

## Active Learning Through History Subject Towards Racial Unity in Malaysia

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**Abstract:** This study aims to identify the level of active learning and its effect towards ethnic integration among multiracial students in Malaysia through history lessons. Active learning is related to a variety of methods and strategies to active participation of students in learning history. Active learning is also an approach to improvise the ethnic unity. Ethnic unity in this study refers to the intimacy and tolerance among the multiracial students in the teaching and learning process in the classroom. The methodology used in this study was a survey, using the questionnaires. The research samples were 1441 from form two students that consist of the Malays, Indians and Chinese. The value of Cronbach's alpha reliability in each aspect in the survey was in between 0.788-0.944. The data analysis indicated that the students' perception towards the active learning and unity were only at the intermediate level. The data also showed that there was a significant difference towards students' perspective based on ethnic. Analysis correlation showed a significant between active learning and ethnic unity with the value of  $r = 415$ . Meanwhile, the regression analysis showed that active learning contributes 40.1% towards ethnic unity.

**Key words:** Active learning, ethnic unity, history curriculum, correlation, Malaysia

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### INTRODUCTION

The rapid changes in national education system in the 1980s have brought changes in goals of the curriculum of history subject in school. As a nation of diverse ethnic, the subject of history is crucial in nurturing the elements of unity among students in the classroom. Therefore, the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MEM, 2002) has acted proactively through the Education Development Master Plan (PIPP) 2006-2010 by placing the subject as a benchmark to develop citizens from early schooling with characteristics of patriotism and love the country and unity through understanding of the history curriculum.

In 2012, the Ministry of Education has made it compulsory for all secondary school students to pass their history subjects in their Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) since, the subject of history plays an important role in the formation of the nation. This issue is in accordance with the study presented by Ismail and Aziz (2009) who find the subject of history is a suitable channel to adopt unity among the various ethnics of student. This goal also can be seen in the report of the MEM (2002) who emphasized that history subject is the basis of racial unit:

History education is to enable the students to understand the historical background of the country from the aspects of political, economic

and social. In a country with a multi-ethnic population, awareness of the history of the plural society in Malaysiacan help pupils to understand the importance of unity in this country (Page: 3)

At present the issue and the matter above are due to the weakness of the history teachers in incorporating the elements of unity in the subject of history. Among the main weaknesses that have been identified were the lack of knowledge and pedagogical skills of teachers in term of varying instructional activities in the subjects of history. National Inspectorate Board found that during process of teaching and learning, the history teachers are still tied to the acquisition of knowledge of students only. Furthermore, the report also suggested that history teachers should vary the teaching approaches that are more students-centred (Haydn *et al.*, 2008).

Other studies that related to the weakness of the history subject teacher are by Ahmad and Suwirta (2007) that student often thought that history is an uninteresting subject. Zubir (1987) on the other hand found that, the subject of history is often considered as dead of curriculum. These shortcomings caused the difficulty in applying elements of unity in the subject of history. Therefore, this research looks at the students perspective

towards history teachers, active teaching and its relationship with racial unity in the subject of history.

**Literature review:** Active learning is crucial in helping the socialization process of students in the classroom. There are many studies that show the contribution of active learning process towards the process of effective teaching and learning. Rashid (2009) also agrees that good teaching must be active, student-oriented and not teacher-centred. Students should be given the opportunity to participate actively in teaching and learning activities. In history, students should be guided to be more critical, arguing, applying the facts and so on. Study by Booth (1980) has shown that active teaching of history able to have a positive impact on students. This study was supported by Hassan (1999) in Abdullah and Khadijah that found teaching method through inquiry has defeated the traditional way in improving student attitudes and achievement in history

On the other hand, the study by Larsson *et al.* (2004) on the difference between the teaching of history in Britain and Japan found that in Britain the history teacher practice open and creative teaching, student-centred and uses a variety of historical sources compared to teachers in Japan who see history as knowledge to be learned through the explanation by the teacher. This could indirectly help the appreciation of history in the classroom. This was also acknowledged by Suhaibo (2007) and Weiner (1995) in Silberman (2009). While, the study of Seng (2008) also shows that active learning can help students to be more active in the classroom. This is because active learning involves the participation of students in the learning process hands-on and minds-on that is not passive and horizontal (Arthur and Wright, 2001; Laughlin and Hartoonian, 1995; Orlich *et al.*, 2001).

