

Nationhood-Values Education: A Humanism Perspective for Nation-building in the 2013-2025 Malaysian Education Blueprint

By

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Abstract

The primary objective in this study was to attempt an evaluation of the 2013-2025 Malaysian Education Blueprint's drive towards the holistic development of values-driven Malaysians, and secondly, to attempt to appraise how sufficiently it has taken cognizance of the principles of the Rukun Negara-the nation's national ideology, the National Educational Philosophy 1988, and the nation's Vision 2020social development goals, to inculcate in students at all levels of education, an " ... unshakeable sense of national identity" (2013-2025 Education Blueprint, p. E-10)Secondary data in the form of the propositions of the New 2013-2025 Education Blueprint primarily, related national education and government reports, and the views of research scholars and well-established educationists, were qualitatively evaluated for a deductive appraisal of the attainment of the national social unification and education goals. The New Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 provides promising educational transformations with eleven shifts, for the re-invigoration of the much-debated current public educational programme. Its primary functional goals for 'student achievements'- i. enabling students to attain to higher order thinking skills/activities (HOTS), ii. Attain universally acceptable levels of ethics and spirituality, and iii. bring about an inclusive sense of national identity as grounded on the principles of the National Education Philosophy and the Rukun Negara, are seen to be wanting. This study hopes to project the cardinal principle that education and all Malaysians citizens need to concertedly strive to cultivate and propagate in our diverse population, beginning with our school youth in the already well-established education system, shared values towards a Malaysian 'consciousness'.

Keywords- *Fractured Education, National Integration, Rukun Negara, Holistic Values Education, Malaysian nationhood-consciousness.*

1. Introduction

The discussion in this paper on the above stated subject, being a qualitative-evaluative study, will be presented in sections under the following related sub-themes- introduction; an overview of Malaysian educational development; some indicators of Malaysian social unity; the Rukun Negara, the New Economic Policy, Vision 2020 and Bangsa Malaysia- the Nation's Push Forward; education for the future; grounding Malaysian education with humanism and nationhood values transformation; conclusion.

The good books of religion invariably emphasise simple, 'right' education as deep learning, reading, becoming knowledgeable, service, sharing knowledge, enhancing the good for mankind and so on, and ultimately developing wisdom, if not, a measure of it (Koran, Bible, Bhagavadgita, Dhammapada); "Iqra" or "ikra" in Islam is very loosely defined as, 'read' or 'recite'). We have to understand the circumstances of the Divine Revelation. The Lord (regarded as god generally) is not going to ask us to read, or (the) Nabi, who will ask us to recite, something he himself could not do. Instead, he wants us to concentrate on — to pay attention to — the flow of wisdom that we are privileged to receive. In Tamil, we use the word "*akrai*" to denote careful and dedicated speech or work. The Bible also says, "know thou this...", thus drawing our wandering attention to optimal human reflection and to the implied meanings of words of wisdom (<http://islam.stackexchange.com/questions/7991/what-does-iqra-%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A3-mean>).

As the primary spiritual faiths emphasise ‘learning’, ‘knowing’, wisdom, cultivating a cognisance for the attainment of wisdom, and careful, well-considered action at all times, it can thus be seen that it is beyond the acquisition of facts, skills and plain knowledge that Malaysia’s education milestones and planning, have broadly laid out educational principles and propositions for the education of its school-university clientele. The national education philosophy emphasizes, as discussed below, knowledge acquisition, in the arts and particularly, in the sciences and modern information technologies which, it is envisaged can take the nation to its aspired ‘developed’ nation status.

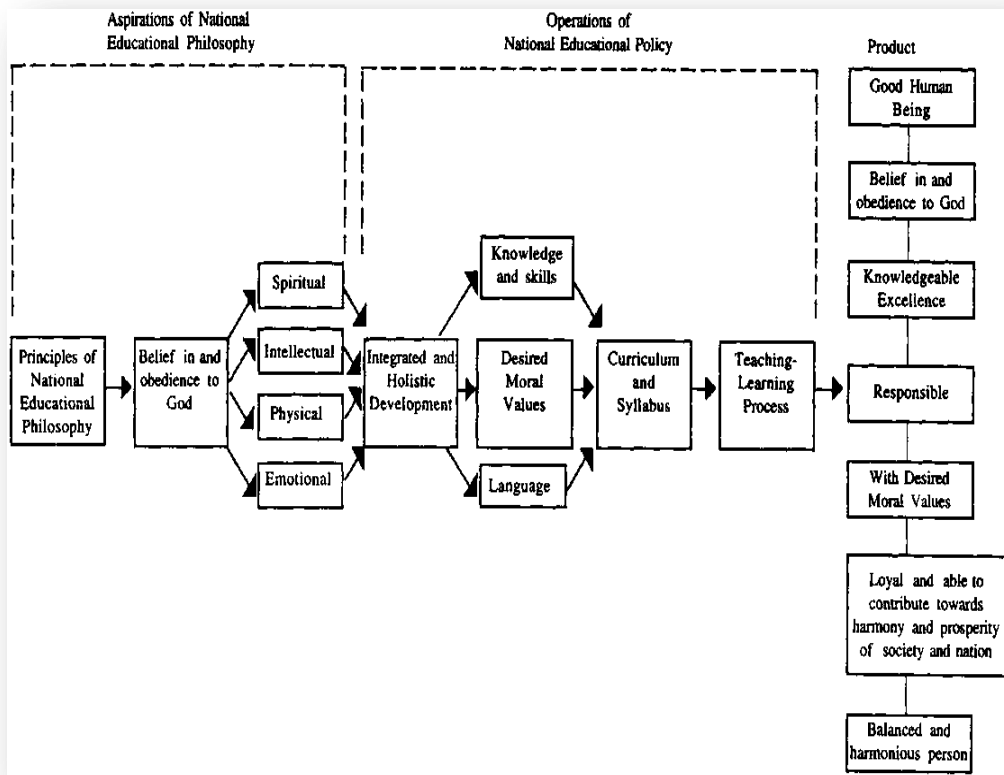
2. Methodology

The methodological procedures employed in this brief study were defined by the qualitative-evaluative approach. The related national and official documents were evaluated in relation to the purposes of this study. The well-considered stand-points of educationists and scholars, on the related issues in this study, were taken note of. These were analysed and the probable meanings and implications to the focus and themes of this study, were then discussed.

