

## EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL COHESION: PROMOTING 1R+3R THROUGH SCHOOL CURRICULUM<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

This article is part of an ongoing project on education for social cohesion. The article aims to present the findings of fieldwork carried out in selected primary and secondary schools in four States in Malaysia (Sabah, Sarawak, Selangor, Kelantan). The aspects to be discussed are the views of the student-respondents regarding the meaning of school and benefit of schooling, the subjects that enable them to learn, know about and respect their own religion, community and home state, as well as other religions, communities and other states in Malaysia. Data analysis will be based on a spatial framework to see if there are differences between States, rural-urban, and types of schools. Education and the schooling system in Malaysia are constant agenda in the discourse of nation-building and national unity. This is because education is regarded as an important avenue to inculcate national consciousness and social cohesion among the people. However, in a multi-ethnic country like Malaysia, it is important to have an education system that promotes inclusion and participation of all citizens, where diversity of learners is recognised and acknowledged. An inclusive education aiming to promote social cohesion, that is, greater understanding, respect and interaction among students of diverse backgrounds, should be grounded on these four principles/pillars of education: *learning to know*, *learning to do*, *learning to be* and *learning to live together*. As social beings, students need to learn to interact and relate with people from different backgrounds. The school is thus an important avenue to learn about diversity and how to live with such diversity. What is the relevance and effectiveness of the education system if it is unable to provide the basic requirements to train the students about the four learning pillars? The demographic plurality of Malaysia calls for our education system to provide such opportunities for our young generation to learn and know more about themselves and others. In the context of social cohesion, failure to take into account the diversity of the national population, and exclusion of some ethnic populations from the schooling and education system, will give a one-sided picture of the real demographic situation. The school as an important educational institution can be the place to foster respect and sense of responsibility towards others. In short, does the education system produce students who are 'academically-literate' (competent in 3Rs – reading, writing, arithmetic) so as to serve as manpower resource for the labour market? Or, does the education system also play the role of producing 'culturally-literate' students, who are competent in 1R + 3r [Relationship + *recognise*, *respect* and *reconcile*]? The findings of the research project indicate that the education system in Malaysia serves the dual role of providing academic competence (3R) and inter-cultural understanding (1R+3r). Through the responses of the student-respondents, irrespective of type of

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school (national, national-type, private; primary, secondary; rural, urban), we can say that there is hope for our schools to develop the four learning pillars and the value of 1R+3r among our young generation through the school curriculum.

Keywords: education, social cohesion, promoting 1r+3r, school curriculum, Malaysia

## INTRODUCTION

This article is part of an ongoing project on education for social cohesion. The article aims to present the findings of fieldwork carried out in selected primary and secondary schools in four States in Malaysia (Sabah, Sarawak, Selangor, Kelantan). The aspects to be discussed are the views of the student-respondents regarding the meaning of school and benefit of schooling, the subjects that enable them to learn, know about and respect their own religion, community and home state, as well as other religions, communities and other states in Malaysia. Data analysis will be based on a spatial framework to see if there are differences between States, rural-urban, and types of schools.

The role of education in promoting a sense of common citizenship, social cohesion or national unity among citizens has long been the focus of governments and policy makers. In a country with people from diverse ethnic, religious, racial backgrounds, this role of education as a cohesive force is even more significant. This is because peace and stability in the country can only arise and develop from meaningful relationships among the people. This integrationist role of education has been the backbone of education policies in Malaysia, from colonial period to present-day. However, to achieve this noble aim, unifying elements need to be present in the policies and actual implementation at the ground (school) level. Do education policies as operationalised through the school curriculum, co-curriculum and environment provide spaces and opportunities for building relationships and developing a foundation of moral character based on trust, respect and cooperation?

Education and the schooling system in Malaysia are constant agenda in the discourse of nation-building and national unity. This is because education is regarded as an important avenue to inculcate national consciousness and social cohesion among the people. However, in a multi-ethnic country like Malaysia, it is important to have an education system that promotes inclusion and participation of all citizens, where diversity of learners is recognised and acknowledged.

An inclusive education aiming to promote social cohesion, that is, greater understanding, respect and interaction among students of diverse backgrounds, should be grounded on these four principles/pillars of education: *learning to know*, *learning to do*, *learning to be* and *learning to live together* (Delors 1996). As cultural beings, students have their own cultural values and norms that guide their behaviour. However, as social beings, they need to learn to interact and relate with people from diverse backgrounds – whether cultural, religious, economic, educational, residential. The school is thus an important avenue to learn about diversity and how to live with such diversity.

What is the relevance and effectiveness of the education system if it is unable to provide the basic requirements to train the students about the four learning pillars? The demographic plurality of Malaysia calls for our education system to provide such opportunities for our young generation to

learn and know more about themselves and others. In the context of social cohesion, failure to take into account the diversity of the national population, and exclusion of some ethnic populations from the schooling and education system, will give a one-sided picture of the real demographic situation. The school as an important educational institution can be the place to foster trust, respect, responsibility towards others and help build meaningful relationships among students. In short, does the education system produce students who are ‘academically-literate’ (competent in 3Rs – reading, writing, arithmetic) so as to serve as manpower resource for the labour market? Or, does the education system also play the role of producing ‘social-culturally-literate’ students, who are competent in 1R + 3r [Relationship + *recognise*, *respect* and *reconcile*]?

These questions are not easy to provide answers to. The debate on education in Malaysia - whether regarding medium of instruction (single or multi-stream), national versus vernacular schools (national language or mother tongue education), different schooling systems (public, private, international, home schooling, religious, secular), access to schooling and education (rural-urban, gender, age, citizenship, economic status) – have dominated the mass media as well as public forums. This state of affairs is aggravated by the constant changes to the education policies and programmes. Human society, not only governments, place high importance on education. For governments, education is regarded as an important avenue to foster equality and citizenship consciousness, which will contribute towards economic development, social cohesion and peace. For the people, education broadens the mind and deepens one’s thoughts about oneself, others and the outside world through the knowledge acquired.

Hence, human beings, irrespective of cultural background, religious, ethnic, class, citizenship, residential location or gender, desire education for self-advancement and self-actualisation. Whether this desire could be attained depends, however, on the political scenario and local aspirations. Take for example, the assassination attempt on Malala Yousufzai, a girl student aged 15. She was shot at close range on 9 October 2012 by Taliban gunmen while on her way home from school in a bus (Husain 2013). Or more recently, the kidnapping of more than 200 girls from a school in Nigeria by a group calling themselves ‘Boko Haram’ (BBC News Africa. 2014; Chothia 2014). While Malala has recovered from her ordeal, the Nigerian girls are still in captivity. What is the reason for this act of inhumanity on Malala and the girls? That education is not for females. That school is not the place for girls. Home and the kitchen is where these girls belong.

