The Pedagogical Approaches to Shift Ethnic Boundaries: Exploring Pedagogical Experiences of Malaysian Youths in School and University.

Fatimah binti Mohd Tajuddin[1*], Kartini Aboo Talib @Khalid[2] , Shazlin Amir Hamzah[3]

[1 2 3]Institute of Ethnic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia,
43600 UKM Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia
fatimahtajuddin86@gmail.com
k_khalid@ukm.edu.my
shazlin@ukm.edu.my
[*]Corresponding Author

Abstract: This research paper investigates the pedagogical experiences of Malaysian youths in school and university that were perceived to shift their ethnic boundaries and facilitate interethnic engagement. Although the education system is perceived to be an important social integration platform, studies indicate a concerning trend of ethnic polarization among Malaysian youths in school and university. Therefore, this study investigates the pedagogical approaches that were experienced by selected Malaysian youths that were able to shift their ethnic boundaries and pave the way for interethnic engagement. There are three research objectives for this study which are (i) to identify the pedagogical approaches that thickens ethnic boundaries (ii) to identify the pedagogical approaches that thins ethnic boundaries and (iii) to identify the pedagogical approaches that dissolves ethnic boundaries. This study utilizes the Ethnic Boundaries concept by Mansor (2021) as an analytical tool to evaluate the pedagogical approaches experienced by the youths in shifting their ethnic boundaries. A qualitative methodology employed key informant interviews with eight selected Malaysian youths and two focus group interviews from the eight selected Malaysian youths consisting of five youth informants for each group. The study's results found three categories of pedagogical experiences shared by the informants, which are segregative, interactive, and critical pedagogical approaches. The findings also highlight the role of the performing arts as a potential pedagogical tool to facilitate interethnic engagement and develop crucial consciousness on interethnic relations among Malaysian youths.

Keywords: Arts Education, Ethnic Boundaries, Interethnic Engagement, Intercultural Education, Pedagogy

1.   Introduction

A reading of scholarly works on interethnic relations in Malaysia suggests that nation-building in Malaysia remains a work in progress (Shamsul, 2008; Abdul Rahman, 2021; Syed Husin, 2015; Mohd Mansor, 2021). To describe the state of Malaysia's interethnic relations, Shamsul (2008) characterized Malaysia's unique social structure as being in a state of "stable-tension" because as a postcolonial and multiethnic society, Malaysia inevitably possesses social structures that provide the opportunities for conflict and tension but not violent conflicts as experienced by similar multi-ethnic countries such as Sri Lanka, Fiji and India which were all colonized by the British. As countries all

around the world become more culturally and ethnically diverse space, education institutions have inadvertently become diverse.

In the context of Malaysia, the national objective of creating unity is reflected in various national policies such as the National Education Policy and the National Unity Policy. One of the key roles of education in multiethnic societies is to create greater social interaction among Malaysian youths from different ethnic backgrounds (Tan & Santhiram, 2014; Ministry of Education, 2012; National Unity Policy, 2021). However, it can be observed that there are challenges in developing innovative teaching and learning practices for higher education institutions to cater for the increasingly diverse student groups in Malaysia (Nurul Fitriah & Rafiza, 2023). Thus, it is essential to examine the existing pedagogical approaches and their challenges within the education system, such as schools and universities that could facilitate interethnic engagement by shifting their ethnic boundaries.

Several studies have highlighted the sociopolitical and social structural factors that contribute to the increasing ethnic polarization among Malaysian youths. Firstly, regarding the sociopolitical factor, the presences of interethnic conflicts stemming from social deficits indicate that the level of Malaysia's social cohesion remains a work in progress (IPNas 2018; Abdul Rahman 2021). After Malaysia's 15th general elections, Malaysia has experienced an overt experience of ethnic polarization in terms of ethnic, religious, and political identities (Welsh 2022). "Polarization is the presence of "divisions" or "cleavages" in a society and is, therefore, indicative of the degree of social cohesion or lack thereof. The latter is a growing concern among many governments, as polarized societies are more vulnerable to political and social instability and conflict, which, in turn, could undermine the sustainability of growth and poverty reduction outcomes" (Gochoco-Bautista et al., 2014, p. 11). These experiences of ethnic polarization have been perceived as a concern in which ethnic, social, religious and religious identities social class and political preferences among the youths.