3. Review of Related Literature

The comprehensively formulated Malaysian National Education Philosophy in 1988 primarily seeks the fullness of the individual. The diagram below illustrates how the aspirations of the above philosophy- the primary dimension being, ‘the belief in God’, relate with the implementation pathways of Malaysian education, towards integrated, thence harmoniously balanced and holistic development of the learner-citizen.

Diagram 1. National Education Philosophy-Aspirations and Operational Ingredients



(Source: <https://www.google.com/search?q=malaysian+national+education+philosophy&biw=1360&bih=619&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwidzMePmqTKAhUFto4KHbZFAq8QsAQIMA#imgrc=2ZBxU6HmUwIbLM%3A>).

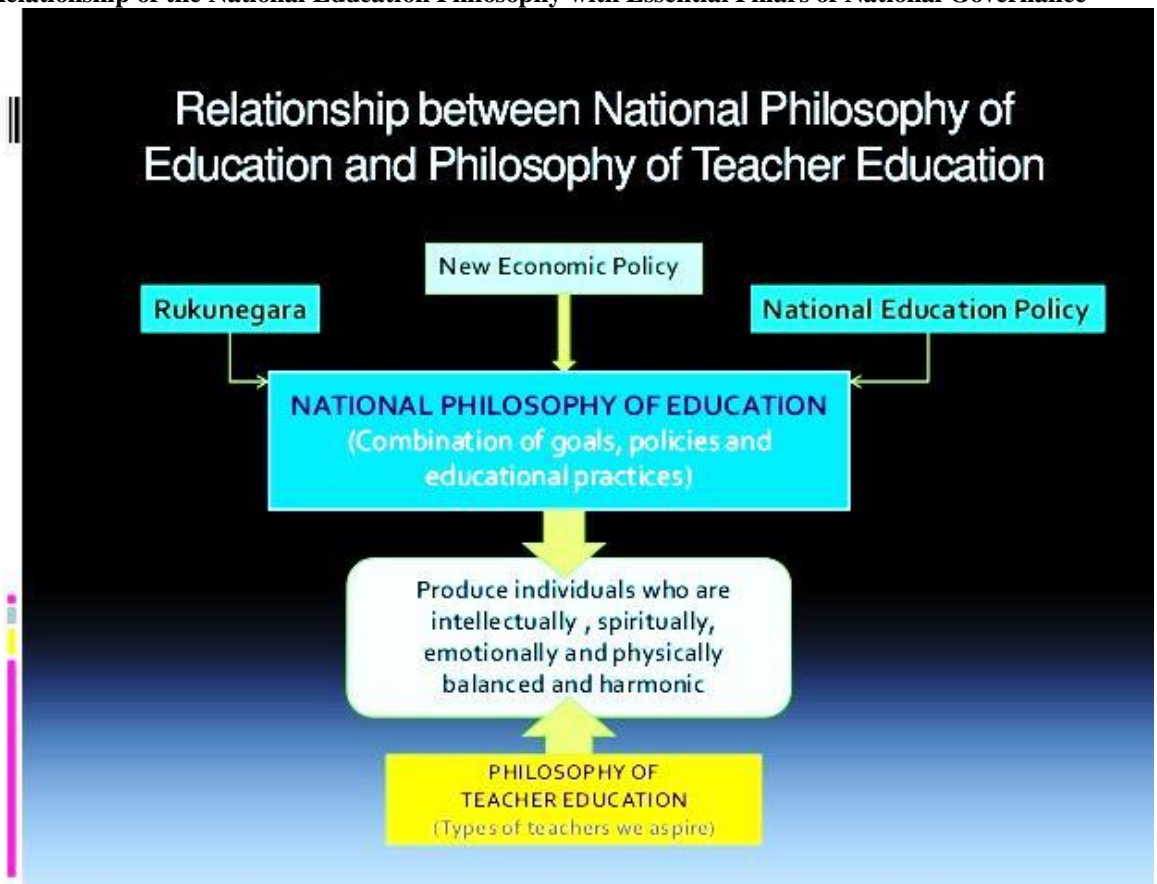
It can be noted further, that the principles of the Rukun Negara, which was proclaimed as the Malaysian national ideology only in 1971 after the tragic racial riots of 1969, which essentially project the attainment of national and spiritual integrity, with the aim of building national solidarity in the nation, are implicitly included and projected prominently in the National Education Philosophy.

It cannot be denied that as with any new developing country, a form of cohesive and stabilizing social and subsuming code and philosophy of life, was deemed crucial by the ruling governments then, so as to take the nation forward. This was especially true, as discussed above, that the tensions and strains in multi-cultural and multi-religious Malaysia then, and it is often said even today, have resulted in the state of Malaysian social cohesion being seen as rather “worrying”. It has tended, at times, to tear apart the social fabric that had existed, and has come to be in an evolving ambience rendering a state of “stable tension” (Shamsul A.B. 2011). This latter social reality, it was felt, was needed to be built upon and fortified, especially amongst the nation’s youth, for posterity.

The following diagrammatic representation, illustrates the central role of the nation’s education philosophy, with attention given to teacher education, forming the underpinning basis and the direction and focus of the other essential governmental pillars, in the nation’s trajectory towards a developed nation status.

Diagram 2

Relationship of the National Education Philosophy with Essential Pillars of National Governance



(Source:<http://www.slideshare.net/mrsnazlan/national-philosophy-of-education?related=1>).

The primary and dual concerns of the nation's education philosophy, it must be emphasized here, are i) human capital development, and ii) national unity (SiowHengLoke et. al, in Abdul RazakBaginda ed. 2009, p.213). In the discussion in this article as such, the writer intends to focus on the latter goal above, and to attempt to deliberate upon the considerations provided in the 2013-2025 National Education Blueprint, in terms of curricular development and reforms, for the cultivation of humanistic, nationhood values towards the manifestation of an ethos of a Malaysian consciousness.

