The Practices of Multiculturalism among the
Young Leadership in the Malaysian Civil Service

[1]Hamidin Abd. Hamid, [1]Noor Sulastry Yurni Ahmad, [1]Abdullah Hassan and [2]Satya Rekha
[1]Razak School of Government (RSOG) and University of Malaya, Level 5,
Menara Prisma No. 26, Persiaran Perdana, Presinct 3, 62675 Putrajaya, Malaysia
[2]Department of Anthropology and Sociology, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences,
University of Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Wilayah Persekutuan, Malaysia

Abstract: Multiculturalism or multi-ethnic issues among the young in the civil service become the significant scenario to be looked at for future leadership in Malaysia. Their participation and commitment in the civil service has to be a platform of building possible trend of civil service environment in the year 2020-2040. It is hope that the understanding gained from the research will help policymakers, businessmen, civil society and international organizations developed more informed and effective strategies that will nurture youth potentials, talents and encourage participation. For this reason, it is expected to promote and develop a more balanced understanding and awareness of multiculturalism among the young in the Malaysian civil service. This study also examines how multiculturalism is conceived and practiced in the civil service and deeply entrenched in the system based on the preliminary results. The challenges posed to existing policies on the implementation of multiculturalism are discussed.

Key words: Multiculturalism, leadership, civil service, young and participation, businessmen

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia has practices a net societal balance of post-independence affirmative action policies. Social imbalances prompted the country to implement affirmative policies to uplift the majority natives (Malay and Bumiputera of Sabah and Sarawak). These policies were reluctantly accepted by the Chinese, Indian, Eurasians and other communities. Over 35 years of implementation, the different ethnic groups were said still struggling to share the economic resources. However, racial harmony in Malaysia is admired by other countries whereby Malaysia practices high tolerance in a racial diversity as to maintain the harmonious landscape. Contrarily, there is a space of incredulity that behind the harmony, prejudice, stereotype and discrimination may be prevailed.

With an intensive media relations promotion, various prescribed public relations programmes involving social community events, campaign launches and interpersonal communication activities being employed to ensure that multiculturalism and patriotism is intertwined within its various publics especially in the public service. Understanding the 1 Malaysia concept is parallel to the long-standing efforts by the government to prolong and perk up the Islamic inclined culture of tolerance and compromise amongst Malaysia's diverse ethnic groups. It aims to create a multicultural Malaysia that strives on excellence, perseverance, acceptance, education, integrity, meritocracy, humility and loyalty. Hence, human development programmes that ascertain a continuous process of effective communication amongst its diverse ethnic groups are crucial. This is because the ultimate goal is to maintain and reinforce racial harmony.

Through the on-going public relations campaign on September 16, 2008, the prime minister announced in which the cabinet, government agencies and civil servants were instructed to place sharp emphasis on ethnic harmony, national unity and competent governance. The concept caters to the needs of all sectors of the plural society in dealing with the equal distribution of wealth between racial groups and between all states within the country which also promotes the spirit and values of togetherness and a sense of belonging regardless of race, religion and creed at the same time.

In order to promote multiculturalism among the Malaysian citizens the implementation of Malaysia concept does not repudiate affirmative action and

Corresponding Author: Noor Sulastry Yurni Ahmad, Razak School of Government (RSOG) and University of Malaya, Level 5,
Menara Prisma No. 26, Persiaran Perdana, Presinct 3, 62675 Putrajaya, Malaysia

Bumiputera privileges as stipulated in the Federal Constitution of 1957. Acceptance goes beyond the concept of tolerance and it is very important that all ethnic groups accept one another to develop a national race. Acceptance is one of the best traits of the Malays, Chinese, Indians and others have to be used. The public service for example, the ministry of education has practices a transparent approach, most specifically on its intake procedures such that ample placements are opened up for all ethnic groups as well as in the government sector or private enterprises. The value of meritocracy emphasizes open competition based on the pre-requisites that have been pre-determined and whosoever is able to fulfil the required criteria has the right to be chosen. At the same time, loyalty to the King and country has to be embraced unconditionally. All ethnic groups have to place priority on loyalty and importance to the country over loyalty to their own ethnic group. Loyalty to leaders and head of an organization is the basis for authority, firmness, success and excellence.

