

The Language Medium Policy in Malaysia:

A Plural Society Model?

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the development and the implementation of language medium policy in the Malaysia Education System and its relation to nation building. Emerson (1957) Furnival (1948) Chopra (1974) contended that Malaysian plural society was divided in almost every respect. As a plural society, nation building or national integration (Ibrahim, 1985) was considered of the utmost importance in Malaysia. Since independence, the Malaysian leadership has believed that education is critical for national integration. It is generally believed that schools inculcate the child with values and facts, which are supportive of national ideology. The language medium policy refers to the medium of instruction in schools. It considers all the functions of language (informative, regulatory, inter national, personal) but in practice it focuses on the - the informative, the regulatory and the heuristic. This reform which has allowed English to be used as a medium of instruction, with the prior approval of the Minister of Education (section 41), was designed to enable Malaysia to make the quantum leap towards an industrialized nation status and eventually into a knowledge economy. The present study focuses on the process of development and the implementation of a education language policy in Malaysia. In addition to interviews with persons directly involved in the process of education in Malaysia, the study examines a number of scholarly publications and other primary sources of information. The findings of my study show that the language medium policy did not successfully develop unity among the students. The process of integration is taking place in the schools setting but this process is rather slow and tottering. In more ways than one the existence of national-type schools may erode the serious desire to unite all ethnic groups. The implementation process of the particular policy was seen to negate the effectiveness of other policies.

Keywords: Language medium policy, Malaysia education system, Plural society model

Introduction

Emerson (1957) Furnival (1948) Chopra (1974) contended that Malaysian plural society was divided in almost every respect. As a plural society, nation building or national integration (Ibrahim, 1980) is considered of the utmost importance in Malaysia. Since independence, the Malaysian leadership has believed that education is critical for national integration. It is generally believed that schools inculcate the child with values and facts, which are supportive of national ideology.

Education Policy- language medium policy

The language medium policy refers to the medium of instruction in schools. The language medium policy in Malaysia's educational system is as follow:

- i. national school –
 - primary: use Malay(5393), Mandarin(1284) , Tamil (526) and English as medium of instruction (Science / Maths).
 - Secondary: use Malay (1645) and English as medium of instruction.
 - Tertiary: use Malay and English as medium of instruction.
- ii. private school -
 - primary: use Malay, Mandarin, Tamil, English and Arabic as medium of instruction.
 - Secondary: use Malay, Mandarin, English and Arabic as medium of instruction.
 - Tertiary: use Malay, Arabic and English as medium of instruction.

Nationalism and Nationism

The concepts nationalism and nationism in language planning and language use have been posited by Joshua Fishman (1968). He defines nationalism (sociocultural integration) as “the process of transforming from

fragmentary and tradition-bound ethnicity to unifying and ideologized nationality". According to him the tie between language and nationalism represents a more ideologized historical interaction (in terms of mass ideology) since nationalism commonly elaborates upon language as one of its markers of symbolic unity and identity.

On the other hand, nationalism (politico-geographical integration) is a process "where the political boundaries are most silent and most efforts are directed towards maintaining and strengthening them, regardless of the immediate sociocultural character of the populations they embrace (Fishman, 1968). Whereas in nationalism the development of self-identity and group identity is through a common group, in nationalism it is the question of efficiency or group cohesion that is important. Malaysia can be said to have achieved nationalism through a common language (Malay language) which is indigenous to the soil. However, nationalism is achieved through English, a language of wider diffusion, which is not indigenous to the soil. Malaysia has always upheld the same philosophy of nationalism supported by nationalism ever since independence, but the moods that went with the times were different (Asmah, 1992). Nationalism and Nationism should not be interpreted as representing two opposing ideologies. They are part and parcel of one another.