In the context of multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious Malaysia, what kind of education and schooling system is appropriate to meet the needs and aspirations of both the government and the local people? Should the education and schooling system be based on the philosophy ‘education for all’, that is a system that caters to the needs of all levels – individual, society and nation?

### **1R+ 3r™ Project: Background, Objectives and Methodology**

The school serves as an agent of socialisation in fostering the national, societal and individual aspirations among the students. Hence, education and schooling should be seen as a socialising process (Cheng 1998: 21) to develop students with such aspirations. If Malaysia is acknowledged to

be a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural society, are education and schools in the country prepared for such diversity in their policies, curriculum and co-curriculum?

This research project, titled ‘Social cohesion through the 1R+3r concept in Malaysian education’ (shortened version ‘1R+3r project’), focuses on the role of education and schooling in fostering social cohesion. **1R** means ‘Relationship’ and **3r** refers to ‘*recognise*’, ‘*respect*’ and ‘*reconcile*’. The main idea underlying the research project concerns the importance of building relationships among students, teachers and parents from diverse ethnic, cultural, religious, gender, economic and regional backgrounds. In order to build meaningful and productive relationships, there are three

The project has 2 main objectives:

1. to explore the opportunities for students to learn about self and others through the school curriculum, co-curricular activities and school environment.
2. to develop a 1R+3r™ ‘Getting to Know Malaysians’ website (*under construction*)

The first objective will be the focus of this article. The first objective takes into account the school context, that is (i) school type [national & national-type; private & government]; (ii) school location [rural & urban; island & mainland]; and (iii) school level [Primary, Year 5 & 6, & Secondary, Form 4 & 5]. Forty respondents are selected from each type of school, location and level. For example, 40 students are selected from Primary 5, rural, national school. Another 40 students are selected from Primary 5, urban, national school.

Data collection consists of a questionnaire with the scope covering questions on Curriculum (*understanding the meaning of school & benefits of schooling; learning about self & others through subjects*); Co-curriculum (*learning about self & others through sports, clubs & associations and uniformed units*); and School Environment (*school environment conducive to intercultural learning and interaction*).

The research team has chosen four States - Selangor, Kelantan, Sabah and Sarawak – as research locations. For each State, selected schools were identified according to the categories mentioned above:

1. National, primary school, urban and rural (SKB & SKLB)
2. National-type, primary Chinese, urban and rural (SJKCB & SJKCLB)
3. National-type, primary Tamil, urban and rural (SJKTB & SJKTLB)  
[\* *not included in this paper*]
4. Private, primary and secondary schools, urban (PTR & PTM)
5. National, secondary schools, urban and rural (SMKB & SMKLB)
6. Private, secondary Chinese schools (IP)

The actual number of schools selected in each State and the number of respondents varied based on the schools’ availability and time constraints (see Table 1 below):

Table 1 Number of Schools by Type of School and State

State/No. of schools	Type of School							Total
	SKB & SKLB	SMKB & SMKL B	SJKCB & SJKCL B	SJKTB & SJKTL B	PTR	PTM	IP	
SW (Sarawak)	2	2	2	0	1	1	0	8
SL (Selangor)	2	2	2	4	1	1	1	13
SB (Sabah)	3	2	2	0	0	0	0	7
KN (Kelantan)	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	6
Total	9	8	8	4	2	2	1	34

Source: 1R+3r fieldwork data 2013

Table 2 Number of Students by Type of School and State

State/Schools		Type of School						Total
		SK	SMK	SJKC	PTR	PTM	IP	
SW (Sarawak)	Students	65	80	87	39	50	0	321
	%	20.0%	25.0%	27.0%	12.0%	16.0%	0.0%	100.0%
SL (Selangor)	Students	78	81	103	41	39	39	381
	%	21.0%	21.0%	27.0%	11.0%	10.0%	10.0%	100.0%
SB (Sabah)	Students	109	82	83	0	0	0	274
	%	40.0%	30.0%	30.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
KN (Kelantan)	Students	79	54	76	0	0	0	209
	%	38.0%	26.0%	36.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Total	Students	331	297	349	80	89	39	1185
	%	28.0%	25.0%	30.0%	7.0%	8.0%	3.0%	100.0%

Source: 1R+3r fieldwork data 2013

Table 1 above shows that 34 schools, including rural and urban, primary and secondary levels, national, national-type, private and independent schools, participated in this research, with a grand total of 1185 students as respondents (Table 2).

Table 3 Type of School by Ethnic Group and State

Ethnic	State/Type	SK	SMK	SJKC	PTR	PTM	IP	Total
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group	of school							
Malay	SW	27 (56)	12 (25)	4 (8)	2 (4)	3 (6)	-	48 (100)
	SL	78 (49)	19 (12)	8 (5)	30 (19)	25 (16)	-	160 (100)
	SB	10 (32)	8 (26)	13 (42)	-	-	-	31 (100)
	KN	79 (47)	54 (32)	36 (21)	-	-	-	169 (100)
Chinese	SW	5 (3)	20 (11)	70 (40)	37 (21)	43 (25)	-	175 (100)
	SL	-	49 (26)	87 (46)	5 (3)	8 (4)	39 (21)	188 (100)
	SB	1 (2)	2 (4)	46 (94)	-	-	-	49 (100)
	KN	-	-	38 (100)	-	-	-	38 (100)
Indian	SW	-	-	-	-	1 (100)	-	1 (100)
	SL	-	13 (42)	8 (26)	6 (19)	4 (13)	-	31 (100)
Lun Bawang	SW	22 (96)	-	-	-	1 (4)	-	23 (100)
Iban	SW	4 (21)	10 (53)	3 (16)	-	2 (11)	-	19 (100)
Bugis	SB	3 (11)	21 (78)	3 (11)	-	-	-	27 (100)
Bajau	SB	72 (55)	42 (32)	17 (32)	-	-	-	131 (100)
Tidong	SB	3 (60)	2 (40)	-	-	-	-	5 (100)
Dusun	SB	-	-	1 (100)	-	-	-	1 (100)
Kenyah	SW	2 (40)	-	3 (60)	-	-	-	5 (100)
Murut	SB	-	-	1 (100)	-	-	-	1 (100)
Brunei	SB	-	1 (100)	-	-	-	-	1 (100)
Bisaya	SB	-	1 (100)	-	-	-	-	1 (100)
Suluk	SB	19 (86)	3 (14)	-	-	-	-	22 (100)
Kadazan	SB	-	1 (50)	1 (50)	-	-	-	2 (100)
Siam	KN	-	-	2 (100)	-	-	-	2 (100)
Sino	SB	-	-	1 (100)	-	-	-	1 (100)
Bidayuh	SW	4 (8)	38 (79)	6 (13)	-	-	-	48 (100)
Others	SL	-	-	-	-	1 (100)	-	1 (100)
Sub-total	SW	64 (20)	80 (25)	86 (27)	39 (12)	50 (16)	0	319 (100)
	SL	78 (21)	81 (21)	103 (27)	41 (11)	38 (10)	39 (10)	380 (100)
	SB	108 (39)	81 (30)	83 (31)	0	0	0	272 (100)
	KN	79 (38)	54 (26)	76 (36)	0	0	0	209 (100)
Total		329 (28)	296 (25)	348 (30)	80 (7)	88 (8)	39 (4)	1180 (100)

