here is that the students will stay together in their 'own' groups and will not mix with other ethnic groups. The recently appointed Vice-Chancellor of Universiti Malaya also stated in a newspaper interview: "every weekend a lot of students *balik Kampung* (go back to their village). [...] Students should spend their time on campus build the camaraderie, mix around, understand each other [...]" (Surin *The Sun* 2006 pE1). There is general concern in the public universities in particular that students do not

---

[11] *Kampung* translates village, but has certain connotations when used in Malaysia. The phrase *balik kampung* refers to returning home to the village, and this is common for most people of rural origin who are living in the urban areas, whenever there is a feast-day or holiday. The reference is mainly to the Malays who make up the majority group from the rural areas. A *kampung* mentality has been referred to on many occasions in this thesis by those interviewed and refers to a closed, insular Malay mindset.

participate to the full in university life. Some urban students have reported their discomfort in the university environment to one academic who was interviewed:

> I do not like UKM - it is like a *kampung,* a village. People do not like me because I speak English and I talk about things very urban. The rural mentality is here. Most of the students are from the rural area.

> (Interviewee C.A. - 15)

Students from the rural areas find it hard to integrate with those from the bigger urban areas and remain attached to their rural communities even within the university campus. As this researcher experienced daily life on a public university campus first hand, it was evident that these groups remained separate and stayed with their own 'community' and returning home at weekends to their home towns and villages.

4.2.1 Challenges in the Malaysian Education System
4.2.1.1 Selection Procedures for Students

The Malaysian education system is centrally controlled, as the Ministry of Education makes all decisions regarding policies and planning, curriculum and teaching methodologies and does not allow for any intervention from teachers and parents (Bakri 2003). Parent involvement in the education of children has been researched and documented in various studies (Garguillo, Graves and Sluder 1997, Gestwicki 2000). This follows the recognition that children are integrally connected to their families which have a significant influence on their development. According to Berla and Henderson (1994), the more the relationship between families and school approaches a comprehensive, well-planned partnership, the higher the student achievement.

In relation to tertiary level education, the selection of students attending public universities is totally controlled by the Malaysian Ministry of Education. Therefore, the academic staff of the individual universities has no autonomy in the area of student selection or the academic level the student must attain in order to qualify for entry. There seems to be a "disconnect between the people who set the vision (the politicians), the

people who actually run the universities (the academics), and the people who implement the rules (the Ministry)" (Chandranayagam *Education Quarterly* Issue 35 2005b p4). It is ultimately the Malaysian government officials who determine the quality and race of the student group selected, as well as the 'quota' of *bumiputra* and *non-bumiputra* students in the various faculties.

One area of major contention is the entry requirements for public university, involving a matriculation system of one year duration, and STPM (*Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia)*, the Higher School Certificate, of two years duration. The latter, a Cambridge recognized qualification, is internationally acknowledged and can be used to enter local private universities. All students may apply for admission to the matriculation, which is run by the Ministry of Education. However, not all applicants for matriculation are admitted and the selection criteria are not publicly declared, which has led to speculation that any existing criteria within the Ministry may not be adhered to. A race-based quota is applied to the admission process, with 90% of the places being reserved for the *bumiputras,* and the other 10% for the *non-bumiputras.* In reality, there are very few *non-bumiputra* doing the matriculation (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malaysia#Education).

There have been numerous complaints from the general public concerning the quality of the one-year matriculation programme. These became very evident through newspaper articles and interviews carried out in the process of researching this thesis. It is considered to be an unfair selection system, due to the quality of the course and the period of study involved. Some statements from the public concern the merit system:

> [...] it is unfair that the same yardstick is being used for STPM students and those who sit the one-year matriculation course. The issue of equal weight is something the Higher Education Ministry should look into. The merit system will only be embraced when there is perception that it is just.

> (Pereira *Sunday Star* 2005 p14)

Interviewee 2 from one public university working in the Faculty of Education commented on the matriculation programme:

As lecturers, we have no control over who comes in. They [MoE] hold it tightly. We have no policy of our own. [...] they created matriculation which is so much easier. It is very poorly 'manned', according to my MA students, with people who are not qualified to teach. Most of them who go in are of 'one kind'. [...] what happens is a place is created to give them access to the university and push them into university. The others have no choice. They have to go through STPM.

(Interviewee I.A. - 2)

Six students in the medical faculty of a public university were also interviewed regarding the entry requirements and one Indian student amongst them stated:

STPM - which is two years - is a very high standard. Many of the students here did matriculation - only 17 students [out of a total of 202] come from STPM, the rest come from matriculation. It is a vast difference between those who get through matriculation and STPM.

(Interviewee I.S. - 16)

The numbers are significant and speak for themselves in showing the *bumiputra* as the majority group who are taking the matriculation and are being promoted, particularly in disciplines such as medicine.

Although there is an official form of meritocracy put in place by the Ministry of Education since 2003 - in practice it is not actively pursued. There is recognition by students and academic staff that a quota system of sorts still exists, in that students of 'one-race' are dominating certain disciplines, in order to increase *bumiputra* figures. They are accessing the universities through the matriculation programme. One Chinese academic in a public university acknowledged that although a meritocracy system has been introduced since 2003 there seemed to be little recognition of strict quotas across all disciplines:

[...] they say the quota system was abolished. To a certain extent I see more students, non-Malays in the Science Faculty and Engineering - more Chinese. I do see evidence of that. [...] but certain faculties I am sure they are limiting their numbers, because it came out in the newspaper of students not being able to do medicine - good students. So I think it has not extended to medicine and things like that [...]

(Interviewee C.A. - 15)

However, dissatisfaction in this area is not uniquely amongst the *non-bumiputras*, as was discussed at a political assembly of the United Malays National Organization in July 2005:

> [...] for more than a year now, Umno politicians in Johor and elsewhere have felt uneasy, confused, even angry over the national push for meritocracy especially in universities. They fear that the policy will marginalize the Malays, especially those from rural areas.
>
> (Tan *Sunday Star* 2005 p21)

As a developing nation, the government is concerned with educating the masses, in order to create a skillful, knowledge-based workforce. This involves giving opportunities to the *bumiputra* as they form the majority population. The government is aiming to reach a percentage of 30%-35% of all school graduates at tertiary level by the year 2010. At present, a figure of 9.95% for 2003 has been quoted by the Malaysian Educational Statistics at tertiary level education. However, as can be seen from the above quotation, there is a question concerning 'quality over quantity' – are under qualified students being allowed enter tertiary level in order to meet this goal?

The Executive Director of one of the private universities - Elizabeth Lee Fuh Yen – states: "we are shaping our students choices a lot more than in developed nations" (Teoh *The Sun* Education Focus 2005 p11). There is public acknowledgement that students often do not get their first choice at university, as it is decided for them by the Ministry of Education. One Chinese student said: "we got sent to this university. There are eight choices; usually we won't get our first choice" (Interviewee C.S. - 3). It is therefore very interesting to examine the cultural groups who dominate in particular disciplines, in determining where the emphasis lies and what groups are being promoted.

Table 4.1 Registered Professionals by Ethnic Group 1999

Profession	Bumiputra	Chinese	Indians	Others	Total
Accountants %	2,167 15.9%	10,520 77.0%	789 5.8%	185 1.3%	13,661 100.0%
Architects %	431 28.9%	1,036 69.3%	23 1.5%	4 0.3%	1,494 100.0%
Doctors %	4,460 36.7%	3,749 30.9%	3,448 28.4%	484 4.0%	12,141 100.0%
Dentists %	888 34.8%	1,074 42.1%	534 21.0%	54 2.1%	2,550% 100.0%
Engineers %	2,688 26.5%	6,806 67.1%	642 6.4%	4 0.0%	10,140 100.0%
Lawyers %	2,783 31.3%	3,640 41.0%	2,379 26.8%	77 0.9%	8,87% 100.0%
Surveyors %	1,495 47.8%	1,482 47.4%	94 3.0%	56 1.8%	3,127 100.0%
Veterinary Surgeons %	409 42.6%	258 26.8%	274 28.5%	20 2.1%	961 100.0%
Total %	15,321 28.9%	28,565 53.9%	8,183 15.5%	884 1.7%	52,953 100.0%

Source: Chapter 4: *Building a United and Equitable Society* (from Third Outline Perspective Plan, p104 Table 4-6)

It is obvious from Table 4.1 that numbers in certain professions such as the medical professions are more dominant in one particular group, which is an area where government are training *bumiputras* in significant numbers. The level of English amongst certain races may also affect graduates qualifying in certain professions. There is concern for the quality of the students in public institutions, with high numbers of graduates from these universities poorly rated by employers (Bakri 2003). The Higher Education Ministry special envoy also stated: "employers readily take students who graduate with a

foreign degree over our public university graduates. This is the reality we are dealing with. We have a quality credibility issue to deal with" (Gomez *The Star* Education 2005 p3). There are two obvious causes: firstly, because of the control that the Ministry has over the students selected, and secondly, due to the level of English language ability of these graduates. One academic stated "In the university, when they get in, a 'blind' eye is turned. You can see the quality in our undergraduates is very poor, very disappointing" (Interviewee I.A. - 2). There is the implication of 'standards' being allowed to lapse, in order to promote numbers of *bumiputras* in certain disciplines.

The disciplines selected often do not reflect the demands of industry as "there are about 21,000 unemployed graduates in Malaysia, many of whom had their fields of education selected as early as in Form Four, six years prior to graduation" (Sabariah *New Sunday Times* 2004 p1). Of the unemployed graduates "22.9 per cent were Bumiputra, 5.2 per cent Chinese, 0.7 per cent Indians and 0.7 per cent other races" (ibid. p11). Those who study in the areas of the social sciences and Islamic studies found it hardest to get employment. In educating the 'masses' there is a 'perception' of an educated workforce, but many are in disciplines where there is no demand for employment.

The public universities, made up of predominantly *bumiputras* are considered to be very traditional and hierarchical in their make up. One academic stated, that they are "guarding the false self" (Interviewee I.A. - 2) whenever they address a broader audience outside of their own institution. This might be considered as being part of the Malay cultural identity dilemma, in wanting to maintain their national language and cultural traditions, but for some Malay academics to the complete obliteration of the use of English as a medium of instruction and any form of internationalisation. One major issue associated with this dilemma is the medium of instruction - namely the use of English or *Bahasa Melayu* - which is a highly contentious issue and is examined in greater detail in Chapter 5.

4.2.1.2 Integration of the students in public universities

The traditional outlook associated with the public universities, and the *kampung* mentality (as discussed in section 4.2) amongst many of its students has been reinforced by the housing arrangements for students on these public campuses. Students from the one faculty used to be accommodated in the same residence. It soon became clear, however, that students attached to particular faculties are often of one race, as a result of which natural integration was certainly discouraged. An interview with the Vice-Chancellor of one public university revealed that, in order to promote integration between cultural groups, it has now become practice in that particular university to mix the students from different faculties in the one residence, so there is a more multicultural grouping. "We even put the students who stay in the halls of residence on a floor mixing them up. On the same floor there will be Chinese, Indians, Sabahans, Sarawakians [...]" (Interviewee M.A. - 12). This will at least, give some more opportunity for natural integration to take place.

Another Malay academic from a prominent public university, explained a practice in place for the students in her particular faculty, to allow for better integration "Formal groups have been assigned through the Dean's office [...] they try to get the gender to be equal and of course we've got race as well. Ideally it would be nice to have equal males to females and a mix of races" (Interviewee M.A. - 1). There is a conscious awareness of the polarization taking place amongst students - and certain local structures have been put in place to deal with the better integration of students in individual institutions. However, there have been no formal guidelines issued from the Ministry to the public universities in this regard.

This does not augur well for relations on public campuses. Student relations are important, as these years are formative concerning the future lifestyles and working relations of these young adults. The perception in Malaysia that government universities (and schools) are 'Malay-orientated', rather than 'national institutions' (i.e. representing *all* ethnic groups), is hugely problematic, and racial polarization is predominant

(Chandranayagam, *Education Quarterly* Issue No 35 2005b p4). A Chinese student in a public university stated, regarding her fellow Malay students:

> They stick to their own groups. [...] The Malays in [the] Universiti have a different background. In second level my best friends were Indians. Then when I got to Form 6 we found out there are different standards...ever since there is a slight rift. I thought I was a *bumiputra* then I realized I was not. We try to mix in the groups. They won't want to talk as they know we will talk English. We are tired.

> (Interviewee C.S. - 3)

Despite the will to mix amongst certain groups, it is apparently not necessarily reciprocated by other groups of students. It seems that as there is no official action to encourage integration of the students in the public universities, this can make it difficult for those students who do make an effort to integrate.

4.2.2.3 Treatment of *non-bumiputra* staff members

Student segregation is, however, not the only concern, as the academic staff is also affected by a form of segregation, with the *bumiputras* getting preference for positions of authority. There is dissatisfaction with poor recognition of academic status and promotional opportunities, as there appears to be a type of 'quota' system for the *bumiputras*. "Plenty of dedicated, thoughtful and multicultural academics [...] often appear stifled by the system, frustrated by bureaucracy and de-motivated by perceptions that their talents go un-recognized" (Chandranayagam, *Education Quarterly* Issue 35 2005b p8). The recent appointment of a new Vice-Chancellor for Universiti Melayu has acknowledged this lack of transparency in the promotion of academics:

> Whoever we appoint would be nominees of the faculty members. So, that's one [thing] we have already done. And then to ensure transparency, the DVC (Deputy Vice-Chancellor) is practically finalizing clear criteria for promotion to senior lecturers, to associate professors, to professors. And these will be publicized and it will be on the website, and the staff will know what it is that is needed to be promoted.

> (Surin *The Sun* Extra 2006 pE2)

This is a considerable change in policy for this public university and it remains to be seen how this will be effectuated.

As a result of poor promotional opportunities, there has been some movement of academic staff to private universities at home and abroad, as acknowledged by the government who initiated a campaign to bring back the professionals who have left Malaysia. It has to do with "the proper implementation of policies" (Ng Kee Seng *The Sun* 2005 p13) according to Datuk Chor Chee Heung, the former Deputy Home Minister and member of the MCA. He claims that thousand of professionals have studied and worked overseas, but are not willing to return because of the 'unequal' and bureaucratic hurdles created by implementers of government policies. This was further commented on by the following academics:

> Who is promoted – getting certain posts – they are not always the best. The educated Indians - they see it - there is no unity, it's getting worse. [...] It's a strong hierarchical structure here – nobody dares to express anything.
>
> (Interviewee F.A. - 9)

Another Indian academic in a public university who had studied abroad stated:

> Sometimes it's not good as you are taught to think critically, look at things differently. Then you find more faults. My own colleagues don't like I am so out-spoken. They try to put you in your place where you cannot speak.
>
> (Interviewee I.A. - 2)

She also stated that:

> The level of qualification – all are put together in the same boat!! Those with no PhD's or no MA's, maybe have an inferiority complex. Experience of different systems is essential. Here they are using titles all the time!
>
> (Interviewee I.A. - 2)

It is this hierarchical positioning of the academic structure which also keeps the majority silent concerning their ideas and opinions on certain issues. Despite having studied

elsewhere and possibly having a vast amount of overseas knowledge and contacts, this is not always well received on returning home to Malaysia. So, whereas on the surface there is obvious tolerance of educational policies, the practice and the feelings of the different ethnic groups are sometimes quite different.