Secondly, the structural factor points to the ethnic ratio and opportunities to form interethnic engagement whereby the observation of ethnic polarization was perceived to be indirect and not deliberate. According to Abdul Rahman (2014), "Ethnic polarization does not occur directly or with clear intention to segregate students; rather, it is a result of these structural factors in schools and in the university" (p. 220), pointing out the latent factors of ethnic polarization in Malaysia.

Although the education institution has been perceived as a significant social institution for national integration, the extant literature has highlighted that there is a lack of meaningful multi-ethnic interaction in schools and universities due to prejudice, limited exposure to a multicultural diverse environment, and limited contacts with other youths from different ethnic backgrounds (Najeemah et al., 2015, Kaur et al., 2017, Ezhar & Moniza, 2017, Amir et al., 2017, Swami et al., 2020). Previous studies on pedagogical approaches for a multiethnic society such as Malaysia are under researched. Therefore, this study seeks to explore and address the existing gap on pedagogical approaches that are needed to facilitate interethnic engagement among Malaysian youths through the shifting of ethnic boundaries.

2.   Literature Review

The extant literature on intercultural education posits the importance of redefining the aims of education to cater to the needs of 21st-century societies characterized as culturally and ethnically diverse. This is because we are experiencing diversity and the challenges and struggles of managing and maintaining social cohesion (Kaur et al., 2017). Other studies have suggested the implementation of a democratic classroom approach in the Malaysian tertiary education context (Lina Mursyidah et al., 2024). These notions are also aligned with the 21st century Education which has stipulated that to face an increasingly complex cultural diversity at the global level head on, social and cross-cultural communication skills and multicultural education are needed (P21, 2019). Therefore, this section will discuss about the conceptualization of pedagogy and types of pedagogical approaches for diverse societies, the studies on Malaysia's pedagogical approaches for a multiethnic society and the application of the ethnic boundaries concept as a tool to analyse pedagogical approaches for a multiethnic society.

2.1   Conceptualization of pedagogy and types of pedagogical approaches for diverse societies.

Due to the changing landscape of culturally diverse societies, some have reconceptualized pedagogy to be more culturally and community responsive. Tintiangco-Cubales's (2010) definition of pedagogy captures the traditional and critical paradigms. She defined pedagogy succinctly, "Pedagogy is a philosophy of education informed by positionalities, ideologies, and standpoints (of both teacher and learner). It considers the critical relationships between the purpose of education, the context of education, the content of what is being taught, and the methods of teaching it. It also includes the identity of who is being taught, who is teaching, their relationship to each other, and their relationship to structure and power" (p.ix). Reflecting on the conceptualizations of pedagogy and considering the education framework they were based on several pedagogical approaches could be observed. Bruch et al. (2004) identified three dominant pedagogical approaches frequently associated with education frameworks for diverse societies: the 'celebratory', the 'critical', and the 'transformative' approaches (Najeemah et al., 2015; Banks, 2016). These approaches will be explained in the following section.

Firstly, the celebratory approach highlights the positive accomplishments, key contributions, recognition, and respect for the plurality of many different cultures and social groups and positions cultural diversity as positive which is to be respected and celebrated. This approach can be contrasted against a segregative approach and a deficit narrative that views cultural differences as deficiencies (Bruch et al., 2004; Spiteri, 2017).

Secondly, Studies on critical pedagogy frequently associate the works of Paulo Freire (Bruch et al., 2004; Spiteri, 2017; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014; Azhar Ibrahim, 2020). It differs from the Celebratory approach which does not challenge and address issues of power and privilege in society, racism, forms of discrimination, and the risk of essentializing the other which can lead to prejudice and stereotyping. Freire (1973) sees critical pedagogy as the liberating process as coming about through a process of 'conscientization' which is the gaining of critical awareness. After gaining critical consciousness or critical awareness, the second step is purposeful action based on this awareness. Freire describes this simultaneous progression as praxis (Spiteri, 2017). The method of dialogue is frequently used as a process of engagement and exchange between the teacher and learner rather than merely a transactional exchange

Lastly, the transformative pedagogical approach attempts to connect the celebratory and critical approach in transforming the learning experiences of the learner, educator, communities and social institutions (Bruch et al., 2004; Banks, 2016). Bruch et al. (2004) argued further that the key strength of the transformative approach is its recognition that individuals and social groups are integrated into systems of power that shape them. When more actors across all levels of a system possess the praxis, the transformative approach can be perceived as a significant pedagogical approach (Freire, 1973; Banks, 2016; Spiteri, 2017). Thus, it is pertinent that individuals, social groups, society at large, and different societies operating cooperatively, engage in conscientization.