This study tries to tackle multiculturalism in the Malaysian public service especially among the young or youth which has gotten to the point of conscious choices regarding the increasing ethnocentric articulations which happens the 1969 racial riots replaced cultural pluralism of post-independent Malaysia with a new landscape. This study intended at asserting principle of human values such as compromise, tolerance and adding Islamic values seem to display positive results in instilling patriotism amongst its diversified multicultural population of Malays, Bumiputeras and non-Malays particularly the youth leadership in the public service.

With due respect, the Malaysian government has puts in rallying its multi-ethnic and multi-religious society through various implementations of campaigns and corporate social responsibilities for the government to promote leadership training through its programmes and policies. For example, the introduction of Dato' Seri Mohd Najib Tun Razak slogan of Gagasan Malaysia campaign emphasized on people first, performance now has been used as a platform to showcase the human communication strategies in applying public relations strategies to achieve its goal. While during the 6th Plan period, the objective of youth development was to nurture youth potential and talents to national development. The government has looked upon the future of the youth today that the continuity of development depends.

The development of youth potential is vital in determining the success of the country's socio-economic development. In the Seventh Plan period, the thrust of youth development will be to provide youths with necessary skills to increase their participation and contribution, as well as develop their leadership qualities and inculcate positive values among them. The plan emphasized on nurturing and developing a generation of youths who are not only educated, skilled, disciplined and imbued with leadership qualities but also possess high moral values.

Since, the Seventh Plan period, various programmes for youth development which covered aspects such as leadership and skill training, healthy lifestyle, entrepreneur skills, sports and culture as well as preventive and rehabilitative programmes were implemented by various ministries. However, in the Tenth Malaysia Plan, 2011-2015 has focuses on the increased labour force participation, full employment and increased job creation, institutional improvements of the labour market and modernization of labour legislation. While the Eleventh Malaysia Plan, 2016-2020 tries to improve productivity, job creation and wage structure, enhancing labour market operation and improving management of foreign workers. The focused has shifted to the labour market for an advanced nation that matches supply with demand and a comprehensive labour market support system.

This has brought to the discussion of Youth Parliament in Malaysia which cultivates a new era of leadership. These are among the initiatives from a comprehensive youth development review and were officially announced by the prime minister during the One Million Youth gathering or National Youth Day on 12th June 2011. It serves as a platform for youths to voice their opinions and address issues, recognize their roles and ensure their abilities and talents are appreciated. The members of Youth Parliament have been exposed and experienced the public service journey as a platform to become the future leaders. This is similar to the Youth Parliament in Australia, United Kingdom, New Zealand and other European countries; Youth Parliament Malaysia provides a platform for youth development and empowering youth on a leadership journey to maximize their contributions to the country.

Hence, this study will explore cross cultural research among the youth leadership in the public service and the promotion of multiculturalism in Malaysia and it is hope to provide a review on the cultural differences of ethnic groups in Malaysia. The study studies on young Malaysian civil servants cultural values and behaviour in the workplace for effective management of ethnic diverse employees in pursuit of organizational success. However, multiculturalism is crucial and problematical issue in United Kingdom.

Multiculturalism or multi-ethnic issues among the young in the public service become the significant

scenario to be looked at for future leadership in Malaysia. Their participation and commitment in the public service has to be a platform of moulding possible trend of public service environment that will shape in the year 2020-2040. The Article of 153 placed a significant impact on interpreting the special rights and privileges to the Malays and Bumiputeras community. The result of this study is to promote and develop a more balanced understanding and awareness of multiculturalism among the young in the Malaysian public service. The purpose of this study is to determine the young civil servants in the Malaysia civil service perceptions, behaviour, attitudes and awareness towards multiculturalism as well as to promote ethnic diversity and equal opportunity employment in the civil service in Malaysia.