The Prime Minister acknowledged at the Malaysian Education Summit 2004, that the current low level of racial integration and understanding is of great concern, as not only are schools becoming mono-racial, but even within multi-racial universities racial cliques are practically the norm. "In local universities, lecturers have had to make conscious efforts to ensure that students do not gravitate towards their own kind when they are, for example, asked to work in groups" (Uda Nagu *New Sunday Times* 2004 p3). This is a trend which the Malaysian government does not wish to encourage; however, unless definite policies are put into place, there will be no unanimous change in procedures.

As can be seen from the above-mentioned practices at third level, intercultural solidarity in Malaysia's diverse society is very difficult to achieve. The present generation of Malaysians has grown up in a relatively stable society, which has become increasingly urbanized, industrialized, modernized and prosperous. They have had access to a broader education system. They are more integrated into the 'idea' of a multi-ethnic Malaysia, yet they are highly conscious of their ethnicity. Whilst being more integrated in some ways, they are Islamized in others and are, as a result, a more polarized generation. Those in higher education, living in more cosmopolitan settings, engage more in communication across races and press more for democratization and civil liberties. However, control is kept of any public debate on these issues due to the Sedition Act (1970). As a result, it is the political parties who fight their own communal concerns, but do not necessarily address the concerns of the nation. On the surface, a false impression of contentment with equal opportunities may be given, due to the prohibition of open debate on certain issues and it is this inequality of opportunities which is a deep grievance particularly in the area of education.

For the *non-bumiputra* students with limited access to public third level education, the private universities offer some options to those who qualify and are in an economic position to apply. Table 4.2 shows the percentage of *non-bumiputra* attending higher level private institutions in 1999. There is a stark contrast between the figure of 20.5% *bumiputra* and 79.5% *non-bumiputra* in private institutions as public institutions are heavily subsidized for the *bumiputra* and as already discussed earlier in this section, entry requirements are aimed at majority bumiputra students attending these institutions. However, those *non-bumiputra* in private institutions may have better opportunities, as the medium of instruction is English and many disciplines offer twinning programmes[12] with universities abroad, offering an international experience and the opportunity of language immersion for one or two academic years.

Table 4.2 Enrolment in Private Institutions of Higher Learning 1999 (OPP3)

Level of Education	Bumiputra	%	Non-Bumiputra	%	Total	%
Degree	6,345	20.5	24,595	79.5	30,940	100.0
Diploma	44,795	40.5	65,933	59.5	10,728	100.0
Total	51,140	36.1	90,528	63.9	141,668	100.0

Source: Third Outline Perspective Plan Table 4.7 p107

As Table 4.2 indicates, the number of *non-bumiputra* at degree level is double that of the *bumiputras* and also quite significant for those at diploma level. This is predominantly due to the public universities mainly consisting of *bumiputra* students and heavily subsidised by the government.

The next section examines the benefits to students who receive a more 'international' experience and looks at how Malaysia is actively recruiting international students to their

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[12] Twinning programmes have been offered in Malaysia through the private universities. This originally entailed the first two years at the home university and the final two years in the foreign university, with the end result of a foreign degree. This has since been adapted from 2+2 to 3+1 and more recently 3+0. The first digit denoting the number of years of study in the local private colleges and the second digit denotes the remaining number of years of study overseas. The 3+0 implies the students will study in Malaysia, but acquire a foreign degree (Source: Education Development Plan 2001-2010).

local private and public campuses. It will examine how they are preparing for this diverse group, and whether there are any policies in place to accommodate international students with even more diverse cultural concerns.

4.3 The Internationalisation of Malaysian Education

As Malaysia seeks to develop into a regional centre of educational excellence, the private institutions, in particular, are being encouraged to attract foreign students as part of the Outline Perspective Plan 3 (OPP3), through upgrading existing facilities and developing their campuses. There are dual benefits to internationalisation for both the host country and the international students, as Malaysia has recently discovered. Students from other countries make substantial financial contributions to the universities, as well as being consumers in the local economy. In the long-term, as more emphasis is placed on research, foreign students may also bring added value to the educational enterprise.

Malaysia has a history of involvement with international education, in that many Malaysians have studied overseas. Malaysia's own education system has also been strongly influenced by the British education system, due to its colonial history. Malaysian students went abroad to study under different circumstances - including scholarship opportunities, awarded primarily to the *bumiputras* as part of the government's preferential treatment policy. In the case of the *non-bumiputras* who were unable to access places in public universities at home, study abroad was an option for some. Rizvi states:

> Almost half of Malaysia's tertiary students attend a Western university abroad where they are exposed in a sustained way to cultural ideas that often conflict with 'the Asian values' promoted by the Malaysian Prime Minister Dr Mahathir. According to Marshallsay, more than sixty thousand Malaysian tertiary students are currently studying abroad. True some of these students go overseas because of the limited number of places available at home, but a larger proportion has a strong preference for an international education.
>
> (Rizvi 2000 p206)

Rizvi says that international education reshapes student identities, their cultural tastes and professional aspirations. For the present generation of Malaysians, the reasons why students are eager to study on an international campus have altered:

> [...] the new diaspora of transnational and transcultural students move overseas temporarily, chasing economic, social, educational and cultural opportunities. This new diaspora represents privileged elites for whom an international education plays a pivotal role in their identity formation.
>
> (ibid. p223)

These students return to their home countries with formative international experiences, and are able to look at the world as dynamic and multicultural. They have experienced multiple cultural identities, and redefined their own cultural identity.

In the year 2000, a research project entitled 'Marketing Education to Asia', which was funded by the Australian Research Council, took place over a period of nine months and consisted of 26 Malaysian students enrolled at three Universities in Brisbane, Australia, who were coming to the end of their tertiary level studies. This study identified the following reasons why students chose an international education:

1. to obtain a well recognized qualification in order to secure a good job (varied answers as to where)
2. the status attached to an overseas qualification by Malaysian employers played a major part
3. some followed a family tradition (never considered studying in Malaysia)
4. the lack of access to Malaysia's local universities (for the non-Malays)
5. improving the level of English (could not imagine studying medicine through Malay)
6. exposure to different cultures, to different ideas and attitudes and to different ways of learning and working

(Rizvi 2000 pp213-217)

Fourteen of the students interviewed were male, twelve female; fifteen were Malaysian of Chinese background; the remaining eleven were *bumiputra* on government scholarships. One of the Muslim students, a fifth year medical student on a government scholarship, stated that "the government is not confident about the quality of education at its own local universities, and they would like their students to have exposure to foreign things" (Rizvi 2000 p214). The Higher Education Ministry special envoy Datuk Seri Effendi Norwawi reinforces this statement by stating in a recent article: "employers readily take students who graduate with a foreign degree over our public university graduates[13]" (Gomez *The Star* Education 2005 p3).

During the 1980s the government sponsored thousands of academics and students to go overseas in any one semester, as was stated by an academic interviewed in UiTM, the University for the Bumiputra:

> In 1988, I was a freshman in the U.S.A. We were sponsored by the Ministry of Education by the thousand at that time. We were then offered undergraduate and Masters programmes, so a six to seven year maximum: four years undergraduate and two years masters.
>
> (Interviewee M.A. - 14)

Now the government is reducing the numbers sponsored, including academics: "there are too many in the system and they all would like to go overseas. Maybe out of a hundred, probably about ten get to go overseas, so ninety stay in the country" (ibid.).

The expansion of private education in Malaysia is therefore significant:

- Firstly by reducing government costs from continuing to subsidize a public education system.

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[13] This article was written in one of the English-language national newspapers and appeared to be aimed at impacting on the urban, middle classes who would speak English more proficiently, rather than the rural community whose level of English is poorer and therefore, would not be exposed to reading English language newspapers. There may be an underlying attempt to encourage students to apply for the private universities, and reduce the financial burden on the government which is supporting a heavily-subsidized public education system.

- Secondly in attracting international students and establishing Malaysia as a regional center of academic excellence.

- Thirdly in order to develop the qualifications and skills of the Malaysian workforce.

- Fourthly to internationalize Malaysian campuses and promote quality education, as the present system of twinning and franchising programmes will attract recognition on a global scale.

In attracting these international students, there are two questions to be considered:

1. What attracts international students to study in Malaysia?
2. How are these students catered for in the education system?

These will be explored in the following sections.

4.3.1 International students in Malaysian universities

Higher Institutions worldwide are attracting international students. Besides the obvious economic benefits they bring many benefits as "They enrich the cultural and intellectual environment of a university and its locality, stimulate new curriculum approaches and foster new understanding between cultures" (CVCP 1998, cited in Ryan 2000 p7). According to Ryan, international students should be seen as an asset to universities, as bearers of culture, and as living resources to assist students to learn intercultural skills and sensitivity. Unfortunately, they are not always recognized in this manner.

International students studying in Malaysia come from 161 different countries throughout the world. As of January 2005, the number of international students was 40,686 in public and private higher education institutions (Alimuddin *Star* Education 2005 p7). The top ten countries from which international students come to Malaysia are:

Table 4.3: International Students in Malaysia 2004

China	9,379
Indonesia	8,653
Thailand	1,712
Bangladesh	1,699
Korea	1,660
Pakistan	1,547
India	1,545
Singapore	1,390
Yemen	1,028
Iran	699

(Source: International Students in Malaysia (as of 31st December 2004) Ministry of Higher Education)

The largest number of international students is from China, which is increasingly important in the Asean region in creating business opportunities and in trade and investment. According to Shamsul, the President of the Malaysian Association of Private Colleges and Universities (MAPCU), many mainland Chinese students come to Malaysia on a private basis, and mostly study the English language, to qualify for twinning programmes to go abroad. The Chinese are credential orientated and want students with degrees from the U.K., U.S.A, Australia and New Zealand. The main problem for the mainland Chinese students is their lack of proficiency in English. Malaysia has the advantage of familiarity with the English language and its use as a medium of instruction in private education. Its mixed racial composition, including a sizable ethnic Chinese population, also allows for easier integration for the mainland Chinese.

For the middle income Chinese family, the tuition fees and living expenses in Malaysia are more affordable, and this allows indirect access to western degree programmes due to the many twinning programmes in place. This started initially in Malaysia during the 1980's economic crisis, when foreign programmes were inaccessible to the average

income earner, and has continued to be a big attraction for students from the less well-developed neighboring countries, amongst others.

A change took place during the latter part of 1998, when the delivery of twinning programmes was fully approved for ten private colleges to offer 3+0 programmes exclusively in Malaysia. These were franchise programmes and the aim was to prevent currency outflow from the country, as well as to facilitate students for whom overseas education became too expensive. As foreign universities began to notice the decline in 'Asian' students, they agreed to the delivery of the 3+0 programmes. The opportunities arose for significant Malaysian Private Higher Education development, to build up an indigenous 'home-based' education system. In the words of a key executive from the Department of Private Education in the Malaysian Ministry of Education, as interviewed by Tan:

> It is to seek independence. Some of the conditions imposed in the conduct of 3+0 programmes like staff exchange, faculty of the partner university to teach a full semester in the colleges concerned, are an opportunity for private colleges to capitalize on the transfer of technology. Private higher education institutions need to appreciate the opportunity as they are given a five-year duration to upgrade themselves in facilities and staff. This is to make sure, too, that our local lecturers are ready for international students.

> (Interview: 28th August, cited in Tan 2002 p157)

In offering these programmes, the staff of the private universities are gaining international exposure and expertise in catering for a more diverse group of students. This can only benefit both local staff and students in the long term.

There has been a 30% increase in student enrolment in private institutions marketing the 3+0 programmes since their introduction (Tan 2002). It seems there have been mixed reactions from the foreign universities offering these programmes, as not all private colleges were willing to pass on students to the foreign universities for further studies. Malaysia was one of the first countries to introduce 'twinning' in Asia, with such models

as the 2+1 and 1+2 programmes introduced in the eighties. As of December 2003, there were 24 recognized Private Universities and University Colleges, five Branch Campuses of Foreign Universities, and 536 Private Colleges in Malaysia (Education Development Plan 2001-2010).

At present, it seems that Private Higher Level Education in Malaysia is the main priority for international students for the following reasons:

1. A more accessible route to obtain foreign degree qualifications due to easier entry requirements
2. The use of English language medium of instruction, to improve their own language level
3. Twinning programmes with western universities provide a stepping stone to the West
4. Lower tuition fees and living expenses than in western countries
5. Accessibility to a safe multicultural environment for neighbouring countries
6. Accessibility for other Muslim countries

4.3.2 How are these students catered for?

The international students who come to Malaysia, whether they attend a public or private institution, must adhere to certain conditions, as the government attempt to give higher education a Malaysian identity. Although international students may experience 'culture shock' as stated by Adler (1975) in his five-stage theory[14] of culture-shock development, in a new study environment, they are required to take *Bahasa Melayu,* Malaysian Studies and Moral or Islamic Education as compulsory subjects along with their course subjects. These courses are aimed at transmitting cultural heritage and national identity to the students, including international students who are also required to take courses on the national language. For the latter, there is no requirement to pass these subjects, but attendance is obligatory. Under the Private Higher Education Act 1996, local Malaysian students must pass these subjects, in order to be awarded any certification. This is not

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[14] Adler's (1975) five-stage theory of culture-shock development incorporates: Contact, Disintegration, Reintegration, Autonomy and Independence.

facilitating immersion into a foreign education system for the international students with the added time pressures of compulsory courses. The government is considering changing these requirements, due to much debate amongst the private education sector - but to date, these compulsory subjects remain.

A second consideration may be given to the public higher level institutions, which are also setting themselves up to attract more international students. English is not the medium of instruction across all disciplines however, which limits the range of international students in certain faculties, as lectures may be in *Bahasa Melayu* only. An international student friendly campus needs to consider, for example, a bilingual signage system on campus as well as in the main library, to assist international students. One Indian academic spoke of a Master's student she worked with, and his reaction to a public university which is recruiting international students:

> A guy from the Caribbean spent 18 months on a Commonwealth Scholarship. He was a Master's student. Initially he suffered. He could have chosen India or Malaysia. He was shocked as there were no signs in English in the university. Why advertise to foreign students? The lecturer's evaluation form was not even in English. Policy and practice are not coordinated. They talk about academic excellence – a regional hub, but don't have the support set-up.

> (Interviewee I.A. - 2)

It is a daunting task to try to access a library in a public university, where the signage is in Malay only and the library staff not always proficient in English. If Malaysia is truly aiming to be the regional hub for academic excellence, and be recognized on the world academic stage, this and similar developments, would be a minimum requirement, for an international student population.

As many of the private institutions are predominantly made up of international students, there is the attraction of well-resourced institutions, which cater for these students with modern accommodation and facilities on campus. English immersion programmes are offered in many of the private institutions, involving classroom instruction, student

mentoring, intercultural activities, and specialized courses with a communicative approach. One example of support from a private institution in catering for the international students is a system including:

- Accommodation for the first six days organized for international students upon arrival
- Immigration clearance
- Transportation from the airport
- Transportation to the university on a daily basis for the first six days
- One telephone call home upon arrival
- Welcome food and drinks
- Transportation for accompanying parents
- Accommodation for parents at RM 35 (7euros) per night per person

(Brochure: HELP University College Accommodation Services 2005)

Another aspect of internationalization involves the development of courses in local universities, in order to cater for more diverse student groups. There is a lack of home programmes in Malaysian institutions and this is of concern to the local universities as many academics feel that foreign adopted courses are not necessarily relevant to meet the needs of national industry. This has been discussed at the MAPCU, National Higher Education Conference (2004), whereby private university colleges are being encouraged to phase out outside programmes, and introduce home or joint programmes. Dr Meriam Ismail Research Division of the MoE's Private Education Department affirmed "the time has come for our HEIs to be more independent and to start creating their home grown programmes tailored to our local and international clients at an economical price" (Ismail, *Education Quarterly* Issue 33 2004 p27). This is being undertaken to some degree in the private institutions, but not on any large scale to date.