The requirements of Nationalism and nationism can be in conflict where language is concerned. Since the problems language presents for nationalism are pragmatic rather than symbolic, a solution to a nationalist problem often creates a nationalist problem. For example, on pragmatic grounds the best immediate choice for the language of government in a newly independent colony might be the old colonial language. But the old colonial language is usually a terrible choice on the nationalist grounds. So nationalist usually have to postpone in new states, to the language of government. That is the solution that was adopted by Ireland, India and Malaysia. Ireland is to declare both Irish and English as official language, while India and Malaysia had declared the chosen nationalist language (Hindi and Malay Language) as official. However, both of them, allowed de facto the retention of English as the second language of the government. Other countries for example, Mali did not make any official selection and used the colonial language for government while they searched for solutions to the national language problem (Alis, 2004).

A national language is more than just the language of the government or education. It is the symbol of people's identity as citizens of that nation. A national language in some cases might not be enough for the fulfilment of all high functions. National language was served the unify separatist functions. However, some human activities require participatory function. The participatory function refers to participation in worldwide cultural developments such as science and technology, international business, and diplomacy. Since the separatist and participatory functions are opposed to each other, not every nation will be able to use the same language for both. One example is Tanzania, where Shahili is the emerging national language, English seems destined to be retained for participatory purposes (Fasold, 1987).

According to the language theory by Fishman (1973), the function of '*nationalist*' is only sufficient for the needs of the ideologists and the nation, whereas the function of '*nationist*' acclaim the pragmatic characteristics of that language, that is, the language is able to contribute to the nation's growth and success. Fishman had summarized that a growing nation, requires two languages, each having its own distinct function. The mother-tongue is normally honoured as the national language and serves its purpose as a unification symbol. This language is built for patriotic pride, and a nationalistic symbol of the country to be used as a unification tool only.

On the other hand, the language that is required for pragmatic function, as needed in the administration of several fields, such as economy, industry, science and technology, is the language that is considered modern, business friendly language of international level, current and scientific. That being English. This colonial and appalling view of Fishman, is the product of famous American linguists of the 1940s and 1950s such as Whorf-Sapir. This view is clearly untrue and has been rejected by the world linguists (Baron, 1990), but unfortunately this view is being used in the Malaysian language policy, which has observed recently – the change of medium of instruction from Malay to English in the teaching the Mathematics and Science subjects at primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education. It's clearly going against the UNESCO Charter which states that the students at primary level need to learn using their mother-tongue (Baron, 1990).

Development of an Educational Policy: Education Act 1960 and 1996

Colonial Educational Policy (Polarisation Policy 1800-1945)

During colonial time most of the schools in urban areas were in the English medium. English medium schools offered students ample opportunities for further education, employment in the civil service and access to scholarships. These schools received generous funding from the government. Also since its impact was in the urban areas, the majority of the student population was non-Malay, in fact, mostly Chinese. Economic and

academic achievements were associated with ethnic groups from the urban areas. The majority of the Malays, who were mainly located in the rural areas, could not benefit from these opportunities (Saran, 2002).

Jesudason (1989) viewed the separate development of the ethnic groups as a deliberate product of the British colonial policy of 'divide and rule'. The Malays who were suffering from profound economic, political, and psychological anxieties about their place in society entered independence in their hands. Their aim was to gradually reverse sense of backwardness by the Malay after decades of colonialism.

Snodgrass (1980) Malay aristocrats, Malay peasants and Indian estate labourers – received the kinds of education that would befit them in playing the roles assigned to them in the colonial scheme of things. The aim of Malay education was to make the son of fisherman or peasant a more intelligent fisherman or peasant than his father. The system failed to prepare the Malays to cope with the rapid changes occurring all around them. The British education for Malays in English medium was only for sons of loyalty and chiefs. It accentuated the stratification of the Malay society by preparing a small, elite segment of Malays to participate in the administration of the country. For Indians, the whole system was aimed at assuring that estate workers' children remained in the estates.

The British governed pragmatically, focusing their attention on immediate problems, allowing things to happen and intervening only when a threat to the British was perceived. The Chinese were left to go their own way. The Chinese were educated both in their own language and in English. The rapid growth of Chinese participation in the English medium education was economic. A basic education in English prepared one for a clerkship in the government, a European owned business or for further education. Compared other ethnic groups, Chinese were best able to benefit from the structure of opportunities offered.