Literature review: Many researches have been done by local and international scholars on youth leadership, public service, multiculturalism and diversity in Malaysia and other countries. However, the researchers did not apply or study on the multiculturalism among the young in the Malaysian civil service, specifically. There were studies conducted looking at the higher level education, schools, financial institutions, multinational corporations and others. The discussions and findings focused on the general understanding of multiculturalism in Malaysia or certain countries such as Africa, Singapore, Russia and many more.

The majority of past Malaysian research was primarily concentrated on comparing the cultural values and behaviour of Malays, Chinese and Indian ethnicities in the workplace (Gibson, 1995; Razak, 2012; Fontaine, 2007). Recent literature review revealed a growing interest in ethnics' cultural values, particularly in the context of ethnic groups in Peninsular Malaysia; however, there is a significant deficiency of literature in the study of ethnic groups in Sarawak and Sabah, the first and second biggest state in Malaysia. Budin and Wafa stated that there have been no studies done yet related to Sabah ethnic culture and its impact in the workplace. This knowledge gap has created a void of information to guide further research in understanding the effective management of Sarawak and Sabah ethnic civil servants in the public services.

Multiculturalism in the diversity of culture and work values: Nordin and Mokhtar (2015) stated that culture is important in business organizations as business interfaces with people: as customers, suppliers or stakeholders. Definitions given by Hofstede (1980) and Asma, refers how culture as the collective programming of

the mind that need to be unlearned, learned and relearned while Asma mentioned that culture is a shared and commonly held body of general beliefs and value which define the 'shoulds' and the 'oughts' of life and were instilled in early childhood. With the definitions, values came in between to represent the core element of culture. Cultural values, according to Cateora refer to the shared values that are unique amongst communities and these differences between cultures resulted from underlying value systems that cause communities to behave differently in similar situations.

Management in Malaysia is much influenced by western management techniques such as those related to teamwork, counselling, performance feedback, negotiation, communication and leadership (Asthma and Lim, 2000). Past research findings show that attempts to import western management practices without considering the host country's culture leads to the frequent failure of these practices (Hofstede, 1993). According to Kennedy in addition to colonial heritage, foreign investment and industrialization have significantly influenced the traditional business management which is associated with the westernization of management practices. While Asma and Kennedy stated that despite this, the core cultural values of the ethnic groups that serve to create cultural differences remains. This was also agreed by Sidhu that Malaysian management have been exposed to a number of western theories and practices which may not be appropriate for the Malaysia employees.

While research done by Wood and Jogulu (2006) found that the lifestyle and behaviour of the respective ethnic groups are guided by a set of value system based on moral and religious beliefs, for example the value system of the Kadazandusuns known as 'adat' which is similar to the Malays they have 'budi' principles, the Chinese based on Confucian teachings and the Indians 'Dharma' (justice and ethical conduct) and reincarnation (Hock and Kesavapang, 2006; Dickson *et al.*, 2003). The results of the research done by Dom shows that Sabah ethnics namely Kadazandusun, Bajau and Malays may share some of the values but the priority of importance may differ. The results of this study also implied that there exist significant cultural differences between the three ethnic groups due to the instinct and separate culture and identity.

In addition, the values that they may have in common may differ in terms of importance or priority. It can be deduced that the Sabah ethnics' cultural values may have significant differences between Sabah ethnic groups, specifically focus on work related cultural values for better understanding of ethnic cultures in Malaysia.

According to Alves *et al.* (2006) and Bandmir and Mehrpouyan (2016) the education system is one of the most significant and effective tools for creating a national identity, national unity and fostering nationalism and love for the country. Education is also considered as a way to reduce ethnic and racial differences (Jogulu and Wood, 2008).