An area which is beginning to develop is the collaboration of research programmes and mobility programmes for staff and students. Private universities have the reputation of being teaching colleges, and not having a research culture. Research is essential,

according to Professor Brian Atkin, Vice President of the University of Nottingham, Malaysia Campus, (MAPCU Conference 2004), if they are to attract international students. This will bring with it international recognition for the academic staff, research funding from multinational companies, financial benefits from the research output, and greater prestige on the world-market. Until Malaysia is recognized internationally as having a strong research climate, its universities will remain undergraduate, teaching colleges.

An example is the public university, the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, which is actively researching links with foreign universities to expose its staff and students to new cultures and ideas, and has signed memoranda of understanding with universities and institutions in Asia and the Pacific. The number of foreign links they currently have is: Southeast Asia (18), Europe (6), New Zealand (5), Australia (5), the USA (4), Korea (2) and Canada (1) (Mustafa *New Straits Times* 2005 p10).

By involving its staff and students in such mobility programmes as "overseas training for master and doctoral degrees, sabbatical leave, postgraduate training, foreign leadership and foreign consultation" (ibid. p10), there is ongoing preparation in becoming more globally competent. Another public university lecturer confirmed that sabbatical leave in her public institution for a period of nine months *must* involve a study period overseas (Interviewee I.A. - 2). However, she also stated that:

> [...] a lot are afraid to go out of the country. They have made it a policy now – if it's nine months, they make you leave the country. It's a language barrier. If they go to the U.K. they'll die, the fear, the shame [...]. Face is a big thing.

> (Interviewee I.A. - 2)

There is a fear of losing face as many academics who have been teaching throughout their careers in *Bahasa Melayu* and are now being asked to switch to English are not confident in the language. They would be particularly conscious of this at international conferences carried out in the English language. According to Abdullah and Pedersen:

A person loses face when he/she is challenged by another in the presence of a group of people, causing him to feel ashamed and insulted. [...] The fear of losing face is nothing more than having a person's reputation defiled in a social setting. A person can lose face by his own actions or inactions [...].

(Abdullah and Pedersen 2003 p101)

Academic staff are being more and more encouraged to attend international seminars, as there are benefits, according to Yang Farina of UKM, resulting in "more institutions visiting us after the initial contacts are made at the seminar" (Mustafa *New Straits Times* 2005 p11). This is another method of encouraging more international contacts with the universities but it is not always easy, if the academic staff is hesitant to participate, due to the language barrier and loss of face.

Training programmes for staff are needed particularly in the public universities, as they are unaccustomed to international students in any large numbers. The staff will have to deal with many culturally diverse groups of students, their needs and their behaviour patterns. It is the opening of this 'mindset' which needs to be encouraged through more internationalized exchange programmes and seminars, as well as more flexibility in receiving foreign academics into the public universities. One Malay academic in the *Bumiputra* University stated, with regards to international experience that: "Exposure is the key - it becomes a reality. I have been abroad for many years and I brought my experience [back home]" (Interviewee M.A. - 14). She elaborated further on the benefits for students:

Our students are exposed, because a lot of us come from a university education overseas. They are happier to see a lecturer from overseas - it is more challenging. They listen to the 'nativeness', they capitalize. I seldom hear them saying it is difficult to follow.

(Interviewee M.A. - 14)

Student identification cards have caused negative international exposure with visiting students in the past. Student visas are tied to the colleges the students have enrolled in -

this makes the colleges accountable for their foreign students. As stated by one marketing manager from a private college: "some colleges have had problems with their foreign students disappearing from school, working illegally, or being conned by unscrupulous Malaysians with promises of permanent residency" (Teoh & Naziree *The Edge* 1999 p8). The treatment of international students can create huge mistrust between countries, if not properly enforced. Malaysia has experienced this with China, as a result of which the Chinese government has been very particular in formally recognizing institutions for study purposes. Immigration issues need to be resolved so that foreign students may obtain multiple entry visas, in order to facilitate transit. In issuing I.D. cards which are chip-based, stating the university and status of the holder, there can be no misunderstanding of the purpose of the international student's stay in the country.

In conclusion, based on the findings of this research and the sections outlined above, it would appear that Malaysia needs to be cautious on several levels in dealing with international students:

1. Quality control of the third level institutions and the programmes offered
2. Knowledge of the disciplines in demand in the global marketplace
3. A more research-orientated higher education focus
4. Integration of multiple cultural identities on all levels
5. Teaching and learning styles which cater for this international student population
6. Policies which encourage research collaboration with foreign and local universities

4.3.3 How can Malaysia 'internationalize' its own students?

In wishing to become a more globally informed country, Malaysia has continued to send its own students abroad in order to reap the benefits of an international education and to establish links for further academic and business endeavours. One concern for the Malaysian government is that Malaysian students abroad may decide to remain in the country of their studies. The Malaysian Chinese, for example, are a practical race and will search the world over for 'greener pastures' if they are not given due credit at home, according to Datuk Chor Chee Heung (MCA), former Deputy Home Minister (Ng Kee

Seng *The Sun* 2005 p13). Interestingly, the government carried out a lot of promotions abroad in the year 2000, in order to bring back Malaysian professionals. At that time 200 were enticed back, but in the year 2005 many graduates have once again left. The dissatisfaction of Malaysians having earned their foreign degrees, but not being recognized for their merit at home, has been expressed by several interviewees. One Malay parent whose daughter (Malay/European mix), is now working for an international company in Malaysia, having studied overseas, stated:

> She went for an interview with Dell and she is very happy with the challenges. They treat her on merit; I think that is good for young people. [...] she did mention she would never find a Malay person working in Dell who can stand the pressures of international expectations. I am glad she had the overseas experience.
>
> (Interviewee M.P. - 17)

Another Malaysian Chinese parent stated that if her daughter were to go overseas to study: "she stays overseas...why should she come back if she does not get a job? And it pays peanuts" (Interviewee C.P. - 11). There is strong skepticism in equal employment opportunities for all. A Malaysian Indian parent said:

> [...] there is a big campaign now to try and get Malaysians working overseas to come back, they will never come back. What will they come back to? There is not the incentive. They have built a career for themselves there. They are comfortable in their lifestyles and all that, but then again [...] it is still not going to work, because when they come back they are still going to be outsiders, whereas where they are now, they are accepted.
>
> (Interviewee I.P. - 13)

For those exposed to a foreign experience, on returning home they often experience a lack of acceptance by those who stay behind, due to the lack of openness to other ideas. Several academics interviewed in the public university sector expressed the opinion that when they returned to Malaysia there appears to be a desire to "keep graduates under control". There is not always a welcoming of ideas or views which would involve the use of international contacts made while studying or working abroad or new initiatives to be

put in place. The hierarchical system prevails. This seems to be a contradictory thought process as Malaysia seeks to internationalize, but looking closer at the Malaysian education system, it is clear that a nationalist sentiment seems to dominate with:

> [...] its emphasis on the teaching of the Malay language and culture, and especially Islam, on the one hand, and its championing of the principles of global capitalism on the other. [...] educational policy in Malaysia occupies a place at the intersection of cultural traditionalism and economic globalism, raising a range of policy dilemmas. The government's response to these dilemmas has been consistently pragmatic; it has kept tight control over its own higher education system and yet has allowed, even encouraged, a large number of Malaysian students to go abroad in search of an education.
>
> (Rizvi 2000 p211)

The Malaysian government has a vision for Malaysia to become an industrialized country and part of the global world economy by 2020. It is seeking to do that within the framework of preserving its cultural traditions, as it is concerned about the risks to its national identity through globalization. Through policies of preferential treatment, it seeks to retain *bumiputra* dominance in the public university sector, while claiming to value the contribution of all ethnic groups equally. Opportunities for all have proven to be unevenly distributed in academia, as discussed in section 4.2, according to whether one is *bumiputra* or *non-bumiputra*. Through the privatization of education, opportunities have been created, but there are major concerns about quality control, relevance of the curriculum, and equality of opportunity.

As more Malaysians become exposed to international education, at home and abroad, they will become acculturated to political and cultural ideas, which may be alien to Malaysian society. One foreign academic spoke of a lecturer who had just returned from working in a foreign university for several years into a public university in Malaysia and remarked:

[this] lecturer (Malay) is very open. She doesn't wear a scarf. I hope she doesn't fall back in her role. These are people you can talk to and listen to 'outside the box'. Sometimes I say 'they [Malays] are celebrating themselves'. This phenomenon I hear it from teachers who come back after 4/5 years with new ideas, but they fall flat!

(Interviewee F.A. - 9)

The above quotation shows further reluctance to open up and consider new proposals. This argument has been put forward by other academics who have had an international experience through their studies and work experience and wish to use contacts they have made to internationalize their own departments and broaden their students and colleagues' experiences, however it is not always welcomed, as cited by one Indian academic:

My Fulbright was stopped by the person who hired me. [...] What are they afraid of? It is the power of controlling you! I was going to Stanford, he didn't like that. Afraid I'd come back with more ideas, more contacts? Of course, it's a great institution of learning! He didn't see the positive part – how much information I could bring back, how many connections I could make.

(Interviewee I.A. - 2)

This study provides many examples of what is termed reverse culture shock or re-entry shock. This is based on Lysgaard's (1955) idea of the U-curve showing that while abroad students experience three phases in their cross-cultural adjustment: initial adjustment, crisis (culture shock) and regained adjustment. This notion was further developed by Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) who found that once sojourners return to their home country they often undergo a similar re-acculturation process, involving 'reverse culture shock', again in the shape of a 'U' - hence the double 'U' – or 'W-curve'. Bochner, Lin and Mc Leod (1980) have shown that returning students anticipate that they will be subjected to contradictory social expectations. They believe that there will be some ambivalence in the treatment they will receive from their professional peer and family groups. The students feared that their stay-at-home friends would view them differently, that their parents may think them to have become too-westernized and that in their

occupation they may not be able to apply the knowledge they had gained overseas. Research on the experience of overseas students has shown that sojourners will change as a result of their stationing overseas and that the intercultural skills obtained by them represent a valuable resource for the internationalisation process. In the case of Malaysia it is obvious from this research that a more open approach to new ideas and learning from new experiences is necessary.

Different universities place a different emphasis on internationalisation within both the public and private higher education sector. However, in aiming to be a developed country by 2020, exposure will be the key for future generations in catering for a more global market economy and a unified system of internationalisation needs urgently to be put in place.

4.4. Conclusion

This Chapter has examined in depth multicultural models of education, as well as the ways in which Malaysia is trying to put together its own model of multicultural education. It is in some ways to the fore in trying to achieve social equality for all. However, as has been shown, it is also very contradictory in its policies, as certain policies implemented seem to move against a multicultural model. Malaysia is not alone in this, as other societies, such as South Africa, also do not achieve the ideal multicultural model of education. Malaysia has a two-pronged approach to meet the demands of local diversity and to meet the needs of the international students it is trying to attract to its third level institutions. Based on the results of this research, several aspects need to be examined by the Malaysian education providers and policy makers:

- Firstly, the dual public and private systems are quite different in their approaches to a multicultural education system. There are different mediums of instruction, foreign degree programmes or franchise programmes are used in many disciplines in private institutions, and the range of diversity of the student body on their campuses is very different.

- Secondly, it appears that the Malay academic mindset is at variance with the government's vision, as the prevailing closed attitudes of the public institutions are slower to make changes and enter into international collaboration in areas of research and developing programmes. The quality of programmes offered and the adequacy of the infrastructure and facilities need to be reassessed on a national scale, as they vary greatly from institution to institution.

- Thirdly, in recognising the different learning styles of this diverse group of students, collaboration with foreign universities in training staff to deal with cultural differences, upgrading technology and transferring knowledge can benefit local students attending such institutions.

- Fourthly, the government's emphasis on 'one-race' has caused a demand amongst the different groups for more significant recognition of their own identity. There is a fear of the loss of this cultural identity, because of the 'nationalization' process taking place in government schools. Whilst the government is trying to emphasize intercultural dialogue through allowing all languages to be taught, this practice is not fully endorsed and skepticism abounds.

- Finally, as multicultural education involves a total school reform and therefore the participation of all members of this social system, it is necessary to involve academics, parents and indeed students in planning programmes and policies. More autonomy from the different institutions can bring greater benefits to the broader school reform.

The next Chapter examines language policies and their repercussions amongst the cultural groups. It also considers the learning styles of a diverse group of local students and how teaching styles may or may not be catering for these groups.

Chapter 5: Languages and Learning Styles

5.0 Introduction

The demands of national interests and internationalisation have placed Malaysia at a linguistic crossroads. On the one hand Mandarin, Tamil and *Bahasa Melayu* are promoted through the school system and third level public institutions and there is a strong interest amongst the various cultural groups in retaining and promoting their languages; on the other hand there is a need to promote competence in the English language, in order to better prepare Malaysians for their future work environments, as well as the internationalisation of their universities. In this Chapter, these linguistic challenges are investigated, including the complexities arising from a government policy which entails a conflicting pull between the desire to support the native language, *Bahasa Melayu,* and the need to promote English for the economic advancement of the country.

Along with the linguistic diversity of Malaysian students, there is a diversity of learning styles which have been formed through prior cultural and learning experiences. As is the case with any nationality, the Asian learner cannot be defined as 'one-type', and the various learning styles of Malaysian learners form a further challenge for the multicultural education system in Malaysia. These too are discussed later in this Chapter, with a view to providing an overview of the 'types' of learners which may have to be catered for in the Malaysian system, such information is also relevant for educators in Ireland working with international students; a topic which will be discussed in Chapter 6 drawing out the implications and findings for the Irish context.

5.1 Issues and Challenges

According to Crystal (1998) 'identity' and 'intelligibility' are two words extremely pertinent to any discussion of language. In the Malaysian context, they are particularly relevant in the debates concerning the roles of the national language *Bahasa Melayu,* and the second language - English. Intelligibility refers to the uses and functions of the standard variety of English and colloquial varieties of English (Gill 2002). This will not

be discussed here as it is beyond the realms of this thesis. However the challenges relating to 'identity' will be further discussed. Crystal (1998) points out that "the need for intelligibility and the need for identity often pull people – and countries - in opposing directions" (p19). This is a crucial issue in Malaysia and forms a major element in the debate on language in this country. Therefore, the focus in this Chapter will be on the issue of 'identity' and in particular in regard to the choice of language spoken and used as the medium of instruction by the three main groups. The internationalisation of Malaysian education also presents complex challenges and will be explored as an essential aspect of the language debate, in relation to language policies and practices and how these define Malaysian identities.

5.1.1 Nationalism and Language Policy in Post-Independent Malaysia

One of the manifestations of national identity is language policy. In Malaysia, in the post-independence era, the national language played a dominant role in enhancing feelings of nationalism. As Fasold (1987) points out: "language, together with culture, religion and history is a major component of nationalism" (p3). Many colonised countries, upon attaining independence, have reacted against the language of the colonial powers and adopted the language of the indigenous people. Fasold emphasizes the importance of the national language in such instances, and states: "For a nation which has just acquired its own geographical territory, the last language it would want as a national symbol would be the language of the state that had denied it territorial control" (p5).

