

## **Role of Principal in Promoting Teachers Unity: Evaluation in Malaysian Secondary Schools**

**Bity Salwana Alias<sup>1</sup>, Zaida Nor Zainuddin<sup>2\*</sup>, Mohd Radzi Ishak<sup>1</sup> and Azlin Norhaini Mansor<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43650 Bandar Baru Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang, Malaysia

### **ABSTRACT**

The inability of teachers to accept cultural, linguistic, and religious differences caused by racial differences can have a negative impact on unity. The literature suggests that principals can play a role in addressing this issue. Thus, the purpose of this study is to determine the principal's role in promoting teachers' unity and to determine the relationship between the principal's role and teachers' unity. This study is a survey design and a quantitative method was used to collect data from 578 teachers in a population of 236,748 teachers in secondary school. The data collected was analyzed descriptively to produce mean value and standard deviation, therefore the level of principals' role in promoting unity and the level of teachers' unity can be interpreted. Inference analysis by Pearson correlation was done to determine r-value, therefore the hypotheses on the relationship between the two variables were tested. Overall, principals' role attained a high level in promoting unity with a mean score of 3.85, whereas the teachers' unity level was also at a high level with a mean score of 4.37. The result also shows that there was a positive relationship between the two variables but at a weak level with  $r = 0.20$ . This paper contributes to the body of knowledge that principals' role in promoting unity has had an impact on the teachers' unity level. This finding also shows that the Malaysian Education System Aspiration focusing on promoting unity is relevant and should be continuously implemented. Apart from having theories implication, the findings bear positive input for principals' training, and also provide input for the teaching fraternity to be more respectful towards each other's differences, thereby avoiding racism and discrimination amongst them.

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##### *E-mail addresses:*

bity@ukm.edu.my (Bity Salwana Alias)

zaidanor@upm.edu.my (Zaida Nor Zainudin)

p97220@siswa.ukm.edu.my (Mohd Radzi Ishak)

azlinmansor@ukm.edu.my (Azlin Norhaini Mansor)

\* Corresponding author

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## INTRODUCTION

A few research articles focused on unity in Malaysia show that racism still permeates unity among Malaysians to a disturbing level. This global phenomenon also happens in England and elsewhere (Miller, 2019). Miller (2019) also argued that the polarization of British society had made racism so common that even members of educational institutions were exposed to racial rhetoric. Therefore, educational institutions must play a significant role in overcoming all forms of inter-racial prejudice, whether by the curriculum, policy, practices, operating systems, and/or leaders and teachers stereotypes towards minority students (Tomlinson, 2008).

Department of National Unity and National Integration (2018) stated that unity existed when a country or nation was at peace without race conflict. This statement also means that unity can be achieved without forcing anyone to believe and to do the same thing or to have the same thought, but instead to accept or respect the diversity among them. Unity can be strengthened by practicing openness and tolerance against physical, cultural, linguistic, social, religious, political, ideological, and/or psychological differences between all parties. Unity over diversity should not be restricted (Akkerman et al., 2012). Their study has shown that cooperation is very important to enable group members to maintain unity despite their differences.

In the Malaysian context, unity is a process that unites members of society and the country through ideology (Shamsul

Amri, 2014). Unity can form a common identity and values as well as establish a sense of nationality in a multi-racial society. It has also introduced the concept of unity in diversity, which is a social phenomenon that can be driven by a deep desire for unity that can influence members of society to carry out various endeavors and activities as a prerequisite for achieving unity.

National unity in Malaysia is a social situation in which people from various ethnic groups, religious beliefs, and regional areas live together peacefully as a single Malaysian nation (Hussein & Haneza, 2017). Both also refer to the National Unity Advisory Panel, which formulates Malaysia as a united country according to the national ideology of the Rukun Negara and the Federal Constitution (Department of National Unity and National Integration, 2018).

Malaysia is the only heterogeneous country with a multi-ethnic society composition ranked 20<sup>th</sup> in terms of stability and peace (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2020), that is on the top of the list, but the Community Tension Index reading in 2017 increased by 2.1% from the previous year (Department of National Unity and National Integration, 2018). The lower level of 287 cases in 2017 compared to 342 cases in 2016 was achieved only for the category of demonstrations and protests. For the category of attacks and fights, the index reported an increase from 502 to 796 cases. For the conflict issue category, the report showed an increase from 252 cases in 2016 to 267 cases in 2017 (Department of National Unity and National Integration,

2018). This phenomenon seems to suggest that unity among Malaysians is fragile and fractured.