While Abdul Halim noted that the education system should not only be beyond racism but should also serve as the place to strengthen, nurture and grow the values of tolerance, friendliness, cooperation, understanding and unity. Abdul Razaq studied on the interaction for unity among trainee teachers at selected teacher training institutes in East Asia found that the highest level of interaction among students of various ethnic groups was high especially in the co-curricular environment followed by daily activities. However, the research focused was on the interaction among the students in East Asia and not looking at the trainee teachers a subject to show the unity of interaction among them in the workplace.

Interracial issues are critical to sustain a harmonious interethnic relationship among diversified ethnic population. Interethnic conflicts, difficulties, anxiety and uncertainties occurred due to people's lack of awareness or insensitivity to the cultural clues of different cultural frame of references and expectations. Symbolic multicultural environments have significant influences to the people's ways of life.

Youth or young leadership a synopsis based on Malaysian development plan: Leadership training has been in line with the Government's objective of developing leadership qualities among the youth, leadership courses were conducted by various Government agencies for youths at the national, state and district levels. These courses covered training in organizational and event management, communication techniques, negotiation skills, social interaction techniques and other aspects of leadership. For a start, a total of 60,000 youth participated in leadership training programmes conducted by various Government agencies, of which 25% were trained by the Ministry of Youth and Sports. Furthermore, there are also programmes implemented by the Ministry of Education which targeted to develop leadership potential for youth in schools and tertiary educational institutions. These programmes included the organization of various activities related to discipline and leadership among student leaders.

The private sector has participated in carrying out training for their employees, particularly in enhancing leadership and managerial skills. While NGOs and political parties also implemented various youth programmes with particular attention on improving leadership qualities among their members.

One of the important components of youth development programmes is the empowerment of youths through their participation in decision making. The number of youth associations increased from 3,460 in 1990-9,000 in 1995 while membership in youth associations increased from 500,000 in 1990 to about 1.8 million in 1995. Most of the youth associations were affiliated to the Malaysian Youth Council. This showed that the National Youth Consultative Council (NYCC) became the prime mechanism to empower youth to participate effectively in determining policies and programmes related to youth development.

Furthermore, the government continued to encourage and expose potential youth leaders their participation in regional and international for a with a view to enhancing their leadership qualities and skills and promoting networking at the international level. The leadership capability of Malaysian youth was also given high recognition and respect by the international youth organizations such as the Asian Youth Council, the World Assembly of Youths and the World Assembly of muslim youths when several Malaysian youths were appointed to important positions which exposed them to challenging functions and responsibilities.

In the year 1996-2000, the government has given greater focus on the development of a resilient youth community which is able to contribute positively to nation-building and has the capability to face the challenges of a rapidly industrializing nation. It also emphasized on the strengthening the family institution and the role of parents inculcating moral and spiritual values among youth.

Leadership development among the youth continued to be given high priority during the plan period to address the complex changes of the future. Efforts will be undertaken to build a new breed of youth leaders to acts as prime movers of development. Among others, they will be provided with techniques and approaches to be more effective leaders as well as inculcated with positive values such as self-confidence, discipline and good ethics. In this regard, the government will review the curriculum of leadership development programme, with a view to making it more proactive and relevant to future needs and conditions. Efforts will also be taken to develop second echelon leaders among youth equipped with integrity and dynamism to face new challenges. It is estimated that about 160,000 youth leaders, including NGO leaders, will be trained under the cleadership programme.

According to Asthma and Lim (2000) as baby boomers born in the 1950s and early 1960s retire or are at the threshold of retirement, the public service stands to

lose their wealth of experience and institutional memory while making way for attracting fresh talent. The vacancies have, inevitably, been filled by the generation X born after the mid-60s and generation Y born after mid-70s. The generation Y entrants will be those who were born in the information age. Handling ICT is second-nature to them

According to Jogula (2010), the young generation are more interested in personal development and ambition and work-life balance than organizational loyalty.