Source: 1R+3r fieldwork data 2013

Table 3 shows the ethnic membership according to school type and State. The availability of certain ethnic groups in particular States is representative of the ethnic composition of that respective State. For example, Lun Bawang, Iban, Kenyah and Bidayuh are the indigenous groups of Sarawak, while Bajau, Murut, Dusun, Kadazan, Tidong, Suluk, Bisaya, Bugis, Brunei and Sino are predominantly found in Sabah. Siamese people predominantly reside in the northern States of Peninsular Malaysia like Kelantan, Kedah and Perlis. The Indian population is very small in Sabah and Sarawak, but a sizable population in Selangor. Chinese and Malays are ubiquitous and they reside in almost all the States in Malaysia.

Concerning the debate regarding the continued existence of vernacular schools and their role in promoting national unity (refer for example, Cheong 2013), an interesting feature as illustrated by Table 3 is that out of 348 students enrolled in SJKC schools (Chinese medium), there are Malay students (18%), Bajau (5%), Indian (2%), Bidayuh (2%), Iban, Bugis, Kenyah, Siam, Sino, Murut, Kadazan and Dusun (1% respectively). 69% of the student population in SJKCs visited are Chinese. This means that SJKCs have a mixed student population, where about one-third of the students are non-Chinese. In comparison, student enrolment in the SK schools visited, which are regarded as national schools using the Malay language as medium of instruction, have about 59% Malays, and 22% Bajaus, 6% Suluks, followed by a very small percentage of Chinese, Iban, Bugis, Tidong, Kenyah and Bidayuh. There were no Indian students in the SK schools visited.

The school, being a secondary agent of socialisation, is an important venue for students from diverse backgrounds to meet, mix, make friends and learn about one another – **recognising** similarities and differences, **respecting** diversity and **reconciling** the uniqueness of each background. If the school has a mixed population, there will be opportunities for direct interaction and making friends with fellow students from different backgrounds. However, if the student population is predominantly of one background, for example, of one ethnic, class, gender or regional background, this opportunity for direct interaction will be limited or less. Hence, in this situation, how does the school and education system provide the opportunities for interaction and learning about others across school boundaries?

This paper will look at the possible opportunities or avenues for students to interact and learn about self and others. The aspects examined are (i) meaning of school and benefits of schooling; and (ii) opportunities to learn about self and others through the school curriculum. But first, we look at the concept of education and social cohesion.

### **Education and Social Cohesion**

Education for social cohesion; education for national unity; education for integration – whichever phrase is used, the intent is clear. Education has a crucial role to play in promoting a sense of unity, common citizenship and solidarity amongst its citizens of diverse backgrounds. In the context of a plural society, the role of education as a prime mover of change towards more meaningful relationships is pertinent as these meaningful relationships will lead to better social

order, respect and peace in the country. However, the question that comes to mind is, how do we achieve such goals? What kind of education and education system should we have to allow us to achieve our goals, or to enable education to play its role in promoting social cohesion, unity or integration, especially so for a plural or multi-ethnic society?

These questions engender further questions: What is education and education for whom and for what purpose? Who will be the decision makers in regards to formulation of educational policies? What is their vision and paradigm for education in the context of national unity, integration or social cohesion as well as manpower needs? How are national unity, integration and social cohesion defined or conceptualised, and how can they be achieved and measured? In whose interests are these policies and measurements decided and formulated?

## **Education**

The task of defining education is not easy and most writers focused on the purpose or objectives and roles of education. A working definition is necessary to put into context a common understanding of what education is, so as to allow decision makers and implementors to share the same viewpoint. A review of the various government education reports and policies substantiates the absence of a definition on education. For example, the latest document on education released by the Malaysian Government in 2013 – *The Malaysian Education Blueprint* (Ministry of Education 2013) – also does not give any definition on the meaning of education. The emphasis in the government reports is more on what education can do in terms of nation building and human resource development for Malaysia, as illustrated by this statement: Specifically, education is perceived as promoting national unity, social equality, and economic development. Education is an instrument for promoting and strengthening national integration by inculcating a common and shared destiny among the different ethnic groups, removing racial prejudices and encouraging cultural tolerance, and establishing the use of a common national language, that is, Bahasa Malaysia. As an agent of social equality, education is to promote social consciousness and social justice by providing equal educational opportunities. Education is seen as a means for social mobility which forms one of the avenues for income redistribution and restructuring the Malaysian society economically. The education system has an important role to play in supplying human resources for economic growth. Besides economic prosperity, the schools are to help in developing a caring society (Lee 1999: 87).

The word ‘education’ literally means ‘to bring forth’ (Ong 2008: 8). Etymologically, the word education is derived from *educate* (Latin), ‘bring up’, which is related to *educate* ‘bring out’, ‘bring forth what is within’, ‘bring out potential’ and *ducere*, ‘to lead’. Education in the largest sense is any act or experience that has a formative effect on the mind, character or physical ability of an individual. In its technical sense, education is the process by which society deliberately transmits its accumulated knowledge, skills and values from one generation to another (Mumbai University 2012). It indicates that the true task of this process is to draw forth from the mind its innate potential to understand things. In the name of education the students are passed through courses of standardised instruction intended to make them efficient servants of an alienated social system.