After World War II, the representatives of Malay, Chinese and Indian communities took an increasing part in educational policy making. The English educated Malays realized that the emphasis on English education would favour the urban non-Malays. The pressure towards Malay as a national language and Malay as medium of education can be seen by a series of landmark committee reports (Snodgrass, 1980).

Post Independence 1957 – 2000s

The Barnes Report 1951 proposed a single inter-racial type of school, the national school. It would provide six years of free bilingual (Malay and English) education for all 6-12 year-olds. The committees aim was the achievement of the elusive goal of educational unification, based on Malay – English bilingualism. It suggested the transformation of all vernacular schools into national schools where English would be the medium of instruction and Malay the national language, while Chinese and Tamil languages were to be taught as subjects in Pupils own language (POL). English was suggested as a medium of instruction to develop skills and knowledgeable human resources for economic prosperity of the new nation.

Another report, popularly known as the Razak Report 1956, was the most influential of all the education committee reports. The Razak Report cited two major desiderata: a place in primary school for every child and a unified educational system which promotes national unity and consciousness by using the national curriculum not the national language. The aim for creating a national identity through the national language, Malay language, was formally integrated into the vernacular education system through the development of a national education curriculum (Hazita, 2003).

The national education curriculum was designed in view of the recommendations made by the Razak Report in 1956. It suggested the introduction of common content syllabuses with a Malayan outlook and the inculcation of national consciousness to foster mutual understanding among the citizens of the various races and religions in all national and vernacular schools. This entailed a selection of socio-cultural values and norms that shaped to unify the diverse ethnic groups into one social unit and to inculcate a national sentiment for the shaping of a national identity through education in the dual education system practiced by the government of Malaysia. These values and norms are in fact the early notions of national identity and the shape of the imagined Malaysian culture (Hazita, 2003).

The Razak Report which became the Education Ordinance of 1957 is normally considered as a watershed in the development of education in independent Malaya. However, as a blue-print for the national system of education, it has failed to satisfy the expectations of the various ethnic groups of the country. Paradoxically, the crux of the controversy was not on the philosophy, structure or the content of the curriculum but rather on the means of achieving the objective. This controversy was further aggravated by the dynamics of ethnicity and politics which in turn impeded its implementation process (Haris, 1983). The Razak report itself as a document of policy, was fraught with dubiousness and ambiguity which have made it unimplementable even under normal circumstances.

With these problems still existing, Malaysian people were jilted with a new educational act in 1996 as the Malaysian government responded to globalisation. The globalisation challenging national economy, national state, and national education system and their implication are accompanied by a large number of contradictions (Kellan, 1997). The educational system is to a large extent under the cross-pressure between the local cultures and their demands; (local language) on the one hand, and the globalisation and internationalizing aspects (more foreign languages) on the other hand (Arnason, 1991).

Therefore, in 1996 the Malaysian government introduced the Education Act 1996 and the Private Higher Education Institution Act. The former approved the use of English as a medium of instruction for technical areas in post secondary courses and the latter allowed the use of English in courses which were provided through twinning arrangements with overseas institutions as well as offshore campuses. In order to ensure that Bahasa Malaysia (Malay language) did not get pushed out by English, the legislation stipulated that the national language be a compulsory subject in the private educational institutions. Section 23 of the Education Act 1996 provided this by stating that ‘where the main medium of the instruction in an educational institution is other than the national language, the national language shall be taught as a compulsory subject in the educational institution (Saran, 2002). The Education Act 1996 which allowed English to be used as a medium of instruction, with the prior approval of the Minister of Education (section 41), was designed to enable Malaysia to make the quantum leap towards achieving an industrialized nation status and eventually into a knowledge economy (Tan, 2002).

The recent crisis in the Malaysian educational system could be seen in Dr.Mahathir’s statement for defending this move: “learning the English language will reinforce the spirit of nationalism when it is used to bring about development and progress for the country....True nationalism means doing everything possible for the country, even if it means learning the English language” (*The Sun, 11 Sept.1999*). This statement had shown that Malaysia really in dilemma between nationalism and nationism (Alis,2004).

