Article

# Ethnic Language Use and Ethnic Identity of University Students in Malaysia

## *Uso de língua étnica e identidade étnica de estudantes universitários na Malásia*

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**ABSTRACT:** The study examined the extent to which ethnic language use is influenced by strength of ethnic identity among university students in Malaysia. In the study, 100 university students from Malay, Chinese, Indian, and Indigenous ethnic backgrounds filled in a questionnaire on language use in six domains, and their ethnic identity was measured using Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM). English and Malay dominated in the mass media and education domains, and in intergroup and formal interactions, but ethnic languages were mainly used with family, friends and for religious practices. The results showed a moderate level of ethnic language use among the Malay (58.37%) and Chinese participants (59.21%), and a lower level among the Indigenous (49.55%) and Indian participants (42.11%). All four ethnic groups showed a positive ethnic identity. There is a significant positive relationship between the extent of ethnic language use and the strength of ethnic identity.

**KEYWORDS:** plural society; ethnic language; language use; ethnic identity; Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure

**RESUMO:** O presente estudo examina até que ponto o uso da língua étnica é influenciado pela força da identidade étnica entre estudantes universitários na Malásia. No estudo, 100 estudantes universitários de origens étnicas malásia, chinesa, indiana e indígena preencheram um questionário sobre o uso da língua em seis domínios, e sua identidade étnica foi medida usando a escala Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM). O inglês e o malaio dominaram os meios de comunicação de massa e os domínios da educação, e nas interações intergrupais e formais, mas as línguas étnicas foram usadas principalmente com a família, amigos e para práticas religiosas. Os resultados mostraram um nível moderado de uso da língua étnica entre os participantes malásios (58.37%) e chineses (59.21%), e um nível mais baixo entre os participantes indígenas (49.55%) e indianos (42.11%). Todos os quatro grupos étnicos detinham uma identidade étnica positiva. Existe uma significativa relação positiva entre a extensão do uso da língua étnica e a força da identidade étnica.

# 1 Introduction

In multi-ethnic societies, minority groups struggle with maintenance of their ethnic language because the domains of language use are progressively shrinking. Minority groups are seeing a declining number of speakers among the young generation such as the Telugu(an Indian sub-group) in Malaysia (David; Dealwis, 2006), the Greek in Australia (Tamis, 1990), and the Malay in Singapore (Cavallar; Serwe, 2010). This is because standard languages, usually also the official language, are expanding their domains of language use from formal domains (*e.g.*, employment, government) into informal domains (*e.g.*, family, friendship). In some countries, such as Nigeria, English is the official language, but in other countries, such as Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei, Malay is the official language. Not by coincidence, Malay is the largest ethnic group in these three countries. For example, in Malaysia, the Malay and indigenous groups constitute 70.1% of the population, followed by the Chinese (22.6%) and Indian (6.6%) (Statista, 2020). With an official language status, Malay becomes a privileged language while other languages are minoritised (Davis; Phyak, 2016). Malays can already speak the language, albeit dialectal, without having to learn it through formal instruction. The use of their language in meetings, governmental communication, and the medium of instruction accords the native Malay speakers and the Malay community more power. In contrast, languages of minority groups like Chinese, Indian, Iban and other indigenous groups have less political power. The tendency is for the speakers of these ethnic languages to shift towards the more powerful languages.

In this paper, we refer to ethnic languages as minority languages, to reflect the smaller number of speakers, and the groups as minority groups, in contrast to Malay community which is referred to as a majority group. The Malay language is referred to as a majority language in this paper. Going by the definition of minoritisation which encapsulates processes of language subordination and unequal power relationships between "minority" and "majority" languages (Amezaga *et al*., 2013), the ethnic languages spoken in Malaysia can be considered minoritised languages. There is a power differential between these languages and Malay. Furthermore, the speakers of the minority languages demonstrate a one-way bilingualism whereby they learn the dominant Malay language but the Malays hardly learn the minority languages (Davis; Phyak, 2016). In addition, the process of marginalisation of the minority languages is also evident because of the diminishing number of domains for the language to be used, to the extent that minority languages are often used in family and social interactions.