This brings to mind Freire's (1972) thesis that the mainstream education system concentrated on the 3Rs – reading, writing, arithmetic – with students acquiring the ability to 'read the word' but not the ability to 'read the world', that is, an education based on the real experiences of social interaction and relationships (1R component) of the students. Today's educational system, hijacked by the demands of the State and Market, aggravates the task of teachers in carrying out their responsibilities efficiently and effectively (to the extent that the Education Blueprint singled out the quality of teachers and teaching as one of the main contributing factors to the decline in student achievement and education standards). Hence, in this article, education refers to the process of bringing forth/nurturing the potential in students, by sharing with them the knowledge, skills and values of what is good or bad, acceptable and not acceptable. The purpose of education is thus to mould the character of students so that they will be equipped with the ability to distinguish between good and bad, desirable and undesirable, acceptable and unacceptable in the society in which they are members.

### **Social Cohesion and National Unity**

Ho (1952: 8-9) listed several topics and questions which required some answers: education and unity; education for social cohesion; and issues pertaining to the educational system. However, Ho did not define social cohesion, apart from stating its importance in a plural society. Reference to the connection between education and social cohesion was mentioned 11 years before Ho's study - in 1941 by Havighurst, an American educator. Havighurst noted that education is generally understood to be an instrument of social policy – to realise our social ideals, and that education is used to promote social cohesion (in Ho, 1952: 94). Several decades later, researchers are still writing about social cohesion, perhaps more so in this age of globalisation, increasing international migration and emerging diversities as well as disparities. As Chan & Chan noted, given the growing cultural and ethnic diversity in society, the challenges of globalisation, widening disparity between the rich and poor, new forms of exclusion, political threats and social insecurity, as well as a handful of other problems, it is easy to understand the concerns that policy makers have with regard to social unrest and governance issues. It is therefore no coincidence that policy makers have found the concept of social cohesion – of people sticking together in the face of difficulty – an increasingly attractive objective (Chan & Chan 2006a: 635-636).

In Malaysia, the term social cohesion is fast gaining ground, as some sections of the society are keen to know what makes Malaysia work, in spite of its plural society and the frequent reports of tension among people of different ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds in the mass media. According to Shamsul, many researchers studying ethnic relations in Malaysia are preoccupied with the conflict paradigm, consequently, using it as an analytical tool to understand and evaluate every single problem or tension perceived to exist in society (Shamsul 2012: 16). Such perceived existence of persisting ethnic tensions could be due to the way unity is being conceived by policy makers and the people. The phrase 'unity-in-diversity' has become a cliché in Malaysia without a clear understanding among the people of what it means and how to achieve this. As Shamsul noted, unity in diversity has become a mantra in the

everyday life of Malaysians, without asking what it means, and the sincerity of policy makers in realising this dream (2012: 2).

The answer according to Shamsul, requires a shift in sociological imagination, from one based on 'unity' to one based on 'cohesion' (Shamsul, 2012: 3). Unfortunately, Shamsul did not offer a working definition of cohesion, apart from mentioning that cohesion is a social phenomenon anchored on a deep aspiration for unity, which consequently encourages members of a society to initiate efforts and activities that could be termed as prerequisites for unity. The sum total of these efforts will engender peace, harmony and stability in the society, however, not quite achieving the aspired unity yet (Shamsul 2012: 3-4).

What then is social cohesion? Chan & Chan (2006a: 635), Markus & Kirpitchenko (2007: 21), Acket et.al (2011: 3), among others, have noted the numerous researches and writings on social cohesion. For example, Markus & Kirpitchenko (2007: 21) wrote that social cohesion as a concept has a long tradition in academic enquiry and occupies a central place in traditional sociological debate on the role of consensus versus conflict in society. Chan & Chan reported that the concept of social cohesion has been popular among policy makers and international regimes in Western democratic societies since the 1990s. However, despite the prevalence of the notion of social cohesion among many governments and international regimes, it is surprising that it still lacks a commonly agreed definition (Chan & Chan 2006a: 635).

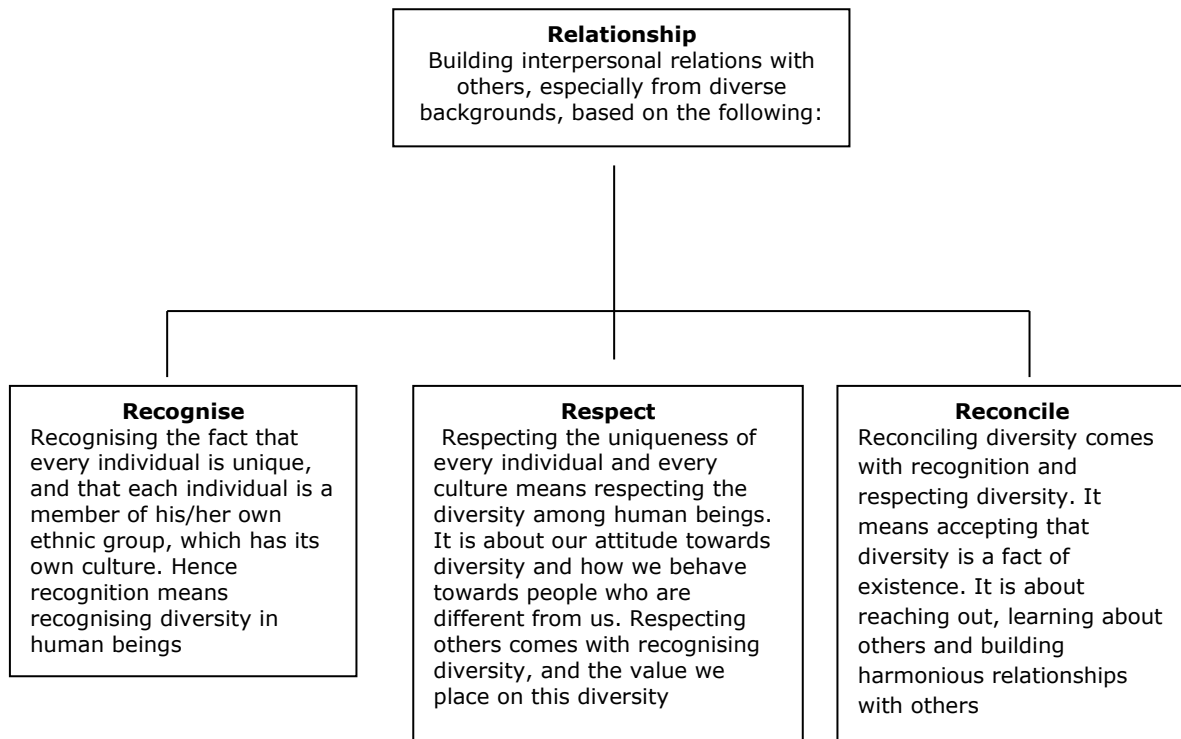
The dictionary defines cohesion/cohere as to stick together, to hold together in a mass that resists separation; to hold together to form a whole. This meaning of cohesion suggests that cohesion refers to a state in which different components 'stick' or hold together to form a coherent, orderly and meaningful whole. According to Markus & Kirpitchenko (2007: 25), most current definitions of social cohesion dwell on the intangible, such as common values, sense of belonging, attachment to the group, and willingness to participate and share outcomes. They have summarised the commonalities and differences in current definitions of social cohesion. The commonalities are:

- 1) *a shared vision*: social cohesion requires universal values, common aspirations or identity shared by their members.
- 2) *a community or group*: social cohesion tends to describe a well-functioning core group or community in which there are shared goals and responsibilities and a readiness to cooperate with other members.
- 3) *a process*: social cohesion is generally viewed not simply as an outcome, but as a continuous and seemingly never-ending process of achieving social harmony.