According to Ibrahim (1980), the government should consider abolishing schools which do not have national language (Malay language) as the medium of instruction. There is some ambiguity in the policy with respect to this. If the government feels that education can promote national integration, then why should non-national medium schools exist? This means that groups of students would be socialized differently. It would be better if these schools are amalgamated into the national system of education but with a provision that the students can learn other language they wished besides the national language. At present there is provision in the national system for the teaching and learning of the student’s mother tongue if there is a request by the parents.

However, there must be fifteen students wishing to take the course. Rather than let these groups of students (attending non-national medium schools) drift from the national system, it would be appropriate to bring them in line with their cohort and provide them with every opportunity to learn the language of their choice. Thus it would not only prevent the multiple school system reminiscent of the pre-1970 days but more importantly, act as an agency of national integration. On other issues, national medium schools have had the desired impact of rising the level of nationalism and the knowledge of national symbols. Even though the medium did not have the desired impact for patriotism and affection towards the government, it did not act in an adversely.

Discussion

Why did the implementation failed?

According to Psacharopoulos (1990), there are three main reasons why education policy objectives can be seen as failures: a) the intended policy was never implemented in the first place. These has happened because the policy’s intention was too vague, e.g. the quality of education should be improved or the intention was lip serviced or a political gimmick, e.g. there will be free education for all; b) Even if an attempt at implementation made, it failed to be completed or achieve the support of a minimum critical mass so as to have an impact – neglect of a prerequisite factor, e.g. feasibility of financing or social rejection, e.g. boycotted by parents; c) Although the policy was implemented, it did not have the intended effect. It may be caused by two factors such as a policy based on invalid theoretical model, e.g. having educational expansion on manpower requirements or a policy based on insufficient information or evidence, e.g. not knowing the exact number of teachers on the payroll in the first place.

Another factor that made these issues more complex is the definition of success or failure. Success or failure a subjective matter and the vague formulation of policy objectives make the evaluation even more difficult. Impossibility of implementation or even partial implementation is a negative signal for the validity of any policy. The degree of success or effect of a given policy is a product of two probabilities: that the policy has been implemented in the first place and secondly, it yields the intended effect:

In order to avoid failure, two conditions should be met in formulating educational policies. Firstly, the policy statement should be concrete and feasible in terms of objectives, including a timetable, source of financing its implementation, and institutional responsibility. Secondly, the substance of a policy should be based on research – proved cause and effect relationships – not goodwill or intuition. Unfortunately, concreteness cannot be easily observed in political statements and the intuitive power of ‘I know what the country needs’ is much stronger than whatever research results have demonstrated.

Malaysia: the issue of language and nation building

All ethnic groups have their own views on the race which symbolizes Malaysia, according to each ethnic background. Because of that fact, they have different historical experiences and do not have an image of common destiny. What emerged from the 1957 independence was a drive for self-rule by the Malay political elite, the Chinese and Indian leaders to achieve independence without really preparing the national base, from the dreams of independence, the philosophy, and ideology of nationalism that exist from being part of a unified race.

According to Ahmat (1994), even though the economic factor was more important the analysis by the academics on the racial riots of 1969, the cultural factor, in particular Bahasa Malaysia, was not given enough attention. It is an unresolved issue that may add to the current conflict, and may hinder the formation of a national identity and the existence of a unified Malaysian race.

Although Bahasa Malaysia has become by law as the official language, the practical status of this language is still not fully realized. This language still gives way to English, and in certain cases loses out to Mandarin. A tertiary (Institute of Higher Learning) student is not assured of a place in the private sector if he or she does not have a good grasp of English. A Malay student with no knowledge of Mandarin will have no chance in getting a job in Chinese firms which usually take workers from their own ethnic groups, and usually members of their own family.

Due to the factors of multiracial nature in Malaysia, culture, language and religion have been a hindrance to the efforts of building a national identity. National integration is still a big issue in Malaysia. Ethnicity is prevalent in everyday life and in politics. All political and administrative decisions must be made by considering ethnic groups' traditions. It is obvious that the failure of the leadership of the government in the successful implementation of a policy and the continual opposition by the Chinese against the inclusion of Bahasa Malaysia in the Constitution had caused retardation in the efforts of nation-building till today.