In conclusion, various pedagogical approaches can be utilized in a culturally diverse society according to its learning needs and objectives, which are celebratory, critical, and transformative.

2.2   Studies on Malaysia's pedagogical approaches for a multiethnic society

This section will explore studies that have highlighted an epistemological gap in education philosophy, frameworks, and pedagogical approaches to cater to multiethnic Malaysian youths. Next, the discussion will review studies on creative and innovative approaches to facilitating interethnic engagement among Malaysian youths.

Within the process of social cohesion in Malaysia, the education system relies on the National education philosophy which outlines the important elements of education. one study has problematized the absence of the social element of student development. As pointed out by Ong et al. (2014) "students might be competent physically, emotionally, spiritually and intellectually (*jasmani, emosi, rohani dan intelek* [JERI]), but they might lack the ability to relate and build meaningful relationships with others. Hence, a more inclusive definition would be JERIS (*jasmani, emosi, rohani, intelek dan sosial*) - physically, emotionally, spiritually, intellectually and *socially*" (p.38). Other studies have emphasized on the unclear development of an intercultural education framework in the Malaysian education system

(Kaur et al., 2017) and the intercultural communication field within the Malaysian academia limited to a few universities and university programs (Ezhar & Moniza, 2017).

At the secondary and tertiary education levels, studies emphasized the urgent need to provide innovative and creative approaches with the objective of creating a deeper understanding and appreciation of Malaysian diversity. One study looked into the elements needed to develop interethnic engagement modules. The study by Amir et al. (2017) found that the elements of culture, language and community activities are needed for any interethnic engagement modules specifically for secondary school youths. Other studies highlighted the need for more effective pedagogy and qualified educators for the Civic and Citizenship subject at the secondary school level. It was taught in the 1970s and included an interethnic relations module, but due to the lack of resources, pedagogy, and qualified teachers, it was discontinued. Civics and citizenship education are currently reintegrated into subjects such as moral studies, Bahasa Malaysia, History and English and emphasized as civic values instead (Chang, 2005; Sitti Hasnah et al., 2017). The studies also highlighted an unclear pedagogical approach to address both civic and interethnic relations dimensions.

At the university level, a subject called Ethnic Relations was created in 2007 with the objective of strengthening national integration. However, feedback from students and lecturers towards the module pointed to the need for improvements in developing a more profound knowledge and empathy towards Malaysia's diverse culture and religions (Shamsul, 2008). Syed Husin (2015) also criticized the module's content to be lacking a critical approach when discussing contentious historical such as the issue of the ethnic riot 13th May 1969 and nationalist movements for Malaysia's independence which provided a limited discussion on the contributions of minority ethnic groups and left-wing political movements.

Lastly, studies discovered the need for a creative and critical pedagogical approach in designing education experiences for Malaysian youths (Najeemah et al., 2015, Kaur et al., 2017, Ezhar & Moniza, 2017). The extant studies on critical pedagogy were limited to learning the English language through literature such as poetry, short stories and role-play where critical literacy was often weaved into the pedagogy (Koo et al., 2012; Jeyaraj & Harland, 2019). Both studies have stated the challenges faced by Asian societies such as Malaysia in applying the critical pedagogical approach as it will require the educator and learner to question power dynamics that can be found particularly for post-colonial societies. Other creative approaches can be found in limited studies using interethnic dialogue and Malaysian films. The only few available studies included Pillai (2017) who discussed a classic Malaysian film written and directed by the late P. Ramlee, with the title Gerimis (1968) teaches concepts and theories of intercultural communication. Apart from the film Gerimis, another learning activity via films was conducted by using the Malaysian film, Sepet (2005) for a Roundtable Cinema Activity (RTCA) discussion (Swami, et. Al, 2020). This study found that using the film Sepet to facilitate interethnic dialogue and empathy among Malaysian university students was effective.

