

PARENTS' ROLE IN CULTURAL SOCIALIZATION OF ETHNIC GROUPS IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract - Among the agents of cultural socialisation, parents play an important role in identity formation. Positive aspects of the cultural socialisation in terms of cultural heritage and pride are often studied, but the negative aspects are relatively unexplored by researchers. This study examined the parents' role in cultural socialisation of ethnic groups in Malaysia. The specific aspects studied were cultural socialisation, preparation for bias, and promotion of mistrust. A survey was conducted among 272 students in a university. The results showed that the students reported relatively higher frequency of socially acceptable aspects of cultural socialisation than "negative aspects". The reported frequency of cultural socialisation into pluralism is relatively higher, in that the parents had talked to them about pride in their cultural heritage and appreciation of other ethnic groups up to two times that year. This is expected because "unity in diversity" is the mainstay of harmonious ethnic relations in a plural society, and parents need to inculcate these values in their children. The study showed that the parents' role in cultural socialisation had decreased by the time the students were in university.

Keywords - Cultural Socialisation, Parent, Ethnic Group, Malaysia

I. INTRODUCTION

Members of an ethnic group are defined as a group of people who share a common culture, religion, language, or nationality (Cooper, Garcia Coll, Bartko, Davis, & Chatman, 2005, in Hughes et al., 2006). It is through the cultural socialisation process that the cultural identity is shared among members of the group. In a multiethnic country, parents socialise their children to handle societal discrimination and bias and to develop pride in their ethnic identity. In some countries, ethnic identity is authority-defined. Jehom (1999, p. 83) argues that authority-defined ethnic identity may not correspond with "the everyday-defined identity members of the group have of themselves", and advocates the importance of studying "subjective aspects of identity formations among ethnic groups since it is through their interactions identities are constructed, reconstructed and reinforced". Based on studies on how children of various ethnic groups negotiate culturally diverse contexts in the development of their ethnicity, Hughes et al. (2006) have identified the parents' role to be among the most important of these socialisation processes.

Hughes et al. (2006) also pointed out that there is limited empirical knowledge about normative developmental and family processes that may be unique to various ethnic groups although they live in the same country or sociopolitical entity. This includes knowing how parents socialise their children to handle societal discrimination and bias and to develop pride in their ethnic identity, particularly relevant in the case of ethnic minority groups. Other content of parents' socialisation include issues such as "cultural heritage and group social status, including discussions about the prevalence of stereotypes and discrimination based on phenotypic

characteristics, language competencies, and other group characteristics" (Hughes et al., 2006, p. 748). While pride in cultural heritage is often researched, less is known about cultural socialisation to prepare children for negative stereotypes and discrimination. The normative developmental and family processes may be unique to various ethnic groups although they live in the same country or sociopolitical entity.

The role of the ethnic language in the ethnic socialisation process also needs to be singled out and investigated – not just whether the ethnic groups are passing on their ethnic language to the next generation (e.g., Campbell, Chuah, & Ting, 2012; Collins, 2001; Dealwis, 2008; Naji & David, 2003; Ting, 2012; Ting & Ling, 2012; Ting & Rose, 2014) but how the language mediates the inculcation of ethnic-based views, attitudes and practices. Musa and Ting's (2015) survey of 200 university students of different ethnic groups on their ethnic and national identities revealed the importance of language in signifying group distinctiveness and the findings show that languages can bind or divide (see also Ting, 2017). For example, how the ethnic language feature in the communication of ethnic cultural values, beliefs and practices in the context of daily routines in which the ethnic language is spoken, traditional foods are served, and customs and traditions are observed. The degree to which the ethnic language is important in cultural socialisation may vary among ethnic groups in an ethnically-diverse community, and needs investigation in light of the shift towards standard languages, most notably languages used for educational purposes.

This study examined the parents' role in cultural socialisation of ethnic groups in Malaysia. The specific aspects studied were cultural socialisation, preparation for bias, and promotion of mistrust.