4. An overview of Malaysian educational development.

Apart from the village-‘pondok’ religious education efforts by local community groups and village elders throughout Malaya [before the advent of the British in the early years,] with British colonialism the issues of language and communal cultures came to the fore. There was a move for the maintenance and continuance of the essential values of the peoples of the different ethnicities in Malaya, which became a ‘deliberate process of transmitting knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values’ (American educationist Lawrence Cremin 1964, in AzlyRahman, in Lim Teck Ghee, et al 2009, p.202).

With the clear divisive cultural-ethicized, and English-westernized secular education ambience taking roots in pre-independence Malaya, the Razak Education Report 1956 felt an urgent need to unify the Malayan education system. It contributed significantly towards establishing the need of a new nation to strengthen its education system, thereby providing the nation with a strong foundation and pillar for stable and progressive growth. This is seen in its objectives, that it was to work towards,

establishing a national system of education acceptable to the people of the Federation as a whole which will satisfy their needs and promote their cultural, social, economic and political development as a nation, having regard to the intention to make Malay the national language of the country while preserving and sustaining the growth of the language and culture of other communities living in the country.

(Report of the Education Committee, 1956, Chapter. 1 (a), p. vii).

The Razak Education schema is said to form the basis of the nation's educational evolution as it is playing out even to this day. The Malay language was to be the lingua franca of the nation, and the primary tool that was to be instrumental to help construct the nation's national identity.

The later Barnes (1951) and Fenn Wu (1951) Education Reports did not diminish the ‘all parties undertaking’ and national aspiration for a united Malayan nation (Fennell 1987, p.167, in AlisPuteh ibid p. 76).

The distrust in a unified education system with the Malay language as the primary medium of instruction, although the latter was accepted as the national language of the nation by the parties concerned, as indicated by the Fenn Wu Education Mission, has clearly had its negative and deleterious *spill-over effects into other existing vernacular and religio-communal education constructions, pushing further away a common education for a Malaysian nationality* (www.aadcice.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/j/publications/sosho4_1-06.pdfbyHJamil). The actualization applications for the latter are still sadly lacking.

It is thus imperative that we need to work within this diffused and long-configured education phenomenon, which tends to set in motion constantly assertive centrifugal forces, countering probably the efforts by various national and non-governmental institutions, to *build bridges among the diverse Malaysian communities.*

The ‘inadequacies’ of the earlier education schemas as such, led to the proclamation of the Education Act 1961. This Act, being based on the earlier Razak Report and the 1960 RahmanTalib Report, laid out the

national education policy. Both the latter reports had clearly emphasized Malay as the primary subject and medium of learning and instruction, and more importantly, to enable education to help create a sense of a *Malayan national consciousness*.

However, the divisive character- with the national schools on one side and the vernacular, essentially ethnic-oriented education quite diametrically contrasted, with teaching practices focusing on ethno-centric traditions and orientations- language, cultural emphases and so on, has continued to be the ‘unforgiving hallmark’ of our education system to this day.

5. Problem Statement and some Indicators of Malaysian Social Unity

1. The index for the state of national tension in Malaysia [*Societal Stress Index (IndeksKeteganganMasyarakat)*] was 4.8 (cases per one million population) in the first quarter of 2011, and remained about the same at 4.7 at the last quarter of 2011/3. This can be contrasted with the *Global Peace Index (GPI)* figure of 19 for 153 nations, throughout 2011/3 (*The Global Peace Index 2015 report by the Institute for Economics and Peace places Malaysia at 28, out of 162 countries*. The state of peace for the Malaysian nation is rated as being ‘High’, with Iceland, Denmark, Austria, New Zealand, and Switzerland seen as having ‘Very High’ states of peace in their individual polities. p.10) (http://www.visionofhumanity.org/sites/default/files/Global%20Peace%20Index%20Report%202015_0.pdf; http://www.jpningov.my/358?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_ez3w&p_p_lifestyle+0&p_p_stat...). This being so, the state of “stable tensions” that the common society has to live with, in their everyday lives, without that sufficiently palpable sense of a one national consciousness, is a worrying state of affairs and a constant reminder of the need to delve further into the deeper and urgent social issues at hand (Prof. Khoo Kay Khim, in Shamsul Amri B., Anis Yusoff, 2011, p.7).

The following table illustrates the state of relative peace and stability, and also the latent opportunities for social conflicts in Malaysia today.

Table 1. DNUI Statistics Malaysia: The State of Social Solidarity (Department of National Unity and Integration)

OVERALL SCORES	2013	2014	2015 (JAN-MAR)
SOCIETAL STRESS INDEX (SSI)	4.7	3.67	2.7
GLOBAL PEACE INDEX (GPI/162 countries)	29	33	33

(Source: <http://www.jpningov.my/en/indeks-ketegangan-masyarakat>).

[Notes: a. The Societal Stress Index (SSI) attempts to monitor conditions that can likely lead to terror, riots, demonstrations, protests, attacks, quarrels and the related issues involved. These can be characterized by differences in economic well-being, social conditions of everyday life, and racial and religious differences and issues.

b. Relatedly, the Global Peace Index (GPI) records the number of deaths from internal conflict, the level of distrust in ‘other’ citizens, and the level of violent demonstrations that occur in a country. It also further measures the degree of societal consensus and cohesion which are seen as prerequisite conditions necessary to underpin a stable, functioning democracy (Institute of Economics and Peace, Sydney 2015 Report,

http://www.visionofhumanity.org/sites/default/files/Global%20Peace%20Index%20Report%202015_0.pdf, www.economicsandpeace.org].

2. The Malaysian king had sharply, with resolute observation decreed that the people need more and more today to be the common beneficiaries of public, common action. Emphasizing the primary duty of leaders and public authorities in bringing the diverse peoples together, the king noted that the Malaysian people were promisingly quite well united today, but sharply observed that, "...this (unity) can further be improved if all parties put the nation's interests first, ...*politicians ... (play) up religious issues. This causes uneasiness among the people, who may be the followers and have no inkling about the issues being fanned*" (New Straits Times, 13.12.2011, p. 1).