After gaining independence in 1957, the language of the indigenous people, the Malays, (*Bahasa Melayu*), was instituted as the national language replacing English. At that time, the Malays formed the largest group at 49.78%, followed by the Chinese at 37.1% and the Indians at 11.0%. Malay was the main language of inter-group communication and it was the language of the literature, culture, philosophy and religion of the Malays. Asmah sums up its importance by highlighting:

[...] its indigenity, its role as a lingua franca, its position as a major language, its possession of high literature and the fact that it once had been an important language of administration and diplomacy in the Malay Archipelago.

(Asmah 1997 p15)

Bahasa Melayu was, therefore, the language chosen as the official language to build up national identity, so essential for a nation that had just attained independence. In the National Language Act of 1976, English was disestablished as the joint official language, giving sole status to Malay.

Once this was decided, the question regarding the medium of education had to be addressed. This was a difficult decision due to the linguistically heterogeneous mix. At this time most of the schools in the urban areas taught through the medium of English. They offered students opportunities for further education, employment in the civil service, and access to scholarships. Interestingly, the majority of this particular student group was non-Malays. The Malays were predominantly in the rural areas and being taught through the medium of Bahasa *Melayu*. The government intervened by implementing the National Education Policy, which stated that *Bahasa Melayu* was to be the main medium of instruction, as recommended by the *Razak* Education Commission in 1956:

> We believe further that the ultimate objective of educational policy in this country must be to bring together the children of all races under a national educational system in which the national language is the main medium of instruction, though we recognize that the progress towards this goal cannot be rushed and must be gradual.

(cited in Awang Had Salleh 1994 p21)

English was phased out gradually as a medium of instruction, beginning in 1969 in primary and secondary schools, and only reaching tertiary level in 1983. It became a second language and a compulsory subject for all students in the school system.

The nineties saw a change in the language policy once again. It was evident that English was the language of international communication and in the face of globalization and open competition in trade, and on scientific and technological fronts, there was a need for English to be more dominant in Malaysian education. The three 'Plans' for Malaysian economic development, which aimed at: (1) becoming an industrialized nation; (2) the establishment of a multi-media super-corridor; (3) the establishment of Malaysia as a regional center of education; all had implications for the medium of instruction.

English was re-introduced in the universities in 1993, but only as a medium of instruction in courses related to science and technology. In 2002, the primary and secondary schools introduced English as the medium of instruction for maths and science-related subjects. This involved substantial teacher training and was very challenging on students who were coming from a *Bahasa Melayu* medium of education at school.

5.1.2 Medium of Instruction in Public and Private Higher Education Institutions

In 1996, the Education Act and the Private Higher Education Institutions Act approved the use of English as a medium of instruction in the public universities, in courses related to science and technology and for technical areas in post-secondary courses. In the private universities, English had always been the medium of instruction for all courses, including twinning arrangements with overseas universities, as well as off-shore campuses, provided *Bahasa Melayu* was taught as a compulsory subject (cf. Chapter 4: 4.3.2).

As emphasized in the Education Development Plan (2001-2010), tertiary education is an essential means of moving the country forward as an industrialized nation: "Tertiary education is a major catalyst in generating a knowledgeable, skilled, and competent human resource to fulfill the needs and vision of the nation" (Section 4.03 p4-1). In this context the Ministry highlights the significance of English language learning:

Low acquisition of communication skills in international languages will hinder the nation's opportunities to communicate with the international community and to be involved and compete in the international market. While upholding *Bahasa Melayu* as the national language, the acquisition of international languages, particularly English, is necessary to provide added value to the nation in global competition.

(Education Development Plan 2001-2010 p4-14)

In order to provide a skilled and competent workforce, the government is placing a strong emphasis on increasing numbers at higher education, with an aim of increasing participation at tertiary level from 25% in 2000, to 40% by 2010 (ibid. p4-17).

However, higher education within the public and private institutions divides Malaysian students on several levels - this includes race, medium of instruction and the recognition given to the graduates as a result of English communication skills. This leads to much dissatisfaction amongst the different groups, who consider that they have not been given equal access to the public universities[15] and whose language skills are associated with the 'type' of university they have attended. The next section gives a breakdown of the attitudes to this divisive policy amongst students and academics within both types of institutions.

The **public institutions** of higher education receive generous funding from the government, to develop human resources to improve the socio-economic status of the general population, but, in reality, the predominant group catered for is the *bumiputra* (i.e. the Malays and indigenous peoples) (cf. Chapter 4).

These institutions have gone through a conversion, from English to *Bahasa Melayu* in 1983, and back to English in 1993. Many Malay intellectuals found this reversal to English to be unwarranted. Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the Prime Minister of Malaysia at the time, re-iterated the reasons for re-instating English as the medium of instruction in higher institutions. They were:

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[15] The selection procedure for students to the public universities is controlled by the Ministry of Higher Education and was discussed in Chapter 4 section 4.2.1.1.

1. for Malaysia to remain competitive at the international level
2. to prevent the efficiency and capability of our people from being lower than those in other countries
3. because the pace of translation cannot keep up with the generation of knowledge and information in the field of science and technology

(Decision on using English *New Straits Times* 1993 p3)

The Malay academics reacted to this at the Congress of Malay intellectuals (1993), by submitting a memorandum to the government which stated the following:

1. to reject any move to introduce English as a medium of instruction for science and technological subjects
2. to encourage the use of foreign languages, including English, which help in the acquisition and mastery of knowledge
3. to emphasize the fact that Malay has been the medium of instruction for about twenty years and has not faced any problems that necessitate any change in the language policy especially regarding the use of Malay as the language for imparting knowledge and instruction

(Translated from a report in *Utusan Malaysia,* 8 January 1994 as cited in Gill 2002 p112)

However, the government was determined to hold its position and English was retained for science and technology related subjects in the public institutions. Despite the Malaysian Cabinet's decision, many of the public universities did not support this policy. Intellectuals, especially Malay intellectuals, are a strong and cohesive group, which has 'not only social but political clout' according to Gill (2002 p112). This is gradually changing with the government putting more pressure on institutions to convert, but a bilingual examination system still exists for many of the science and technology related faculties, which leaves graduates with a 'compromised' standard of English.

This then begs the question as to who is losing out as a result of the new language policy. Unfortunately, it is the students of the public institutions of higher learning, who have been educated through the medium of *Bahasa Melayu,* as it has become increasingly difficult for them to read widely in their own field in English, which is a prerequisite of university education. Their inadequate command of English will be an even greater obstacle in this age of global competition, where English is the common working language in the world. There were strong sentiments expressed by many students interviewed for this thesis, including two Chinese students at Masters Level attending one public institution:

> [...] because we are from the generation who do not study English at all. We had instruction in Malay. We must also get a credit in this subject. We are the generation they have 'sacrificed' [...] even learning linguistics, many of the books are in English and we face a lot of problems.
>
> (Interviewee C.S. - 20)

Six undergraduate medical students, comprising members from all three ethnic groups, interviewed in their first year of study spoke of the difficulties they experienced with English as the medium of instruction. One student said, for example:

> Starting this year we have lectures in English but the exam papers will be bilingual. [...] now the schools are changing to English as a medium of instruction in the sciences. It is quite a struggle for us to change to English entirely.
>
> (Interviewee I.S. - 16)

This statement was reiterated by other members of the group, as these students had come through government schools and had been taught through the medium of *Bahasa Melayu.* The change to English medium had taken place for maths and sciences in their last year at school and had minimum impact on their competence level as they had an option of taking their examinations in English or *Bahasa Melayu.*

An academic from a public institution commented on the fact that everything is still bilingual, even though the policy changed three years ago to teaching and examining through English:

> The bilingual program is a big problem. It's double the work. I have to translate into Malay, all my work. Exams are in two languages. Mainly, the teachers are not qualified to teach in English, so things will change slowly. The natural tendency is to reject change. There is a group who say, 'don't give in to a foreign language'. In certain States the pressure is strong. The government policy says it has to change.

(Interviewee I.A. - 2)

The views of both students and academics demonstrate that, in converting to *Bahasa Melayu*, there is a feeling of compromised educational opportunities. Although it is clear there are difficulties for students and staff alike, Malaysia is not alone in having several mediums of instruction, with the English medium[16] being essential for internationalisation.

With the challenge of globalization, education has come to be regarded as an export commodity. Public universities can no longer remain isolated, but need to adopt new policies and a more open mindset to deal with foreign institutions and collaborate their research efforts in order to be recognized in a global context. According to Altbach (1991), with the cuts on education budgets, public universities worldwide have been forced to compete for funds and student enrolment in the open market. In the case of Malaysia, the government is planning for the country to become a regional center of education and has provided the private education field with a competitive edge by encouraging and supporting links with foreign institutions of higher learning using English as the medium of instruction, in order to attract international students.

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[16] This has similarities to the South African experience which, since the implementation of Section 3(4) of the National Education Policy Act (Act 27 1996), has introduced the national language-in-education policy, requiring the promotion of multilingualism through using more than one official language as the language of instruction, and the offering of additional languages as subjects.

In the **private education** institutions, the government acknowledges that, in order for this education sector to flourish, freedom with regard to the medium of instruction had to be given. Funding for private education has been from corporations, and not from the government. As referred to previously, the 1996 Private Higher Education Institutions Act approved the use of English as a medium of instruction, stipulating that: "where the main medium of instruction in an educational institution is other than the national language, the national language shall be taught as a compulsory subject in the educational institution" (Ministry of Education, The Education Act 1996:23).

This has implications for foreign students studying in private colleges in Malaysia who must learn *Bahasa Melayu*, as well as deal with English, often as a second language, as the medium of instruction. This also has implications for local Malaysian students who may be 'twinning' with an English speaking university, where their own competence in the English language may be weakened with the time spent on extra courses which might be better spent on improving their level of English competency.

5.2 Implications of the division between Public and Private Higher Education Institutions

The implications of these two streams of higher education are now examined in the context of creating a multicultural education system for all. There are two significant differences between the local students attending these higher institutions. Firstly, the private institutions are more expensive and many local Malaysian students may not be able to afford them, whereas the public institutions are heavily subsidized by the government – and therefore more accessible for these students. Secondly, the majority of students in public institutions are *bumiputra*, while the majority in private institutions are *non-bumiputra* - firstly Chinese, then Indian and others (Lee 1999). As a result, students are divided not only along ethnic lines, but also along socio-economic lines.

Formerly, graduates from the public universities used to be heavily employed in the Malaysian civil service but in recent times, jobs in the private sector have become more prominent. As employers from the private sector require competence in the English

language, those from private universities have had added advantages, because of the medium of instruction and the twinning programmes with English speaking countries, which brings overseas experience to the workplace.

Ironically, it seems that the *bumiputra* are the main victims, as the largest group in public institutions, being disadvantaged in their English competence level and international experience, as evident from the large numbers of graduates coming from the public university sector who are unemployed. As stated by Datuk Mustapha Mohamad, Executive Director of the government-sponsored National Economic Action Council (NEAC):

> This is basically a Malay problem as 94% of those registered with the Government [as unemployed] are *Bumiputra;* Chinese constitute 3.7% and Indians, 1.6%. It has to do with the courses taken, and [...] also their poor performances in, and command of the English language.
>
> (*New Straits Times* 14 March 2002:1 & 12 as cited in Gill 2002 p115)

Some senior academics in the public universities lament the situation in which graduates from public universities have become victims of adherence to nationalistic language policies: "I think we must pay more attention to the means of communication, otherwise who would want to come to us – the language is our barrier, our inability to master the English language would hinder us from reading books, journals [...]" (Interviewee M.A. - 12).

The mixed reactions to the introduction of English as a medium of instruction by Malay academics within the public universities demonstrate a fear that the national culture and tradition will be taken over by a western culture. Kunio expresses a common sentiment among Malay nationalists when he says:

Globalization gives rise to negative national sentiments, by bringing in foreigners, or encouraging people to go for foreign (western, in particular) cultures, for economic benefits. The latter problem can become serious over time in the developing countries that cannot produce an internationally competitive national economic base, which can employ the graduates who have been taught in their own languages.

(Kunio 2001 p7)

Malaysia cannot employ graduates in the international sector, who are only fluent in the national language, *Bahasa Melayu*. It is a challenge to impress on Malaysians, that learning English is not going to detrimentally affect the national culture, traditions and language; rather it is an acquired *additional* skill. According to Gill they can look at it as the various layers of the onion:

The inner core and layers will be what they have been brought up in, the core values of their cultural processes. Then the additional layers are the skills which may seem foreign to their cultural socialization but which are crucial for developed nation status. They will never forget their inner core, but instead they will form layers that enrich them and enable them to communicate effectively as the varying cultural situations demand. All of this will help to make citizens of the world richer culturally and communicatively and enhance them as individuals.

(Gill 2002 p16)

The question might well be asked as to how the government claims to be reflecting national identity and aspirations through their education system, by treating Malaysian citizens along such segregated lines regarding equal opportunity in higher education. If the government is truly seeking one Malaysian identity, how can ethnic groups be educated separately and under unequal circumstances? Language becomes a segregating factor if it is the cause of better opportunities for one group over another.

In relating language to a particular cultural group's educational opportunities - whether it is a government Malay education and followed by a public university or a vernacular (Chinese or Tamil) education, followed by a private university - it is useful to examine how these groups identify themselves in relation to the English language. The next

section examines the identity of those students who have come through the vernacular school system and who are non-Malay, but identify more closely with either English or their 'own language' and speak *Bahasa Melayu* as a second or indeed third language.

5.3 Languages and local identities

Several multiculturalist educators have stated that multilingualism must be accepted in a positive way as a source of cultural wealth and capable of integrating socio-cultural differences. Ovando, for example, claims that:

> Language is a powerful and transformative part of culture. [...] It is a forceful instrument for giving individuals, groups, institutions, and cultures, their identity. Through language, we communicate our values, attitudes, skills and aspirations as bearers of culture and as makers of future culture.

<div align="center">(Ovando 2004 cited in Banks and Mc Gee Banks 2004 p289)</div>

Multilingualism, by means of education, can give rise to privileges that benefit certain linguistic communities to the detriment of other communities. This is how imbalance, misunderstandings and rivalry based on language differences begin in a country. The Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights states that:

> All languages are the expression of a collective identity and of a distinct way of perceiving reality. Education must always be at the service of linguistic and cultural diversity and of harmonious relations between different language communities throughout the world.

(Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights Barcelona 1996 cited in Kua, K. S. 1998 p145)

In the Malaysian context, studies on language and identity are said to be concentrated on 'national identity' according to Asmah (1998). She states that "identity, on the lower level, for example the community or group has not really been given much attention to by the researchers" (ibid. p2).

Asmah's (1991) own study of a group of bilingual non-Malay academics, which comprised of mostly Chinese and Indians at a local Malaysian university, found that the primary language of these two ethnic groups usually does not play the role of giving a 'label' to the ethnic group. Most responded that they were using the language they were educated in, which was English, as they had been educated in the English medium schools.

However there was a gradual trend towards reversing the language shift when it came to their children. Several Chinese and Tamil subjects responded that they were ensuring that their children learn their mother tongues through private tuition, indicating a revival of pride and interest in their ethnic and cultural identity. Asmah (1991) believes that this can be interpreted as a 'conscious rebirth' of their ethnic heritage.

