

Communication and Prejudice towards Others within Students of the Public University

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Abstract—This paper analyses one particular public university towards the prejudice aspects of one ethnic to another and the frequency relationship between inter-ethnic communication. This paper is based on a research data of 300 questionnaires given to the relevant ethnics in that particular university. The data analyzed revealed that the inter-ethnic communication is at a state of monotone yet the frequency of communication within different ethnicities is slim and bounded. The challenges occur within the major category of ethnics – Malay, Chinese and Indian within the context of 1) frequency of communication; and 2) level of prejudices. Null relationship could be approved directly from the questionnaires of the survey to show that the prejudices antecedence is based on the frequency of communication among the three major ethnics. Albeit, ethnicity in itself is problematic.

Keywords— inter-ethnic communication, prejudice, students

I. INTRODUCTION

THE Malaysian government prioritizes the importance of ethnic relations amongst all races. In this regard, a module called 'Ethnic Relations' is made compulsory for all undergraduates to uptake in higher learning institutions. This module introduces the variety of cultures and practices amongst the diversity of races in Malaysia. Albeit, it covers the fundamental ideology of relationship at the microscopic level for the undergraduates to appreciate the customs, religions and anthropological aspects of each race. It shows the government really serious in developing unity amongst students at the tertiary level. This fact is strengthened by Gurin & Magda (2006) who stated that this exposure in the long run would be prolonged towards their graduation time and beyond.

Ramlee Mustapha, Norzaini Azman, Faridah Karim, Abdul Razak Ahmad and Maimun Aqsha Lubis (2009) claimed that the inter-relationship amongst ethnic communication in Malaysia is of moderate level. In addition, Ezhar Tamam, Fazilah Idris and Wendy Yee Mei Tien (2011) stated that the non-Malay students have better inter-ethnic

communication compared to the Malay students. Ezhar Taman (2006) also noted that inter-ethnic communication contributes toward students' attitude toward other ethnic group.

On the other hand, Binder, Brown, Zagefka, Funke, Kessler and Mummendey (2009) propagated that the frequency of inter-ethnic communication can cause prejudice towards other ethnic groups. This is to say that high frequency of inter-ethnic communication can reduce the level of prejudice towards other ethnic groups. However this situation can only take place if the interaction with other ethnic groups is under fair and stable level.

Morsin Peraman (1991) researched on the complexity of reoccurring prejudice in a day to day social and communication context amongst the different ethnics within the population of undergraduates namely the Malay, Chinese and Indian. The research concluded that there was prejudice amongst university students towards different ethnic groups. Abdul Samad Hadi (2003) in his research stated that 80 percent of the multi-ethnic respondents have prejudice towards other ethnic groups. It seemed that their relationship is good at surface level as the students did not do their daily activities with students from different ethnic groups.

In contention through a general conception of reading without statistical proof, most article refer to the statement of Chinese ethnic is good at entrepreneurship but dirty in nature. India is rather alcoholic and create scene of fighting. The Malay is the one that is religious, giving in nature but yet rather lazy.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Prejudice as a paradigm in inter-ethnic communication

Pettigrew and Troop (2006) said that prejudice is an emotion that caused unsavory feeling towards other ethnic groups. According to Stein, Post & Rinden (2000) prejudice also influences attitude towards other ethnic groups. A member of one ethnic tends to avoid having any interaction with another from a different ethnic group. However, Dixon & Rosenbaum (2004) stated that a member of an ethnic group who has a positive attitude towards other ethnic group tends to have interaction with other ethnic group. This is supported by Pettigrew (1998) and Pettigrew and Tropp (2008) where they said inter-ethnic communication can reduce the negative

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attitude towards other ethnic groups.

Naturally prejudice can reduce the frequency of inter-ethnic communication. Pettigrew and Trop (2006) did meta-analysis researches based on the relationship between prejudice and inter-ethnic communication and the results showed that 95 percent of the 516 research shows that inter-ethnic communication has negative relationship due to prejudice. Someone that has prejudice towards other ethnic group would neglect to have an interaction with people from other ethnic groups. Meanwhile, Eller and Abrams (2003) and Levin, Van & Sidanius (2003) said that prejudice can reduce the interaction with other ethnic groups and at the same time inter-ethnic communication can also reduce prejudice.

Vorauer (2008) claimed that an individual who has prejudice would have the tendency to act bias, unfair treatment and difficult to expose personal details towards other ethnic groups. This in turn would allow that individual to experience problem while they are having interaction with people from different ethnic group while an individual who has less prejudice may not have problem while communicating with people from other ethnic group.