Unity level in 2014, 2016, and 2018 by the Educational Policy and Research Division (EPRD), Ministry of Education Malaysia (MoE) seems to support a statement that the level of unity is decreasing. In those particular years, the study showed that the unity index ranged from a high to a medium level only (i.e. not at a very high level). The findings also showed that the ability to accept differences was the lowest. Overall, the teachers' unity was moderately high in 2014 with a 7.3/10 index, but gradually decreased to 6.9/10 in 2016 and decreased to 5.5/10 in 2018. Even at the same level, which is moderately high, it is important to study the factors that caused the decline in the index.

Attempts to promote unity in school have been made by the MoE through various activities involving several Divisions. The emphasis on the role of the principal in secondary school towards fostering unity can also be seen through the initiatives of the MoE, which empowered the Aminuddin Baki Institute (2017) to implement the Unity Course for school principals and headmasters; it aimed to provide knowledge on the values of unity that should be translated into the role of leadership in schools. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine the role of principal in Malaysian Secondary schools in promoting unity among teachers and the relationship between the two variables. The conceptual framework for this study is as shown in Figure 1

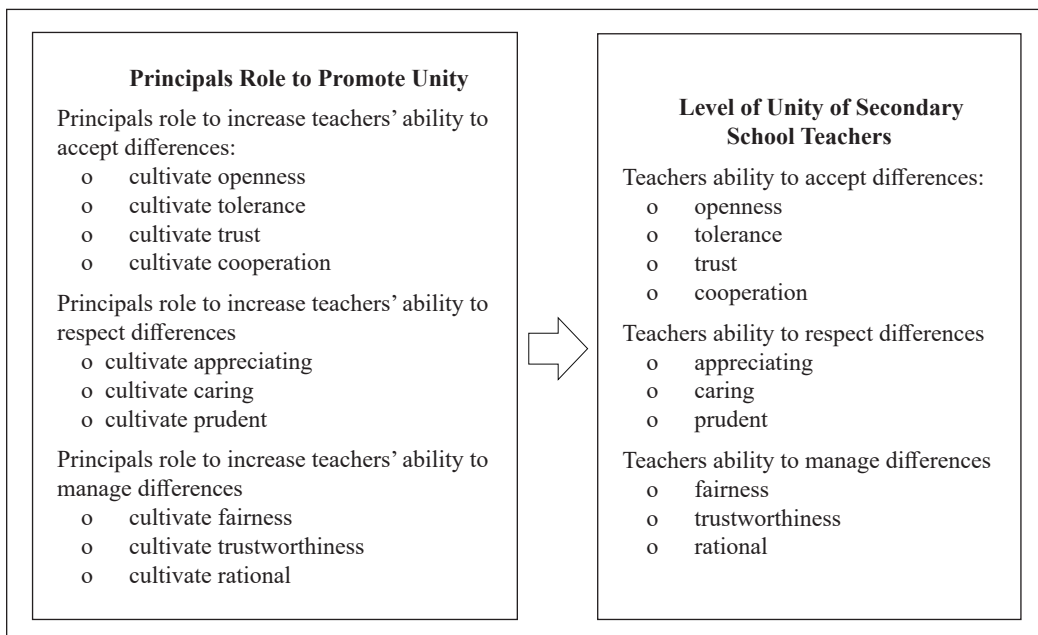


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework shows that principals' role in promoting unity is an independent variable and is measured based on the ability of the principals' role to increase the ability of the teachers to accept, respect, and manage differences, which also means the role of the principals in inculcating the 10 values of unity among the teachers. Teachers' unity level is a dependent variable that is measured based on their ability to accept, respect, and manage differences, which also means the level of 10 unity values that they possess. The context is secondary school in Malaysia whereas the unit of analysis is the principals' role in promoting unity, the teacher's level of unity and the relationship between them.

The specific objectives of this study are:

1. To determine the level of principals' role in promoting teachers' unity.
2. To determine the level of teachers' unity.
3. To test the relationship between principals' role in promoting unity and teachers' unity.

This study is important that the findings may have theoretical, managerial, practical, and training implications. It provides input to agree or disagree with the unity model, to strengthen unity policy, to improve the focus of principals training regarding their role in promoting unity, and to guide for the unity practices in school. This paper will proceed with the literature review, the methodology, and the findings. Next, the paper concludes with a discussion of the implications, limitations, and directions for further research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Model of Unity

When a country is at peace and there is no conflict among its races, unity is existing (Malakolunthu & Rengasamy, 2017). Therefore, it can be said that Malaysia has achieved unity, where people live happily without fear. However, there is a view stating that there is still no unity in Malaysia (Shamsul Amri, 2014). He highlighted that what was happening in Malaysia was simply a process of social cohesion in which people of various races tolerated and avoided negative feelings towards each other. These differences of opinions may reflect contrasting definitions.