The lovers and supporters of the English language including Malay leaders (and even perhaps its traditions) believe that everything can be solved through the use of the English language in everyday life. This is a victory of the colonials over their colonized ‘children’. They seem to be oblivious to the fact that many of the major countries in this world do not use English as their everyday language, nor as the communicational language in Mathematics and Science subjects. In actual fact there is nothing special about the English language with respect to the level of education of a student and in scientific discovery and advancement. This is especially obvious in the scientific field, as the number of important researchers and scientists who have made important discoveries are not dominated by native English speakers, or English trained individuals. For example, the current joint Nobel Peace Prize winners for Chemical Engineering are Koichi Tanaka from Japan, John Fenn from the United States and Kurt Wuethrich from Switzerland. Tanaka is 43 years old and is the fourth winner from Japan in the past three years (*Berita Harian, 10.12.02*).

In the fields of Mathematics and Science at school level, research is carried out every four or five years to study the levels of advancement of secondary students all over the world (about 40 countries take part) by researchers in the United States under the sponsorship of WFS. It has been carried out four times and the last study was done in 1999 (*Newsweek 2.12.1999*). On each occasion, the results should have converted the English language supporters in Malaysia because native English speaking countries (USA, UK, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Ireland) had worse rankings than those from developed countries, who are not native English speakers.

The results for the year 1995 had shown that the countries, which have Chinese based languages (Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Singapore) were placed high in the rankings; the European countries occupied the mid rankings (until 15th place). What was surprising was Thailand (a country that uses its own unique language) had shown to perform as equals with the English speaking countries, and countries which use colonial languages like Spanish, Portuguese, French and English in their education system. The latter have achieved lower rankings. Our country, which is said to be non-competitive based, using Bahasa Malaysia as the medium of instruction and had shown good standings in 1999, and even managed to out perform countries, which adopt the English language like the Philippines. One exception to the norm is Singapore (a country that does not use its own language but performed well), which achieved first placing in 1995 and third placing in 1999. All this is a manifestation of the social edict about the relevance of one's own language in one's achievements and growth, and also highlights the fact that

there are other factors involved with the problems associated with the quest for knowledge, not because the English language is superior as viewed by the current Government recently (Shaharir, 2002).

According to Kunio (2001), the national community becomes weakened when market forces and globalization become socially divisive. One division comes from the widening income gaps. Another comes from the difference in the language of education. For developing countries, globalization usually means the increased presence of foreign companies that heavily rely on English as the medium of communication. When the national economic base remains weak, many students prefer to get educated in English, and become separated from the other students who are educated in their national language (this has happened to Malay students in Malaysia). When these divisions occur, those who lose out under the market forces and globalization may become politically organized and stop further deregulation and liberalization. They may even force the government to take backward steps. When these things happen, the economy will stagnate or even decline.

In the Japanese model, effective mass education was one important reason for the Japanese success in promoting a freer, more globalized market economy. This was because effective mass education empowered a majority of people to benefit from a freer market economy. Effective mass education was probably a factor in reducing income inequality as well. It enabled people not to be left behind when the economic structure changed with deregulation and liberalization. With the functional literacy and basic knowledge they acquired during the period of compulsory education, which was later kept up by the spread of mass media, people found it easier to adjust to economic changes.

English is spoken in 45 countries of which 40 non-Western countries in Africa, Asia and South America continent, use English as their sole official language or as one of their official languages. Most of these countries, especially the ones that use English as their sole official language, are observed to have not progressed, some are even stricken by poverty. Some examples are found in Africa, like Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. French is used in 30 countries, where 26 countries are non-Western countries, like Chad, Congo, Gabon, Mali, Togo, Zaire, and Haiti. They are all non-developed countries.