The differences concern the factors that operate to enhance (and erode) the process of communal harmony, and the more complex issue of the relative weight to be attached to the operation of those factors. Differences in approaches are also found in the way social cohesion is treated as a cause or effect, that is, as an independent or dependent variable of the societal analysis (Markus & Kirpitchenko 2007: 25-26).

With the foregoing discussion on unity as an ideal aspiration, and social cohesion as a process, but both requiring some common bases as prerequisites, such as shared vision and common values, trust and responsibility, sense of belonging and inclusiveness, mutual help and cooperation, justice and equality in all spheres of life (economic, political, socio-cultural), how then can education play a role as an instrument of social policy to facilitate these characteristics and elements among students?

With the existing educational structure and schooling system in Malaysia, how can we create opportunities for the different school systems to play their role in enabling the 1R + 3r principle to flourish in the hearts and minds of their respective students, thereby enabling education to play its role in fostering social cohesion among the diverse communities? For this, we provide a framework called 1R+3r, comprising of **Relationship** plus *recognise*, *respect* and *reconcile*:



Source: 1R+3r fieldwork data 2013

### Data from the Field: Students' Experiences and Views

This section presents the students' responses regarding the meaning of school and benefits of schooling and the opportunities to learn about self and others through the school curriculum. We will first look at what the respondents say about the ethnic composition in their respective schools and classes, as shown in Table 4 and Table 5.

Table 4 Students' Perceptions of Ethnic Composition of Students in School

State	Student Population in School	Type of School (%)								
		SKB	SKLB	SJKCB	SJKCLI	SMKB	SMKLE	PTR	PTM	
SW	Mixed	98	46	100	100	100	100	100	100	
	Non-mixed	2	54	0	0	0	0	0	0	
SL	Mixed	100	100	93	98	100	88	100	100	
	Non-mixed	0	0	7	2	0	12	0	0	
KN	Mixed	63	80	100	100	10	21	-	-	
	Non-mixed	37	20	0	0	90	79	-	-	
SKLB1 SKLB2 SKLB3										
SB	Mixed	100	100	94	100	100	100	100	-	-
	Non-mixed	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	-	-

Table 4 above shows interesting results, as follows:

- a. For national primary urban schools (SKB), all the respondents in SKB Selangor and 98% in SKB Sarawak said their schools have mixed student population. In Kelantan, 63% respondents reported that their school is mixed.
- b. For national primary rural schools (SKLB), all or almost all respondents in the three SKLBs in Sabah and Selangor said their schools have mixed student population. In Kelantan, 80% respondents in SKLB said their school is mixed. For SKLB in Sarawak, 46% said their school is mixed.

- c. For national-type (Chinese) primary urban schools (SJKCB), the responses are more skewed towards SJKCBs having a mixed student population. All respondents in SJKCBs Sarawak, Sabah and Kelantan said their schools have mixed student population, while 93% respondents in Selangor said their SJKCB is mixed.
- d. For national-type (Chinese) primary rural schools (SJKCLB), responses are similar to SJKCBs.
- e. For national secondary urban schools (SMKB), all respondents in Sarawak, Selangor and Sabah reported that their SMKBs are mixed. On the other hand, 90% respondents in Kelantan reported that their SMKb is non-mixed.
- f. For national secondary rural schools (SMKLB), all respondents in Sarawak and Sabah reported that their SMKLB is mixed. For Selangor, the percentage is 88% for mixed population (predominantly Chinese as the residents in the vicinity of this school is mainly Chinese). For Kelantan, 79% respondents said the student population in their SMKLB is non-mixed (mainly Malay).
- g. For private primary (PTR) and secondary (PTM) schools, the fieldwork only involved Sarawak and Selangor. The student population in these schools is reported to be mixed (100% for PTR and PTM Selangor and Sarawak).

Table 5 Students' Perceptions of Ethnic Composition of Students in Class

State	Mixed Student Population	Type of School (%)								
		SKB	SKLB	SJKCB	SJKCLB	SMKB	SMKLB	PTR	PTM	
SW	Mixed	100	52	100	100	100	95	90	98	
	Non-mixed	0	48	0	0	0	5	10	2	
SL	Mixed	5	16	63	97	100	59	100	100	
	Non-mixed	95	84	37	3	0	41	0	0	
KN	Mixed	5	3	98	100	0	6	-	-	
	Non-mixed	95	97	2	0	100	94	-	-	
SKLB1 SKLB2 SKLB3										
SB	Mixed	100	100	100	81	100	100	100	-	-
	Non-mixed	0	0	0	19	0	0	0	-	-

Source: 1R+3r fieldwork data 2013

Table 5 above presents responses regarding student population in class, as follows:

- a. For national primary urban schools (SKB), all the respondents from Sarawak said the student population in their class is mixed. On the other hand, for the two States in Peninsular Malaysia, that is, Selangor and Kelantan, the student population in SKBs is seen as predominantly non-mixed (95% respectively), that is, of one ethnic group - in this case, Malays.