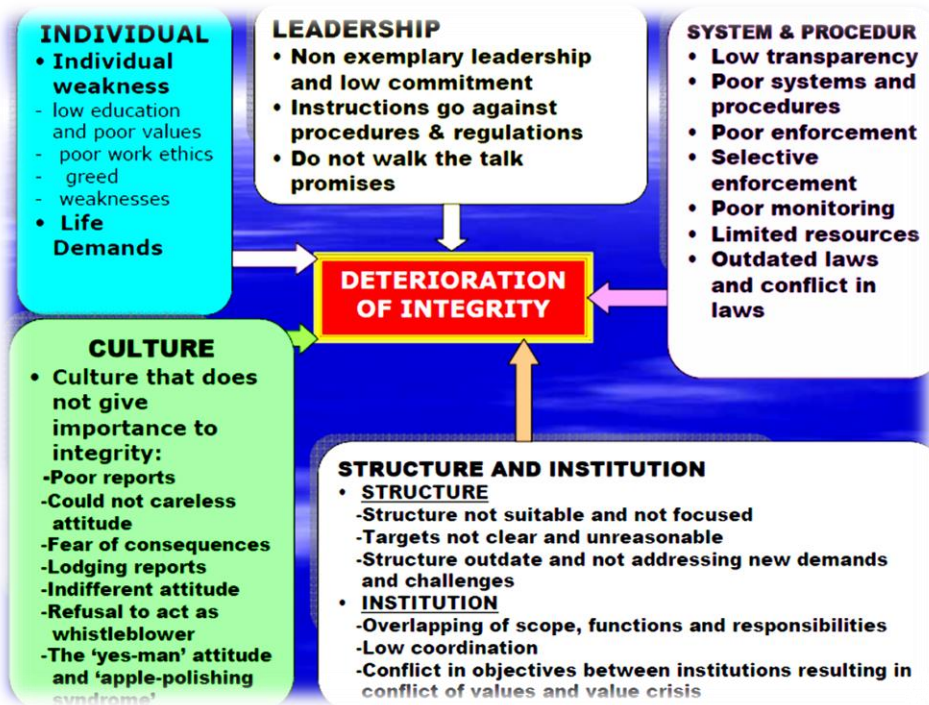
The above observation by the nation's king and 'father figure' of the masses as such, indicates the importance of the values of integrity, duty and service that all national leaders and the general society need to uphold in ensuring that the pluralistic and intricate social fabric that has been established with the efforts of our founding fathers, is at all times enriched and safeguarded.

3. The Centre for Public Policy Studies (CPPS) carried out a study in 2010-12, and found that 75 per cent of Malaysians see their own culture as superior to other cultures. On a positive note, *92 per cent are happy to live in the nation because they are able to enjoy different cultures. Further, the study revealed that about two-thirds of young Malaysians' close friends are often from the same ethnic group or religion as them.*

1. It is also appropriate to give some serious attention at this juncture, to an aspect of the **National Integrity Plan Report (2007)**, which has highlighted the social 'ingredients' and factors that can result in the **Malaysian society possibly drifting farther apart**. These are presented in a diagrammatic representation for our perusal¹.
2. Clearly exemplifying the impact of the above 'ingredients' in the possibly tangible deterioration of integrity in our nation, as illustrated in the diagram above, Prof. Dzulkifli Razak (the Sun, 20.1.2016, p.11) has highlighted the recent case of one Salwani Tajuddin, a FELDA (Federal Land Development Authority) resident in Kuantan, Pahang. This prominent educationist stresses, with a *strong dose of humanistic satire*, designating her as an exemplary Malaysian '**Integrity Idol**' that,
3. She can proudly claim to have *internalised the real purpose and meaning of being a Felda settler par excellence by harnessing a tough spirit of being self-dignified...* (as evidently reflected in this massive land-for-people and economic and social development effort, left to us as a *world-renowned*) ***institutional legac(y)*** (by) *the then second prime minister, Tun Abdul Razak Hussein.*

¹In relation to this issue of national significance today, is the nation's perceived falling levels of corruption, which necessarily can be seen in the broader context. In the Berlin based Corruption Perception Index (CPI) for 2015, Malaysia's ranking has dropped from 50 in the earlier years, to 54 out of 168 nations. Last year, it ranked 53 out of the same number of countries in the index (Prof. Dr. Chandra Muzaffar, the Sun, 29.1.2016, p.15; Sheridan Mahavera and Nathelie Tay Published: 3 December 2014, (<http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/malaysia-moves-up-3-spots-to-be-less-corrupt-in-global-index#sthash.O64cqylQ.dpuf>). A rating of 0 means the nation is considered to be 'perfectly' clean from corruption, and 100 means the nation is very corrupt.

Diagram 3. Relationship between Socio-Political Factors and their Sub-Ingredients Resulting in Poor Levels of Integrity and Social Cohesion



(Source: National Integrity Plan 2007).

The values and the national message implicit in the above succinct reflection, need further to be given much concerted attention for the ‘holistic’ development of the young Malaysian citizen more focusedly.

As it is aspired, a developed Malaysia is not only seen in the context of the material perspective- high living standards and material prosperity, but together with the development in terms of *humanistic values and social advancement*, giving its citizenry the wholesome ‘quality’ of life and well-being. This is portrayed in the Vision 2020 statement below.

Malaysia aims to become a fully developed nation in its own mould by 2020...The transformation towards a developed nation is not solely based on economic and technological progress. It also needs *progress in social, cultural, intellectual and spiritual fields*. To achieve these, the enhancement of *ethics and integrity* to ensure that they become part of the society’s culture is absolutely necessary

(Source: National Integrity Plan, p.3)

The education of the nation’s youth and society thus, entails **ethical and value-driven education**, in order that the *significance of the simple principles of integrity* in a political entity is *learnt and lived*, and that the *life-applications of ethics for nationhood- for a commonality of purpose*, is given full importance.

6. The Rukun Negara, The New Economic Policy, Vision 2020 And Bangsa Malaysia- The Nation’s Push Forward

In the heyday of the proclamation of the Rukun Negara as the nation’s national ideology in 1970, seen as yet another socially and theoretically ‘well-conceived’, constructive instrument for national integration

and well-being, there was a good measure of hope as regards its positive gains for the nation- for national unity, stability and prosperity.