A further study by Asmah (1998) of Malays, Chinese and Indians investigated the correlation between linguistic identity, an individual's ethnic heritage, and the part linguistic identity plays for the individual as a member of a group or groups. The findings showed that linguistic identity in the individual is not inborn, and not a fixture, but "changes with the individual's development, environment and situations of language use" (p21). As a result, an individual has multiple linguistic identities which are projected with various degrees of strength. She states that identity building comes with nurturing and that it is a result of comparing and contrasting, and does not find a breeding ground in homogeneity. For the Malays, having the national language as the medium of instruction seems to have been a stabilizing factor. For minority groups, movement away from the original linguistic group is not always towards the majority group. There is a preference for the language which has a higher prestige in the context of the wider world, as seen in the move towards English. Another factor that Asmah cites to explain the defection towards English is its perceived neutrality. Unlike the other vernacular languages, English does not possess a first language speech community in Malaysia; hence movement towards the language means a membership without other cultural constraints (Asmah 1998).

A more recent doctoral study by Lee (2003c), investigating the impact of the English language on the construction of the socio-cultural identities of a selected group of ESL learners in Malaysia, found:

> The participants possess a range of diverse identities depending on the contexts and the reference groups they are interacting with, and have to subtly manage the complexities of their multiple identities in order to fit in or belong to the group they were interacting with.

> (Lee 2003c p74)

The findings revealed that within certain contexts, it is the non-use, rather than the use of the English language that enhances conformity and acceptance. Using the English language within certain contexts where there is resentment towards its use may bring about hostility, marginalization and even alienation. Referring to some Malay students in her class, a Chinese TESL student stated: "They won't talk, as they know we will talk English. We are tired" (Interviewee C.S. - 3). What is perhaps even more disturbing is how she reports the attitudes of her lecturers: "our lecturers say we think we are so prestigious. They see us as different, 'as one type', just because we speak English more often – we do speak Malay" (Interviewee C.S. - 3). If the teachers negate the use of English, it is difficult for a multicultural classroom to develop in any formative manner. As discussed in Chapter 3, the significance of 'blending in' with society includes having to speak the same language as everyone else, so as not to stand out, and appear different. One academic in a public university who is an ESL trainer stated:

> [...] we found out that they felt alienated when they tried to speak in English. People say 'you think you are so clever, so you want to be like the English' and especially if you are Malay, they associated English with Christianity and things like that, so they have no choice but to speak Malay and to speak Chinese.

> (Interviewee C.A. - 15)

Lee's (2003c p75) study shows that resentment still exists towards using English within interpersonal contexts particularly among Malays who are not proficient in English, resulting in those attempting to use English being labeled as 'showing off'. The use of

English is also seen as trying to be like the 'whites'. Hostility exists because it is seen as a relic of colonialism. In addition, the English language is associated with Christianity, which means that Malays are seen as not being 'good' Muslims when they use English. Chinese students face many of these problems, because of their proficiency, but also because of their ambition to do well and improve their opportunities, they do not blend in and are ostracized as a result (Interviewee I.A. - 2).

The advantages of learning English in terms of career advancement and future job prospects are in many cases overshadowed by the demands of society and the desire to conform to the norms of society. As Lee puts it:

> [...] language learners will invest in a language if the rewards are perceived as worthwhile. However, acquiring or mastering a language is more complicated than just positive gains and the reward factor. In a complex postcolonial society such as Malaysia, investment does not bring straightforward returns or dividends. Using English requires that one be very attuned to the localized contexts and whether its use is acceptable to the situation. Although the acquisition of the English language has many advantages, 'using it' can bring about non-acceptance, resentment, marginalisation, or a combination thereof.

> (Lee 2003a pp148-149)

A Chinese academic indicated that the attitude in the public university contrasts markedly with the private university regarding English language usage inside and outside of the classroom (Interviewee C.A. - 15). She gives two examples of private universities: (1) the *Universiti* Islam where "everybody wants to talk English; they want to learn English, to improve their English, because there are so many students from all over the world - that is the medium of instruction"; and (2) UNITAR where "English is like social mobility" (Interviewee C.A. - 15). In these institutions there is an open acceptance of the benefits of having a good competence level in English.

Interestingly, Lee (2003b) also found in her study that various ethnic groups, as ESL speakers, concluded that learning English was an empowering and positive experience. It

offers 'neutrality' as it frees the user from the cultural and moral stance of one's native tongues, and allows a means of direct self-expression. The subjects of her study were very proficient English speakers, studying at Master's level in a public university, consisting of 14 Malaysian women - namely 7 Malays, 3 Chinese, 2 Indians and the remaining 2 were an Iban from Sarawak and a Kadazan from Sabah. The cultural traits in their own language, which inhibit self-expression, were indirectness and non-confrontation. Switching to another language, and concomitantly another identity, allows for more direct expression of feelings. As language reflects mindset, English as a second language offers a quality of directness and neutrality. "Language and culture are so inextricably interwoven, that when using one particular language, one operates within that cultural world view" (Lee 2003b p34).

In order to understand the learners' struggles in using English as a second language, awareness of the difficulties of language, but also awareness of socio-cultural identities is necessary. Teachers need to be aware that the classroom is not a self-contained mini-society isolated from the outside world and larger society, but a place where the domination of gender, ethnicity, class, race, religion and language is a daily event.

Naturally, many academics interviewed expressed the desire that their students practise English outside of the classroom. However, awareness of the difficulties students may face beyond the classroom is necessary, and guidance in teaching students how to cope with these problems, must be provided. This is especially important where there may be resentment towards English, and speaking it whether within or outside the classroom environment.

All of the above discussion illustrates how prior learning experiences, developed during primary and secondary schooling, are paramount in understanding the participation of Malaysian students in multicultural classrooms, be it at home in Malaysia or as foreign students abroad.

5.4 An overview of Malaysian learning styles

Following the examination of language in Malaysian education, it is clear that this issue presents a major challenge to the development of multicultural education in Malaysia. It is also clear that the competency in the host language and the prior experience of that particular language play an important role in the success of the individual learners in the multicultural classroom in any country. Language is, however, just one of the many elements which presents challenges in the multicultural classroom – another crucial element, which is of interest to this research, is the individual learning styles which present themselves within a multicultural education setting. This element will be discussed here with a view to further illuminating the current challenges in Malaysia and the challenges which will increasingly present themselves in education in Ireland, as this country moves into a new era in education (see Chapter 6 for further discussion).

A student will arrive at higher level education with deep-rooted conceptions of what learning and studying involve, based on their individual school experiences. Gibbs (1981) states, that these habits and techniques need to be recognized in order to help the student develop a learning process that will meet with study demands and their intellectual development at higher level education. Students' conceptions of learning shaped by their prior learning experiences, has been researched by Eklund-Myrskog (1997), who maintains that educational contexts influence students' ways of experiencing learning and tackling tasks. It is consistent with Entwistle, Mc Cune and Walker (2001) who indicate that the meanings students attach to the concepts of learning are derived from the cumulative effects of previous educational and other experiences.

In recent years there has been a strong emphasis on learning at all levels of education. The understanding of how a student learns can have an impact on the individual's performance and academic achievement. Lim (2002) recognizes that how a person learns may be influenced by social, psychological, emotional, environmental and physical factors, as well as the individual's learning styles.

Just as there may be a diversity of the student population within any one classroom, there may equally be a diversity of learning styles. Tan et al. (2003) state that learning styles appear to be biological and socialized differences, which influence classroom learning in particular, and lifelong learning in general. There are many types of learning styles according to Butler (1988) such as:

- **Psychological/affective styles:** a student's social and emotional traits, personality traits, sense of individuality and inner strength all influence how they learn.
- **Physiological styles:** to facilitate learning through the senses or environmental stimuli. This will include auditory, visual, kinesthetic, olfactory preferences or preferences for environmental conditions.
- **Cognitive styles:** there are consistent ways of responding and using stimuli in the environment to determine how things are perceived and made sense of.

Other models which are used to characterize learning styles, representing an individual's unique approach to learning, will now be examined in greater detail, to understand the learning styles of Malaysian students. There are four prominent schools of thought on learning styles:

1. **Dunn & Dunn's (1978) environmental preferences**
2. **Gardner's (1993) multiple intelligences**
3. **Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle**
4. **Honey & Mumford's (1982) learning types**

Each model will be described briefly below and, as no *one* model neatly defines the diverse range of traits found in Malaysian society, elements of each of the models will be related to the different styles of learning of Malaysian tertiary level students.

(1) Dunn & Dunn's environmental preferences:

Dunn & Dunn's (1978) environmental preferences model identifies three basic perceptual learning styles as **visual, verbal** and **kinesthetic/tactile:**

Visual learners relate best to visual displays like written information, notes, diagrams and pictures. They prefer to be at the front of a lecture to avoid any visual obstruction of

the speaker in order to read body language and facial expressions. They will take detailed notes as they learn from writing down and visualizing what they learn. They follow written instructions better than oral ones.

Auditory learners relate best to verbal lectures, discussions and listening to what others have to say. Written instruction may have very little meaning until it is verbalized and read aloud. They like to participate in class discussions and debates. They would rather listen to a lecture than read a textbook. They are good at making presentations and speeches.

Kinesthetic/tactile learners learn best through a hands-on approach. They learn through moving, doing and touching. They may be considered hyperactive and need frequent breaks as they become distracted by their need for activity and exploration. They skim through learning materials to get the gist of the content before reading in more detail. They enjoy working with their hands.

In examining the above model of learning, it is important to note that many studies have been done on the learning styles of *Asian* students who are said to bring with them learning experiences that favor "rote, reproductive, surface, teacher-centered and dependent approaches to learning" (Ballard & Clanchy 1997; Devos 2003; Gribble & Ziguras 2003). This stereotype of Asian international students has been challenged on the grounds that it fails to recognize differences by country (Burns 1991; Chalmers & Volet 1997; Ninnes et al. 1999). The learning styles of students from China and India are different to those of Malaysia due to specific factors including - medium of instruction, cultural make-up and the educational system of all three countries.

However, in examining the Malaysian Chinese and Malaysian Indians, the valued cultural influences and learning styles of mainland China and India are reflected in certain respects. The Malays are also examined as another group of Asian students with their own unique learning styles. As very little research has been done in examining the specific learning styles of the Malays, the Malaysian Chinese and the Malaysian Indians, the sources used for the purpose of this thesis include studies written about Malaysian learners on foreign campuses, and interviews with academics in two local public

universities and one local private university, who have written papers on this subject matter (Ling et al. 2004; Thang 2003).

Firstly, the Malaysian Chinese students have mixed educational experiences, as they come through different systems of primary and secondary education, depending on whether they go to government or non-government schools. Confucian-thinking moulds the theories on education and influences the styles of learning that takes place, particularly in their *own* vernacular schools, which reflects that of mainland China. It focuses on the improvement and refinement of the student, rather than inventiveness. It is refining through the master (or teacher), as the teacher and lecturer are highly respected in this culture. They may therefore be seen as visual learners taking detailed notes from the teacher, as the written format helps them to 'visualize' what they learn. One academic said of her Chinese students, studying German: "I feel they want to know everything – which word in what place. What do I have to fill in? They have difficulties to express themselves in either language. The Chinese especially, rely strictly on memorization. […] There is no reflection" (Interviewee F.A. - 9).

The Malaysian Indians are from an even wider variety of background and from an urban-rural divide. They are strongly influenced by their art and music and seem to be more kinesthetic/tactile learners, as discussed in greater detail in the second model.

Finally the Malays themselves, as determined partially by their cultural patterns of learning large sections from the *Quran* are strongly influenced by an auditory style of learning. This is also discussed in more detail in the next section, reflecting the content of learning. One academic stated that: "the Malay-Muslim tradition is more oral, because of the preaching. They can sit for hours and just listen. The Malay-Muslims, they memorize but they don't understand. Rote-memory is actually the audio-phonetic, sound-memory" (Interviewee M.A. - 8).

(2) Gardner's multiple intelligences:

Gardner's (1993) multiple intelligences theory focuses on the content of learning. He refers to eight intelligences, namely: **Linguistic/Verbal, Spatial/Visual, Bodily Kinesthetic, Logical/Mathematical, Musical, Interpersonal, Intrapersonal and Naturalist intelligence.**

- **Linguistic intelligence** is sensitivity to the meaning and order of words.
- **Logical/mathematical intelligence** is ability in mathematics and other complex systems.
- **Musical intelligence** is the ability to understand and create music. It is developed in musicians, composers and dancers.
- **Spatial intelligence** is the ability to perceive the visual world accurately and recreate it in the mind or on paper. It is highly developed in artists, architects, designers and sculptors.
- **Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence** is the ability to use the body in a skilled way, for self-expression or towards a goal. Mimes, dancers, basketball players and actors display this intelligence.
- **Interpersonal intelligence** is the ability to perceive and understand other individuals, their moods, desires and motivations. Political and religious figures, skilled parents and teachers and therapists use this intelligence.
- **Intrapersonal intelligence** is an understanding of one's own emotions.
- **Naturalist intelligence** refers to the ability to recognize and classify plants, animals, minerals, rocks, grasses and all variety of flora and fauna. It also is the ability to recognize cultural artifacts like cars and sneakers for example.

(Gardner 1993)

In relation to these eight intelligences significant differences between the three main groups emerge. The Chinese, like many Malaysian Chinese students, follow the ancestors and traditions along the Confucian way of thinking, which makes for a peaceful society, but not necessarily a creative one, as creativity is bound strictly within given limits.

Chinese students are associated with rote learning. One academic in a Malaysian public university states: "the Chinese rely strictly on memorization. It's hard to break it, to tell them it's easier to make connections. If it comes to thinking – they don't know, they never heard of it." (Interviewee F.A. - 9). According to another academic, this is done in order to learn the "content of the subject matter" (Interviewee M.A. - 8). He emphasizes the importance of understanding variations in rote memory, taking the example of the Chinese students, who learn in order to better understand the content: "the Chinese when they learn – we always talk about content. [...] The Chinese are more practical" (ibid.).

Regarding language use, the mainland Chinese strongly emphasize English as an essential part of their education programmes, but the Malaysian Chinese place great importance on Mandarin in promoting Chinese culture in Malaysia. English is viewed on a practical level, as a second language and as a tool to do business. As pragmatic learners, 'interpersonal intelligence' is emphasized in their learning and English is a necessary tool. A pilot study was carried out on the Australian foreign branch campus of Curtin University of Technology in Sarawak, Malaysia in 2002 (Shamsul et al. 2002), involving Chinese students from the foundation course, first year and second year of their studies. They labelled the student group as 'Confucius Heritage Culture' (CHC), and concluded that these learners are *natural* left-brain thinkers whose preference is for a teacher-centered learning environment. Contrasted to these are a group of right-brain thinkers, who are more predisposed to a student-centered learning environment. The CHC term is used to describe "those of Chinese cultural and familial background" (Shamsul et al. 2002). The findings of this pilot scheme have corresponded with some studies done on CHC learners throughout the world including:

- The view that knowledge is to be transmitted by the teacher, rather than discovered by the learner (Online Zhen Hui 2001).
- Chan (1999) argues that many CHC learners would consider ineffective teaching is taking place if they are continually asked in class to express their opinions or to solve a problem by themselves.

More and more research challenges the view that Asian learners are 'mere' rote learners, but rather 'repetitive learners', whose learning strategy for understanding academic materials lead them to follow a systematic and consistent reinforcement approach, that looks like rote learning. They also dispute the passivity of Asian learners, by reporting active Asian student participation in class discussions, and incidences of interrupting lecturers to ask for clarification (Biggs & Watkins 1996).