- b. For national primary rural schools (SKLB), all the respondents in the three SKLBs in Sabah said their schools have mixed student population. For SKLBs in Sarawak, the student population is somewhat balanced between mixed and non-mixed. For Selangor and especially for Kelantan, the SKLBs are more skewed towards a non-mixed student population.
- c. For national-type (Chinese) primary urban schools (SJKCB), the responses are more skewed towards SJKCBs having a mixed student population. All respondents in SJKCB in Sarawak said their schools have mixed student population. Even in Malay-dominated Kelantan, 98% of the respondents said their SJKCB has mixed population. In Sabah, 81% said their SJKCB is mixed while for Selangor, 63% respondents said their SJKCB is mixed.
- d. For national-type (Chinese) primary rural schools (SJKCLB), the student population is reported to be mixed, with 100% from respondents in Sarawak, Sabah and Kelantan, and 97% for Selangor.
- e. For national secondary urban schools (SMKB), all respondents in Sarawak, Selangor and Sabah reported that their SMKBs are mixed. On the other hand, all respondents in Kelantan reported that their SMKb is non-mixed.
- f. For national secondary rural schools (SMKLB), all respondents in Sabah reported that their SMKLB is mixed. For Sarawak, the figure is 95%. For Selangor, the percentage is 59% for mixed and 41% for non-mixed, that is, more skewed towards Chinese majority (as the population in the vicinity of this school is mainly Chinese). For Kelantan, the student population in SMKLB is predominantly non-mixed (mainly Malay).
- g. For private primary (PTR) and secondary (PTM) schools, the fieldwork only involved Sarawak and Selangor. The student population in these schools is reported to be predominantly mixed (100% for PTR and PTM Selangor; and 90% for PTR and 98% for PTM Sarawak).

Table 6 Students' Understanding of the Meaning of 'School'

Type of school		Meaning of 'School' (%)					
		Learn	Play	Make friends	Learn & Make friends	Learn & Play	Play & Make Friends
SWK	SKLB	88	0	0	0	12	0
	SKB	90	0	0	8	3	0
	SJKCLB	82	7	0	11	0	0

	SJKCB	72	0	0	9	19	0
	SMKB	75	0	5	18	3	0
	SMKLB	90	0	0	10	0	0
	PTR	62	0	0	36	3	0
	PTM	72	2	2	24	0	0
SLGR	SKLB	83	0	0	17	0	0
	SKB	93	0	0	5	2	0
	SJKCLB	81	0	7	7	5	2
	SJKCB	86	0	5	5	5	0
	SMKB	73	0	0	17	10	0
	SMKLB	100	0	0	0	0	0
	PTR	93	0	2	5	0	0
	PTM	52	0	3	41	3	3
KLTN	SKLB	100	0	0	0	0	0
	SKB	92	0	0	5	3	0
	SJKCLB	97	0	0	0	3	0
	SJKCB	100	0	0	0	0	0
	SMKB	100	0	0	0	0	0
	SMKLB	85	0	0	15	0	0
	PTR	-	-	-	-	-	-
	PTM	-	-	-	-	-	-
Type of school		Learn	Play	Make friends	Learn & Make friends	Learn & Play	Play & Make Friends
SBH	SKLB 1	98	0	0	2	0	0
	SKLB 2	100	0	0	0	0	0
	SKLB 3	100	0	0	0	0	0
	SKB	-	-	-	-	-	-
	SJKCLB	78	0	0	12	10	0
	SJKCB	100	0	0	0	0	0
	SMKB	64	0	0	36	0	0
	SMKLB	100	0	0	0	0	0
	PTR	-	-	-	-	-	-
	PTM	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: 1R+3r fieldwork data 2013

In Table 6, we see that for all types of schools and locations, school is seen as a place for ‘learning’ first and foremost, followed by a place for ‘learning and making friends’ and a place for ‘learning and play’.

Table 7 Students’ Understanding of the Benefits of ‘Schooling’

Type of school	Benefits of ‘Schooling’ (%)					
	Learning	Play	Making friends	Learning & making	Learning & play	Sleeping

					friends		
Sarawak	SKLB	100	0	0	0	0	0
	SKB	83	0	3	15	0	0
	SJKCLB	77	2	5	16	0	0
	SJKCB	81	0	2	16	0	0
	SMKB	75	3	5	18	0	0
	SMKLB	68	0	5	28	0	0
	PTR	74	0	0	26	0	0
	PTM	49	0	8	43	0	0
Selangor	SKLB	70	5	0	22	3	0
	SKB	78	0	5	2	15	0
	SJKCLB	79	0	8	2	11	0
	SJKCB	85	5	3	0	7	0
	SMKB	32	0	5	5	58	0
	SMKLB	80	0	0	0	15	5
	PTR	79	0	8	0	13	0
	PTM	41	0	10	41	8	0
Kelantan	SKLB	85	0	0	13	2	0
	SKB	69	0	0	3	28	0
	SJKCLB	57	0	3	0	40	0
	SJKCB	68	0	0	30	3	0
	SMKB	100	0	0	0	0	0
	SMKLB	67	0	3	0	30	0
	PTR	-	-	-	-	-	-
	PTM	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sabah	SKLB 1	92	0	0	5	3	0
	SKLB 2	92	0	3	0	5	0
	SKLB 3	100	0	0	0	0	0
	SKB	-	-	-	-	-	-
	SJKCLB	53	0	0	7	40	0
	SJKCB	74	0	9	16	0	0
	SMKB	80	0	0	0	20	0
	SMKLB	84	0	0	0	16	0
	PTR	-	-	-	-	-	-
	PTM	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: 1R+3r fieldwork data 2013

Consistent with the responses for meaning of school, the respondents' perceptions regarding the benefits of schooling also prioritised the learning aspects, followed by opportunities for making friends and playing.

### Recognise and Respect through Subjects Taught in School



In the research questionnaire, students were asked to list three subjects (by rank) they have taken that enabled them to recognise/understand and respect their own religion and other religions, their own ethnic group and other ethnic groups, their own home State and other States in Malaysia. This section will present the first-choice subject given by the students.

The subjects taken by the students are (varies according to school type [national, national-type and private] and level [primary and secondary]):

Malay Language (BM)	Living Skills (KH)
English Language (BI)	Visual Arts Education (PSV)
Chinese Language (BC)	Music Education (Muzik)
Arab Language (BA)	Physical Education (PJ)
Science (SAINS)	Geography (GEOG)
Mathematics (MATH)	Literature (SASTERA)
Local Studies (KT)	Moral Education/Islamic Education (PMPI)
History (SJRH)	Civics and Citizenship Studies (PSK)

