10 Cooperative Learning In The Pre-Employment Programme, Universiti Malaya

M. K. Khemlani, D. and Wendy Y. M. Tien

10.1 INTRODUCTION


10.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE LANGUAGE SYSTEM IN MALAYSIA

During the British colonial rule, there were different types of schooling systems. Each of these systems set the stage for learning different languages. For example, there were the Malay schools, mainly for the Malays, the majority of whom were then agriculturalists. The main objective of these schools was to familiarize young Malays with simple arithmetic to handle small business transactions, to develop a better sense of hygiene and to train the sons of the Malay aristocracy in English to serve the colonial rulers. Similarly, the Indians were also given only six years of elementary education to provide labor for the rubber plantations and railways. The Chinese established their own schools and used curricula, teachers and textbooks from China. Each of these schools had, as their medium of instruction, their respective mother tongues. In order to supply sufficient manpower for the British administrative machinery, the British colonial government however, established English schools (Abdullah, 2004). Thus the colonial education system using different languages (Malay, English, Mandarin, Tamil) resulted in creating not only a population divided economically, socially but also linguistically.

After independence in 1957, in order to achieve national integration and unity among the multi-ethnic groups, the Malaysian government established Malay Language as the national language, to be used in all government functions and as the medium of instruction at all levels. As Tun Abdul Rahman (the Prime Minister of Malaysia then) mentioned in one of his speeches at the University of Singapore on 9 December 1964:

It is only right that this be done in our own. If the language is a soul and a heart of a nation, it must also be a soul and a heart of a country.

Having a national language is the key of a nation. The implementation of a national language is a very important task that must be carried out with competence and proper planning. Having a national language can be used as an unifying factor and a means of communication among the different ethnic groups. The language can be used as a tool in promoting national unity and social cohesion.

10.2.1 The Phenomenon

The historical social development of the different ethnic groups in Malaysia, especially the Chinese and the Indians, was shaped by the British colonial rule. The Chinese, being the largest ethnic group in Malaysia, were importers of labour from China and were employed by the British colonial government in various administrative and economic activities. The Indians, on the other hand, were brought in as workers to the plantations and were employed as laborers.

The implementation of the national language policy in the education sector was not without challenges. The policy was met with resistance from the non-Malay communities, particularly the Chinese and the Indians, who were used to their own languages and cultures. The national language policy was perceived as a threat to their cultural identity and linguistic rights.

To address these challenges, the Malaysian government implemented a bilingual education policy to accommodate the needs of the non-Malay communities. The bilingual education policy was designed to provide language support for students who were not fluent in Malay, allowing them to learn in their mother tongue while acquiring proficiency in Malay.

Despite the challenges, the national language policy has been successful in promoting national unity and social cohesion among the different ethnic groups in Malaysia. The policy has also contributed to the development of a shared national identity that transcends ethnic and linguistic differences.

148