Minority groups find that they are helpless to fight against the encroachment of majority languages into domains previously occupied by ethnic languages. However, some groups like the small Bidayuh community in Malaysia feel that they can work at heightening the ethnic identity among the younger generation through language revitalisation efforts such as teaching of heritage languages in kindergartens (Kayad *et al*., 2020; 2021). The question is whether a strong ethnic identity translates to extensive use of the ethnic language or vice versa, and the findings would provide an indication of whether the effort and time invested are worth it. Ethnic identity has been conceptualised to include "a commitment and sense of belonging

to one's ethnic group, positive evaluation of the group, interest in and knowledge about the group, and involvement in activities and traditions of the group" (Phinney, 1996, p. 145). While use of the ethnic language may mark membership in the ethnic group or strengthen the sense of belonging to the group (Spivak, 2001), the use of the language is not inherent in definitions of ethnic identity. Researchers are divided on whether language use strengthens ethnic identity. Those in support of a reciprocal relationship between language use and ethnic identity include Felföldi (2004), Fishman (1972), Gudykunst and Schmidt (1987), and Spivak (2001). On the other hand, other researchers believe that ethnic identity can be strengthened by cultural practices and affirmation by ethnic group members independent of ethnic language use (Mah, 2005; Varghese, 2017; Wong; Xiao, 2010; Yip; Fuligni, 2002). The relationship between language use and ethnic identity varies with ethnic group (Granhemat; Abdullah, 2017). Thus far, the findings on this relationship for the Chinese have been inconsistent (*e.g.*, Chow, 2018; Gu, 2011) but this could be because the studies have been conducted on the Chinese living in different countries and the context may have influenced their notions of ethnic identity.

In the case of Malaysia, ethnic identity is a rather static identity and not fluid. Ethnic identity is a defining social identity that is "reinforced by government policies of identifying all individuals and situations in ethnic terms" (Nagata, 1974, p. 347). The ethnic background is put in the birth certificate, identity card, passport and a host of other official documents. This is the ethnic identity which Malaysians would use in all kinds of applications which require the information to be declared, ranging from bank loans to supermarket loyalty programmes. The Malaysian constitution defines a Malay as one who speaks Malay and is a Muslim. The authority-defined Malay identity appears to make the ethnic boundary less permeable for the Malay, compared to other ethnic groups for which there are no official definitions. However, the everyday reality is different because non-Malays who have adopted Islam as their religion and speak Malay are still not considered Malay by people around them. There seems to be a pervasive definition of ethnic identity by parentage, which is particularly strong among the Chinese and Bidayuh (Ting; Ooi, 2014). There is still inadequate understanding of whether a strong belief in inherited ethnic identity is associated with a belief in language as a marker of ethnic identity.

If there is a reciprocal relationship between ethnic language use and ethnic identity, then it provides an empirical basis for working towards incorporating the ethnic language in the education system. At present, only Chinese, Tamil, Iban and Kadazandusun are taught as optional subjects in public schools in Malaysia. In addition, the Chinese community uses political and financial means to maintain private Chinese-medium schools and 90% of Chinese children attend Chinese primary schools (Lee *et al.*, 2017; Ting; Lee, 2019; Wang, 2017). Other communities like the Bidayuh are less fortunate and suffer from lack of financial resources for long-term sustainability of privately-funded Bidayuh-language heritage playschools and kindergartens (Kayad *et al.*, 2020; 2021). However, if there is a reciprocal relationship between ethnic language use and ethnic identity, it gives the community a strong basis to engage parents, the community and non-governmental organisations in a concerted effort to advocate for the teaching of indigenous languages in school to ensure transmission of the ethnic language and the cultural knowledge embodied in it to the younger generation.

The study examined the relationship between ethnic language usage and ethnic identity among university students in Malaysia. The specific aspects studied were language usage in six selected domains, strength of ethnic identity, relationship between ethnic language usage and ethnic identity, and differences

between ethnic groups. This paper offers a perspective on the interplay of language and ethnic identities outside the western world.

# 2 Literature review

Language usage and ethnic identity have a reciprocal relationship in Gudykunst and Schmidt's (1987) view. The ethnic language is important for cultural distinctiveness and language maintenance. Language transmits culture and is important for the survival of a culture (Felföldi, 2004). However, "while maintenance of language is not sufficient in itself to keep a culture alive, the survival of a culture is virtually impossible without it" (Felföldi, 2004, p. 435). This kind of reasoning leads to the conclusion that the ethnic language is an important factor in establishing ethnic group identity although the feeling of cultural identity can come from cultural practices (Mah, 2005) or positive affirmation of their ethnic group members (Varghese, 2017).