Table 8 Recognise through First Choice Subject by State Visited

State	School/ First Choice	Own Religion	Other Religions	Own Ethnic Group	Other Ethnic Group	Own State	Other States
Sarawak	SKB	PMPI	PMPI	PSK	PSK	PSK	KT
	SKLB	PMPI	PMPI	PMPI	BM	KT	KT
	SJKCB	PMPI	PMPI	BC	BM	BM	KT
	SJKCL B	PMPI	PMPI	BC	PMPI	BI	KT
	PTR	PMPI	PMPI	PMPI	PMPI	PSK	KT
	PTM	PMPI	PMPI	PMPI	PMPI	PSK	SJRH
	SMKB	PMPI	SJRH	PSK	PSK	PSK	SJRH
	SMKL B	PMPI	PMPI	PMPI	PSK	SJRH	SJRH
Selangor	SKB	PMPI	PSK	BM	PSK	PSK	KT
	SKLB	PMPI	PSK	BM	PSK	PSV	KT
	SJKCB	PMPI	PMPI	BC	BM	PSK	KT
	SJKCL B	PMPI	PMPI	BC	PSK	BM	KT
	PTR	PMPI	PSK	PSK	PSK	PSK	KT
	PTM	PMPI	PSK	PMPI	PSK	PSK	SJRH
	SMKB	PMPI	PMPI	PMPI	PSK	PSK	SJRH
	SMKL B	BC	SJRH	BC	SJRH	PSK	SJRH
Kelantan	SKB	PMPI	PSK	BM	PSK	PSK	KT
	SKLB	PMPI	PSK	BM	PSK	KT	KT
	SJKCB	PMPI	BC	BC	BM	PSK	KT
	SJKCL B	PMPI	BC	BM	PSK	PSK	KT
	SMKB	PMPI	SJRH	SJRH	SJRH	GEOG	SJRH
	SMKL B	PMPI	BM	BM	PSK	SJRH	GEOG
Sabah	SKLB 1	PMPI	PSK	PSK	PSK	BM	KT
	SKLB 2	PMPI	BI	BM	KT	BM	KT
	SKLB 3	PMPI	PSK	BM	PSK	BM	KT

	SJKCB	PMPI	PSK	PMPI	PSK	KT	KT
	SJKCLB	PMPI	PMPI	BC	BM	PSK	KT
	SMKB	PMPI	PSK	PSK	PSK	GEOG	SJRH
	SMKLB	PMPI	SJRH	SJRH	SJRH	SJRH	SJRH

Source: 1R+3r fieldwork data 2013

From the data presented in Table 8, we can say that the students demonstrate the ability to identify the subject for the specific situation or context. For example, for recognising own religion, the subject prioritised by the students is PMPI (Moral Education/Islamic Education). All schools except SMKLB (national secondary rural school) in Selangor cited PMPI as the first-choice subject enabling them to **recognise and understand own religion**. For the students of SMKLB, which is located in a predominantly Chinese area, the Chinese language subject enabled them to learn about their own religion.

As for first-choice subject enabling them to **recognise and understand other religions**, the range of subjects has widened. PMPI (Moral/Islamic Education) no longer commands top priority for all the schools. Instead, there are an additional 5 subjects mentioned as first-choice subject for recognising and understanding other religions, that is History (SJRH), Civics and Citizenship Studies (PSK), Chinese language (BC), Malay language (BM) and English language (BI). The breakdown of responses by State, type of school and first-choice subject is as follows:

- For Sarawak, all schools except SMKB listed PMPI as first-choice subject. This SMKB listed SJRH (History) as first-choice subject.
- For Selangor, the subjects are a mixed bag, varying from PMPI (for SJKCB, SJKCLB, SMKB), PSK (for SKB, SKLB, PTR, PTM) and SJRH (for SMKLB).
- For Kelantan, the first-choice subject varies according to school type and level. For SKB and SKLB, the choice is PSK. For SJKCB and SJKCLB, the subject mentioned is BC. For SMKB, the choice is SJRH, and for SMKLB, it is BM.
- For Sabah, the subjects are also mixed, with PSK for SKLB1, SKLB3, SJKCB, SMKB; PMPI for SJKCLB; BI for SKLB; and SJRH for SMKLB.

For **recognising and understanding own ethnic group**, five subjects are said to play the role as the first-choice subject. These five subjects are Moral/Islamic Education (PMPI), Civics and Citizenship Studies (PSK), Chinese language (BC), Malay language (BM) and History (SJRH). The details are as follows:

- For Sarawak, three subjects are listed: PMPI for SKLB, PTR, PTM, SMKLB; PSK for SKB and SMKB; BC for SJKCB and SJKCLB.
- For Selangor, the subjects are a mixed bag, varying from PMPI (for PTM & SMKB), PSK (for PTR), BC (for SJKCB, SJKCLB & SMKLB) and BM (for SKB & SKLB).
- For Kelantan, the first-choice subject is BM for SKB, SKLB & SMKLB; BC for SJKCB; and SJRH for SMKB.
- For Sabah, the subjects are also mixed, with PSK for SKLB1 & SMKB; BM for SKLB1 & SKLB3; PMPI for SJKCB; BC for SJKCLB; and SJRH for SMKLB

For **recognising and understanding other ethnic groups**, five subjects were also listed as first-choice – all but one the same as for own ethnic group. These five subjects are Moral/Islamic Education (PMPI), Civics and Citizenship Studies (PSK), Malay language (BM), History (SJRH) and Local Studies (KT). This KT subject replaces the Chinese subject for own ethnic group above. While schools in Sarawak mentioned PMPI, schools in Selangor, Kelantan and Sabah didn't mention this subject. The details as follows:

- For Sarawak, three subjects are listed: PSK for SKB, SMKB and SMKLB; BM for SJKCB, PMPI for SJKCLB, PTR and PTM.
- For Selangor, three subjects are given priority: PSK for SKB, SKLB, PMPI (for PTM & SMKB), and SJRH for SMKLB.
- For Kelantan, the first-choice subject for all schools is PSK (SKB, SKLB, SJKCLB, SMKLB), BM (SJKCB) and SJRH (SMKB).
- For Sabah, the subjects are also mixed, with PSK for SKLB1, SKLB3, SJKCB and SMKB; KT for SKLB2; BM for SJKCLB; and History for SMKLB.

For **recognising and understanding own home State**, seven subjects were listed as first-choice – Civics and Citizenship Studies (PSK), Malay language (BM), History (SJRH), English language (BI), Local Studies (KT), Geography (GEOG) and Visual Arts (PSV). These 7 subjects are said to enable the students to learn, recognise and understand the students' own home state.

On the other hand, for learning, **recognising and understanding other States** in Malaysia, the subjects listed are focused mainly on Local Studies (KT), History (SJRH) and Geography (GEOG).

The choice of subjects for learning, recognising and understanding differ according to the context, that is, whether it is for own or other religions, own or other ethnic groups, and own or other States in Malaysia.

