INTER-ETHNIC TOLERANCE AND CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION: ITS RELATIONSHIP AND IMPORTANCE IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

Wendy Yee Mei Tien and Maya Khemlani David

University of Malaya, Malaysia

Malaysia is a multi-cultural country, as a result of colonialism and economical geography. Such diversity makes tolerance a requirement for survival. Without tolerance, there can be a lot of tension or even conflict as a result of miscommunication in society. Literature has demonstrated that effective inter-cultural communication is critical to the establishment of favourable inter-group relations (Gudykunst, 1988; Hall, 1976). This study aims to identify the importance and relationship of inter-ethnic tolerance and inter-cultural communication in multi-cultural Malaysia. A total of 310 undergraduates were involved in this study and the results indicated there is a positive correlation between inter-ethnic tolerance and inter-cultural communication. This study provides statistical evidence on the importance of inter-cultural communication in a multicultural society.

Keywords: Inter-Ethnic Tolerance, Inter-Cultural Communication, Multicultural Society, Youth

INTRODUCTION

Although the era of the British colonialism is long over, the effects of colonialism still live on. Mass migrations during the colonial regime have resulted in the multi-cultural mosaic of present day Malaysian society. A noted historian and Pulitzer Prize winner, Arthur Schlesinger, suggested, conflict is inevitable when people of diverse cultural, ethnic, religious, or linguistic backgrounds converge in one place. As one turn the pages of Malaysian history books, one will note records of several ethnic conflicts in this country. Though these ethnic conflicts were localized (only a small district in the country was affected), such 'small' and continued disturbances frighteningly reveal the frailty of the politico-social fabric (Chandra Muzaffar, 2001). These conflicts were ignited by racial and ethnic tensions they were very often political in origin.

Over the years, the Malaysian government has taken various initiatives; through numerous activities and channels to achieve tolerance and unity among the different ethnic groups in the country. This is crucial because according to Professor Dr. N. Radhakrishnan (2007), the