In regard to the pilot study of Curtin University students, the results recognized that the CHC learner's learning style is:

> [...] a result of not just traditional culture, family background, values and way of thinking, but also of academic achievement, expectations placed by the Malaysian educational system and learner's prior educational experience at the Malaysian secondary school level.

<div align="right">(Shamsul et al. 2002 p5)</div>

The following points summarize their findings, covering the two main groups of learners. The first group of Chinese 'left-brain thinkers' showed the following traits:

- They associate with analytical and logical learning styles
- They enjoy facts, ideas and theories
- They learn more from a fact-based lecture
- They are discomfited by open-ended discussions

The second group consisting of Chinese 'right-brain thinkers':

- They like to understand everything and work things out well on paper
- They want lectures and tutorials well planned, practical, structured and consisting of step-by-step instructions
- They are not comfortable with a competitive classroom
- They reported a need to feel comfortable with everyone, in order to learn effectively

<div align="right">(Shamsul et al. 2002 p9)</div>

The Chinese therefore, show themselves to be visual learners, strong in linguistic intelligence as they see language as a means of climbing social and career ladders. They also value the logical/mathematical disciplines as structured learning is important for them. Interpersonal intelligence is a necessary skill to do business and, along with language, an essential part of their education programmes. Following Confucianist thinking they value the teacher-centred classroom and well structured programmes of instruction.

The Malaysian Indians can be considered as two groups representing the urban-rural divide. Those who come from the rural background may have had a 'poorer' education, but in the eyes of one foreign academic are seen as being 'straight – forward plain thinkers' (Interviewee F.A. - 9). One Malay Academic considers the Malays and Malaysian Indians as being very alike, as they are more spiritual than the Chinese (Interviewee M.A. - 8). They rote learn poetry and religion as part of their cultural traditions. They are considered more artistic and musical, as this too, is an essential aspect of their cultural lifestyle. Musical intelligence is emphasized in this group. They may be considered as kinesthetic/tactile learners as they use dance and art to express themselves within their own cultural groups. In language learning, they use more repetition and mimicry. The urban Indians also tend to have good English language levels, often due to the use of English as the first language in the home. Just as the Chinese promote Mandarin, the Indians also show an interest in promoting Tamil within their school system, in order to preserve their cultural identity.

The Malays in contrast, are considered very lazy, by one foreign academic and poor autonomous learners. They will do the minimum amount of work required. She states: "Malays are lazy, they don't work. I collected workbooks – 100% nothing done" (Interviewee F.A. - 9). However, she considers them good improvisers, as they are very creative and do not simply 'follow' in their thinking. The Malay academic would agree, as he cites their creativity in using verses like the *pantun*, in order to deliver an indirect message. He states: "The Malay *pantun* this is where you spontaneously respond. Its creative and it shows the mind working. The creativity and a kind of spontaneity – it's

not rote learning in that sense" (Interviewee M.A. - 8). Their learning pattern is generally more auditory, as they are capable of learning many lines of the Quran for recitation at prayer. Dr Thang Siew Ming who has done a study termed "Investigating Malaysian Distance Learners' conceptions of their learning styles in learning" (2003), makes the comparison between on-campus learners and distance learners in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, a public university, and concluded that both groups valued classroom interaction and teacher contact and guidance more than independent learning. This reinforces the notion that they are not autonomous learners, as they rely on a teacher-centred classroom interaction.

Therefore, a focal point for all three groups for guidance is a reliance on the 'sage' or teacher in this culture, which cannot be excluded. It is with great difficulty the teacher might be questioned or criticized as has been discussed with several academics interviewed, as well as examined in several studies mentioned (Abdullah and Pedersen 2003; Interviewees M.A. - 1; I.A. - 2; F.A. - 9; C.A. - 15)

(3) Kolb's experiential learning cycle & (4) Honey & Mumford's learning types:
Drawing on Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle: Concrete Experience → Reflection → Theory → Preparation, Honey & Mumford created a model which describes four separate learning styles. The definitions of these types are as follows:

- **Activists** are open-minded, enthusiastic and constantly thriving for a new challenge. They are however bored with implementation and long-term consolidation. They enjoy learning through games, competitive teamwork tasks and role-plays.

- **Reflectors** prefer to observe others and reflect. They are cautious, may be perceived as indecisive and adopt a low profile. The reflector prefers learning situations that are observational and carrying out investigations.

- **Theorists** adapt and integrate information in a step by step logical way. They prefer to maximize certainty and feel uncomfortable with subjective judgments, lateral thinking and flippancy. They prefer learning activities that explore the interrelationship between ideas and principles.

- **Pragmatists** are anxious to try out new ideas, theories and techniques to see if they work in practice. They are essentially practical, down to earth people, who like making practical decisions, act quickly on ideas that attract them and tend to be impatient with open-ended discussions. They prefer learning activities that are as close to direct work experience as possible.

(Honey & Mumford 1982)

To sum up the definitions of the above, the **Reflector** in discussing an issue may ask *Why* it is important; the **Theorist** will be interested in *What* it is all about; the **Pragmatist** will be concerned with *How* it can be applied in the real world; while the **Activist** will be keen to know *What if* we were to apply it here and now.

In applying the above model to Malaysia's three main ethnic groups, Malays may be seen to be reflectors, the Indians as theorists and the Chinese as pragmatists.

The prior learning experiences of all three groups reflect the role of the teachers and how they strongly influence students' learning styles. For this thesis a two-hour forum discussion was held with four Malaysian Chinese students attending a public university. When asked about the style of learning used at secondary level, they responded that they were trained "to sit still, absorb and not ask questions" (Interviewee C.S. - 3). The teacher was the main focus of the classroom activities. For each of the students, tertiary level education has been a new challenge for them so far, as they have had to adapt their classroom norms to a more interactive style of learning, whereby they are (mostly, depending on the lecturer) encouraged to speak, to work interactively in groups, to do presentations and to share their opinions. They will still use rote learning for such areas as grammar for examination purposes. They find discussions amongst their peers as being very effective.

Certain lecturers will teach them to question what they learn and to analyze, in order to better understand. They tended to differentiate between those lecturers who had experience of studying or teaching abroad, particularly in western universities, as being

more demanding in classroom interaction. They were expected to take a more interactive and critical stance in their classroom participation as well as investigative research activities. There was a more student-centered approach to their teaching, which challenged the students outside of the norms of learning which they had experienced to date. The four students enjoyed the 'refreshing change' of teaching styles used by those lecturers who were foreign-trained. They were more challenged to think for themselves and to question ideas. They felt their opinions counted and were more motivated as a result. This was very obvious in their enthusiasm in talking about certain lecturers and classes they particularly enjoyed and felt that they benefited from.

Within their own class group, which was predominantly Chinese, followed by Indians and a few Malays, the Chinese students considered the standard of English to vary quite significantly. They complimented the high level of English amongst the Indian students, but had mixed reactions to the competence levels of the Malay students. They feel it unfair, that they are all together but of unequal standards and are irritated at how this affects their own learning experiences.

Two Indian academics were interviewed concerning the learning styles of their students (Interviewees I.A. - 24 and I.A. - 25). They both had PhD qualifications from American universities. They stated that there were no formal discussions or meetings within their Faculty regarding teaching and learning style methodologies. This might take place in the form of workshops for new, young lecturers joining the Faculty. For the more experienced lecturers, the teaching styles were a subjective decision, which, in their opinion, was strongly influenced by where the individual lecturer had trained. In explaining their students' general approach to learning, they related a team-teaching experiment, which they conducted with a group of undergraduate students in order to 'stir up' a debate and discussion forum. They conducted a debate amongst themselves in front of the student group as opposed to giving a lecture. The reaction of the students was of 'shock' as they felt uncomfortable in not being in a formal learning session. They felt it was just wasting time and did not consider it a 'proper' learning technique. This new approach caused the students irritation and they got annoyed at the two lecturers for not

having prepared 'a proper lecture'. This reflects the findings of the previously mentioned pilot study conducted in Curtin University, Sarawak. The students are set in their ideas of what formal learning and teaching methodologies are, and feel uneasy if new approaches to learning are introduced. This illustrates the dangers of imposing teaching methodologies which do not fit, which may work well in the west, but are not appropriate for the learning styles of Malaysian students.

There is recognition in Malaysia of a need to educate students as critical thinkers, ready to take their places amongst a global workforce. One public university is changing its teaching and learning methodologies within the medical faculty, as explained by a lecturer from the Faculty of Medicine, who had trained in the Royal College of Surgeons, Dublin. The styles of teaching are formalized methodologies which have been decided within the faculty. Firstly, apart from formal lectures and tutorials, which still make up the core teaching styles of the Faculty, problem based learning is used, in order to teach the students to be more critical thinkers and more independent learners. Lecturers act as facilitators and do not participate in correcting the students, during their group discussions. Problem Based Learning has been carried out over the last five years within this Faculty. Another methodology which is recently being introduced is 'Case Based Learning', with all lectures being reformatted to suit this style of interactive learning.

This change of methodology in public universities has been acknowledged as part of a government incentive to encourage students to change teaching and learning styles in order for students to become more independent learners and critical thinkers.

There are several aspects of Malaysian learning styles which contrast with western learning styles and this is an important consideration both for those Malaysian students who study abroad and for international students going to Malaysia. Another example is the open-door policy Malaysian students are accustomed to in order to see their lecturers in case of any difficulties; it is often difficult for the student who finds the contact with their lecturers in the western university as more distant. Having had a dependency on the

teacher from an early stage in their education, it is often a difficulty for students who study abroad, where there may be far less contact with their lecturers.

Secondly, Malaysian students, according to a Malay academic (Interviewee M.A. - 1), will not participate in class without being asked questions directly. They are unresponsive and sit passively and must be trained to 'act' differently in a classroom situation. Until a rapport is built with them, there is little response. She states that: "even then, it's nothing compared to my Irish class, we were much more active in participation" (Interviewee M.A. - 1).

It is however quite surprising that despite the consensus in Malaysia today amongst educational policy makers and practitioners, that qualitative improvement in teaching and learning should be given priority, few programs seem to be taking place across the board and it remains very much a decision for each individual institution to pursue new teaching methodologies aimed at critical thinking and learning techniques.

5.5 Conclusion

This Chapter has attempted to give insights into the complexities of language and how the government's language policies affect the attitudes, identities and educational opportunities of the individual groups within the Malaysian education system. The medium of instruction in public and private universities and unequal access to some universities, determine inequity in both qualifications and employment opportunities for graduates. Language therefore, has become a segregating factor as a result of government policies.

The increased emphasis on 'identity' has been due to a language shift to a mother-tongue education for such ethnic groups as the Chinese and Indians. Identity has become an issue of contention for those who speak English 'openly' on certain university campuses. It has led to the marginalization and alienation of some students, showing the inequity in language policies originally aimed at promoting unity and national identity. An

awareness of attitudes to English language use, inside and outside of the classroom is necessary to promote a multicultural classroom.

The complexities of the learning styles of the different groups, partly due to their cultural patterns of learning and partly to the methodologies used in the Malaysian education system, emphasizes the underlying differences of the three main ethnic groups. In catering for the multicultural classroom it is therefore significant not to categorize Asian learners as being of 'one type'. This is of extreme importance within Malaysia, but also vital for understanding Malaysians abroad. The acknowledgement of alternative approaches and interpretations within the international classroom are key issues in academic success.

Chapter 6 will now examine those factors which influence the multicultural classrooms of Malaysia in the light of the changing Irish classrooms and highlight suggestions which could be adapted to suit the Irish model of multicultural education.

Chapter 6: Conclusions for Malaysia - Recommendations for Ireland

6.0 Introduction

This Chapter sums up the main conclusions of the thesis, drawing together the various strands examined throughout the different chapters concerning the Malaysian multicultural education system. It highlights the aspects which most effect education practices in Malaysia and evaluates the delivery of this multicultural education system. It further examines how it measures up to the theories put forward by multiculturalists worldwide (cf. Chapter 4), and shows how this compares to the policies and practices in place in other countries (cf. Chapters 4 & 5). In examining the practices in place, the thesis also reflects on Malaysia's own aspirations to move forward as a developed nation seeking recognition for academic excellence and actively recruiting international students to its educational institutions.

The following key elements have been selected from the different chapters in order to highlight the successes and failures, the advantages and disadvantages, the challenges and solutions of the policies and practices in place in Malaysia, whilst offering lessons to Ireland on this new era of multicultural education: (1) Legislation in a Multicultural Society; (2) Cultural Similarities and Differences; (3) Multicultural Theories in Practice and (4) Language, Learning Styles and Teacher Training.

6.1 Legislation in a Multicultural Society

In examining legislation, it is important to consider the approach to the multicultural society as a whole, in order to see what is emphasized and how this impacts on educational policies for the different cultural groups. In catering for a multicultural society and legislating with a whole society approach in mind, with a view to fair practice for *all*, Malaysia recognizes its diverse population through the celebration of religious and cultural festivities on its official calendar. The government's aim is for national integration through the unification of the different groups with 'one' common identity – a

bangsa Malaysia. On the surface, this seems to be a celebration of the nation's diversity and creates awareness for *all* Malaysians of its own multicultural makeup. The empirical research done for this thesis shows that, in practice, the emphasis is in fact, on 'one-culture' - the Malay culture, which is stressed through its national education system, through the curriculum and indeed the hidden curriculum of the school or institution (cf. Chapter 1:1.2). The 'preferential treatment' given to the *bumiputras* has been legislated in many different areas (cf. Chapter 1:1.3), but it is the educational policy which is of particular concern in this thesis.

6.1.1 Educational Policies

A policy which directly affects the educational equity afforded to *all* Malaysians is the 'preferential treatment' given to the *bumiputras* or indigenous peoples (cf. Chapter 1:1.3). In order to contain any public protest regarding these 'preferential treatments', the parliament introduced the *Internal Security Act* which has "made it an offence to raise sensitive issues like questioning the special rights of the Malays or the use of *Bahasa Melayu* as the official language" (Shuid & Fauzi 2001 p53). Chapter 4 has discussed the consequences of over-emphasizing the *bumiputra* students. It has examined the feelings of the *non-bumiputras* in relation to what they consider unfair access to public universities, segregation issues on campuses, as well as language issues (as discussed in greater detail in section 6.5). The knowledge that the *non-bumiputras* are treated differently in third-level education has created a rift between student ethnic groups. Interviews with students and academics of the different ethnic groups have emphasized that it is of deep concern on public university campuses.

The lack of clear action policies on campuses to integrate students has been acknowledged by the government, but to date there has been no clear mandate put in place to rectify these issues. Individual faculties have introduced policies such as ethnically-mixed study groups and mixed residences, all of which are positive moves towards changing the way for future multicultural student groups. However, unless a clear policy is put in place to change the general practices of these institutions, there is no long term planning to effect any permanent change.

6.1.2 Religious Practices

Awareness and tolerance of each others' religious practices is promoted and strongly supported by the government. However, in practice, the over-emphasis on the teaching of Islam within the government schools has been an issue of contention for many non-Muslims, who have moved their children to the vernacular (Chinese or Tamil) schools. The sensitivity of a pluralist society is highlighted as it prefers a segregated approach within the education system, as a result of the special attention given to 'one-culture' and 'one religion' in the national government schools. The hidden curriculum of the government schools emphasizes the Malay culture (as discussed in detail in Chapter 1:1.2) and does not promote other cultural groups beliefs and cultural practices.