Implementation of active learning in the classroom, especially in the subject of history is seen able to generate a new transformation in the context of pedagogical of history towards promoting unity among multi-ethnic students (Rashid, 2000). Students will be more proactive and interested in the subject. Active learning pedagogy that applies the teaching methods taught heuristically and inductive clearly provide opportunities for students to think, solve problems, interact with materials and peers and to reflect on values and ethics of this issues. This indirectly will create more active learning process among students of different races.

The Ministry of Education also proposed various methods and techniques that can be used, such as;

lectures, simulations, case studies, experiments, brainstorming, discussion, projects, role play, active, research, demonstration, use of resources, field work and drills. The various active approaches is believed to be able to develop a variety of potential and enhance the capacity and ability of students as a whole and balanced besides effectively improving the understanding, skills and appreciation of history within them.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The methodology of this study is a survey, using the survey questionnaire as the main instrument in answering the research questionnaires. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2009), survey method is suitable to measure respondents' views on an issue or topic, the goals achievement of program and attitudes as well as behaviours of respondents. In addition, the survey method is a method that can collect original data quickly and involve the public respondent through the sampling technique (Babbie, 2007). This study used a questionnaire administered by the researcher. Questionnaires used in this study are developed by the researcher based on the theory and literature and then validated by three experts in history education. The component of the questionnaire discussed in this study is; active learning consisting of 14 items as well as aspects of national unity which contains 5 items. There were 1441 respondents involved in this study that involve form two students, from 4 zones that is North, Central, Eastern and Southern zone in Peninsular Malaysia. The obtained data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics based on the research questions. Data are processed using Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS) Version 17.0.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Students' level of perspective on active learning:** Based on Table 1, the data shows the student perspective on the items in the active learning aspects of the history teacher is to be moderate. This shows that the teacher has not been able to diversify the teaching techniques in history subjects. The failure of teachers in delivering student-centred lesson and active will cause students to become passive. This matter is in line with the opinion proposed by Cutler (2004) which states that the students will get bored fast or cannot focus on what they have learned because the teacher utilize only the lecture method in teaching. Besides that, the study presented by Hoon (2005) also supports that passive teaching will produce passive students and active learning will attract

Table 1: Students level of perspective towards active learning

Active learning	Mean	SD	Levels
Various method and techniques	3.31	0.560	Average
Involve students actively	3.36	0.580	Average
Involve students actively	3.36	0.560	Average
Challenging activities	3.37	0.490	Average
Solving problem activities	3.33	0.430	Average
Solving problem activities	3.23	0.560	Average
Compromise and tolerance	3.58	0.600	High
Discussion members	3.59	0.610	High
PRS lesson	3.42	0.680	Average
Relate facts with current issue	3.46	0.720	Average
Comparison techniques	3.41	0.740	Average
Opportunity for arguments	3.42	0.600	Average
Emphasis on thinking skills	3.37	0.520	Average
Encourage students to ask	3.32	0.630	Average
Overall means	3.43	0.264	Average

the attention of students in participating in the learning process. Various techniques in the subject of history will be able to foster the elements of patriotism more effectively (Rashid, 2001). Diversification activities including elements of humour and use of multimedia in learning history can also encourage student's interest consequently able to promote the elements of unity indirectly which is better than promoting the unity aspects directly based on factual only.

However, analysis of the related data item on compromise and tolerance in terms of active learning aspect appears to be at high level which shows some history teachers are using active learning in the classroom but it is not comprehensive. Overall, the study findings are consistent with Cutler (2004) who found that teachers and not only history teacher are lacking in employing method that can challenge the students minds and bringing values in their daily life. If active learning is made, it is definitely will help students not only to understand but can appreciate the values, particularly in the subjects of history.

Based on Table 1, the analysis shows that the perspectives of participants towards active learning are at average with a mean value between 3.23-3.59. This shows history teacher still does not deliver good active learning among students during the process of teaching and learning the history subject in the classroom. It is found that teachers teaching methods and techniques were less diversified; while, the diversity of techniques is important in increasing student interest. If active learning can be held in the classroom, it will certainly improve the relationship and unity among students in order to be more responsible in the various social groups (Hoon, 2005). The study also found that students are less involve in the classroom and teachers also employ less challenging activity of minds of the students. The teaching and learning that carried out is also not based on problem