The *deep-set values* as embedded in the Rukun Negara and particularly propounded in its preamble- a democratic way of life for the nation's pluralistic society; ensuring a liberal approach at all times as per the rich and diverse cultural traditions; educating and demonstrating to the nation's social capital-the youth and the larger society, the lessons behind the social conflicts and stresses that the precarious and prevalent contentious social elements that the nation's social fabric innately embodies, had brought about; building a progressive society oriented towards modern science and technology, but ensuring nevertheless, **LIVING OF THE SHARED VALUES** as per the multiculturalism of the nation's 'real and manifested cosmopolitanism', so as to transcend the "primordial sentiments" of group orientations (C. Geertz.1973), towards the desired "imagined community" (Benedict Anderson, 1985) of Malaysian nationhood, these building blocks of unity have not been sufficiently well discoursed and projected to Malaysian society and the nation's school youth, like with Indonesia's 'Pancasila' (Saifuddin Abdullah 2014 p.11, a council member of the National Unity Consultative Council and Chief Executive Officer of the Global Moderation Foundation; Alis Puteh, 2006, Zaid Ibrahim, 2012).

The *New Economic Policy (NEP)* launched in 1970, was essentially to achieve national unity in the evolving Malaysian nation. The dual and parallel running socio-economic ambience pervading the nation in the 1960s, with one, the modern sector- the tin mines and estates being primarily dominated by the urban and supposedly semi-urban communities, was seen to be a mainly thriving and monetarily profitable part of the nation's socio-economy.

The peasant economy, with the Malays dominating it, was very much on its own and isolated. While the immigrant population generally 'prospered' in the urban-commercial-industrial sector, the *socio-economic dualism* that quite markedly began to take form, resulted in some 'fractures' in the social fabric of the nation.

With the NEP, it was aspired that, by contributing to the restructuring of Malaysian society, removing the identification of race with occupation and the reduction of poverty in all communities, will lead to the re-building and re-unification of the diverse groups in the nation. The Malaysian government thus, was directed at combatting racial inequality and bring about social justice in the nation (Abdul Rahim, 2002, p.50).

As the Second Malaysia Plan 1971-1975 emphasizes,

The NEP embodies specific proposals designed to restructure the pattern of employment and ownership of wealth in the country. The *overriding objective is that of national unity with implementation to be so effected that no one racial group should feel deprived in the process* (p.30).

Despite the ostensible strides achieved for the general population and the Malay-Bumiputera community particularly (Second Malaysia Plan, [ibid/http://www.epu.gov.my/en/second-malaysia-plan-1971-1975](http://www.epu.gov.my/en/second-malaysia-plan-1971-1975)), the broader goals of communal and national integration and socio-economic sustainability were somewhat set to some stresses and strains.

Particularly, the rise of nationalist and opposition groups within nations, as much electrifyingly global as the phenomenal 'Arab Spring' in the northern African nations, ideology cum violence-oriented groups clamouring for change and the ouster of corrupt and uncaring leaderships, and so on, have certainly given rise to social-ethnic fractures and impacted negatively on the existing societal cohesion, internally and in nations worldwide. These developments, it is noted by scholars generally, tend to help foment further distrust and disharmony in the often, already culturally-religiously divided social entities.

(**Note:** Edmund Terence Gomez and Johan Saravanamuttu, 2013 in their book, 'The New Economic Policy in Malaysia-Affirmative Action, Ethnic Inequalities and Social Justice', discuss the impact of the

NEP on Malaysian social cohesion, genuine entrepreneurial capacity, and intra-Bumiputera inequities and related issues; Maznah Mohamad, Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied eds., 2011 pp. 15, 23, 42-6).

These developments can then tend to diminish and blunt the efforts towards the cultivation of the sense and ethos of a Malaysian consciousness.

The social scenario that manifests places the nation-builders then with a most pressing challenge. The shortcomings thus, seemingly interwoven in the Malaysian social structure, and admittedly in the ways of the nation's efforts towards national integration, are reflected by the following pertinent observation by Dr. Jun E-Tan (New Straits Times, 10.2.2015, p. 13), who has most succinctly projected the need for foundational social solidarity in a plural society, as envisaged earlier by the Vision 2020 developed-nation-strategy programme.

...The *social and solidarity economy (SSE)* is of particular interest as a subset of the 'people economy', [as it includes a broad array of organisations and enterprises which produce goods and services]... with explicit social and environment objectives on top of their economic goals. ...the true potential of the sector (SSE) is actualised by using economic activities as a vehicle to achieve far more important ends, such as strengthening social capital and the **community spirit** amongst the people, and enabling them to live meaningful and dignified lives. . . . (Focusing) on *values and principles* (the emphasis of development then moves on to) the **quality of growth** rather than quantity, necessitating a shift in how we regard *success*. ...*what values and principles are important to us as a nation?* ...It is during (trying) times that the resilience of the society is tested, and it is during these times when having an *empowered populace with strong community networks based on shared values and principles, will matter the most*.

Emphasizing that social cohesion refers to the *processes of building shared values so as to nurture the existing diverse communities to attain a sense that they are together* "...engaged in a common enterprise, facing shared challenges, and that they are members of the same community" [Judith Maxwell(1996) in Easterly, W., p.4], it is pertinent to note, that in congruence with the theme of national integration of this study, the above writer defines 'social cohesion' in an instrumental sense, in that the measures of marked income inequalities and thereby, weakened social well-being, can have deleterious impacts on social cohesion in the course of the progression of time.

Thus, in the context of Malaysia, this has often raised the disturbing question of whether the central and crucial education pillar of the developmental programme, is on the 'right' track, as guided by the stated goals of the nation's constitution, its national ideology-the Rukun Negara, its education philosophy and its Vision 2020. These above cardinal documents categorically posit that Bahasa Malaysia is the nation's national language and the primary medium of instruction in the public education domain. The English language and all other communal languages can be taught, used in common interactions and studied [Federal Constitution, Article 152, clause (1) a, b].