In conclusion, this section has discussed the epistemological gap and challenges in Malaysia's education philosophy frameworks and current pedagogical approaches that Malaysian educators should be aware of when designing meaningful pedagogies for Malaysian youths in school and university.

3. Methodology

This study utilized a qualitative research design to explore the pedagogical experiences of selected Malaysian youths who were able to shift their ethnic boundaries. Key informant interviews (KII) and two focus group interviews (FGI) were carried out towards 8 purposively selected Malaysian youths who have gone through the national education system at the secondary and tertiary level. There are three research objectives for this study, which are to identify (i) the pedagogical approaches that thicken ethnic boundaries, (ii) the pedagogical approaches that thin ethnic boundaries, and (iii) the pedagogical approaches that dissolve ethnic boundaries. This adopted the Qualitative Content Analysis Model by Mayring (2014). The central elements of all forms of content analysis are the categories which can be deductively formed from theory (Mayring 2014). This study has adopted the concept of ethnic boundaries by Mansor (2021) as an analytical tool which is perceived to be more suitable for a postcolonial society such as Malaysia as it considers the fluidity of ethnic identities and the sociohistorical and political context of Malaysia.

Mansor (2021) explained that when an individual or ethnic groups engage in a social interaction, their ethnic boundaries tend to thin, thicken, or dissolve. This process can exist in a continuum but it can shift towards different degrees of "thickness" within their ethnic boundaries. The thinner the ethnic boundaries, the more substantial social cohesion and social bonds one can experience in a social interaction. Firstly, the thickening of ethnic boundaries describes the individual or ethnic group prioritizing their ethnic preferences. Due to the lack of social interaction beyond their primary ethnic social groups such as family, peers, education, religion, political ideology and media, their actions and perceptions of other ethnic groups would be affected by their limited worldview and social interaction (Mansor, 2021). If a pedagogical approach contributes to stereotypical thinking, prejudice and discrimination, ethnic boundaries will thicken when one encounters different ethnic groups.

Secondly, the thinning of ethnic boundaries is indicated by the actors' who prioritize universalistic norms which refer to social preferences instead, when interacting with others such as to gain materials, status and personal obligations. Even though the thinning of ethnic boundaries has occurred, behavioral tendencies based on ethnic preferences may still be observed, but cross-ethnic social interactions have been formed (Mansor, 2021). If a pedagogical approach contributes to interethnic engagement and social bonding, ethnic boundaries will thin when interacting with different ethnic groups.

Lastly, the dissolution of ethnic boundaries is indicated by the ability of an individual and ethnic groups whom are able to prioritize civic preferences such as good governance and democracy. The civic preferences go beyond universal norms (thin ethnic boundaries) and ethnic group preferences (thick ethnic boundaries). The civic preferences were observed to have the potential to transcend ethnoreligious political agendas, as these agendas are often ethnicized (Mansor, 2021). In this category, if the pedagogical approach is able to develop critical consciousness and opportunities for dialogue on various civic issues and shared social struggles, ethnic boundaries will dissolve.

4.   Findings

The study's findings are divided into four sections: demographic profiles of the youth informants and findings based on the three research questions.

4.1   Demographic Profile

The demographic profile of the key informants was presented by considering their ethnicity, age, gender, and educational background. Table 1 provides a summary of these findings.

Table 1. Demographic profile of the youth key informants

Informants	Class Categories	Ethnicity	Age	Gender	Secondary Education	Tertiary Education	State of Origin
A1	Middle Class	Malay	26	Male	National School	Bachelor in Arts, Broadcasting, Public and Private university	Selangor
D1	Middle Class	Indian	27	Male	National School	Bachelor in Communication, Broadcasting, Private University	Selangor

Informants	Class Categories	Ethnicity	Age	Gender	Secondary Education	Tertiary Education	State of Origin
W1	Middle Class	Chinese	26	Female	National School	Bachelor in Communication, Broadcasting, Private University	Selangor
Y1	Working Class	Chindian	28	Female	National School	Sociology and Anthropology, Public University	Kedah
H2	Middle Class	Malay	21	Male	National School	Bachelor in Arts, Broadcasting, Private University	Selangor
V2	Middle Class	Indian	21	Male	National School	Bachelor in Arts, Broadcasting, Private University	Penang
K2	Working Class	Chinese	28	Male	National Type School and National School	Bachelors in Communication and Media Studies, Private University	Perak
T2	Working Class	Indian	28	Female	National School	Sociology and Anthropology, Public University	Kedah