6.1.3 Lessons for Ireland

In a multicultural society like Malaysia, people are not expected to give up their cultural and religious backgrounds, but rather to celebrate them openly. One lesson of cross-cultural communication for Ireland is to acknowledge the identity of *all* students by operating an *open-house* which celebrates the main festivals of the diverse groups. An international notice-board, for example, can be used as a regular reference for any celebrations or events, all religions should be welcomed and, as far as possible, catered for; international students should be encouraged to 'promote' their cultural identities and take part in and organize cultural events. As Ireland's top five non-European groups of international students include Chinese (14%), Malaysian (5%) and Indian (3%) (Education Ireland 2006 p14), lessons can be learnt for Ireland in dealing with legislative matters of concern to these cultural groups. The Malaysian Chinese and Malaysian Indians reflect the cultural habits of mainland China and India as part of their cultural heritage and the recognition of their religious and cultural festivals within the greater Irish society, as well as on university campuses, could lead to a more integrated approach for *all* students.

Malaysia has learnt that 'culture-specific' schools can lead to segregation for the students arriving at third-level universities. Ireland has recently consented to the Polish government to open a Polish school in 2007-8, with a Polish national curriculum and

Polish qualifications catering for the children of the 150,000 Poles who have registered to work in Ireland since May 2004 (Mc Laughlin and O' Brien, Irish Times 2006). The aim is for the Polish government to stay in touch with its migrant generation. There has been a demand from this community for Polish language lessons. Ireland needs to be aware that if these pupils continue on into the Irish third level education system, as their prior-learning experiences will have been culturally specific, there may be difficulties concerning integration. As Ireland moves away from the emphasis on religious schools separate religious practices in the Muslim schools is of concern. The National Representative Organization for multi-denominational schools, 'Educate Ireland' encourages multi-denominational schools on the basis of a commitment to provide "equality of access and esteem to children irrespective of their social or religious backgrounds" (Educate Ireland 2005). Separate schooling has proven to enhance issues of ethnicity and identity in Malaysia, and Ireland should carefully consider the positive and negative aspects of these schools before making the same mistakes as Malaysia.

6.2 Cultural styles

As the different styles of multicultural groups effect how these groups react to educational policies and practices, Chapter 3 stressed the similarities and differences of the three main cultural groups of Malaysia. This comprehensive understanding of how a cultural group thinks, feels and reacts is vital to developing a multicultural education system which works fairly for all groups. What needs to be emphasized in promoting a multicultural education system for *all* are the cultural characteristics which ethnic groups have in common, with an aim to establishing policies based on these 'common assumptions' as priorities for the multicultural classroom. Some examples of what Malaysian cultural groups have in common and what is different is explained in section 6.2.1.

6.2.1 Cultural differences and similarities

The common values of the three main Malaysian ethnic groups are (1) a 'group' society (2) harmony above all else (3) family as a priority group (4) hierarchy as the norm and (5) face-saving in showing respect for others. Differences arise in such areas as (1)

religion (2) attitudes to local cultural factors over 'western' approaches in policy and decision-making and (3) attitudes to one's fate, which Malays and Indians believe is pre-determined, as opposed to the Chinese who believe they can determine fate by their actions.

Through over-emphasizing one culture in Malaysian society, there has been a fervent pursuit of an education system which allows the cultivation of cultural groups' 'own' languages and customs. This has resulted in 'culture-specific' schools for Malaysia, contradicting the government's aim of 'one' *bangsa Malaysia* with one national education system catering for *all*. The division between secular and non-secular demands has caused ethnic groups to seek separate schools. The hidden curriculum of the institution can mask the actual intended policy or aim of catering for *all* multicultural groups.

6.2.2 Multicultural Campuses

The empirical research for this thesis has found that some Malaysian students became even more conscious of being *non-bumiputra* and were considered as 'different' when they came to the public universities (cf. Chapter 4:4.2.1.2). This was accentuated in some cases by teachers' attitudes to certain groups, as well as to the languages that were spoken both inside and outside of the classroom. There was evidence of *bumiputra* students being shown favouritism over the *non-bumiputra* students. Students are aware that *all* Malaysians are not treated the same at third level public education, which results in divided loyalties with some academics seeking employment prospects abroad and resulting in a 'brain-drain'. This has been acknowledged by the government who has sought ways of enticing academics back home (cf. Chapter 4:4.2.2.3).

6.2.3 Lessons for Ireland

Ireland must be aware of the specific cultural groups' needs in the individual educational institutions. This awareness includes an understanding of the groups' cultural differences and similarities to those of the host country. International offices have been set up in many third-level institutions receiving international students and, apart from providing

administrative support for the students, should place an emphasis on the importance of the broader intercultural experience for *all* students. Awareness of the presence of these cultural groups and some knowledge of their customs, languages, beliefs and festivals will create wider exposure for these students and this can help initiation into the classroom setting and result in more intercultural exchanges.

6.3 Multicultural Education

In examining the multicultural education theories which have been adopted by Malaysia, there is one important question which needs to be addressed concerning changes in the 'total school or educational environment' (cf. Chapter 4:4.1). All multiculturalists agree that no 'one' model suits any one pluralist society. It involves a multitude of variables and factors which need to be adapted. Some of those factors involve the cultural emphasis and the hidden curriculum of the institution, the learning styles of students used and the language of instruction, the teaching styles and the policies and practices in place in individual institutions. In relating this to Malaysia the factors which play an important role are (1) ethnic identities, (2) cultural pluralism and (3) the socio-political issues.

6.3.1 Ethnic Identity

The emphasis on identity having come through 'culture-specific' schools with 'own' language as the medium of instruction, as well as the emphasis placed by the different cultural groups on their 'own' religious and cultural festivities, can segregate students who arrive in a public university with no fixed-policy for integration. The *bumiputra* students who arrive from the rural areas are often labelled as having a *kampung* (village) mindset (cf. Chapter 4:4.2) and remain amongst their own groups, returning to their home towns and villages whenever possible, rather than integrating with the local urban student groups. Policies and practices are necessary in the educational institutions to encourage integration on and off-campuses. There are similarities in Ireland with some international students who appear on campuses and keep to their own groups, not integrating with the local students.

6.3.2 Cultural Pluralism - Indigenous Language Issues

Language, used to communicate cultural habits and customs from one generation to the next, has been stressed through the ethnic groups' demands for Chinese and Tamil medium schools, and the nationalists' demands for maintaining *Bahasa Melayu* in certain disciplines at university. The English language has brought with it its own controversies amongst the multicultural groups and will be discussed in section 6.5. The promotion of *all* of the main student groups' languages is essential in offering *all* groups the opportunity to learn other languages as a 'tool' for further education and communication. A poor level of English language competency is associated with the rural schools which are seen as disadvantaged and made up primarily of *bumiputras*. The association of cultural group with economic and educational status is what the government aims to change in Malaysia by giving more access to the *bumiputras* to improve their educational status, with preferential treatment policies. It will however, also involve educating the attitudes of these groups to *all* languages and their benefits, not to be viewed as a replacement of their 'own' language, which is of concern to many nationalist groups.

6.3.3 Socio-Political Issues - Access to Third-level

There is general dissatisfaction with the selection procedure for public universities as the *non-bumiputras* are seen to be less favoured. There is a centralized control by the Ministry of Higher Education in selecting students. Many of those interviewed for this thesis were concerned with the quality of the graduates from these universities, and the lack of autonomy for academic staff on the selection of students. If students are not accepted into third-level institutions on merit, as opposed to race, there is an immediate division on a multicultural campus.

6.3.4 Lessons for Ireland

Hale and Tijmestra (1990) state that international institutions need to agree on an "overall objective to expose students, and faculty, to an international climate and in particular to involve them in the experience of studying and working outside a single national culture" (p7). One practice in achieving the desired internationalized faculty is to encourage existing staff to travel and engage in various international activities such as conferences,

joint research projects with foreign institutions, periods of placement in foreign institutions as visiting lecturers or teaching short courses. This brings benefits to both local and international bodies of students. A collaboration with the countries of origin of international students regarding the training of local staff as a preparation to receiving those students can particularly benefit those groups. This can help academics in understanding any issues of 'identity' or language difficulties which may be replicated on local campuses for international students. Malaysia's experience of twinning programmes and foreign universities has resulted in foreign campuses being set up in Malaysia and collaboration through staff and student exchanges (cf. Chapter 4:4.2.2.3).

Concerning access for students, there is the ongoing debate as regards whether international students are 'displacing' Irish students on some programmes (e.g. medicine) on Irish campuses. This area needs to be addressed – and clarified – by the authorities in order to dispel any belief that some international students may be 'paving their way' into certain programmes, and not necessarily reaching the academic criteria. This could certainly cause problems for integration (The Higher Education Authority 2003 p138).

6.4 Language

Language can have demands on national as well as international interests. Malaysia is struggling with the need to advance economically, as well as academically by improving the nation's English language competence, whilst promoting its own official language *Bahasa Melayu* and allowing the ethnic groups to promote their own languages. As the public and private university systems are divided due to the medium of instruction used, with the *bumiputras* educated through a dual system of English and *Bahasa Melayu* there is concern regarding equal educational opportunity. The government's aims are clearly to advance Malaysia economically, but at present there is not the same opportunity for *all* to advance due to limited access to third-level and poor competence levels in the English language, as a result of prior educational experiences and opportunities.

6.4.1 English language – competence and consequence

As the majority group, the *bumiputras,* come from the rural community, they have had least exposure to the English language and to qualified English language teachers and are immediately disadvantaged at third-level institutions because of their lower ability. However, the government is supporting this group by allowing them greater access to the public universities. The attitudes to the use of the English language are also issues of contention as explained in detail in Chapter 5:5.3. The constraints lie with strong nationalist sentiment, linguistic identity and conformity to the group. These are contentious issues which can be applied to the multicultural classroom in many societies, as for example in South Africa (cf. Chapter 4:4.2). What has been agreed by multiculturalists is that linguistic identity is not inborn, but changes with the environment and situations of language use (cf. Chapter 5:5.3). There is therefore a need for multicultural policies to promote multilingualism and to discourage any stigma attached to a particular language or language group.

6.4.2 Visibility of languages on a multicultural campus

The university campus needs to be attuned to the needs of its own linguistic population. An awareness of the attitudes towards use of a particular language, both on and off the campus, is a positive step in recognising where the emphasis should lie. As Malaysian campuses seek academic excellence internationally, the English language needs to be accessible to *all* students. There is a need for its acceptance as a medium with far reaching benefits and its recognition as a tool for further education.

On any multicultural campus there is a visible need to promote the multilingual aspect of *all* ethnic groups and not to privilege one linguistic community over another. Malaysia is learning that opinions and attitudes much change and that this needs to be promoted firstly by the government's policies, but also by practices on individual campuses.

6.4.3 Lessons for Ireland

Language can be a unifying as well as a divisive force amongst a mixed racial society. It is vital to offer equal opportunities for advancement in educating and training students to cope with academia through a foreign language – English in the case of Irish institutions. The loss of identity through a language shift can lead to marginalization and alienation for students overseas, and it affects their attitudes and academic abilities. Language difficulties can be compounded by a huge range of factors including nuances in the meaning of words, or obscure cultural or literary references. This can be made even more difficult by professional jargon, the use of slang and individual peculiarities of accent (Ryan 2000). One area where undergraduate students - both local and international - may benefit is by improving their academic writing skills, for example: through encouraging them to read selectively and critically and giving examples of model essays which have used texts selectively (ibid.). This might be considered as part of the induction to third-level education for all students. By sharing common problems for all cultural groups, there is a mutual sense of educational advancement, as well as intercultural exchange.

6.5 Learning Styles

In developing the multicultural classroom, the different cultural groups' learning styles must be recognized by the teachers. This involves teacher-training in the key learning styles of the students, as well as awareness amongst the students of what is required at third-level education. In the case of Malaysian students, the danger lies in classifying *all* Asians as being of 'one' type and failing to recognize the influences of cultural make-up, medium of instruction and educational systems, which impacts on an individual's prior-learning experiences. Chapter 5 of this thesis has given some insight into the learning styles of the three main Malaysian cultural groups.

6.5.1 Prior Learning Experiences

Malaysian students, consisting of different ethnic groups who have come through 'culture-specific' schools with their 'own' language and cultural emphasis will have different styles of learning. They will be accustomed to teaching methodologies which may be quite different to that of the West. In Malaysia there is a dependency on the

teacher from an early stage in their education system and this continues into third level education. Accessibility to the teacher on the campus is common in Malaysia, but this is not necessarily the case in the West. How interactive the students are in class is also due to what is common practice within their own educational experiences to date (cf. Chapter 5:5.4). All of this information is necessary for academics who are dealing with Malaysian students in the multicultural classroom.

6.5.2 Teacher Training

Malaysia has recognized the need to improve teaching methodologies within the Malaysian classroom. Academics are now encouraged whenever they take a nine-month sabbatical, to spend that time abroad in order to experience new teaching and learning styles and to become involved in collaborative research. This is a positive approach in encouraging the use of different outlooks on teaching, as these teachers introduce new methods of teaching into the Malaysian classroom and challenge their students to learn in a more inquisitive manner. It is equally important that students themselves are open to these new methodologies. There is therefore, a need to educate students in what is expected of them, concerning interaction in the classroom, investigative learning styles, and how to become more 'critical-thinkers'. Students need guidance in these areas and that should be the responsibility of the educational institutions' teaching staff.

6.5.3 Local and International students at third level

It is a common reaction of some local students to feel impeded in the multicultural classroom, because of international students who may be accustomed to very different classroom norms. However, it is equally important for the first year undergraduate student, who also has prior-learning experiences, to be aware that third-level education has other demands on their own approaches to learning. Some guidance in the art of critical thinking is often needed for the local students themselves, as well as for the international students. Cosh (2000) recommends Personal Development Planning (PDP) which focuses on students taking control of their own learning through critical analysis, to understand the process of learning, to encourage student independence and strategies for personal improvement, through guiding personal reflection and planning for

educational and career goals. This is a course of action which might be developed through the International Office, but as this researcher feels it may also affect the local students and is, after all an area of academia[17], it would probably be better placed in Schools themselves, with tutors and teachers of first year undergraduate students.

6.5.4 Lessons for Ireland

When the students and teachers come from different countries, confusion can sometimes occur because of different ideas about teaching and learning that are deeply embedded in the different cultures. Allen and Higgins (1994) and Ames (1996) suggest that academic staff require training and development if they are to be effective, whether in their role as a counselor, tutor, or supervisor of international students. An induction for the academic staff concerning the cultural influences and the prior-learning experiences of these international students can be of benefit in preparing broader based techniques to suit diverse learning styles. An awareness and understanding of the emphasis on education within a cultural group, as well as the role of the teacher and an overview of the international students' education systems, should be included in the training and development of the academic staff dealing with culturally diverse classrooms.

6.6 Conclusion

This thesis has 'looked east' to Malaysia's multicultural education system and has examined the influences of culture, ethnicity, government policies, languages and learning styles on third level education. It has attempted to analyze those influences and see what lessons can be learnt by Ireland as a new era of diverse cultural groups enter the classrooms of this country. In some ways Malaysia is to be lauded for the success of its multicultural policies, but in other ways, it is not functioning well. However, it is important to take into consideration that it is an ongoing process, and as like any other multicultural education system elsewhere, it still has a way to go to reach its envisaged ideal. Banks (2001) states that: "multicultural education must be viewed as an ongoing

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[17] Many International Offices offer an administrative and customer-care service rather than academic.