Undoubtedly, language is the core of ethnic identity for some groups. For instance, an Arab is a person whose mother tongue is Arabic (Fishman, 1972). Similarly, in the Malaysian constitution, a Malay is defined as one who speaks Malay and is a Muslim. Given that language is the core of the Malay ethnic identity, it is not surprising for Granhemat and Abdullah (2017) to find that a majority of the Malay university students with moderate ethnic identity were more inclined to use their ethnic language, whereas no significant relationships were found for the Indian and Chinese students.

However, some studies have indicated that language usage and ethnic identity may not be linked. An example is the Chinese. There are mixed findings on whether ability to speak the ethnic language is an essential criterion for being a Chinese. Some Chinese diaspora consider themselves Chinese because of their ancestry (Clammer, 1982; Wong; Xiao, 2010). Other studies have found that the ethnic language marks ethnic identity for Chinese (Gu, 2011; He, 2006; Howie, 2002; Kang, 2004; Tannenbaum; Ting; Ooi, 2014; Voon; Pearson, 2011). Chow (2018) did not directly correlate heritage language use and ethnic identity of Chinese Canadian adolescents but his results showed a co-occurrence of these two variables. In Thailand, younger Thai of Chinese descent acknowledge their Chinese ancestry, view themselves as Thai, but few can speak Chinese well (Lee, 2014; Morita, 2004, 2005). Speaking Chinese is not the only marker of Chinese ethnicity because engaging in Chinese cultural practices can have the same symbolic value (Mah, 2005). Chinese high school students in New York City felt "more Chinese" on days when "they engaged in more ethnic behaviours such as speaking Chinese, eating Chinese food, and reading a Chinese newspaper" (Yip; Fuligni, 2002, p. 1563). Up till this point in time, the Chinese in Malaysia have been engaged in zealous maintenance of their cultural distinctiveness through the three pillars that uphold Chinese identity, that is, Chinese schools, Chinese mass media, and Chinese associations (Suryadinata, 1997).

The relationship between ethnic language use and ethnic identity among the Chinese has been extensively studied, although the reasons for the inconsistent findings have yet to be fully understood. In comparison to the Chinese, this relationship among the Malay, Indian and indigenous in Malaysia is little understood because of the lack of research.

# 3 Theoretical framework of study

The theoretical framework of the study was Phinney's (1992) model of ethnic identity development, and ethnic identity was measured using the Multiethnic Ethnic Group Measure (MEIM). MEIM measures three aspects of ingroup-oriented ethnic identity (affirmation/ belonging, ethnic behaviour, and ethnic identity achievement), and other-group orientation. These constructs are explained next.

Firstly, the affirmation/belonging component measures pride in belonging to one's ethnic group. Secondly, the ethnic behaviour component includes language behaviour, which Phinney (1993) describes as a form of ethnic behaviour that individuals practise, along with their attitudes towards their ethnic group. Ethnic language usage was excluded from MEIM because it has different salience for various groups, and Phinney's (1992) intention was to develop a general measure that is applicable across ethnic groups. However, Phinney (1992) was open to MEIM being supplemented with items directed at specific ethnic groups such as those that focus on language usage or practice of specific traditions, if the purpose is to study the unique aspects of ethnic identity. An example is Ting and Rose's (2014) adaptation of MEIM (Phinney, 1992), where they added four items on language behaviour because of the importance of this ethnic marker in Malaysia (see Appendix 1).

Thirdly, the ethnic identity achievement component measures exploration of ethnic identity and commitment to an ethnic identity. Individuals explore their ethnic identity by thinking about and participating in activities intended to help define the meaning of their ethnic identity, and this leads to individuals committing to a particular meaning for their ethnic identity (Scottham *et al.*, 2010). Children learn the label for their own ethnic group, begin to understand the significance of their ethnic group membership during adolescence, and the process may continue through youth and adulthood. Individuals who have not explored and resolved issues regarding their ethnicity may have adjustment problems (Phinney; Alipuria, 1990), but those with an achieved ethnic identity are likely to have positive self-esteem, and more positive in- and intergroup attitudes (Phinney *et al.,* 2007). However, Phinney (1990) makes the point that in the ethnic identity achievement stage, individuals may be clear and confident about their ethnicity without wanting to maintain their ethnic languages or customs.