The Educational Planning and Research Division (EPRD), MoE, issued a clear statement in 2014 on what it considered unity to be. The Unity Model (Figure 1) expresses the idea that unity is the result of teachers and students from multiple races accepting, respecting, and managing their cultural, language, and religious differences. This model was produced during the instrument development process to measure unity among teachers and students. The underlying theories for the development of the Unity Model are the theory of functionalism (Dawi, 2006), the Thrones of Unity and Pure Values (Department of National Unity and National Integration, 2018), and the views of Shamsul Amri (2012) that unity is a relationship where people of different races willing to receive, respect and reconcile (1R: Relationship = 3R: Receive, Respect, Reconcile) with each other. The content of the model and

the theories are referred to in the creation of the instrument to measure the role of principals, whereas the questionnaires with all the main constructs and subconstructs developed by EPRD (MoE) have been used to measure the teachers' unity. Besides, at the early stage of developing the model, several discussions have been done between the MoE and various parties, including the Department of National Unity and Integration (JPNIN), the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS), INTI International University, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Institut Teknologi Mara (UiTM), Institut Pendidikan Guru Malaysia (IPGM), and Kolej Vocational (KV). The validity and reliability of the model have been statistically tested using the Analysis Moment Structure (AMOS) and Winsteps software and being published in the Malaysian Education Blueprint Annual Report 2014. Since then it becomes a reference by other MoE divisions for strategies to promote unity.

### **The Concept of Unity**

The definition of unity adopted in this model stems from the willingness of multiracial teachers to accept, respect, and manage cultural, religious, and linguistic differences, both in their interactions at school and outside the school. In line with that definition, the model shows that the three main constructs of unity are accept, respect, and manage differences. Each main

construct has its sub-constructs, which are values that need to be nurtured to strengthen unity. All the main constructs and sub-constructs are the main reference for this study. The first construct, which recognizes differences, implies that teachers of different races can be open, tolerant, trusting, and cooperative despite differences in race, culture, religion, and language. Being open is defined as the ability to accept the views, practices, and appearances of other races and to be able to accept these differences in line with the values of Malaysian society. Tolerance is defined as the ability to tolerate the needs and desires of other races, whether in the context of culture, language, religious practices, or other matters, for the sake of racial harmony. Cooperation is described as the ability to support, help, and contribute to people of other races to achieve a goal, whereas trust is described as the ability to trust in the abilities, honesty, and kindness towards people of other races and to have good prejudices.

The second construct that recognizes differences means teachers of different races are prudent, appreciative, and compassionate for others, despite demographic differences. Prudence is described as the ability to be courteous in associating with other races as well as being able to maintain sensitivity between races. Appreciating is the ability to feel proud of the uniqueness of various cultures and languages in Malaysia, to be grateful for the harmony of the country, and to recognize the success achieved by people of other races. Caring is described as the ability to empathize and be sensitive to the

problems or environment of people of other races, always ready to support or solve their problems, and to love other races.

The third construct, which manages differences, means that teachers of different races adopt a trustworthy, fair, and rational attitude despite their differences. Fair means the ability to practice integrity, to make fair decisions as well as to make due judgments in situations where people of other races are also involved. Trust is defined as the ability, to be honest in carrying out responsibilities and doing the best in situations where people of other races are involved, whereas rationale is the ability to think critically based on clear and logical reasons and evidence and to do the right thing (Figure 2).

### School Leader and Role in the Unity

As leadership is a process of persuading or influencing others to act and to achieve an organizational goal (Kouzes & Posner, 2003), or about a group of people (leaders and followers) who interact, communicate, and influence each other to accomplish a common objective (Yukl, 2013), there is no doubt that principals play a pivotal role in inculcating unity values and in persuading school community to unite. By sharing and disseminating the goal of unity to all teachers, principals can change the behaviors of the teacher (Hughes et al., 2002). Besides, unity must be a collective aim and must engage all members of the organization (Harris et al., 2013).



Figure 2. Unity model for school teachers and students  
Source: Ministry of Education (2014)

The principal is responsible to understand unity as an aspiration of the system and should also have the knowledge and skills to play their role to promote unity effectively (Mohd Radzi & Bity Salwana, 2020). The principal should understand the values of unity as stated in the Unity Model for School Teachers and Students (Ministry of Education, 2017), possess the values, and instill the values in teachers by showing appropriate actions or play their roles to strengthen unity. The principal needs to clearly understand that the ability to accept, respect, and manage differences will lead to a higher level of unity among teachers.