However, with the much-desired social solidarity in the nation still a much 'disparaged' issue, arising as such from a shallow and not a deep-set sense in the general Malaysian society, that we are 'united', but yet, we do just co-exist in a state of 'social cohesion' (Shamsul A. B. 2007, PusatKomas, 'Unity and Social Cohesion- Making It Possible'; Dato' Prof. Dr. Mohammed Mustafa Ishak, in the interview with the writer, 28 July 2013, UUM Chancellory; NajibRazak, New Straits Times, 12 January 2009). We do indeed continue to move on with a 'strained' sense of tolerance and acceptance, and possibly, laboriously to some measure.

It is thus imperative that the measures necessary to be undertaken, both at the *macro stage*, that is, from a government-national perspective, and more importantly, from a grassroots approach of sowing and cultivating directly, in small measures rather subtly and informally, both in the homes, and particularly in

schools, towards firmly imbedding in our youth-students, humanistic and nationhood values towards the future, be given the utmost attention today.

7. Education for the Future

The new education blueprint, launched with a high sense of expectations and hope in 2013 was the result, nevertheless, of consultation with over 12,000 stakeholders, as it were, who represented the public, parents, teachers, academics, students, and other Malaysians interested and willing to contribute their view-points in enhancing the education system geared towards fulfilling the first challenge of Vision 2020- the birth of a 'Bangsa Malaysia'², a socially and economically vibrant and united Malaysian nation, and the other eight challenges for a developed nation fruition.

The Education Blueprint lays out its goal, particularly of importance to the discussion in this paper, namely that of the cultivation of a '*sense of nationhood*' in young students, as follows.

In order to compete with the best in the world, our education system must develop young Malaysians who are knowledgeable, think critically and creatively, have leadership skills and are able to communicate with the rest of the world. Just as importantly, our students must be imbued with values, ethics and a sense of nationhood.

(Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2015, Ministry of Education Malaysia 2013).

The Prime Minister, in his Foreword for the Blueprint, had not only expressed his hopes but also indicated his thoughts as to the educational direction that needs to be taken by this new Blueprint towards the nation's future, stressing that we need to "... (rise in achievement gaps) from the bottom-third to the top-third PISA and TIMSS in 15 years; and ***(BUILDING) AN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM THAT GIVES CHILDREN AN APPRECIATION FOR OUR UNIQUE IDENTITY AS MALAYSIANS. ...***".

However, while acknowledging the continuation of the present, long-established, and possibly 'fatigued' and divided education system, the Blueprint notes the importance of homogeneous learning environments for our youth, that can well contribute towards building an appreciation of our *common identity as Malaysians*. It emphasizes, "(They-the homogeneous environments) make it more *challenging for students to be exposed to different cultures and ethnic groups and to develop an appreciation for diversity that is critical for unity*" (ibid. p. E-12).

In this regard, the Blueprint faithfully takes into consideration six **student aspirations**, one essential dimension among them- the development of "ethics and spirituality" (**Note:** This crucial domain is recognized in the National Educational Philosophy 1988), which can be foundationally constructive in the building of a **common identity as Malaysians** as discussed above, that is, a "national identity". This latter national goal is also stated as the sixth student aspiration in the Education Blueprint (ibid. pp.E-9, E-10).

² The concept of 'Bangsa Malaysia' is the first of nine challenges faced by the Malaysian peoples, as propounded by TunDr. Mahathir, in the Vision 2020 programme proclamation in 1991. This concept *focuses on the cultivation of a sense of Malaysian oneness* for the nation to move forward and attain developed nation status. It does not in a realistic sense, with the nation having 'progressed' on, economically and socially for over half a century, refer to any policy intention of 'forming' a *one Malaysian race*. The concept takes full cognisance of the realities of Malaysian socio-political multiculturalism. As Prof. Dr. Mohamed Mustafa Ishak notes, "The notion of Bangsa Malaysia illustrates that the *project of nation formation* is advanced as part of a package of economic development inherent in Vision 2020. ...the success of the project of nation-formation needs more than economic measures. *Nationalism and national identity are not only about the economy; it must be embedded in a strong sense of shared culture and emotional ties*" (2014. 'The Politics of Bangsa Malaysia: Nation-building in a Multi-ethnic Society'). And further, as TunDr. Mahathir (ibid) has cogently discoursed on the issue of nation-formation, "...building a nation out of diverse people with differing historical, ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural and geographical backgrounds is something more than just FOSTERING consensus...It involves the *fostering of shared historical experiences; shared values; a feeling of common identity and shared destiny that transcends ethnic bounds without undermining ethnic identity; loyalty; commitment and emotional attachment to the nation; and the flowering of (a) distinctly national ethos...*"

However, as Professor DzulkifliRazak notes, the ‘ethics and spirituality’ dimension which is the least “developed” in our youth today, and for the Malaysian “national identity” domain to come to fruition, the former needs to be given further concerted and ‘grounded’ attention in educational planning. *Ethics and spirituality need to become a palpable attainment in the lives of youth and the general society*, before further ‘imbalances’ in educational ‘outcomes’ become more serious (see this article, section VII, point 4, p. 3- 2007 MACC survey, Youth attitudes on corruption ambivalent).

With an equal measure of brevity, relatedly, the Blueprint goes on to remind parents, educators and the general society that,

...it is important for students to interact and learn with peers and teachers from various ethnic, religious, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds.... the Ministry has programmes like the Student Integration Plan for Unity (RIMUP-RancanganIntegrasiMuridUntukPerpaduan)- to strengthen interaction among students from different school-types, through co-curricular activities. A review ... found that where RIMUP was run, there was good evidence of inter-ethnic mixing, both inside and outside the classroom. ...there has been a significant drop in the number of activities under the RIMUP programme due to funding constraints (ibid).

The new Education Blueprint promisingly advocates eleven shifts to transform the existing education scenario, and of these, the first four are highlighted here, underlining their need and importance in pragmatic, applicational terms for the learning of nationhood values towards a Malaysian consciousness. These are as follows,

1. provide equal access to quality education of an international standard,
2. ensure every child is proficient in Bahasa Malaysia and English language and is encouraged to learn an additional language,
3. develop VALUES-DRIVEN MALAYSIANS, and
4. transform teaching into the profession of choice (ibid, p.E-15).