Lastly, the other-group orientation component focuses on positive ethnic attitudes towards other ethnic groups because negative ethnic attitudes (*e.g.*, preferring another group over one's own) have been found not to work due to an intense rejection of items that suggest rejection of their identity (Phinney *et al.*, 2007). In multi-ethnic societies, other-group orientation has important implications on ethnic relations and integration. This is because ethnic groups often relate using the collective identities of "us" versus "them" and live with the perceived incompatibilities between ethnic groups (Holst, 2012).

# 4 Method of study

The study was conducted in a public university in Sarawak, an East Malaysian state located on Borneo Kalimantan Island. The data were from 100 students aged 21 to 25, who came from all over Malaysia. The focus was on university students because the tertiary education environment causes the youth to explore

and understand their ethnic and cultural background to develop a coherent sense of self (Phinney; Chavira, 1992). It is important to study one age group because changes in ethnic identity are related to age (Phinney, 1992; Phinney; Chavira, 1992; Phinney *et al.*, 1997). Table 1 shows that there were 64 females and 36 males (mean age=23.2, standard deviation=1.4). The disproportionate percentage of female and male students was unavoidable because of the generally higher number of female students in Malaysian universities (see Holst, 2012 who also had a similar gender ratio in his survey).

The participants were Malay (44%), Chinese (16%), Indian (11%) and from indigenous groups (29%), namely, Iban, Bidayuh, Kadazandusun, Melanau and Sungai. The Indian and Chinese have migrant backgrounds dating back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries respectively. Most of the participants were from middle to lower socio-economic status backgrounds, estimated based on the parents' monthly income. Participants from low socio-economic backgrounds had parents earning less than RM2000 per month. At the time of the study, individuals earning less than RM2300 per month were not taxed, indicating that this is the poverty line. Many of the participants' fathers were farmers and retirees, while others were still in active service as police officers, teachers, labourers and hawkers. Half of the participants' mothers were housewives, while the rest were farmers and teachers.

Table 1 – Demographic characteristics of participants (N=100)

| Demographic characteristic | | Number |
|---|---|---|
| Gender | Female | 64 |
| | Male | 36 |
| Ethnic group | Malay | 44 |
| | Chinese | 16 |
| | Indian | 11 |
| | Iban | 16 |
| | Bidayuh | 8 |
| | Kadazandusun | 3 |
| | Melanau | 1 |
| | Sungai | 1 |
| Parents' monthly income | Less than RM2000 | 51 |
| | RM2000-RM3999 | 35 |
| | RM4000-RM5999 | 11 |
| | RM6000-RM7999 | 1 |
| | More than RM8000 | 2 |

Source: Own elaboration.

The questionnaire, prepared in Malay, consisted of items on demographic background, language use, and ethnic identity. Following MEIM (Phinney, 1992), participants were asked to write down their ethnic group and also those of their parents. Data on self-identification as "a member of an ethnic group is a necessary precondition for ethnic identity and should be explicitly assessed in order to avoid confounding ethnic identity with ethnicity" (Phinney, 1992, p. 158).

There were 19 items on main language used in six domains: family (8 items), friendship (2 items), transaction (1 item), mass media (6 items), education (2 items), and religion (1 item). These domains were selected because students often engage in these interactions on a daily basis. Three other domains (legal, government and employment) that were identified by Platt and Weber (1980) were excluded as students usually do not engage in interactions in these domains.

The ethnic identity section comprised 24 four-point Likert type items (1, "strongly disagree", 2 "disagree", 3, "agree", and 4, "strongly agree"). The ethnic identity measure was adapted from Ting and Rose (2014) who added four questions on language behaviour to Phinney's (1992) 20-item questionnaire (see Appendix 1). This is because language is a marker of ethnic identity for many ethnic groups in this setting (Ting; Ooi, 2014; Ting; Rose, 2014). Ting and Rose's (2014) adapted questionnaire yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.765, showing the internal consistency of the ethnic identity items.