On the same note, an individual that has less prejudice would have the tendency to improve the relationship with people from other ethnic groups. It does not only improve the attitude towards others but it will also create a dynamic and good relationship with people from other ethnic groups. Having a good relationship with people from other ethnic groups can improve the interaction with them. On the other hand, an individual that has prejudice tends to have more relationship with people from the same ethnic group. This may cultivate prejudice which will reduce the positive feeling towards others and this can reduce the inter-ethnic interaction (Gaertner, Rust, Dovidio, Bachman, & Anastasio, 1994).

B. The Contact Theory

Most of the previous research is reading into the contact theory in relations to inter-ethnic communication and prejudice towards different types of ethnicity. In this particular research, the theory is conceptually framed to understand and interpret the meaning of relationship amongst graduates in one of the public universities (Binder et al., 2009). Several western scholars also developed the contact model that was introduced by Allport's (Brewer & Miller, 1984; Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Gaertner & Davidio & Pettigrew, 1998).

Allport (1954) stated that contact between different ethnic group is very effective to reduce prejudice towards other ethnic groups. However, Allport (1954) mentioned that positive output only occurs under four situations namely both communicators having the same status and objective, cooperation and interaction supported by the authority. Allport (1954) also stated that the frequency of inter-ethnic communication and prejudice towards other ethnic groups would result in reverse relationship which is the more one

communicates with people from other ethnic group, one would give a lesser level of prejudice towards them.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In Malaysia, inter-ethnic communication has formed a dilemma over the years. Most local writers form a conclusion that the universities failed to cultivate the spirit of integration amongst students (Kamaruzaman Askandar, 2006). Several parties also blamed the universities and believed that the universities failed to unite multi-racial students. They also criticized by saying that there are ethnocentrism and segregation and no toleration in campuses (Segawa, 2007).

There are numerous research and scholars framing this ideology of inter-ethnic communication from the local and global view. The main context is reviewed under the subject of prejudice (Mahli, 1998; Zahara Aziz, Amla Salleh & Hardiana Ema Ribu, 2010; Khamil Zainal et al., 2009; Zaharah Hassan, Bahaman Abu Samah & Abu Daud Sidong, 2005; Mansor Mohd Noor, 2000; 2005; Morsin Peraman, 1991; Sanusi Osman, 1984; Agoes Salim, 1983; Zaharah Hassan, Fazilah Idris, Noor Aziah Mohd. Awal, Azizah Ya'acob & Mansor Mohd. Noor, 2010). Based on the previous research, none theless, there is a limited research done on the prejudice level amongst different ethnic groups. Interestingly, it showed that research on frequency of communication related studies and prejudice never has been quantified within the nature of ethnic practice among the three major ethnics of which belong to the group of 1) Malay; 2) Indian; and 3) Chinese.

Based on this discourse of conceptual framework, this research is:

1. To measure the level of prejudice among the Malay, Chinese and Indian.
2. To identify the frequency of inter-ethnic communication within the context of graduates of Malaysian Public University.
3. To identify inter-ethnic communication in relation to prejudice within the ethnic groups.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is a quantitative research and questionnaires were used to collect data from respondents. The questionnaire is divided into three sections namely demographic of respondents, frequency of inter-ethnic communication and prejudice towards other ethnic groups. Level of prejudice are measured based on Likert Scale of 1 = Extremely disagree, 2 = Strongly disagree, 3 = Disagree, 4 = Agree and 5 = Strongly Agree through 15 statements which covers themes such as emotions, stereotyping, beliefs and these are adapted from Linda & Thomas (2005). Similarly for frequency of inter-ethnic communications, 8 statements ranging from daily campus social interaction such as lectures, hostel, library as well as taking the public transport. These 8 statements are also measured using the Likert Scale of 1 = Extremely disagree, 2 = Strongly disagree, 3 = Disagree, 4 = Agree and

5 = Strongly Agree.

For data collection, questionnaires were given to respondents. The random sampling respondents consist of the undergraduate students in University Putra Malaysia. There are 300 respondents namely Malay (150 pax: 50 %), Chinese (100 pax: 33.3 %) and Indian (50 pax: 16.7 %). The demographic profile is concluded in Table 1.

TABLE I
DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE (N=300) OF RESPONDENTS

Variable		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	146	48.7
	Female	154	51.3
Ethnic	Malay	150	50.0
	Chinese	100	33.3
	Indian	50	16.7
Religion	Islam	152	50.7
	Buddhism	86	28.7
	Hinduism	47	15.7
	Christian	15	5.0
Hometown	Town	172	57.3
	None urbanite	128	42.7
Age	20 - 21	161	53.7
	22 - 23	113	37.7
	24 - 25	20	6.7
	26 and above	6	2.0
Hostel	Kolej 14	87	29.0
	Kolej 12	79	26.3
	Kolej 15	77	25.7
	Kolej 16	57	19.0
Specific location of grown up	Majority of minor ethnic	144	48.0
	Mix ethnicity	134	44.7
	Other ethnic	22	7.3

Half of the respondents are female and the rest are male (the ratio is 57.3 % to 42.7 %). More than half of the respondents are non-urbanites and the rest are from the city. Majority of the respondents are at the age of 20 -21 years old. In summary about 48 % of the respondents has been living and brought up within the context of mono-ethnicity.