Younger public servants want to be in control of their destiny. They want to be empowered and do not like to be micro-managed. And they will not take instructions without questioning them, if so warranted.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study applies preliminary results, empirical research using qualitative approach which is based on the library research and secondary data. This study has explored the factors influencing the necessity of introducing strategies and programs promoting equal opportunity and ethnic monitoring in the Malaysian public service. This study focuses on the young civil servants who possess diploma and degrees certificate of education in selected governmental departments in Malaysia. The young sample involves those who are working in the public service age 21-40 years old. Malaysia in endowed with multi-ethnic groups reflecting the multicultural and diverse topics which are the focus of this study. The study population involves the young civil servants who possess diploma and degrees certificate of education in selected governmental departments in Malaysia. The young sample involves those who are working in the public service age 21-40 years old and.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study has found that the efficiency and effectiveness of the Malaysian civil service can be elevated to a higher level. With aid of information technology, the productivity of every official and employee can be optimised; no longer have to apply for additional employed or new departments in the assumption that it will solve all problems. According to Najib, the process of modernising the public service continues to be consolidated with a more open policy via the Cross-Fertilisation Programme which allows groups of outstanding students to serve in selected organisations, including Government-Linked Companies (GLCs) or

specific private bodies. This effort has clearly borne fruit and attracted the interest of young people to contribute to the country. In accordance with this, the government is committed to continuing and expanding this to other parties including international agencies, multi-national companies Malaysian representative offices abroad, Sabah and Sarawak state governments and other states such as Kelantan, Terengganu and Johor.

Furthermore, Najib added with this programme, the government is confident that the goal of developing and high prestige in the public sector can be achieved, thus bringing us closet to Vision 2020 and cementing Malaysia's status among other developed countries in the world. This is aligned with the Malaysian Youth Policy which is an update and an improvement to the National Youth Development (NYDP) 1997. An improvement of policies relating to youth in the country is seen as very appropriate and in line with the current environment as well as the National Youth Transformation Programmed announced in the 2015 Budget speech by the Prime Minister.

The 2nd concept of Malaysian Youth Policy: Holistic and based on the Federal Constitution and Rukun Negara which is the 4th youth priority area leadership emphasized on youth capacity building in terms of capability, efficiency and achievement as a leader. While the 8th youth priority area youth work professionalism is a new field focusing on building the capacity and competency of the group organizing the youth in related matters. The purpose is to make sure that the implementers of youth development are capable in ensuring that the implementation of MYP truly fulfils the needs of youth development and contribute towards strategic development of the country in the future. This is a good remark and new future for the youth to set their own platform in every aspect of life. With the full courage and effort set by the Ministry of Youth and Sports Malaysia, the youth is the significant benchmark for the success of Malaysian leadership.

It is clearly found that there is no restriction of recruitment or promotion in the public service by looking at the ethnicity, age or gender wise. The Malaysian public service pledges promoting the multiculturalism among the public officials leading a prosperous way of healthily working environment. According to Saufi *et al.* (2002) multiculturalism is a system of beliefs and behaviour that recognizes and respects the presence of all diverse and of all diverse groups in an organization or society, acknowledges and values, their socio-cultural differences and encourages and enables their continued contribution within an inclusive cultural context which empowers all within the organization or society.

The study can be concluded as to promote multiculturalism; the management of multicultural public service officials must reference multicultural dimensions in some way. They have to behave ethically, economically, efficiently and effectively. However according to Buss, he stated the problems of multiculturalism in Malaysia. The first problem is the more goals and strategies, the less likely things will get done and the second problem is multiculturalism competes with numerous other goals. Even though, Buss emphasized on the difficulties of creating a multicultural organization in the public service may be the difficult task. He suggested that the policy makers should not underestimate the time and resources required, imbed change across governments and leaders political versus civil servant leadership and the needs to begin with recruitment and proceed with talent management over years.