To date, there is still no way to gauge the extent to which school leaders use their power to influence a person's behavior to the extent that they are willing to cooperate with others to achieve unity at a high level (Jamaliah & Norhasimah, 2006).

Past studies have shown that the spirit of patriotism and unity among the younger generation is gradually deteriorating and eroded (Aziz et al., 2014). Azizan et al. (2004) who stated that the spirit of patriotism among young people was starting to fade due to more global cultural influence factors that attracted young people as opposed to national issues supporting this statement. Besides, people are still vague with the concept and spirit of patriotism (Ghazali & Jalani, 2015). Although studies show that there are those among this group of young people who have an awareness of patriotism, yet it is seasonal (Mahat, 2015). This study would fill the void that there are not many studies involving teachers, including young

people to evaluate the principal's role in promoting unity.

Sabariah (2018) mentioned that many efforts had been made to forge national unity in Malaysia. Besides involving all races in implementing such programs, Sabariah (2018) also suggested that good conduct, integrity, ethics, and honesty (national principles or *Rukun Negara*) were important values that Malaysians should uphold to ensure peace and unity. The degree to which the principal as school leader instills good conduct, including the unity values in teachers, remains questionable until the findings of this study have been presented.

Lee (2014) claimed that unity could be promoted through language, sport, and festivals. In "How to forge National Unity", he expressed the view that after 56 years of independence, there was no excuse for ordinary Malaysians of all races not to be fluent in Bahasa Melayu, the national language. In other words, Lee (2014) believed that mastering Bahasa Melayu could promote unity. The reality that is happening in school today is that some teachers do not even speak Malay in their daily conversations, as well as in school formal events, such as co-curricular activities, assemblies, or even teachers' meetings. Therefore, it is important to carry out a study to determine the principals' action in facing this challenge.

Lee (2014) further explained that sports could bring people of all races under a common platform, and suggested that "open house" culture should be encouraged and celebrated during festivals. He pointed

out that the festive seasons brought a true message of unity to all Malaysians. Celebrating all the festivals has been practiced even at the pre-school level. The PERPADUAN Pre-school ethos towards children's social development is designed to promote a feeling of unity and acceptance among Malaysia's ethnically diverse society. The pre-school teacher acknowledges that it is the responsibility of PERPADUAN Pre-school to instill in its young children, the knowledge of integration and participation in a common national culture that upholds Malaysia's values and identity (Chang et al., 2013).

Religious elements in the spirit of unity are important elements for the preservation of harmony and prosperity among the multi-racial society in Malaysia (Zaizul et al., 2018). Shah Rulbani and Maimun Aqsha (2016) found that there had been a similarity between the Medina Charter and the Malaysian Constitution regarding unity. Both guarantee that there is no restriction to religious roles, whether Muslims or non-Muslims. Non-Muslims are recognized as citizens with the same rights and responsibilities as Muslims. In certain schools, however, there is always a group of teachers who are silently uncomfortable with the religious practice of other races (Bity Salwana et al., 2020). This feeling, even though not clearly shown by the teachers, but if not quickly tackled, can be the reason for a further conflict among multiracial teachers, which indirectly loosens the unity among them.

To promote unity, Yeoh (2019) proposed 4Rs (respect, reciprocity, responsibilities of citizenship, and racial and religious tolerance) and 4Ms (moderation, morality, mechanisms to overcome conflicts, and middle Malaysia standing up for unity and harmony). In his paper "Promoting National Unity and Harmony", Yeoh (2019) argued that the 4Rs and 4Ms were required to overcome conflict. He also emphasized that the values of acceptance, compromise, and tolerance were required to enhance trust and confidence. He added that national harmony could be further boosted if policies were fair, just, and inclusive. Miller (2017) examined unity from a different angle and wrote that unity was an important component of managing any successful organization. Accordingly, she proposed five steps to promote unity: developing a common goal; organizing team-building activities; encouraging open communication; celebrating important events; resolving any issues arising. No one has yet examined how far these five steps to promote unity have been taken by school principals.

On the other hand, a study by Marlina & Norasmah (2018) suggested that the principals should play their role in ensuring activities that could increase cooperation, unity, and tolerance in a more organized and harmonious manner. Again, to date, there is no study on the role of principals in ensuring fair and equal use of school facilities among multiracial teachers, therefore becomes the focus of this study.