Table 2: Means value and standard deviation towards racial unity

Unity construct	Mean	SD	Levels
National loyalty spirit	2.84	1.190	Low
Self esteem as a Malaysia citizen	3.23	1.220	Average
Create spirit of unity and togetherness	2.87	0.921	Low
Understanding society and country	3.01	1.140	Low
Collective memory on historical events	3.02	1.020	Average
Overall means	3.01	1.170	Average

Table 3: Different levels of unity and active learning based on ethnics

Dependent variables		mean	Groups	N	Mean	Differences t	DK	Sig.
Unity	Malays	735	3.45	0.249	6.68	1439	0.000	
	Non-Malays	706	3.20					
Active learning	Malays	735	3.40	0.156	4.78	1439	0.000	
	Non-Malays	706	3.24					

solving. This is contrary to the notion that active learning is not only contribute to the interest but also enhance the values that contributed to racial unity.

**Students level of perspective towards racial unity:** Based on the analysis carried out as shown in Table 2, the overall descriptive students perspective findings towards construct of unity is at the average level with the mean value of 3.01 and SD: 1.17. There are 5 items presented to respondents to measure this construct. The findings show that there are 2 items that have a lower level of mean value that is national loyalty spirit and creating the spirit of unity and togetherness with the mean value of 2.84 and 2.87. This reflects the national spirit and the desire to create the spirit of unity and belonging among students is still not adequate. Teacher is seen not emphasizing these aspects in the teaching and learning in the classroom. This is quite contrary to the views expressed by Chik (1992) and Brandom (2001) as scholars study showed this element able to produce a society with self-esteem (Phillips, 1997). It also describes the role of teachers in the history of this value can still be further improved. The study also shows that there are 3 items at the average level with a mean value between 3.02-3.23. It also means that teachers less focus on the 3 items during the learning of history though the 3 most important items in building unity among the students, as asserted by Haydn *et al.* (2001).

**Differences of racial unity level and active learning based on race:** Table 3 shows the findings of t-test on different levels of unity and active learning between Malay and non-Malays students. It is found that there is differences in perceptions between the Malay and the non-Malays on unity (mean difference = 0.249, t = -6.68 and Sig. = 0.000 <0.05) and active learning (mean difference = 0.156, t = 4.78 and Sig. = 0.000 <0.05). Malay students have higher mean values than the non-Malay students on perception of unity and active learning

Table 4: Differences from the racial unity aspects

Dependent variables mean	Groups	N	Mean	Differences	t	DK	Sig.
Loyalty spirit	Malays	715	3.35	0.296	6.89	1158	0.000
	Non-Malays	677	3.05				
Self-esteem as a Malaysian	Malays	715	3.29	0.997	2.23	1158	0.026
	Non-Malays	677	3.19				
Creating unity and togetherness	Malays	715	3.28	0.160	3.47	1158	0.001
	Non-Malays	677	3.12				
Understanding society and nation	Malays	715	3.32	0.191	4.16	1158	0.000
	Non-Malays	677	3.13				
Collective memory towards Historical events	Malays	715	3.02	0.147	3.51	1158	0.000
	Non-Malays	677	2.87				

(the mean of 3.45 and 3.40). Based on these findings clearly shown that Malay students involved more in active learning and have higher level of acceptance of unity compared to non-Malay students. This actually in line with the study which states that the Malay students interested more and learn to appreciate the history subjects compared with other races. This matter caused by the events in history textbooks is very much involved about the history and development of the Malays. To overcome this problem, historical aspects of the Chinese and Indians should also be display together with indigenous history. To enhance national unity through the subject of history, teachers also play an important role in increasing students' interest and appreciation of the elements of racial unity. The teacher's role is important to use active learning that involves students from different ethnic groups in classroom activities and course work outside the classroom. This approach can help reduce the difference and acceptance of learning of history that involves all races.

**Differences based on level of racial unity:** The analysis in Table 4 shows the difference in the aspect of variables in the dimension of unity between Malays and non-Malay students. This finding suggested that there are differences in perception between Malays and non-Malays towards the spirit of national unity (Mean difference = 0.296, t = 6.89 and Sig. = 0.000 < 0.05), self-esteem as a citizen of Malaysia (mean difference = 0.997, t = 2.23 and Sig. = 0.026 < 0.05), creating a sense of unity and belonging (mean difference = 0.160, t = 3.47 and Sig. = 0.001 < 0.05), understanding the situation of society and nation (mean difference = 0.191, t = 4.16 and Sig. = 0.000 < 0.05) and collective memory on historical event (mean difference = 0.147, t = 3.51 and Sig. = 0.000 < 0.05). Malay students gave a mean value of the spirit of national unity, self-esteem as a citizen of Malaysia; understand the society and nation and collective memory of national events higher than the non-Malays.