The same goes for Spanish. It is used in 30 countries, most of which are in South America, the result of Spanish colonials. There are several countries in Africa that use two non-native languages as their official language. Examples are Cameroon (English and French) and Surinam (English and Dutch). Both these countries are not, or not yet developed. Then we can look at the other non-Western languages used as official language, like Arabic, Bahasa Malaysia, and Mandarin. Arabic is used in 20 countries, Bahasa Malaysia in 4 countries (Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, and Singapore), while Mandarin is used in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. We find that most of these countries are developed, or at least not as poverty stricken as the other countries that have been colonized and use a Western language as their official language.

Malaysia Education Policy: The Malays and the Chinese dilemma

Although Malaysia has 45 years of independence, the position between these two main ethnics is still unbalanced. The Chinese still control the Malaysian economy and have made a gain in politics whereas the Malay control of politics has weakened from time to time. The sense of fear and insecurity among the Malays due to the disparity existing between themselves and the non-Malays particularly in the fields of education and economics still exist after 45 years of independence (Table: 1).

Insert Table 1 Here

The encapsulation of the majority of Malay, Chinese and Indian children in separate schools sowed the ‘seeds of separation’ by socializing the younger generation into different linguistic and cultural traditions. This system of multiple language schools mirrored and exacerbated the characteristics of a plural society in which different ethnic groups lived economically differentiated, politically compartmentalized and culturally distinct lives (Tan, 1997). The Malaysian government still adopts the colonial system after 45 years. The backward English policy by the government has proved to be a divisive factor, which engendered a social cleavage between the urban and the rural people. The English achievement between rural (Malays) and urban (Chinese) schools is glassing (table 2).

Insert Table 2 Here

The statistics taken in 1967-1968 shows a clear correlation between the ethnic background and the medium of instructions. Most Malays attended the Malay medium schools (89%) while most Chinese attended the Chinese medium schools (85%) and most Indians attended the Tamil medium schools (67%). The majority of the rural people were Malays while the urban people were mostly Chinese. Opportunities for higher education have also shown a lack of uniformity among the various races. The Indians show a proportionately higher percentage (1.98%)

in tertiary education as compared to the Chinese (1.75%) and the Malays (0.97%), while the percentage of persons of all races in the tertiary education is only 1.57% (Table 3).

Insert Table 3 Here

Taylor (1997) mentioned about ethnic composition of twinning colleges showed that 70% from Chinese-speaking backgrounds does not reflect Malaysia's population which only 35% Chinese.

Milne and Mauzy (1980) highlight another factor that was claimed to be yet another possible cause of Malay fear: the alleged softness of premier Tuanku Abdul Rahman (Malaysian first prime minister) towards the Chinese was perceived by certain quarters in the Malay community in general and UMNO in particular as being contributory to the ethnic imbalance. The softness of UMNO still can be seen in 90s where the Malays rather swing to opposition party and the believed that UMNO needs Chinese voters for their survival of power. In 'Malaysia: Making a Nation' Cheah Boon Kheng (2002, pg 239) said:

"Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir first adopted pro-Malay policies and then latterly reached out to the non-Malays, each time largely determined by his need for political support and for his own political survival".

Abdul Razak Baginda (1999) said the National front won, but UMNO lost because it lost the Malays. UMNO has to stop fooling itself and look at the way it is. UMNO has to change culturally – it's seen as a businessman's party, an elitist party that, to a large extent, has lost credibility with the Malay (*AWSJ 20, 12-99*). It is very clear that the politics of bargaining in Malaysia should not be neglected, and that there should be consistent and continuous effort to address the problem of racial imbalance.

Malaysian Education Policy Implementation

In the Malaysian context, the Education Act of 1961 contained a principal law that regulates education in Malaysia at all levels. It enshrines an education policy which affirms the role of the national language as the medium of instruction and provides a common curriculum and common public examinations for schools. The Act was further amended in 1995 to reinforce the position of Bahasa Malaysia as the national language. It requires the study in Bahasa Malaysia to be extended from the public education institutions to all educational institutions in the private sector (Tan, 2002).