Other scholars have discussed the relationship between leadership and unity. For example, Aziz (2019), in her paper “Empowering Unity”, suggested that leaders should strive to use common terms associated with unity to ensure that the objectives of unity and peaceful coexistence were realized. Words such as tolerance, harmony, goodwill, and diversity must be mutually understood and should mean the same for all races. Aziz (2019) had also shown that leaders’ statements and speeches always acted as catalysts for their subordinates to take the necessary action. Therefore, responsible principals would strive to minimize chaos and factors that could destroy the unity of their teachers. They should use their position to promote healthy relationships, harmony, and unity among all races. To date, there is no clear answer to the question of how significant the relationship between principals’ role in promoting unity and the teachers’ unity level, hence the alternative hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between principals’ role and teachers’ unity level has been tested in this study.

## METHODS

Survey research design and quantitative approaches were used for this study. Based on data from MoE, the population of secondary school teachers in Malaysia is 179,352. With an average of 20 teachers from a total number of 30 schools across Malaysia, the sample of this study turned out to be 578 teachers. The sample was chosen through a combination of purposive

and stratified sampling (Sabitha, 2005). Purposive sampling was applied to choose schools with multi-racial teachers, whereas stratified sampling was applied to ensure that teachers who were selected to become the sample of each school included all types of race and balanced in number as well.

The questionnaire is a combination of self-development and adaptation of the questionnaire by the EPRD, MoE to measure unity in 2014, 2016, and 2018. The questionnaire contains sections for school, principal, and teacher’s backgrounds, the section to collect data to measure principal role in promoting unity, and the section to collect data to measure the level of unity of secondary school teachers. All items constructed are positively patterned. The items or instruments have also undergone validity and reliability process such as face validity, content validity, as well as construct validity (factor analysis). Items or instrument is said to have a high validity if the items measure what should be measured (Baba 1997; Hair et al. 2006; Konting, 1990; 1994). In developing the questionnaires, theories, models, concepts, and opinions regarding unity have been referred. Unity Model Among School Teachers and Pupils (Educational Planning and Research Division, 2014) is the main reference, whereas the definition of leadership by (Sergiovanni, 1990; Jamaliah & Norashimah, 2005; Yukl, 2013), and the Theory of Functionalism (Dawi, 2002; Brinkerhoff & White 1989), The Foundations of Unity and Pure Values, and the concept of 1R = 3R (Shamsul Amri 2012) also being referred. Construct validity

tests and reliability tests were performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS PC 22 for windows) program when pilot data were obtained. As the samples are over 100 respondents, the validity test conducted sets a loading factor value of .55 for items be accepted as valid. The analysis shows that the item achieves a loading factor value between .27 to .92. Therefore, some items that do not reach the set loading factor value are dropped. For the reliability the Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.60 and the Corrected Item-Total Correlation value of 0.25 were used as acceptable values. This result is in line with the views of Konting (1990) and Aron and Aron (2002) that a minimum Cronbach's Alpha value of .60 were acceptable. Based on the pilot data, the Cronbach's Alpha value for the items to measure principal role in promoting unity are between .85 to .97 with the item corrected value - total correlation between .32 to .90. The Cronbach's Alpha value for the items to measure the level of teacher unity are between .85 to .97 with the item corrected value - total correlation between .34 to .83. This finding makes it eligible for questionnaires to be used (Abu Bakar 2001; Hair et al. 2006 & Hilton et al. 2004). The validity and reliability tests were performed again on all actual study data items. The construct validity tests were conducted with the loading factor value set based on the number of samples used (Hair et al. 2006). Since the number of samples is 587, the set value for loading factor is .30 (Hair et al. 2006; Hilton et al. 2004). The analysis showed that loading factors for each item reached acceptable value that is above

.30 (Hair et al. 2006; Hilton et al. 2004). Since all items achieve good loading factor value, the validity of the questionnaire has been strengthened.

Data were analyzed descriptively to produce mean and standard deviation, so the level of principals' role in promoting unity and the level of the teachers' unity can be determined. The interpretation of the mean value was based on Bity Salwana (2009). The mean score of 0.98 to 1.78 indicates a very low level, 1.79 to 2.59 is a low level, 2.60 to 3.40 is a moderate level, 3.41 to 4.21 is a high level, and 4.22 to 5.02 indicates a very high level. Inferential analysis, i.e. Pearson correlation, was performed to produce correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) value, so the relationship between the variables can be determined (Darusalalam & Hussin, 2018). The strength of the relationship was interpreted according to Jackson (2006),  $r = .00$  to  $.29$  or  $r = -.00$  to  $-.29$  means a weak relationship,  $r = .30$  to  $.69$  or  $r = -.30$  to  $-.69$  means a medium relationship, whereas  $r = .70$  to  $1.0$  or  $r = -.70$  to  $-1.0$  means a strong relationship between the variables.