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process, not as something that we 'do' and thereby solve the problems that are the targets of multicultural educational reform" (cited in Banks &Mc Gee Banks 2004 p4).

For Ireland the key factors to remember as it begins this journey to create a multicultural education system which serves *all* cultural groupings are: (1) a total school or educational reform is necessary with all aspects of the institutional makeup working together; (2) cultural recognition must have deep reaching consequences and be incorporated into the daily life of the educational institution; (3) government policies need to incorporate the experience of the academic workforce who deal directly with diverse groups of students; (4) resources and collaborations which can be shared through the internationalisation of experiences gained by teachers and students alike, can be beneficial to improving the intercultural workplace for *all* groups.

As this research entails an outsider's view of Malaysia, there are limitations to highlighting every aspect of the multicultural education system in place within this thesis. However, it is hoped that it will contribute in some way to offering lessons to Ireland, by making visible the complexities of Malaysian society, highlighting some of the successes and failures of creating an education system for such a diverse group of cultures, all the while remembering that it is 'a work in progress'.

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Appendix A – (1) Interview Questions for Tertiary Level Students

1. To which ethnic group do you belong?

2. Do you consider yourself firstly a Malaysian?

3. Do you consider yourself firstly Malaysian Chinese/Indian or Malay?

4. What exactly does race mean to you?

5. What type of schools did you attend for primary/secondary level?

6. Who chose the school? Why?

7. Why did you choose to enroll at the Universiti of Malaya?

8. Have you been enrolled in your first subject choice?

9. If not, then why not?

10. Do you feel as a Malaysian Chinese/Indian that you are given equal opportunities?

11. Do you feel as a Malay that you have unfair advantage over other races?

12. In what way?

13. How do you feel that this effects relations between other ethnic groups in the public universities?

14. Do you consider each of the ethnic groups to mix equally?

15. If not, why not?

16. Which group, in your opinion, keeps more to their own ethnic grouping?

17. Why is that?

18. Which language do you speak amongst your peers?

19. Does this vary depending on the ethnic mix?

20. Is there more of a tendency to speak Bahasa Melayu?

21. Which ethnic group will be more at ease speaking English and why?

22. How do you feel you are treated as students of U.M. by the academic staff?

23. Do you feel in anyway differentiated from other ethnic groups?

24. In what way?

25. Do you consider there to be different attitudes amongst the ethnic make up of the academic staff of U.M.?

26. How do you feel about English becoming a primary language of instruction at tertiary level?

27. Do you feel any of the ethnic groups are at a particular disadvantage in this regard?

28. How do you consider the standard of English to be amongst your peers?

29. Do you feel there is a certain stigma attached to speaking English outside of class? In what way?

30. Do you feel that religion is a controversial issue at tertiary level?

31. Is this a topic you would discuss amongst your peers?

32. How tolerant do you believe Malaysians are with regard to religious practice?

33. Do you respect the cultural practices of your peers?

34. Are there any circumstances where you consider Malaysians to be less tolerant?

35. How do you view the affirmative action policy of government regarding the Bumiputra?

36. Would you feel in any way segregated in your own country due to this policy?

37. What reforms would you like to see the government undertaking in order to make for a more equitable society in Malaysia?

38. What reforms that the government has already undertaken do you feel have ignited stronger feelings of segregation amongst your peer group?

39. What are the advantages of living in a diverse society such as Malaysia?

(2) Interview Questions for Faculty Members

1. What are the main forms of teaching styles used?
   (Frontal lectures, tutorials, group discussions formal/informal)

2. What type of participation is expected of students?
   Active class participants/ asking questions/ listening silently....

3. Is group work encouraged?

4. Do students prefer to work alone?

5. What amount of lecturer-student interaction is prevalent?

6. What size are lecture and tutorial groups?

7. What are classroom norms?

8. How frequently are students assessed and what % goes towards the final results?

9. Are oral presentations rated?

10. Are students expected to hand in frequent projects/assignments?

11. What are the main forms of assessment used?

12. Who grades the final end of year assessment?

13. How much autonomy does the Faculty have in curriculum planning, staffing, financing etc..?

14. How frequently does faculty meet with teaching staff?

15. Who is involved in planning assessment format? How often is this reviewed?

16. Do teaching members attend workshops on teaching and learning styles?

17. Is there a multicultural policy in place to incorporate the diverse racial mix of students?

18. What form does this take?

19. Is there any consideration of the different types of schooling of the students in planning teaching styles or assessment techniques?

20. What is the primary language of instruction? What language is used for assessments?

21. Are students from different racial backgrounds taken into account linguistically?

22. What quality assurance system is in place?

23. How are faculty members graded?

24. What are the minimum qualifications of teaching staff?

25. Is further research proposed as an incentive to staff?

26. What proportion of staff has received their training overseas?

27. Does this influence their teaching styles?

28. Does faculty share their experiences in planning assessment techniques from experience gained abroad?

29. Do you consider that the teaching styles used are influenced more by western or eastern standards?

30. Are their any exchanges of faculty members with universities abroad?

31. Do any foreign students attend undergraduate or do postgraduate studies with this faculty?

32. How are they catered for regarding teaching styles?

33. What is the gender mix of students in this faculty?

34. What is the racial mix?

35. Are there any particular learning difficulties that the different racial groups bring to the classroom?

36. What form of assessment do students coming from second level to third level have most difficulty with?

37. What difficulties would you consider Malaysian students having if they were to study in a western university system?

38. Would Malaysian students be 'typified' as having a preference for rote learning?

Appendix B - Coding of Interviewees

Individuals interviewed in the Public Universities:

Code	Ethnicity	Position	Institution	Faculty/Department
M.A. 1	Malay	Academic	Public University	Medicine
I.A. 2	Indian	Academic	Public University	Education
C.A. 6	Chinese	Academic	Public University	English
F.A. 9	German	Academic	Public University	German
M.A. 12	Malay	Vice-Chancellor	Public University	——
M.A. 14	Malay	Dean of Faculty of Education	*Bumiputra* University	English
C.A. 15	Chinese	Academic	National Public University	English
C.A. 22	Chinese	Teacher Trainer	Public University	English
M.A. 23	Malay	Academic	Public University	English
I.A. 24	Indian	Academic	Public University	English
I.A. 25	Indian	Academic	Public University	English

Groups interviewed in the Public Universities:

Code	Ethnicity	Position	Institution	Faculty/Department	No.
C.S. 3	Chinese	Undergraduate Students	Public University	English	4
M.S. C.S. I.S. 16	Malay Chinese Indian	Undergraduate Students	Public University	Medicine	6
M.S. C.S. I.S. 18	Malay Chinese Indian	Secondary Teachers Graduates	Public University	English	4
C.S. 19	Chinese	Masters Students	Public University	Humanities and Social Sciences	2
C.S. 20	Chinese	Undergraduate Students	Public University	English	4
M.A. 21	Malay	Administrators	*Bumiputra* University	International Office	2
M.A. 30	Malay	Academics	Public University	English / French	2

Private Universities:

Code	Ethnicity	Position	Institution	Faculty/Department/Area of Work
C.A. 7	Chinese	Administrator	Private University	Editor of University Magazine
M.A. 8	Malay	Dean of Faculty	Private University	Humanities and Social Sciences
M.P. 17	Malay	Parent of Graduate	Private University	Business

Ministry of Education:

Code	Ethnicity	Position	Institution	Department	No.
M.A. 26	Malay	Civil Servants	Ministry of Education	Curriculum Development	4
C.A. 27	Chinese	Civil Servant	Ministry of Education	English Language Teaching Centre	1
MA. 28	Malay	Civil Servant	Ministry of Private Higher Education	Education Promotion Division	1
I.A. 29	Indian	Civil Servant	Ministry of Higher Education	English Language Teaching Centre	1

Other:

Code	Ethnicity	Position	Institution
C. 4	Chinese	Director	Irish Universities & Medical Schools Consortium
C. 5	Chinese	General Manager	Nationwide Professional Education Services
M.P. 10	Malay	Parent	Primary and Secondary school going children
C.P. 11	Chinese	Parent	Secondary going child
I.P. 13	Indian	Parent	Secondary going child

M.A. = Malay Academic   M.P. = Malay Parent   M.S. = Malay Student
C.A. = Chinese Academic   C.P. = Chinese Parent   C.S. = Chinese Student
I.A. = Indian Academic   I.P. = Indian Parent   I.S. = Indian Student
F.A. = Foreign Academic   C. = Chinese

Appendix C - Student Learning Style Pilot Questionnaire

Full name: _____

Race: _____

Mother tongue: _____

Other languages spoken or written: _____

Language of Primary Schooling: _____

Language of Secondary Schooling: _____

Gender: _____

Year of Study: _____

Study Discipline: _____

Name of University/Tertiary Level Institution:_____

Scholarship/Other Financial Award: _____

1. What do you think is the main purpose of education?

    _____
    _____
    _____

(Please circle the letters in the questions below that best apply to your educational experience.)

2. What do you think is the main purpose of learning?
    a. developing intellectual knowledge
    b. acquiring practical skills
    c. developing confidence in oneself and one's abilities
    d. other_____

3. When do you learn best?
    a. alone
    b. doing assignments
    c. reading
    d. listening to the lecturer
    e. working with other students in a group
    f. talking to other students informally
    g. together_____

4. Who has the main responsibility to make the learning process effective?
   a. yourself
   b. the lecturer
   c. a partnership between lecturer and student

5. How would you describe the appropriate nature of the relationship between student and lecturer?
   a. formal and impersonal
   b. informal and friendly
   c. open but professional

6. How would you characterize the role of the lecturer in the learning process?
   a. as a guide and mentor
   b. as the expert imparting knowledge
   c. providing opinions for the student to think about
   d. listens to student and facilitates learning process
   e. other_____

7. What is the purpose of assessment in Higher Education?
   a. to measure student's skills
   b. a means of control over standards etc..
   c. to show the public university is doing its job
   d.other_____

8. Which of the following do you think is the most effective method of assessment?
   a. examinations
   b. written assignments/essays
   c. presentations or oral assessments
   d. self assessment methods
   e. other_____

9. How effective do you think that formal modes of assessment (exams/essays etc) are as a way of measuring your learning?
   a. very effective
   b. effective
   c. not very effective

10. Which style of learning do you think most effective in helping you to learn?
    a. formal lecture
    b. formally organized group seminars
    c. small group tutorials
    d. student-led group work
    e. practical experience e.g. work placements

11. Which style of learning do you like best?
    a. formal lecture
    b. formally organized group seminars
    c. small group tutorials
    d. student-led group work
    e. practical experience e.g. work placements
    f. other_____

12. What is/are the language(s) of instruction used for your course?

_____
_____
_____

13. How much contact do you have with your lecturers outside class time?

_____
_____
_____

14. How frequently do you have assessments over a semester?

_____
_____
_____

15. Do you ask questions in tutorials? If not, then why not? If so, why?

_____
_____
_____

16. Do you share notes with other students? If not, then why not? If so, why?

_____
_____
_____

17. Do you put off doing assignments? If so, then why?

_____
_____
_____

18. Do you take part in class discussions? If not, then why not? If so, why?

_____
_____
_____

19. At what 'time of day' do you prefer to study? Why?

_____
_____
_____

20. Where do you prefer to study?

_____
_____
_____

21. Do you consider 'rote learning' (memorization verbatim) the most appropriate form of learning?

_____
_____
_____

22. What form of learning do you consider more appropriate/ beneficial?

_____
_____
_____

23. Would you question what you learn in order to better understand?

_____
_____
_____

24. Is there room for questioning or alternative points of view?

_____
_____
_____

25. Do your lecturers expect you to question what you are learning?

_____
_____
_____

15th April 2005

Appendix D – Criteria used for Analysis of the Interviews

1. What multicultural policies and norms are in place amongst the different racial groups?

2. What is the quality of undergraduates in the public universities? Is quality compromised because of race?

3. What are the standards and qualifications of teachers teaching through English and what are the language policies in place?

4. Malaysia is setting itself up as a hub for academic excellence in the region - Who is Malaysia attracting? To what purpose? How are they advertising themselves internationally?

5. What are the entry requirements to the different Universities – is there discrimination amongst the different ethnic groups? Matriculation for whom? Form 6 and STPM for whom?

6. What is the 'image' portrayed by Malaysia nationally and internationally – including the "facework" of Malaysians?

7. What are the styles of learning of undergraduate students?

8. What is the level of communication amongst students and academics, as well as the academics and their peers?

9. Any forms of discrimination or disparities amongst the different ethnic groups?

10. Are graduates being produced en 'masse'?

Appendix E - Sample of Colour Coding used in two Interviews

(1) Interview - C. A. 15

Continued...

But it is also to bear in mind that this (1) is a public university and the students who come here from the rural area and they start forming their own *kampung*, they have their own collective societies and things like that. And so when I started to investigate I found that the students will only speak English in the class as soon as they leave the class they will speak other languages. They do not seem to want to improve their English and we carried out studies with high proficiency students and the main thing is we found out that they felt alienated when they tried to speak in English. People say you think you are very clever, ' so you want to be like the English' and especially if you are a Malay they associate English with Christianity and things like that so they have no choice but to speak Malay and to speak Chinese.

(6) From the Chinese schools they often have that problem, people say why is it you cannot speak Chinese, and you are Chinese and things like that. To blend in with society to be part of society they have to learn the language that everybody else uses. In that way they do not use English much. Of course they realize when you talk to them that English is important. I have to improve my English, but ultimately because of the society around them they cannot go and speak English too often, because, one thing nobody wants to speak to them in English and if they want to speak English then they have two or three of them in a group and then people start isolating them. It is very difficult. It is a logical thing. Many of these students when they start working in the private sector they start picking up the English and I meet them a few years later and they speak so much better English. In the workplace they have no choice.

(9) So...that means there is a problem with our environment here. It is an environment that does not promote the learning of English. How do you solve this problem? I heard this problem from Chinese students in university X...especially those who are from the Kuala Lumpur area. They always tell me I do not like University Y it is like a 'kampung' a village. People do not like me because I speak English and I talk about things, very urban.

Continued...

(3) The bulk of the notes they refer to is in Malay if there is no choice they go into the internet and they find they cannot understand the materials in the internet.

(7) The students from the sciences are better. I make them do it in English they have to pay to use the computer internet facilities in the library. The rate is low but the queue is very long. They go to the cyber café; they however feel that their money is dropping with the time. It is time we give free internet access. They will only go online if they have to.

Continued...

(2) Interview - C. S. 20

Continued...

(9) We are Chinese. I went to a Chinese primary government aided school. The language was Chinese for six years. The secondary school was a fully aided government school and fully through Malay. We had one period a week to learn our own mother language of Chinese. I taught in this POL classes. I know about this problem we should have at least three periods a week but it is not arranged in the timetable. We study Chinese classes when the other races, like the Malay have religion classes. The problem is in form 1 to 3. The Malays have six periods per week of religion. The Chinese must do a double that means three periods of Moral Studies and three periods of Chinese language from form one to three. Now when we come to form four and five and the religion classes for the Malay is four periods. Again the problem is the Chinese must do three periods of Moral Studies and only one period left for Chinese language.

Continued...

(5) Some people still question the meritocracy?
Yes. This issue is brought up every year. Even until June or July of this year. There are many Chinese who have top results and still cannot get into this university. I don't know how they run this system of meritocracy. There still is a quota of sorts.

Kuala Lumpur June 2005