Table 2. Open ended questions for the focus group interviews and individual in-depth interviews

FGI	KII 8 youths
1. What is your experiences of learning about Malaysia's interethnic relations? 2. How do your teachers and lecturers teach Malaysia's interethnic relations?	1. Were there any school subjects/clubs/events/programs that you feel was a good or bad effort for you and your friends to learn about each other in terms of ethnic identity and relating to one another as Malaysians? 2. How do your teachers and lecturers teach Malaysia's interethnic relations.

4.2   Pedagogical approaches that thickens ethnic boundaries

This section has identified two categories of pedagogical approaches experienced by the youth informants that contribute to the thickening of the ethnic boundaries of the informants. Firstly, the informants shared their opinions on the role of the education system in reinforcing ethnicized social structures. Secondly, the informants experienced a lack of educational resources and opportunities for critical discussion at their schools and universities.

The first category identifies the lack of inclusive representation of ethnic identities within the Malaysian education system. This has resulted in experiences of ethnocentrism and stereotyping. K2, who was also from a national type school and national school, could attest to the phenomenon of growing ethnocentrism, particularly among those from monoethnic education environments, regarding the factor of language. The observation by T2 highlights the limited education framework and pedagogical approach for a multiethnic society. She observed how official textbooks on ethnic identities are usually represented stereotypically. Below are the quotes from the youth informants in which other informants agreed with their opinions during the FGI,

> I don't agree to have those Vernacular School this very sensitive statement. But I think that when it comes to education, it has to be everyone sharing the same education system'. But because of the ethnocentrisms of the Chinese, we do have that kind of a feeling of 'I need to protect my mother tongue (K2 FGI 2).

> the Ibans do not always wear their traditional attire all the time, right? And the Indians do not always have dark skin tones all the time. There is a lot of labelling, stereotyping, I think the education system is not so effective to actually educate good ethnic relation. (T2, FGI 2)

The second category highlights the informants' opinions and education experiences on the lack of education resources and opportunities to discuss Malaysia's ethnic relations. Below are their opinions,

> Although we have festive celebrations at school and exchange traditional attires, in my opinion, significant activities are actually about us sitting down and talking about our differences and our similarities, having actual cross-cultural discussions. I don't think we have any of those. (W1 KII).

> In our Ethnic Relations class, it's just a mention like literally one sentence and there's no discussion about 13th May. It is also difficult to find film documentaries on this issue (D1 FGI 1).

Based on the opinions of the Malaysian youth informants, it can be observed that Malaysia adopts a content-driven pedagogical approach using textbooks such as "Ethnic Studies" at the tertiary education level and subjects on civic and citizenship studies at the secondary education level. The informants expressed their frustrations when they rarely had the opportunity to engage in an interethnic dialogue. These findings are also aligned with the literature on education for diverse societies which has pointed to the need for an intercultural education framework and a critical pedagogical approach (Banks, 2016; Kaur et al., 2017; Jeyaraj & Harland, 2019). A Study by Nur Atiqah & Anuar (2020) also highlighted that the differences between various ethnic identities in Malaysia were frequently viewed in silos. However, they argued that with regard to the dichotomy of ethnic majority and minority, they must be viewed in relational terms and not as mutually exclusive. The findings show that without these education framework and pedagogical approaches could take place, it could result in the thickening of ethnic boundaries of Malaysian youths. In other words, it is a form of an indirect-segregative pedagogical approach that limits Malaysian youths to engage in interethnic dialogue and meaningful cross-ethnic relations. This is because the pedagogical approaches they experienced limited their opportunities to meaningfully and deeply learn about one another.

4.3   Pedagogical approaches that thins ethnic boundaries

This section has identified one category of pedagogical approaches experienced by the youth informants that has contributed to the thinning of ethnic boundaries. The informants shared about the role of the co-curricular activities that has facilitated cross-ethnic relations and the blurring of ethnic boundaries. The informants opined that these activities enabled them to develop cross-ethnic relations. According to K2, he critically pointed to the social fact that, he did not get to formally learn about ethnic relations in class, but he benefitted from the co-curricular activities. For A1, he participated in a Broadcasting Club that enabled him to socialize more with other students from all kinds of backgrounds. Similarly to W1 and Y1, both were very active in their Drama club and Sports club to which they recalled fond memories of developing friendships beyond their ethnic identities. Below are selected quotes to represent the category,

> When I joined National Secondary School, I learned about the harmonious relations between the ethnic groups is not in the syllabus. It's my spare time, and my co-curriculum time (K2, FGI2).

