

Forming National Unity among the National Service Program (MNSP) Participant through the Language and Literature Program (LLP)

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Abstract. The aim of this study is to examine whether the Language and Literature Program (LLP) is effective in fostering the understanding and national unity among the various ethnic groups of National Service Program (MNSP) participants in Malaysia through the national literature mechanism. There are characteristics of literature on the ethnic group's relationship in the anthology of poems, My Motherland (2005), the mandatory text book for the participants. Quantitative method was applied by using a questionnaire to survey the acceptance of the MNSP participants toward the above anthology. Three National Service camps selected for this study represented three zones of Malaysia with 393 sample size. The Literary Unity Theory (Chew, 2007) was applied in this study and identified 13 unity indices in the anthology of poems, My Motherland (2005). Five social background characteristics of the respondents, consisted of ethnic type, gender, SES, domicile and the level of education, were analyzed regarding their relationship to the perception and the thinking of the MNSP participants. Findings showed that there were significant differences of opinions according to ethnic, SES and domicile, but no significant relationships for gender and levels of education. The impact of reading the anthology of poems, My Motherland (2005) among the MNSP participants was 21.3%. In conclusion, that MNSP was successful in building understanding among the different ethnic groups.

Keywords: The Language and Literature Program, Malaysian National Service Program, National Integration, National Literature, Literary Unity Theory

1. Introduction

The Malaysian National Service Program (MNSP) was introduced and started in 2004. It is aimed at forming a disciplined society, with true spirit, self confidence, faithfulness towards the nation, always prepared to face any trial and challenges, as well as to inculcate cooperation and fostering unity among all the ethnic groups in the country. MNSP is carried out in the Malaysian perspective to achieve the country's need. Thus, four training modules which include the physical aspect, character building, nationalism and community service were designed[1].

2. The Language and Literature Program (LLP)

2.1. Statement of Problem

The Language and Literature Program (LLP) in MNSP aims at expanding the knowledge and understanding among the trainees on the importance of national language and literature (Malay Literature) for the purpose of building the spirit of goodwill among the main ethnic groups in Malaysia[2]. In this program, the anthology of poems, My Motherland (2005) was chosen as the compulsory text for the entire MNSP participants. It is hoped to foster cultural understanding and inculcate spirit of goodwill among the youths by learning national elements like country, nation and people, culture and religions from the anthology of poems, My Motherland. The anthology will be used as the main source for the presentation during the MNSP Literary and Cultural Night.

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The study on the effectiveness of My Motherland (2005) in inculcating national unity spirit among the MNSP participants was found to be vital. Performance based on My Motherland (2005) in LLP is an important mechanism to encourage and transform the attitude of MNSP participants and interest in literature and Malay culture because this is the utmost important aspect of forming national culture and literature[3]. As part of the Malaysian national education, MNSP is the other platform for all youths from the various main ethnic groups of Malaysia, religions and cultures to form the ultimate national unity. What is more important is that the MNSP involved almost half of youths who have sat for their SPM examination aged 18 years old and will be the nation's future leaders.

2.2. Objectives of Study

The aim of this study is to examine how far the anthology of poems, My Motherland (2005) is fostering understanding and national unity among the various ethnic groups of MNSP participants in Malaysia was determined by their social background. There are characteristics of literature on the ethnic group's relationship in the anthology of poems, My Motherland (2005). Examples of the relationship are ethnic relation, cultural interaction, understanding of religion and love for the country. Specifically, this study aims to evaluate the impact of reading My Motherland (2005) in cementing the relationship among the participants. Their feedback on the appreciation of the literary work especially poems will be proved as the tools and mechanism for national unity.

2.3. Research Questions

- Is there any significant difference between the perceptions of the participants towards the anthology of poem My Motherland (2005) based on their social background?
- What is the impact of reading the anthology of poems My Motherland (2005) in cementing national unity among the participants?

2.4. Conceptual Framework

The approach used in this study is the Literary Unity Theory [4]. It was applied to determine the acceptance among the national service participants towards the anthology of poems, My Motherland (2005) as the main text for reading and performing at the Literary and Cultural Night. According to the theory, it is important to examine the perceptions, opinions and thoughts of the readers who come from various social backgrounds towards the literature. Therefore, the main target and focus in this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of the anthology in forging unity among youths.

2.5. Methodology

This study was conducted in three state followed by different zone, that is Pahang to represent East coast of Malaysia, Melaka representing the West Coast of Malaysia and Sarawak representing East Malaysia. There are three National Service camps selected for this study, namely the Gambang National Service Camp, Pahang; the Recreation Jungle Camp of Ayer Keroh, Melaka and Sematan National Service Camp of Kuching, Sarawak. The sample size selected is 393 respondents from the total of 560 national service participants.