What is absent, apart from the known strategies- the RIMUP, the secondary school students National Service programme and so on (Blueprint, p. E-7), are the institution-directed-‘internalising’ and “value-driven” character constructs classroom strategies, the ‘learnings’ from which can be ‘imbedded’ in our national youth and society, ‘educating’ them to blossom into the “aspired” Malaysian.

In line with the above, it has been thus proposed that higher order thinking skills (HOTS) through creative teaching and learning schemas, such as the de-emphasis on memorization and rote-learning for examination ‘wants’ purposes, to a more school-based assessment approach in ‘education’ (Education Blueprint, Chapter 5, p. 5-2).

These then can be the possible everyday ‘student-education’ strategies to deliver the aspired quality education for the nation’s future ‘prosperity’, and the well-being of its diverse peoples³.

8. Grounding Malaysian Education With Humanism And Nationhood Values Transformations

The writer will attempt to discuss in this section three cardinal educational pillars-

³Dr. Syed Husin Ali (2015), the renowned Malaysian political scientist and sociologist, notes, discoursing the significance of national unity and common values for societal well-being, that, “The agenda for national unity in Malaysia, 57 years after Merdeka (Independence) now, has still not succeeded but, instead, appears to have receded further into the distant mirage. The Merdeka Proclamation read by Tunku Abdul Rahman, emphasized that Malaysia ‘shall be forever a sovereign democratic and independent State founded upon the principles of liberty and justice and ever seeking the welfare and happiness of its people and the maintenance of a just peace among all nations’ . . .to achieve welfare and happiness’ for the people within a united entity, the values of democracy, independence, liberty, and justice must not only be aspired for, they must be worked at (ibid.p.1). . . . There is a *need to promote ethnic cooperation and interdependence in economic activities, and also to establish transracial institutions that cut across ethnic barriers at all levels. . . .* it is also necessary to disseminate universal values and attitudes, which can help people so that they do not succumb easily to racial or ethnic appeals. *Until racial and ethnic harmony come naturally, they must be worked at*” (ibid p.201).

1. curriculum-language-education dimension imbued with humanism-nationhood values,
2. the pervasive need for an educational focus towards embedding the total education structure with **Rukun Negara-based, universal-inclusive values**, and
3. the **teacher-agent dimension** tasked focusedly for the inculcation and ‘delivery’ of nationhood values education, in relation to the above Education Blueprint.

1. **Curriculum-Language Education**-It is paramount to often note the comprehensive and high ideals set by the nation’s education philosophy. The development of the full potential of the Malaysian child in a holistic and integrated manner, which when seen in the light of the proposed shifts to be made, there can be a marked development in the ‘learning’ curriculum, leading positively then, to the realization of the full and desired potential of the national citizens.

The shifts towards equal access to quality education in line with that of nations of established-international educational repute; also defined as the emphasis on upgrading students’ proficiency in Bahasa Malaysia and English, the latter regarded as crucial for Malaysian students’ progressive development in their future, national and global-oriented careers and their lives; a further marked and concerted direction in the development of values-driven Malaysians through the nation’s education system henceforth; improving teacher-education; and maximizing information communications-computer technologies (ICT) for high quality teaching-learning in both urban and rural areas, these above shifts particularly, can then contribute to a possible positive paradigm transformation of the nation’s education curriculum.

However, *for a ‘balanced’ change and ‘progress’, the humanism-values factor* can be seen as paramount. As Dr. Jun E-Tan (p.14 above) has lucidly argued, that the Social Solidarity Economy (SSE) is foundationally crucial for the material economic prosperity to ‘stand’ on, for community-building and thus *quality development* as such; and what Dr. Mahathir (“*But Malaysia is our country, the country of the Malays, the Bumiputeras, and Malaysians of Chinese origin, Indians, Ibans, Kadazans and other ethnic groups* (The New Straits Times, 28 September 1985, p.17, and highlighted in Maya Khemlani and other, above) has reminded the nation that *respect and acceptance of cultural differences and respect FOR the differences of other members of society, are universal values which can take the nation forward cohesively, in stability and peace.*

The curriculum content thus, apart from that pertaining to the physical infrastructures for economic prosperity, laid out on the ‘inclusive’ pathways as propounded by the national ideology-the Rukun Negara, the National Education Philosophy and the Vision 2020 programme primarily, and thereby imbedded with the ‘right’, humanistic-nationhood values, can be further *affectively and holistically* presented in the student classrooms.

It needs to be clearly noted, being directly congruent to the above consideration, that the United Nations UNESCO Delors 1996 Report’s *four educational pillars*, particularly,

-learning to be (developing self-confidence), and

-learning to live together (acting interdependently for the common good).

be epistemologically and schematically commingled with the life applications imbedded in the four Ps proposed by the 2016 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*, which are *founded positively with the long-term interests of mankind* given the utmost attention, namely,

- i..planet (ecology),
- ii. people (culture),
- iii. prosperity (economy) and
- iv. policy (social).

(see Section VII, point 4, p.34. DzulkifliRazak 2016).

2. Rukun Negara-Values Education- If we look at one instance of discussion in the Blueprint, a brief account on “Student Learning” as given below, the ultimate and crucial objective of student acquisition of much needed skills and value orientations are well intended. However, the discussions are in the future-positive, as proposals and intentions, as the starting sentence indicates- “Ministry *will focus...*” (op cit. p. 4-30), “In line with the National Education Philosophy, the Ministry’s approach to education *is focused on developing* students holistically. This means, the education system addresses intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical development, alongside a strong sense of national identity” (op cit. pp.4-1, 4-2), “Malaysian education system *will also evolve from...*”, “Malaysian education system *wants to inculcate...*” (ibid. p. 4-30), “This requires a reconsideration of what student learning means, and a re-articulation of...” (ibid), “...has evolved into an education system that *strives to produce* a ...united and resilient (society) *in facing changes and adversity*” (ibid. pp. A-1, A-2), and so on. The following excerpt from the Blueprint illustrates the above position.

