The Importance of Cognitive Competency in Interethnic Relations among the Youth

Wendy Yee Mei Tien and Irene Wong Poh Sim

Introduction

Malaysia is a unique multiethnic society. The population is a contrast of racial and cultural roots, with a predominance of Malays, Chinese and Indians and diverse groups of indigenous people such as Iban, Bidayuh, Kadazan, Bajau, Melanau and Murut. Despite the differences in ethnicity, religion, culture, values, beliefs, norms and practices, the people in Malaysia are able to live harmoniously compared to many other multiethnic countries in the world. In the period before independence the country experienced some interethnic clashes and later, during the post-independence period, another ethnic clash happened in 1969 known as the May 13 incident. This clash has left quite an impression and conscious mark on the lives of those who experienced it. Soon after the government introduced several policies to reunite and rebuild the country. For example, the New Economic Policy (NEP) was introduced whose objectives were to create prosperity for all Malaysians and to ensure that no community would experience a sense of loss and deprivation. In addition, the government also introduced the National Education Policy that set the national