V. DATA ANALYSIS

A. The Level of Prejudice Towards Ethnicity

The first objective seeks to measure the level of prejudice among the Malays, Chinese and Indians. Table 2 describes the level of prejudice amongst the three ethnic groups ranging from 1 to 5. None of the prejudice level goes beyond 3 but there is evidently a differentiation between the groups. Malay students show a moderate level of prejudice towards Chinese (M = 2.41, S.D = 0.70) and low level of prejudice towards Indian students (M = 2.33, S.D = 0.69). For the Chinese

students, they have moderate level of prejudice towards Malay students (M = 2.39, S.D = 0.55) and low level of prejudice towards Indian students (M = 2.32, S.D = 0.55). For the Indian students, they show low level of prejudice towards both the Malay students (M = 1.92, S.D = 0.71) and the Chinese students (M = 1.83, S.D = 0.54). Through this data analysis, it shows that the Indian students are more tolerant towards other ethnic groups namely the Malays and Chinese.

TABLE II
PREJUDICE TOWARDS OTHER ETHNIC BASED ON GROUP (N=300)

Ethnicity	Potential Ethnic	Percentage of Prejudice (%)			
		Low	Moderate	High	Min (SD)
Melayu	Cina	47.3	49.3	3.3	2.41 (.700)
	India	50.7	46.0	3.3	2.32 (.690)
Cina	Melayu	48.0	52.0	-	2.39 (.550)
	India	51.0	49.0	-	2.32 (.550)
India	Melayu	78.0	20.0	2.0	1.92 (.710)
	Cina	82.0	18.0	-	1.83 (.540)

Note: Low Level=score 1-2.33, Moderate Level=score 2.34-3.66, High Level=score 3.67-5.0

B. Frequency of Communication Between Ethnic

The second objective is to identify the frequency of inter-ethnic communication within the context of the undergraduates. Table 3 concluded the analysis on the frequency of inter-ethnic communication. It is shown that communication is not focusing on the group but occurring within the university campus. It is noted that inter-ethnic communication happens more when academic matters are involved.

Table 4 showed the frequency of inter-ethnic communication within the three groups. It is said that more than half of the Malays, Chinese and Indians have moderate level of inter-ethnic communication where the Malays is at 54.7%, Chinese at 53.0% and Indians at 59.0%. This shows that the inter-ethnic communication amongst the Malay, Chinese and Indians do not take place frequently.

TABLE III
FREQUENCY IN INTER-ETHNIC COMMUNICATION (N=300)

Item	Frequency (%)					Min (SD)
	1	2	3	4	5	
I interact with other ethnics at faculty	1.7	7.0	7.9	40.7	43.0	4.16 (.950)
I interact with students of different ethnic for group work	3.7	7.3	11.0	42.3	35.7	3.99 (1.04)
I interact with students from other ethnic during co-curricular activities.	6.0	8.7	15.3	42.7	27.3	3.76 (1.12)
I interact with students of other ethnic during in hostel.	4.3	13.7	17.3	35.3	29.3	3.71 (1.15)

I interact with students of other ethnic during university activities	5.3	11.7	20.7	42.0	20.3	3.60 (1.09)
I interact with students of other ethnic at cafeteria	6.3	16.7	18.0	36.7	22.3	3.52 (1.18)
I interact with students of other ethnic at bus stop	5.0	18.7	19.0	37.7	19.7	3.48 (1.14)

Note: 1 = Extremely disagree, 2 = Strongly disagree, 3 = Disagree, 4 = Agree and 5 = Strongly Agree

TABLE IV
THE LEVEL OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN ETHNIC (N=300)

Ethnic	Percentage (frequency)			Min (SD)
	Low	Moderate	THigh	
Malay (n=150)	3.3	54.7	42.0	2.83
Chinese (n=100)	7.0	53.0	40.0	2.76
Indian (n=50)	4.0	59.0	37.0	2.92

Note. Range 1-5. Low=1-2.33, Moderate=2.34-3.66, High=3.67-5.0

C. The Relationship Between Communication within Ethnic and the Prejudice Towards Others

Table 5 showed the analysis of relationship within the ethnicity amongst the three groups of which (Malay, Chinese and Indian). The correlation of the inter-ethnic relationship between the Malay and Chinese is ($r = -.140, p = .047$) with the prejudice towards Indian is ($r = -.160, p = .050$). It means that higher engagement between the Malay towards another ethnicity, the percentage of prejudice would then be lower.