## RESULTS

### The Level of Principals' Role in Promoting Teachers' Unity

Overall, principals' role in promoting unity was at a high level with a mean score of 3.85 (SD = .77). The role of increasing teachers' ability to manage differences reached the highest level with a mean score of 3.90 (SD = .82), whereas the role of increasing teachers' ability to accept differences reached the lowest level with a mean score of 3.76 (SD = .90). A high level was

achieved by the principals in instilling 10 unity values among the teachers with mean scores between 3.62 and 4.02 as shown in Table 1.

### The Level of Teachers' Unity

The mean score for teachers' unity is 4.37 (SD = .58), meaning that they were at a high level of unity. Teachers also attained a high level for the ability to accept, to manage, and to respect unity with the mean score of 4.30 to 4.42. This research finding also shows that teachers possessed unity values at a high level with the score mean ranging from 4.19 to 4.46. The highest mean score is for the value of "trustworthiness" and the lowest mean score is for the value of "trust" as shown in Table 2.

### The Relationship between Principals' Role in Promoting Unity and Teachers' Unity

The third research question is, "Is there any significant relationship between principals' role in promoting unity and teachers' unity?" and the alternative hypothesis,  $H_{a1}$ , for the research question is, "There is a significant relationship between the role of principals in promoting unity and teachers' unity". The findings of the analysis as in Table 3 show that the correlation coefficient value,  $r$  is 0.20,  $P < 0.001$ .

This finding indicates that there was a weak positive relationship between the principals' role in promoting unity and the teachers' unity. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis,  $H_{a1}$ , that there is a significant relationship between the principals' role in

Table 1  
*The level of principals' role in promoting teachers' unity*

Construct/Sub-construct	Mean	SD	Indicator
The level of principals' role in increasing teachers' ability to accept differences	3.81	.77	High
<i>The level of principals' role in increasing teachers' openness</i>	3.64	.85	High
<i>The level of principals' role in increasing teachers' tolerance</i>	3.62	.83	High
<i>The level of principals' role in increasing teachers' teamwork</i>	4.02	.81	High
<i>The level of principals' role in increasing teachers' trust</i>	3.97	.86	High
The level of principals' role in increasing teachers' ability to respect differences	3.86	.79	High
<i>The level of principals' role in increasing teachers' prudence</i>	3.85	.83	High
<i>The level of principals' role in increasing teachers' appreciation</i>	3.77	.82	High
<i>The level of principals' role in increasing teachers' caring</i>	3.96	.83	High
The level of principals' role in increasing teachers' ability to manage differences	3.90	.82	High
<i>The level of principals' role in increasing teachers' fairness</i>	3.90	.85	High
<i>The level of principals' role in increasing teachers' trustworthiness</i>	3.94	.83	High
<i>The level of principals' role in increasing teachers' rationality</i>	3.87	.83	High
<b>The level of principals' role in promoting unity</b>	3.85	.77	<b>High</b>

\*N = 578, SD = Standard Deviation

Table 2  
*Teachers' unity level*

Construct/Sub-construct	Mean	SD	Indicator
The level of teachers' ability to accept differences	4.30	.53	High
<i>The level of teachers' openness</i>	4.35	.60	High
<i>The level of teachers' tolerance</i>	4.36	.56	High
<i>The level of teachers' teamwork</i>	4.31	.60	High
<i>The level of teachers' trust</i>	4.19	.65	High
The level of teachers' ability to respect differences	4.40	.54	High
<i>The level of teachers' prudence</i>	4.42	.59	High
<i>The level of teachers' appreciation</i>	4.42	.59	High
<i>The level of teachers' caring</i>	4.40	.58	High
The level of teachers' ability to manage differences	4.42	.56	High
<i>The level of teachers' fairness</i>	4.39	.61	High
<i>The level of teachers' trustworthiness</i>	4.46	.58	High
<i>The level of teachers' rationality</i>	4.42	.58	High
<b>The level of teachers' unity</b>	4.37	.53	<b>High</b>

\*N = 578, SD = Standard Deviation

Table 3  
*The relationship between principals' role in promoting unity with teachers' unity*

		Teachers' unity
Principals' role in promoting unity	Pearson Correlation	.20**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

P<0.001(2-tailed), N = 350

promoting unity and the teachers' unity was rejected. Even if the relationship is weak, this finding means that if principals increase their role in promoting unity, teachers' unity will also increase, even though the possibility of increasing is low.

## DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The results of the study show that principals have not yet played a key role in promoting unity. Principals' roles to promote unity and to increase teachers' ability to accept, respect, and manage differences have

not yet been fulfilled. What was done by principals was against the unity theory (MoE) stating that to unite, the unity values and ability to accept, respect, and manage differences must be instilled in the school community. This study also shows that the principals paid less attention to increasing the teacher's ability to accept differences and lesser attention to inculcate tolerance in teachers. This statement also fortifies the suggestion by Bity Salwana et al. (2009) that the principals must have the competency to manage human resources and, in this aspect, teachers' unity. Principals should take note

of Hallinger's (2011) comments that as a general role, principals are more interested in academic progress, which may lead to human resource management issues being ignored.

The Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB 2013-2025), which emphasizes promoting unity, should also serve as a reminder to principals to give equal attention to human relations. Principals must support MoE's effort to promote unity through the education system. Values such as openness, tolerance, cooperation (teamwork), and trust must be instilled. The Ministry has added a teamwork element in schools as a key component to establish a harmonious and conducive environment, which added support from the local communities (Educational Planning and Research Division, 2018). To ensure that the vision is realized, principals must equip themselves with the required skills and knowledge to unlock their potential in promoting unity as suggested by Bity Salwana (2009). Moreover, the ability of the principals in promoting unity would effectively establish a haven of unity among Malaysians.

The results of this study also do not support the findings of previous studies, such as the EPRD (Educational Planning and Research Division, 2018), stating that the teachers' unity level was only at a moderate level. The difference in the findings may be caused by the situation at the time the data collection was carried out. MoE's study in 2018 was done at the time of Malaysia's 14<sup>th</sup> general election. But

the degree to which this statement is true still needs to be studied. The results that teachers attained a high level for the main constructs also did not run parallel to the previous results of EPRD (MoE), which shows that teachers attained a low level or a moderate level for the ability to accept, to respect, and to manage differences. The result shows that teachers attained a high level for the unity values, including openness, tolerance, teamwork, and trust, once again did not support the results from the previous study done by EPRD (MoE). Besides the situation during the data collection process, the methods used for these two studies may be additional reasons for different results. Further study will have to go into detail about the factors that caused the difference. However, the result of this study supports Yeoh's (2019) 4Rs and 4Ms theory of respect, reciprocity, responsibilities, tolerance, moderation, morality, mechanisms to overcome conflicts, and middle Malaysia standing up for unity and harmony as elements that can promote national unity and harmony. As Yeoh (2019) also suggested, the unity level is high due to a high level of acceptance, compromise, and tolerance, trust, confidence, fairness, justness, and inclusivity among multi-racial teachers. These findings reciprocate with Kubaev's (2020) five steps to promote unity developing a common goal; organizing team-building activities; encouraging open communication; celebrating important events and resolving any issues that may arise.

The principals' role to promote unity efficiently can also be the reason for teachers to attain a high level of unity values, for the ability to accept, to respect, and to manage differences and a high level of unity. Therefore, this finding also supports unity theory, which states that unity is the output, whereas teachers possess the values of unity and have the ability to accept, to respect, and to manage differences. The fact that teachers possess high-level unity values is also against past studies, which indicate that unity among the younger generation is increasingly deteriorating and eroding (Aziz et al., 2014) and that the spirit of patriotism among young people is starting to fade due to global cultural influence factors that attract young people as opposed to national issues. Sabariah's (2018) opinion, suggested that good conduct, integrity, ethics, and honesty (national principles, or *Rukun Negara*) are important values that Malaysians should uphold in order to ensure peace and unity. The result also runs parallel to that of Lee (2014), that unity can be promoted through language, sport, and festivals. All researchers suggested that the "open house" culture during the festival should be encouraged. They pointed out that the festive seasons has brought a true message of unity to all Malaysians. This study found that more than 84% of the teachers joined festival celebrations of other races, whereas more than 80% invited other races to their celebrations. Besides, more than 95% of the teachers appreciate the cultural diversity among various races.

The importance of Bahasa Melayu as a *Bahasa perpaduan* has been proven by this study. Therefore, Lee (2014) statement that unity could be promoted by mastering Bahasa Melayu is very true without a doubt. This study found that more than 94% of teachers agreed that Bahasa Melayu should be used in daily communication, while everyone must open their minds towards the diversity of mother tongues, languages, and religions (Zaizul et al., 2018). Last but not least, this study agrees with the statement that school management and administration have an important role in enhancing unity (Kuznetsova & Matytcina, 2018). Words such as tolerance, harmony, goodwill, and diversity must be mutually understood and should mean the same to all races.