To collect data, the second researcher invited university students to participate in the study. She explained the purpose of the study on language use and ethnic identity and informed them about voluntary participation and confidentiality of responses. Those who agreed to participate in the study signed a consent form before they filled in the questionnaire. The questionnaires were collected upon completion.

For the data analysis, the questionnaire data were divided into the language use data and the ethnic identity data. To obtain group patterns in language use, the percentage in which a particular language was used was computed for 19 situations, and done separately for the four ethnic groups. Then the data were analysed to show the extensiveness of ethnic language use for each participant by counting the number of times an ethnic language was used by each participant. The maximum number of times is 19 because there were 19 situations of language use. For a participant who used Malay in three situations and Malay dialects in nine situations, the score was nine.

The formula used to calculate the extensiveness of ethnic language use (in percentage) is as follows:

*Number of times a particular language is used x 100% = Extensiveness of ethnic language use*
Total number of situations (which is 19)

It is important to use percentage for ease of comparability of findings across studies because the number of language use situations differs from study to study. As for ethnic identity, the scores for the negatively worded items were reverse coded so that a higher score means agreement (see Appendix 1). For example, "Sometimes I feel it is better of different ethnic groups do not mix" (other-group orientation). To compute the strength of ethnic identity for each participant, their scores for the 24 items were averaged. Scores above 2.5 (the mid-point) showed achievement of ethnic identity, while scores below 2.5 showed identity diffusion. For purposes of group comparison, means were computed for each ethnic group. To establish if there was a relationship between extensiveness of ethnic language use and ethnic identity, a Pearson correlation test was run.

# 5 Results

## 5.1 Self-identification of ethnic group membership

Table 2 shows that 96% of the participants self-identified their ethnic group following their father's ethnic group but 4% from mixed marriages identified their ethnic group differently from their father's. In Malaysia, the ethnic group put on official documents like the birth certificate follows that of the father but they may use a different ethnic label informally.

These results confirm Phinney's (1992, p. 159) contention that the ethnic label that an individual uses for oneself must be distinguished from objective ethnic group membership because the ethnic label has implications on "their sense of belonging to their group, attitudes towards the group, their ethnic behaviours, and their understanding of the meaning of their ethnicity." In an ethnically diverse society where mixed marriages are frequent, it is important to study cases where the official record of ethnic group and self-identification differ.

Table 2 – Participants' identification of ethnic group membership (N=100)

| Ethnic group | Participant's ethnic group | Father's ethnic group | Mother's ethnic group |
|---|---|---|---|
| Malay | 44 | 44 | 39 |
| Chinese | 16 | 16 | 16 |
| Indian | 11 | 11 | 11 |
| Iban | 16 | 15 | 16 |
| Bidayuh | 8 | 7 | 7 |
| Kadazandusun | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Melanau | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Sungai | 1 | 1 (Banjar) | 1 |

Source: Own elaboration.

## 5.2 Extensiveness of ethnic language use

In this section, the participants' ethnic language use is reported by ethnic group. Table 3 shows that for the Malay participants, the most frequently used language is Malay (381 instances), followed by Malay dialects (293 instances) and English (142 instances).

Table 3 – Percentages showing Malay participants' language usage (n=44)

| Domain: Situation | Languages used (%) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | English | Standard Malay | Malay dialect | Chinese dialect |
| Family Father | 4.54% | 31.82% | 63.64% | 0 |
| • Mother | 2.27% | 29.54% | 68.18% | 0 |
| • Grandparents (paternal) | 0 | 29.54% | 65.91% | 0 |
| • Grandparents (maternal) | 0 | 27.27% | 68.12% | 0 |
| • Aunt and uncles (paternal) | 0 | 34.09% | 65.91% | 0 |
| • Aunt and uncles (maternal) | 0 | 29.54% | 68.12% | 0 |
| • Cousins (paternal) | 2.27% | 31.82% | 65.91% | 0 |
| • Cousins (maternal) | 2.27% | 29.54% | 65.91% | 0 |
| Religion | 0 | 68.12% | 9.09% | 0 |
| • Mass media • Radio | 45.45% | 45.45% | 6.82% | 0 |
| • Television | 68.18% | 31.82% | 0 | 0 |
| • Movies | 72.72% | 27.27% | 0 | 0 |
| • Newspaper | 43.18% | 52.27% | 0 | 4.54% |
| • Social media | 34.09% | 54.54% | 11.36% | 0 |
| Transactions • Shopping | 4.54% | 59.09% | 36.36% | |
| Education Lecturers | 22.72% | 75% | 2.27% | 0 |
| Support staff | 4.54% | 81.81% | 11.36% | 0 |
| Friendship Same ethnic group | 0 | 50% | 50% | 0 |
| Different ethnic group | 15.91% | 77.327% | 6.82% | 0 |
| *Total number of instances (N)* | *142* | *381* | *293* | *4.54* |
| Mean number of situations per participant for the use of ethnic languages | | 8.66 SD=4.55 | 6.66 SD=4.43 | |
| • Mean number of situations per participant for the use of either Malay or Malay dialects | | | 11.09 SD=2.75 | |
| Percentage of language use situations dominated by Malay or Malay dialects | | | 58.37% | |