The survey instrument used in this study comprise of two sections of a questionnaire, namely Section A consisting of the demographic aspects of the respondents which include race, gender, parents' income, and domicile whereas Part B consisted of questions in the form of quotations selected from the anthology of poetry My Motherland (2005). Participants are required to read a passage of poetry before answering questions developed based on the Likert scale. Each question is constructed in accordance with indices of national unity including positive values, unity, spirit of defending the country, love for motherland, self-esteem of youth, love their homes, fight for independence, pride of national glory, bridging the gap of the economy, bravery, family ties, natural source of knowledge, and friendship.

2.6. Findings

Table 3 T-test Between NS Participants According to Gender and Domicile of their Views Towards 13 Indices of Literary Unity in the Anthology "My Motherland" (2005)

Social background (n=393)		N	M	SD	t	p < .05	η
Gender	Male	257	3.94	0.93	-.10	.92	.33
	Female	136	3.65	0.83	-.11		
Domicile	Urban	193	3.79	0.96	-4.74	.00	1.76
	Rural	200	4.09	0.79	-4.73		

η eta value

Table 3 shows that there were no significant differences in views between the LLP male participants ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 0.93$) with female participants ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 0.83$) of 13 indices of unity in the poetry anthology *My Motherland* (2005) with $t(193) = -.10$, $p = .92$, $\eta = 0.33$. According to Cohen [5], value of eta (η) of less than 0.6 is considered small effect. In other words, gender of the participants only contributes small effect size towards all the indices of unity in the anthology of poem *My Motherland* (2005). According to gender, male is found to be more positive in accepting the 13 indices of unity in *My Motherland* (2005) compared to the female respondents.

Comparison between NS participants from urban and rural areas by using t -test showed significant differences between the two groups in their assessment of the poetry anthology *My Motherland*. The participants from the urban areas ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 0.96$) showed less tolerant opinions compared to the participants from rural areas ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 0.79$) in their assessment of the anthology of poem, *My Motherland* (2005) with $t(193) = -4.74$, $p = .00$, $\eta = 1.76$. Value of eta 1.76 showed that the domiciles of the participants contribute major effect towards all the indices of unity in the anthology of poems, *My Motherland* (2005).

Table 3 Participants' Views on the Anthology *My Motherland* (2005) according to Social Background

Social Background	(n=393)	Mean	SD		Sum of Square	df	F	η	p < .05
Ethnic	Malay	168.23	21.04	Between groups	75716.299	3	49.17	3.64	.00
	Chinese	141.71	24.55	Among groups	199659.171	389			
	Indian	123.75	39.51						
	Others	170.62	19.36						
SES	Low	145.30	27.48	Between groups	48858.868	2	42.06	.00	.00
	Intermediate	164.62	18.72	Among groups	226516.602	390			
	High	171.14	24.56						
Level of education	Primary	161.81	26.91	Between groups	2440.145	2	1.74	.01	.18
	Lower secondary	154.91	28.35	Among groups	272935.325	390			
	Upper secondary	159.77	25.16						

Analysis of the results showed that there were significant differences of opinions of the participants between the two aspects of the background with 13 indices unity in the anthology of poem, *My Motherland* (2005). Two social background variables were ethnic and SES, whereas no significant difference in their opinions were seen according to the level of education of the participants.

Analysis in terms of the four ethnic groups of Malays, Chinese, Indians and others, showed significant differences in their views about the anthology *My Motherland* (2005) with $F(3,389) = 49.17$, $p = .00$, $\eta = 3.64$. This means that NS participants view the indices of unity in the anthology of poem, *My Motherland* (2005) very differently among the four ethnic groups; however the value of eta (η) is less than 0.6, meant that the effect size of ethnicity towards the anthology was small. According to mean score, it was found that

other ethnics gained the highest mean, followed by Malay, Chinese and lastly Indian. This indicated that other ethnics pursued the positive attitude compared to Malay and Chinese towards the unity indices, whereas Indian was the least positive ethnic group.

The participants were also analyzed in terms of SES which was divided into three groups, namely low SES group (<RM2,000), intermediate SES (RM2,001-RM3,999), and high SES (> RM4, 000). One way ANOVA analysis showed that the value of $F(2,390) = 42.06, p = .00, \eta = .00$. This meant that all three groups showed significant differences of opinion towards the anthology of poem, *My Motherland* (2005). Higher SES groups hold more positive views compared to intermediate and lower SES groups towards the unity indices in the anthology of *My Motherland* (2005).