### **Theory Implication**

The findings of this study have implications for the theory of unity, namely the Unity Model for Teachers and Students (Rahim et al., 2019). The theory has listed three main constructs of unity that is the ability to accept differences, the ability to respect differences, and the ability to manage differences. This study not only confirms the main constructs, but also the subconstructs, namely the 10 unity values (openness, tolerance, cooperation, trust, prudence, appreciative, fairness, trustworthiness, and caring).

### **Managerial and Practical Implication**

Schools are places where not only education for intellectual academics take place, but also where positive values, including unity

values, are inculcated. Principals can refer to the findings of this study to trace their strengths and weaknesses in promoting unity. The findings of this study show that the principals might be successful in promoting unity by increasing teachers' ability to accept, respect, and manage differences. Principals must understand the unity values and must inculcate the values among the teachers and all school communities. Principals can also collaborate with the community to manage unity better and to improve the school environment. Responsibility to promote unity also requires support and assistance, not only by school staff, but also from the District Education Office (PPD), the State Education Department (JPN), and the MoE. This would facilitate and help principals to face any challenges, difficulties, or obstacles in managing unity.

### **Training Implication**

As the ability to promote unity is not pegged at a very high level, principals must undergo training that focuses on sharing and giving ideas on how to improve teacher's ability in accepting, respecting, and managing differences. This suggests that the training syllabus should improve principals' knowledge and skills to increase their ability to promote unity. Principals should strive hard to equip themselves with the necessary competencies. Therefore, training programs are necessary to acquire appropriate knowledge and skills. The MoE through IAB, for example, needs to plan training and courses to further improve

unity management roles among principals. This is also to ensure that MoE can provide educational organizations with efficient and effective officers who can perform their responsibilities. Several aspects need to be considered when preparing training programs or courses for principals. Among them are those aspects that can improve principals' knowledge and skills to deal with problematic students and teachers. Psychological knowledge can also be learned to not rely entirely on school counselors when dealing with students' disciplinary problems. Principals should also be proactive and take the initiative to attend courses and programs held by MoE or other parties. Information on training programs or courses can be searched online. IAB, an institution that trains school managers, is recommended to provide training that is compulsory for principals to gain knowledge and skills to better manage their human resources. MoE also requires training courses that promote open-mindedness and positivity in principals toward lifelong learning, because from time to time, knowledge and skills need to be improved to suit current and future needs.

### **Policy Implication**

One of the main goals of the Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013-2025 is that unity can be promoted. This is clearly expressed by the goals of the education system aspirations: accessibility, quality, equity, unity, and efficiency. The Blueprint also listed several initiatives related to principals to ensure that schools are

managed by leaders with high competencies. It is therefore important to monitor the policy implementation at the school level. The findings of this study also recommend that the Malaysian Government needs to continue its policy towards unity.

### **Social Balance Implication**

By improving unity among the school communities, principals are also contributing to the social balance among nations. A peaceful and harmonious environment would lead to a decrease in crime rates. The country's economy would also increase due to the increase in the amount of domestic and foreign investments. It is a national responsibility to maintain the safety, harmony, and unity of a country, and principals and teachers must also play a pivotal role in this issue.

### **LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The limitation of this study is the evaluation on principal's role to promote unity and self-evaluation to determine unity done only by teachers. The findings of low level for principals' role to cultivate some of the value of unity and the low unity level of teachers cannot be explained by this study. Besides, analysis of both variables based on demographic factors was also not implemented. Therefore, for the future research, it is recommended that mixed method design is applied whereas the analysis on the variables based on the demography factors should be done. Only then, the findings can be more meaningful.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

This paper contributes to the factors that may increase the teacher's unity. This research's conceptual framework and findings from Malaysian universities have confirmed that principals play an important role in helping to attain a better environment in the country. This study also affirms that unity values must be strengthened to improve unity. Educational management policies, managerial staff, and training must focus on improving the principal's role to promote unity. Challenges and issues arising from time to time should be handled by those who are capable of planning, executing, overseeing, and improving unity through the participation of all members of the school community. The study would add to the body of knowledge on how leaders in Malaysia, including educational leaders of multiple institutions, implement education by ensuring that no students of all races are left behind. Hence, studying the principals' role in promoting unity should pose as a sincere and everlasting effort to secure a safe and harmonious country for a better life in the future.

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