Table 9 Respect through First Choice Subject by State Visited

State	School/ First Choice	Own Religion	Other Religions	Own Ethnic Group	Other Ethnic Group	Own State	Other States
Sarawak	SKB	PMPI	PMPI	PSK	PMPI	PMPI	KT
	SKLB	PMPI	PMPI	PMPI	PMPI	KT	PMPI
	SJKCB	PMPI	PMPI	BC	BC	KT	KT
	SJKCLB	PMPI	PMPI	PMPI	PMPI	KT	KT
	PTR	PMPI	PMPI	PMPI	PMPI	KT	KT
	PTM	PMPI	PMPI	PMPI	PMPI	PMPI	SJRH
	SMKB	PMPI	PMPI	PMPI	PMPI	SJRH	SJRH
	SMKLB	PMPI	PMPI	BC	PMPI	PMPI	SJRH
Selangor	SKB	PMPI	PSK	BM	BM	KT	KT
	SKLB	PMPI	PSK	BM	BM	KT	KT
	SJKCB	PMPI	PMPI	BC	BC	KT	KT
	SJKCLB	BC	BM	BC	BC	KT	KT
	PTR	PMPI	PSK	PSK	PSK	KT	KT
	PTM	PMPI	PSK	PSK	PSK	SJRH	SJRH
	SMKB	PMPI	PMPI	PMPI	PMPI	SJRH	SJRH

	SMKLB	BC	PMPI	BC	BC	SJRH	SJRH
Kelantan	SKB	PMPI	PSK	BM	BM	KT	KT
	SKLB	PMPI	PSK	BM	BM	KT	KT
	SJKCB	PMPI	BC	BC	BC	KT	KT
	SJKCLB	PMPI	BC	BM	BM	KT	KT
	SMKB	PMPI	SJRH	SJRH	SJRH	SJRH	SJRH
	SMKLB	PMPI	SJRH	BM	BM	SJRH	GEOG
Sabah	SKLB 1	PMPI	PSK	PSK	PSK	KT	KT
	SKLB 2	PMPI	PSK	BM	BM	KT	KT
	SKLB 3	PMPI	PSK	BM	BM	KT	KT
	SJKCB	PMPI	PSK	PMPI	PMPI	KT	KT
	SJKCLB	PMPI	PMPI	BC	BC	KT	KT
	SMKB	PMPI	PSK	SJRH	SJRH	SJRH	SJRH
	SMKLB	PMPI	SJRH	SJRH	SJRH	SJRH	SJRH

Source: 1R+3r fieldwork data 2013

Table 9 above shows the responses of students with regards to subjects that enable them to respect themselves and others of different religions, ethnic groups and State. For **respecting own religion**, the main first-choice subject mentioned is Moral/Islamic Education (PMPI). This PMPI subject is chosen by all the schools in all four States except two schools in Selangor – Chinese primary rural school (SJKCLB) and national secondary rural school (SMKLB), whose student population is predominantly Chinese. These 2 schools chose the Chinese language (BC) as the first choice to learn and respect own religion.

For **respecting other religions**, there is a variety of subjects mentioned. Moral/Islamic Education (PMPI) no longer commands predominance. Except for Sarawak schools which still maintained PMPI as the first-choice subject, schools in the other three States listed Civics and Citizenship Studies (PSK), Malay language (BM), Chinese language (BC) and History (SJRH) as subjects that enabled them to learn and develop respect for other religions.

For learning and developing **respect for own ethnic group**, while schools in Sarawak still gave dominance to Moral/Islamic Education (PMPI), besides Civics and Citizenship Studies (PSK), and Chinese language (BC), schools in Kelantan did not mention PMPI at all, while only one school in Selangor and Sabah respectively mentioned PMPI. These other schools highlight subjects such as Civics and Citizenship Studies (PSK), Malay language (BM), Chinese language (BC) and History (SJRH).

Moving on to **respecting other ethnic groups**, the list of first-choice subjects include a new subject not mentioned above, that is, Local Studies (KT). For schools in Sarawak, the emphasis is still on PMPI. All schools except the primary urban Chinese school (SJKB) listed PMPI as first choice, while the Chinese school students listed the Chinese language (BC). For Selangor schools, the emphasis is spread between BM, BC, PSK and PMPI. For schools in Kelantan and Sabah, only 2 subjects are mentioned that is Local Studies (KT) and History (SJRH).

First-choice subjects for **respecting own State** and **respecting other States** in Malaysia mentioned by students in all schools in the four States are predominantly Local Studies (KT) and History (SJRH). There is mention of PMPI by 2 schools in Sarawak for respecting own State and other States, and Geography (GEOG) for respecting other States by one school in Kelantan.

## Conclusion

This article has presented the responses of students concerning the meaning of school and benefits of schooling; and the listing of first-choice subjects in learning to recognise and respect own and others' religion, ethnic group and home State. The main basis of comparison is school type [national & national-type; private & government]; (ii) school location [rural & urban; island & mainland] in four selected States - Selangor, Kelantan, Sabah and Sarawak.

The varied schooling systems in Malaysia calls for an inclusive education where learning about diversity and the opportunities to engage in this diversity is a great necessity. The school, through its curriculum, co-curriculum and environment, is thus an important avenue to learn about this diversity and how to live with such diversity in the real world. In the context of social cohesion, failure to take into account the diversity of the national population, and exclusion of some ethnic populations from the schooling and education system, will give a one-sided picture of the real demographic situation. The school as an important educational institution can be the place to foster trust, respect, responsibility towards others and help build meaningful relationships among students. However, the variability of the Malaysian schooling system being the reality, students from diverse backgrounds will be pursuing their education in the schools of their choice. Hence, we have schools that are predominantly of one ethnic group or religious affiliation, principally because of the nature of the residential population in the vicinity, or because of the medium of instruction, or other perceived pull factors.

The data analysis indicate that the students in all the selected schools in the four States are able to discern which subjects play a major role in enabling them to recognise and understand, as well as to respect their own religion and other religions, their own ethnic group and other ethnic groups, and their own home State as well as other States in Malaysia. This is a good start to nurture 'informed and culturally-literate' students who are competent in the 3r's - *recognise, respect and reconcile*. Through recognition, the students learn that every individual is unique, and that each individual has his/her religious affiliation, is a member of his/her own ethnic group, and home State. Hence recognition means the ability to recognise diversity among the population in the country. Through respect, the students learn that respecting the uniqueness of every individual and every culture means recognising and respecting the diversity among human beings. Through reconciliation, the students are able to accept that diversity is a fact of existence. It is about reaching out, learning about others and building harmonious relationships with others.

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