Based on the sample from the Chinese ethnicity, the r-correlation is higher for the inter-ethnicity communication. Table 5 showed that the significant of $-r$ towards the Malay is at the range of ($r = -.221, p = .027$) and prejudice towards Indian is ($r = -.221, p = .027$) This means that the higher communication engagement between the two ethnicities, the lower the rate of prejudice can be achieved. The Indian ethnicity do not have any prejudice towards the Chinese and Malays. However, a higher communication engagement concluded that the more flexibility can be tolerated by all races but this do not apply towards the Indians. The rate towards Indian to Malay is ($r = -.023, p = .107$) and the rate towards Chinese is ($r = -.027, p = .057$).

TABLE V
THE VALUE OF RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INTER-ETHNIC COMMUNICATION AND PREJUDISM

Malay		Chinese		Indian	
Prejudice toward Chinese	Prejudice toward Indian	Prejudice toward Malay	Prejudice toward Indian	Prejudice toward Malay	Prejudice toward Chinese
-.140	-.160	-.221	-.200	-.023	-.027
$p = .047$	$p = .050$	$p = .027$	$p = .046$	$p = 1.07$	$p = .057$

VI. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research focuses on prejudice of one ethnic group to another along with the frequency of inter-communication and

its relationship within the three ethnic groups namely the Malays, Chinese and Indians. It is rather obvious to show that inter-ethnic communication amongst the undergraduate students in University Putra Malaysia is at a null stage. The data and findings from this research concurs with what was stated in previous researches (Zaharah Hassan, Bahaman Abu Samah & Abu Daud Sidong, 2005; Morsin Peraman, 1991; Abdul Samad Hadi, 2001; Ramlee Mustapha, 2009; Hamidah Ab Rahman, Norlin Ahmad, Nur Akmar Nordin, Norasikin Mahmud, Rozianan Shaari & Shah Rollah Abdul Wahab, 2011; and Kamaruzaman Askandar, 2006) which is the inter-ethnic communication is at the moderate level. A university and its consitution must heed this factor as a serious issue so that a better integration and exercise of inter-ethnicity communication can be put into a stage of stability and common usage regardless of group and religion.

The findings indicated that the level of prejudice among Malay students towards their fellow students and vice versa Chinese students towards Malay students, are of moderate level of prejudice. However, both the Malay and Chinese students share the same prejudice level towards their Indian counterparts which is of the low level. This means that there is a fair amount of prejudice within the three ethnic groups in the university. Although it has not reached an alarming level it should not be taken lightly either.

In addition, the findings also indicated that engagement in the context of inter-communication is limited but relatively not in the level where there should be any concern. According to the research of Osman (1989) and Peraman (1991), there is an increased level of frequency in terms of inter-communication between the ethnic groups. There are two aspects that can be seen through this level. Firstly, inter-communication between these groups happen when it is motivated by personal needs such as to complete academic tasks. Secondly, inter-communication frequency level is at the moderate level when the desired level should be of a higher frequency looking at the fact that a public university is a place where there exist a melting pot of ethnicities and it should reach a stage where inter-communication is seen as a norm in a student's daily social interaction.

Further, this research also found that inter-communication between ethnic groups does not come naturally. For the Malay and Chinese groups, there is a linkage between the level of prejudice to the frequency of inter-communication between the groups. The higher the frequency of inter-communication between them, the lower the level of prejudice gets. However, this finding does not significantly apply to the Indian students as they have low levels of frequency of inter-communication as well as low level of prejudice towards their counterparts. This is perhaps the Indian students are of minority group and therefore, less dominant and possess higher level of tolerance towards others. Therefore, this finding does not concur with the Contact Theory where it stated that the higher frequency of contact would definitely lowers the level of prejudice

(Aronson & Patnoe, 1997; Mullen & Copper, 1992; Binder, Brown, Zagefka, Funke, Kessler & Mummendey, 2009; Ezhar Tamam, 2009). Suffice to say, ethnicity is a factor to be considered where prejudice level is considered.

In a nutshell, the theoretical framework which has been adopted and adapted is relevant to the research but there are more aspects to be considered where inter-communication between different ethnic groups is taken into account. The aspects of engagement and tolerance within the context of social, political and academic should be cultivated amongst students to increase inter-communication as well as to reduce level of prejudice. A university such as University Putra Malaysia should encourage a positive and effective integration between the different ethnicities in its campus community given that Malaysia is potpourri of diverse race, religion and culture. This is a mandatory step to ensure peace and stability for the betterment of the society at large.

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