All the respondents (N = 393) consisted of participants selected with various levels of education. However, their views on the anthology of poems, *My Motherland* (2005) showed no significant difference of opinions among the groups according to level of education. LLP participants of different groups holding primary, lower secondary and higher secondary schools earn $F(2,390) = 1.74, p = .18, \eta = .01$. Primary school leavers were found to have more positive opinions compared to secondary schools leavers.

Table 4 *Multiple Regression Analysis for Variables Influencing Participants' Perception of Unity in Anthology of Poem, My Motherland (2005)*

Social Background	Beta	t-value	p < .05
Ethnic	-.29	-5.99	.00*
Gender	.047	.93	.36
SES	.24	5.27	.00*
Domicile	.16	3.20	.00*
Level of education	.00	.05	.96
R^2	.223	Adjusted R^2	.213

Table 4 showed that national unity which contained in the anthology of poem, *My Motherland* (2005) has a contribution of 21.3% and is significant ($p < .05$) for NS participants. If the independent variables are examined one by one, the Beta value indicated the importance of the contribution of the factors. In this analysis, the order of independent variables according to the Beta starts with the ethnic of -.29 (-5.99 t-value) with the negative impact, followed by positive impact contributed by factors SES .24 (t-value of 5.27), domicile 0.16 (3.24 t-value), gender .043 (t-value of .93) and ending with the .00 level of education (t-value of .05). This meant that ethnicity was an important independent variable other than SES and domicile in determining the significance of the relationship and contribution to anthology of poem, *My Motherland* (2005) for NS participants, while gender and level of education did not directly influence the perception of participants because these two variables did not directly indicate a significant relationship at the .05 significance level.

2.7. Discussion

In a multiracial country such as Malaysia, language is a sensitive issue of the community. Language is a medium of communication as the basis of ethnicity. For each group or community, its language is in the form of a symbol of uniqueness and identity in addition to the cultural heritage and ethnic traditions [6], but the medium will determine the social and linguistic groups that have more opportunities in politics and economy, and narrow down the chances of other ethnic groups [7]. In this study, a national literature that made the Malay language as the medium of instruction would have a much different response between the ethnic Malays and non-Malays in that the Malay participants respond better than non-Malays.

Aspects of respondents' social background such as gender, SES, domicile, and level of education affect the tendency of the participants thought towards the anthology of poem, *My Motherland* (2005). The results showed that male participants from higher SES who live in rural areas and have primary school education were more positive and open toward the anthology than the female participants of lower and middle class in urban areas and secondary school education.

Multiple regression analysis showed that the effect of NS participants reading the anthology of poem, *My Motherland* (2005) was 21.3%. In other words, the reading of all the indices of unity in the *My Motherland*

(2005) contributed a certain influence to the NS participants. The main factors were ethnicity, SES, and domicile, while gender and level of education were not significant factors. The figure showed that the anthology *My Motherland* (2005) has influence and impact in building national unity among the participants in the NS. Even though it contributed a small percentage, the anthology of poem has proven to achieve the goal of producing a united and disciplined Malaysian nation.

However, the substance and thinking in the anthology *My Motherland* (2005) should not be narrowed, but should be broad and reach problems and aspirations of many people. In fact, the poets are responsible for nurturing the elements of unity through their poetry. With the diversity of background history, tradition and culture, and views of life, they can contribute something meaningful in order to enrich and diversify the national literature. It is more interesting and effective if the poets describe the nature and cultural environment of their respective ethnic communities and their relationship with the Malay community so that all ethnic groups can come closer to understanding the mindset and culture of other ethnic groups in an effort to build understanding between people.

The results of this study are consistent with the findings of Rebecca, Rosemary and Mary [8] who found the multicultural books read in the classroom enable adults and children to appreciate the multicultural elements in their lives. Their observation found that Marlene, one of the children said “throughout the book *Letters From Rifka*, the author reminds us that people overcome adversity through perseverance.” The preschool teachers described the Lessons Learned about perseverance, tolerance, the importance of family, and discovering who you are.

3. Conclusion

From this study, it is clear that the unity poetry has a strong future as the Malaysian National Poetry. Malaysian society needs poems with the theme of ethnic unity. In driving the growth momentum, NS and Institute of Language and Literature, among others, have shown the ability and success through LLP to create unity through the construction of poetry anthologies such as *My Motherland* (2005). Through the continued earnest efforts, we believe that poetry is not only capable of uniting the nation through literature, but it also makes a very significant contribution in the effort to create the appearance of a united nation, loyalty to country, earnestly and diligently to develop and success of national ambition, live and die with the country.

4. Acknowledgements

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