> My circle of friends are all Malays. The broadcasting club helped me to really go out of my comfort zone and talk to everyone because I had to take their pictures for the school yearbook and videos too. From there I also made friends with non-Malays (A1, KII).

> The late Mr. Francis, he created this drama club. it was very mixed. We were very close, none of us saw colour. (W1, KII)

> I really enjoyed my school because of the netball sports club because you have the same common thing which is sports team and house spirit (Y1, KII).

The findings identified the pedagogical approaches that were able to facilitate the thinning of ethnic boundaries through the co-curricular activities. Based on the opinions above, it can be observed that an interactive celebratory pedagogical approaches from the activities in the co-curricular school clubs enabled more opportunities for students to form meaningful cross-ethnic relations and develop their soft skills such as communication skills (Nur & Mohamad 2020). The use of performing arts-based co-curriculum activities such as theatre and media allowed them to creatively engage with one another by blurring their ethnic boundaries. According to Mansor (2021) one of the strategies to thin and expand ethnic boundaries is to blur ethnic boundaries. The opportunity to blur ethnic boundaries and develop teamwork can be observed in theatre studies. Roselina (2020) found that children and youth theatre performers experienced enjoyment, were able to explore different perspectives and social realities. These social bonds of friendship and teamwork are the sharing of universal values, which is a clear social factor for the thinning of ethnic boundaries (Mansor, 2021).

4.4   Research Question 3

This section identifies two categories of pedagogical approaches experienced by the informants that contributed to the dissolution of ethnic boundaries. The first category describes the role of art and film appreciation in developing critical thinking skills and the second category identifies education subjects that developed the informants' critical consciousness. For the informants with a background in film studies, they emphasized the critical need for art appreciation to be included in the Malaysian education system so that Malaysian youths could develop critical thinking skills. Below are their opinions,

> Firstly, we need to expose the students to any art form at an early age because if they are older or more matured, it might be more difficult. One of the ways from my experience is to normalize watching and analysing films. As this will allow them to exercise the critical thinking part of their brain. Then the next step would be to ask the students to watch something that is out of

their alley and get them to analyze that so they will be comfortable with differences and open minded about it too and making it easy to appreciate and accept differences. (H2, FGI 2).

Another opinion is from A1 who focused on the role of art education such as film appreciation in addressing the 'multiracial problem' which should start from school. This opinion is also aligned with other informants where they agreed that normalizing film appreciation and the critical thinking skills that it can develop is beneficial for Malaysian students from different ethnic backgrounds. Below is his opinion,

I think if there's one thing that could change everything, that can solve this whole multiracial problem is education. Without education, you cannot learn to appreciate movies. Without the ability to appreciate the film, the film won't be any help. So what I think would help the film to be beneficial is to have a film appreciation in school. (A1, FGI 1).

The second category described some of university subjects that the informants experienced that enabled them to develop critical consciousness and engage in dialogue. For A1, who experienced both public and private universities he shared that many of his lecturers and peers at his private university were very open minded to discuss about sociopolitical and cultural issues. Below are his experiences,

> I had two subjects which we were able to discuss and debate such as journalism and sociology. These classes opened my eyes and allowed me to see how my classmate thinks of politics. My experiences at my private university are quite interesting because I got to be exposed to many types of art and entertainment which is heavier and more critical compared to when I was in a public university studying Mass Communications. The subjects that have changed my perception is like World Cinema which discusses about films in a thought-provoking way. I also got to explore things on my own but the lecturers are way more open and broadminded when it comes to films and art (A1, KII).