**Relationship between active learning and racial unity:** Table 5 shows the results of correlation analysis (Pearson

Table 5: Pearson correlation relationship between active learning and students' perception of racial unity

Variables	Unity
<b>Active learning process</b>	
Correlation Pearson	0.415**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
N	1441

\*\*Correlation is significant at the level of 0.01 (2-tailed)

product moment correlation) relationship between the implementation of active learning and unity. Based on Table 5, there is an average level of relationship between active learning process with unity as a whole with  $r = 0.415$  and the Sig. =  $0.00 < 0.05$ . This shows that active learning process that was done is not enough to achieve the unity goals as outlined in the subject. This give us that active learning is still done less to help drive towards unity among the multi-ethnic students in the classroom. This is due to the lack of using or applying active learning by the teachers in the classroom as asserted by Suhaibo (2007). This was also emphasized by Seng (2008) who see there is difficulty for teachers to apply the elements of active learning in class.

**Contribution of active learning process towards racial unity:** Table 6 clearly shows that active learning has a big impact by 40.1% on the achievement towards the goal of teaching of history in which of the characteristics is creating unity. This contribution actually has been predicted based on actual studies related to pedagogy that has a very important role in determining the interest, attitude and appreciation of students in any subject.

Among the studies are by Suhaibo (2007) and Weiner (1995) in Silberman (2009). Studies by Seng (2008), Hassan (1999) and Rashid (2000) also show that active learning can help students move actively in the classroom. This is because active learning involves the participation of students in the learning process hands-on and minds-on that is not passive and tedious (Arthur and Wright, 2001; Laughlin and Hartoonian, 1995; Orlich *et al.*, 2001). All these studies show pedagogy is the main component in the achievement of educational goals.

Table 6: Contribution of active learning process towards racial unity

Standard predictor	B	Error	$\beta$	t	Sig.	R <sup>2</sup>	Contribution (%)	Tolerance	VIF
Active learning	0.375	0.022	0.406	16.905	0.000	0.401	40.1	635	1.576

Independent variables: Active learning, Dependent variables: Racial unity

## CONCLUSION

Finally, it can be concluded that the active learning process in teaching and learning history will not only attract and cheer up the learning in the classroom but also helps to foster the unity elements among students of various ethnicity. The positive reception of learning history is crucial in producing students that are mutual respect, tolerance and assist each other in the context of various races in the classroom. This in turn can help the process of racial unity in this country. This study also found that active learning process in the classroom history can still be further improved. Teachers are viewed as fostering and diversify teaching methods and techniques to make learning more of life and natural. Thus, active learning is very significant in helping the process of racial unity in this country. The method of chalk and talk that emphasizes on one-way interaction and memorization techniques towards a fact turn out history as dead of the curriculum (Ahmad and Suwirta, 2007) must be removed. Teachers need to provide hands-on activities to increase students' interest in learning. This thinking shift is in line with the aspirations of Ministry of Education Malaysia that emphasizes the appearance of history education as a dynamic discipline through a learning approach that involves students actively in class (PPK: 2002) as the basis of racial unity in this country.

## IMPLICATIONS

The implications of this study prove that the knowledge and pedagogical practice of history teachers from the aspects of active learning that is using various methods and techniques that students-centred is still not satisfactory. All student gave slim responses amount of encourage about the teaching of history. However, there are many features of active students have been received by the students to form relationships and tolerant has been adopted by history teachers and it should be continued to form other activities that are more innovative. Besides that, the perspective of the students also showed differences in the active learning towards the development of national unity. Based on the Malay, Chinese and India ethnics, it shows that the Malay students appreciate the learning of history compared to other races. This is because the figures and events in history textbooks are closely related to the history and culture of the Malays.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The pedagogy of teachers and the content of history textbooks should be revitalised so that it is appropriate to the needs and interests based on racial diversity. The content of textbook should also incorporate events and facts related to the history of Chinese and Indian communities that have historical ties with the indigenous Malays society. Apart from that, the prominent figures of the various people who contributed to the national development should also be discussed in history textbooks.

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