...The Ministry is at the starting point of its journey *to develop an education system capable of producing Malaysians who will be competitive* in a globalised, 21st century world. This *requires a reconsideration of what student learning means*, and a re-articulation of the kinds of skills ...*Malaysian education system wants to inculcate* in its students. In order to truly transform student learning, change needs to happen at all levels- the Ministry, states, districts, schools, principals, and teachers. In the initial years..., *the Ministry will focus on strengthening existing foundations...* As the system improves, the Ministry will roll out more structural reforms to curricular and assessment and award greater operational flexibility ... (Chapter 4, Student Learning, p. 4-30).

Nevertheless, even if the above possibilities, which clearly need a particular dare, especially that which involves adapting well-trying and generally regarded ‘successful’ education systems around the world, may not be imminently possible, this study strongly posits that consistent and intense language education, as based on the preamble and principles of the Rukun Negara (as discussed above in section IV, p. 18), can contribute much in the nation’s quest for nation-building and national integration).

The national challenge can therefore be said to be- to bring life-building, existential meaning to young Malaysians by ‘presenting’ these above values, and closely and constantly linking them to the Rukun Negara, through meaningful pedagogical applications, while being readily cognizant of the realities of the globalizing world, so that there is an ‘evolutionizing’ and progressive realization of these above intrinsic values as in the above national ideology, in ‘real’ terms in society and particularly, amongst the Malaysian youth.

The essential challenge is with *school leaderships* (as this important educational dimension is also one of the eleven educational shifts given much weightage in the above Blueprint) to help *transform teacher practices and the directly effecting and ‘affecting’ teaching-learning pedagogies on students*.

3. Teacher-Agent Dimension and Nationhood-Values Language Education- With the above Blueprint extolling the need for the nation’s education to move up the educational ladder and to be on par with other high-performing education systems (Blueprint, Prime Minister’s Foreword; p. E-4), teaching as such, needs to be viewed as an enculturation effort. The outcomes of teaching and education are necessarily the ‘desired quality education’, and very much, the ‘residuals of education’. That is, what stays with us long after we have left the classroom (Ritchhart, R. 2015, *Creating Cultures of Thinking*, p.19).

It needs to be emphasised, for the above Education Blueprint to come to its aspired, true fruition in the next decade or even sooner as such, that the teaching outcomes also determine our ‘dispositions’. As Ritchhart (2002) has well argued, “Our dispositions define who we are as (a) people, as thinkers, as

learners. ...the dispositions that define as thinkers (particularly) make up our intellectual character” (op cit).

Incorporating the above Rukun Negara-values language education for strong Malaysian nationhood as such, in which the nation comes first at all times, and ethnicity, religion, language are not held as primary social markers, the teacher education pillar too needs to be further fine-tuned and strengthened. Quality education, as opposed to ‘politicised education’, as often highlighted by concerned Malaysians, is what then the Malaysian nation would very much need and welcome today.

Educational leadership can most urgently revisit the purpose of an educator. The core role of a teacher, universally, is to facilitate learning. And, in the context of multicultural social milieus, such as that of Malaysia, the teacher also has to foster and gradually nurture in his charges, the sense of oneness, belonging to the nation and the knowledge of the character of one’s nationhood.

10. Conclusion

In relation to the theme of this above discussion, that is, nationhood values are necessitated today to be given a central position in the education domain, the writer concludes with the following pointers for needful, grounded consideration and deliberation of educators, parents, leaders and students.

1. That *humanistic and civic education* NEEDS TO underpin and subsume all educational curriculum and ventures. When ‘learners’ are seen to fall behind in their optimal and ‘natural’ ‘character disposition’, in their *knowledge and practice* of the related values of the above, then remedial ‘*educating*’ has to be provided,
2. that the *national educational curriculum- both in the public and private education sectors, needs to emphatically include clear Malaysian and ‘world’ social studies, as based on the aspirations of the nation’s national ideology- the Rukun Negara, the National Education Philosophy and the Vision 2020.*
3. that *language education* be further energized such that the Malaysian student’s ‘*weltanschauung*’ – the orientations, attitudes, life style, hopes, ambitions, world views (Awang Had Salleh *ibid.* p. 161), be pedagogically enhanced, from early education, towards the inculcation of humanistic-nationhood values *that the agency of teacher education- not solely the creation of ‘good, smart teachers’ per se, be seen as truly the primary nation-building national resource,*
4. that together with the UNESCO’s (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation)-Delors Report of 1996, as regards the four universal educational pillars, which essentially reflect the goals of education nations can commonly commit to and pursue, namely,
 - i. learning to do (skills education),
 - ii. learning to know (broad-based knowledge for use and applications),
 - iii. learning to be (developing self-confidence),
 - iv. learning to live together (acting interdependently for the common good), and commingling with the above, particularly the last two, with the goals and principles of sustainable socio-economic development [*Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2015*], the latter having been founded upon the four Ps,
 - i. planet (ecology),
 - ii. people (culture),
 - iii. prosperity (economy) and
 - iv. policy (social),

and thenceforth, moving towards a committed transformation as based on *values-based, academic cultures*. The process to attain the above needs to be a clear epistemologically purposive and well-constructed shift from a rather overly strong emphasis on a *corporate-economic gains perspective and its related forms of education.*

At this juncture it needs to be stressed that in view of a jarring and worrying development in our youth's psyche, as illustrated by the 2007 MACC (Malaysian Anti-Corruption Council) survey, that Malaysian youth today held ambivalent attitudes towards corruption. This can well be attributed to the 'imbalances' arising from our fixated orientations towards the western-based education philosophies, which have resulted in the compartmentalization and separation of the intellect-cognitive and the affective-emotional educational perspectival domains. Holistic education and development (National Education Philosophy, 1988) of the student-learner entails going beyond the above compartmentalized mind-set dichotomy, and helping learners integrate and harmonise both the above perspectives.

That pedagogical pragmatics of education for the holistic, common life needs and pursuits of society, cognizant of the 'material' together with the humanistic 'urgings' of the human person, be formulated for an education and awareness which can be socially and educationally 'instructed' towards a sense of connectedness, in order to nurture Malaysians to attain a shared Malaysian consciousness (Michelle Kwa, New Straits Times, 19.1.2016, p.16).

The possible 'lessons' in this above study it is hoped, can help provide a further grounded impetus towards the much-yearned for national integration, by means of a re-energized national education system in the Malaysian nation thenceforward.

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