Despite the above Act, the reality in the private education sector is that English is used as the medium of instruction. There is no enforcement of the national language act in the private sector because the government realises that for the educational sector to flourish, freedom with regard to the medium of instruction policy has to be given. After all, the private educational sector is largely driven by fundings from corporations and wealthy individuals. The Government does not in any way provide fundings for the private education sector. Therefore, the enforcement of this educational act would not be welcomed by the private education industry. Another reason for not enforcing the Education Act in relation to medium of instruction policy has to do with the Government's intention to make higher education in Malaysia attractive to students in the region and Malaysian students who intend to study abroad by offering degree programs in the international lingua franca, that is English. The philosophy of the Malaysian leadership is to develop a generation that is able keep up with development in the fields of science, industry and technology, English was also needed (Saran, 2002).

As a result of the above education policies, two higher education streams have emerged – public universities where undergraduates study in Malay and private institutions of higher learning where instructions are provided in English. There are two main differences in the nature of local students in these higher institutions. Firstly, private universities are more expensive than public universities which are heavily subsidised by the government. Therefore, students from middle class families usually enrol in private universities whereas those from working class families can afford to enrol in public universities. Secondly, the majority of the students in public universities are Malays whereas the majority of the students in private universities are Chinese. As a result, undergraduates are divided not only along socio-economic but also along ethnic lines (Saran 2002).

According to Taylor (1997) the Chinese students were pleased to be studying for a degree from an English-speaking overseas university because their prospects of obtaining a better job in private sector. Most of local universities which used Malay language as the language of instruction may be useful to those (majority Malay students) who find employment in the public sector. However, in private sector where most of the new attractive jobs are emerging prefers graduates who able to speak English fluently and who had an exposure to Western education. How is the Malaysian politics of nation building, particularly in relation to ethnic politics, affected by the rapid development of large private education system?

The Malaysian state finds itself on the horns of dilemma. Its economic interests lie in supporting the trends towards international private education, but its interests in nation building suggest that it should attempt to expand its public education sector. The current Malaysian government is ideologically committed to reducing its public sector, and has sought therefore to support the development of a relatively unconstrained private education system within Malaysia (Taylor, 1997). Alexander and Rizvi's (1993) showed that Malaysia's higher education policies are being constructed in reference to the processes of globalisation. The five new Education Acts passed by the Malaysian parliament in January 1996 may then be viewed as its response to the dilemmas created for it by globalisation.

Conclusion

Although the education policy mentions the importance of unity, the weakness of Malay leaderships, the opposition of the Chinese and the challenges of globalisation has made the policy unimplemented. All the characteristic of policy failure as mentioned by Psacharopoulos (1990) has appeared in the process of the implementation of Malaysia's language medium policy. Malaysia still has not been able to resolve the problems of divergence, nor has it been able to form a national identity due to certain historical events. This failure is becoming a threat to the stability of the communities and the country as a whole. Only the economic strength of Malaysia has managed to hold the entire nation together. The colonial policy should be change after 52 years of independent by the alternative policy which more balance between self-identity and competitive skill.

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Table 1. Economic and Education Imbalance among Malay and Chinese (%)

	Economic (Equity)			Education (IHL)*		
	1970	1995	1998	1996	Pri.	Gov.
Bumiputera (Malay)	19.2	20.6	19.4	5	55	
Non-Bumiputera(Chinese)	46.8	43.4	41.1	95	45	

Source: Yahaya Ismail (2002) *Zainal Abidin (1996) IHL:inst. of higher learning

Table 2. UPSR 2001: English as a subject

Ethnicity	% Grade : AB	% Grade:DE
Bumiputra (Malay)	27.9	43.0
Non-Bumiputera (Chinese)	51.7	29.6

Source: Education Ministry, 2001

Table 3. Percentage of the distribution of the population by Race in the various levels of Education

Levels of Education	All Races	Malays	Chinese	Indians
Primary	80.45	87.47	75.45	74.68
Lower Secondary	8.81	5.48	11.66	11.85
Middle Secondary	5.01	2.87	6.62	6.99
Upper Secondary	3.44	1.70	4.50	4.42
Tertiary	1.57	0.97	1.75	7.98

Source: Asmah, 1979 pg 22