For V2, he experienced an interesting class activity for his Film production subject. His lecturer organized a film screening of the Malaysian horror film titled Roh (spirit), and held a dialogue with the filmmaker. V2 shared his and his classmate's critical discourse with the filmmaker. Below is V2's experience,

> I saw it in one way and when he explained it to me, the whole perspective changed when I understand the real context behind the meaning of the quote of the Quran. So that's the conversation that we have. like I said, between races and religions, whether you are non-film or film student, I think we should all watch films from different languages, and try to deeply understand from other person's identity and perspectives to really enjoy each other's culture. (V2, KII).

The findings identified the pedagogical approaches that were able to facilitate the dissolution of ethnic boundaries through the role of art appreciation. Based on the opinions above, it can be observed that the critical pedagogical approach by using the arts, such as film appreciation and subjects that addresses cultural and sociopolitical issues can develop critical thinking skills and critical consciousness. This finding is aligned with studies on the function of art education and pedagogical approaches that can facilitate critical thinking skills. According to Subramaniam et al. (2015) analysing works of visual art enhances one's perception and appreciation, deepens one's feelings for other human beings, and elevates one's level of humanity" (p.57). The interconnectedness of art education and critical pedagogy can be observed because art education provides the text and critical thinking skills while the social subjects provide the sociopolitical contexts. As emphasized by critical pedagogists, critical thinking is dissimilar to critical consciousness but they are interdependent. According to Giroux (2021), critical thinking is referred to as "the ability to step beyond common sense assumptions and to be able to evaluate them in terms of their genesis, development, and purpose" (p. 40), whereas critical consciousness can be defined as the development of critical awareness through dialogue (Freire, 1973). However, in the Malaysian context, there is implementation gap on using pedagogical approaches to

facilitate critical thinking skills such as the Socratic Method which provides the educator and student to engage in critical discourse through developing critical thinking questions on social issues (Siti Fairuz et al, 2022). Such pedagogical approach is deemed beneficial for Malaysian students to thin and dissolve their ethnic boundaries. The informants have highlighted their experiences with subjects such as Film production, World Cinema, Mass Media and communication and Sociology that allowed them the skills and the safe space to critically learn about their multiethnic society and sensitive subject matter such as politics and religion. They recalled opportunities to engage in critical thinking and interethnic dialogue with regards to different political ideologies, religious worldviews and social experiences as a human being and as a Malaysian.

5.   Conclusion

The findings of this study contribute to the field of Malaysia's secondary and tertiary education by highlighting the current pedagogical approaches that has the potential to shift ethnic boundaries and facilitate interethnic relations. By addressing the gap between current pedagogical practices and the missing pedagogical approaches, this study has contributed to the ongoing discourse on the development of pedagogical approaches that is based on a clear intercultural education framework for Malaysian youths. These gaps were also emphasized by Malaysia's education blueprint 2013-2025 and Malaysia's education blueprint for higher education 2015-2025. Both blueprints have stated the significance of providing opportunities for Malaysian youths to engage in meaningful cross ethnic relations, shared aspirations and learning experiences to forge unity and a national identity.

This study has contributed to the corpus of ethnic studies in Malaysia within the context of education by applying the concept of ethnic boundaries. When the informants experienced a segregative education approach, due to the lack of an intercultural education framework, it provided a polarizing function for the informants which reinforced the thickening of ethnic boundaries. However, when the informants experienced an interactive-celebratory education approach, from the co-curricular education system and performing arts-based activities, the informants were able to form meaningful cross-ethnic relations, breaking stereotypes and prejudice, which facilitated the thinning of ethnic boundaries. Lastly, when the informants experienced a critical pedagogical approach due to art appreciation and criticism, it was found that the creative and critical education approach functioned to develop critical thinking skills and critical consciousness which enabled the informants to look beyond the ethnic paradigm resulting in the dissolution of ethnic boundaries. These celebratory and critical pedagogical approaches which has utilized the performing arts could also be included in the Ministry of Education's Social Integration programs and guidelines for High Impact Education Practices (HIEP) for Malaysian tertiary education. Such pedagogical approaches provide an interactive and critical function to shift ethnic boundaries, bridge interethnic gaps, facilitate interethnic dialogue and develop critical consciousness among Malaysian youths that transcends ethnic boundaries.

6.   Co-Author Contribution

The authors affirmed that there is no conflict of interest in this article. Author1 carried out the field work, prepared the literature review, collected and analysed the data and overlook the writeup of the whole article. Author 2 and Author 3 provided critical feedback on the data analysis and the whole write up.

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