According to Tam Weng Wah, Malaysia's competitive edge at the global level depends very much on the efficiency and effectiveness of its public sector delivery system. This is why it is important for Malaysia to seek ways and means to continuously improve public sector service delivery. He highlighted some of the major challenges confronting Malaysia as it moves ahead into the turbulent future which include managing success, attaining balanced development, changing mindset, declining global competitiveness and building a high performance workforce for service delivery excellence. He also identifies several key areas for improvement to enhance public sector performance such as customer-focused, quality-focused, accountability, effectiveness and efficiency, continuous improvement and teamwork. Furthermore in order to achieve and moving towards an excellent service in the public sector leadership, Tam proposed several guiding principles on how to develop a high performance workforce in the public sector to ensure it continues to contribute positively and significantly towards service delivery excellence, racial harmony, economic growth and national development.

CONCULSION

It is very important to emphasize on the fundamental guiding principles to move Malaysia towards service excellence, glory and distinction. These principles are not exhaustive but essential to ensure Malaysia remains highly competitive in the new century which include building a highly competent workforce, taking pride and passion in work, demonstrating a high level of integrity, applying common sense, learning from the moments of truth and working together by Synergy. The service excellence promotes the practice of serving with pride and passion in the public service which also promotes togetherness in the workforce for a balance working culture.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

REFERENCES

Alves, J.C., K.J. Lovelace, C.C. Manz, D. Matsypura and F. Toyasakic *et al.*, 2006. A cross cultural perspective of self-leadership. J. Managerial Psychol., 21: 338-359.

Asthma, A. and L. Lim, 2000. Cultural dimensions of anglos Australians and Malaysians. Malaysian Manage. Rev., 36: 1-17.

Bandmir, S.M.A.A. and A. Mehrpouyan, 2016. Designing and implementing knowledge industry: An integrative framework for universities. J. Adv. Hum. Soc. Sci., 1: 28-40.

Dickson, M.W., D.N.D. Hartog and J.K. Mitchelson, 2003. Research on leadership in a cross-cultural context: Making progress and raising new questions. Leadership Q., 14: 729-768.

Fontaine, R., 2007. Cross cultural management: Six perspectives. Cross Cult. Manage. Int. J., 14: 125-135.

Gibson, C.B., 1995. An investigation of gender differences in leadership across four countries. J. Int. Bus. Stud., 26: 255-279.

Hock, S.S. and K. Kesavapany, 2006. Malaysia: Recent Trends and Challenge. Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, ISBN: 978-981-230-339-4, Pages: 313.

Hofstede, G., 1980. Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values. Sage Publisher, Beverly Hills, California, ISBN: 9780803914445, Pages: 328.

Hofstede, G., 1993. Intercultural cooperation in organization. Manage. Decis., 20: 53-67.

Jogulu, U.D. and G.J. Wood, 2008. A cross cultural study into peer evaluations of women's leadership effectiveness. Leadership Organiz. Dev. J., 29: 600-616.

Jogulu, U.D., 2010. Culturally linked leadership styles. Leadership Organiz. Dev. J., 31: 705-719.

Nordin, S. and M. Mokhtar, 2015. Discussion: Diversity in Malaysia new media art. Int. J. Bus. Administrative Stud., 1: 94-98.

Razak, N., 2012. The Civil Service: Forges Changes Exceeding Expectations. RSOG and ITNM, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, ISBN: 978-983-068-836-7, Pages: 111.

Saufi, R.A., S.A. Wafa, Y.Z. Hamzah and M. Yusoff, 2002. Leadership style preference of Malaysian managers. Malaysian Manage. Rev., 37: 1-10.

Wood, G.J. and U.D. Jogulu, 2006. Malaysian and Australian male and female middle managers: A cross cultural comparison of workplace attitudes aspirations for promotion and self-rated leadership styles. Int. J. Knowl. Cult. Change Manage., 6: 109-120.