Source: Own elaboration.

In the family and transaction domains, more participants spoke Malay dialects than standard Malay. Standard Malay was clearly the language for the practice of Islam and educational purposes. About half of the participants used standard Malay in the mass media, particularly for listening to radio programmes, reading newspapers and communicating on social media, but they preferred English television programmes and movies. The Malay participants used both standard Malay and Malay dialects for communicating with Malay friends but both Standard Malay and English with friends from other ethnic groups and for formal communication.

Table 3 shows that Standard Malay or Malay dialect was used in 11 out of 19 situations by Malay participants. Standard Malay is more frequently used (M=8.66) than Malay dialects (M=6.66). This is because Malay dialects are usually spoken by the Malay community as other ethnic groups may not know how to speak the dialects. Ethnic language use was moderately strong (58.37%) among Malay participants but the level is lower than expected and it is interesting that they preferred English for entertainment programmes and communication with non-Malay friends and lecturers.

Table 4 – Percentages showing Chinese participants' language usage (n=16)

| Domain: Situation | Languages used (%) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | English | Standard Malay | Malay dialect | Mandarin | Chinese dialect |
| Family Father | 0 | 0 | 0 | 81.25% | 18.75% |
| Mother | 0 | 0 | 0 | 68.75% | 31.25% |
| Grandparents (paternal) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 56.25% | 43.75% |
| Grandparents (maternal) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 56.25% | 43.75% |
| Aunt and uncles (paternal) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 81.25% | 18.75% |
| Aunt and uncles (maternal) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 81.25% | 18.75% |
| Cousins (paternal) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 81.25% | 18.75% |
| Cousins (maternal) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 81.25% | 18.75% |
| Religion | 0 | 0 | 0 | 62.5% | 31.25% |
| Mass media - Radio | 25% | 0 | 0 | 68.75% | 6.25% |
| Television | 12.5% | 75% | 0 | 12.5% | 0 |
| Movies | 50% | 50% | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Newspaper | 31.25% | 68.75% | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Social media | 12.5% | 0 | 0 | 81.25% | 6.25% |
| Transactions - shopping | 31.25% | 6.25% | 0 | 43.75% | 18.75% |
| Education Lecturers | 50% | 6.25% | 25% | 18.75% | 0 |
| Support staff | 6.25% | 68.75% | 25% | 0 | 0 |
| Friendship Same ethnic group | 0 | 0 | 0 | 81.25% | 18.75% |
| Different ethnic group | 25% | 50% | 25% | 0 | 0 |
| *Total number of instances (N)* | *39* | *52* | *12* | *153* | *47* |
| Mean number of situations per participant for the use of ethnic language | | | | M=5.21 SD=3.53 | M=2.94 SD=3.97 |
| Mean number of situations per participant for the use of either Mandarin or Chinese dialects | | | | | M=11.25 SD=1.34 |
| Percentage of language use situations dominated by Mandarin or Chinese dialects | | | | | 59.21% |

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 4 shows the Chinese participants spoke Mandarin (153 instances) more than any other languages. Mandarin is the standard Chinese language, and Chinese dialects include Cantonese, Foochow, Hakka, Hokkien, and Teochew. In the family and intra-ethnic friendship domains, Mandarin dominated. Only 43.75% still used Chinese dialects with family, mostly with grandparents. Mandarin was the main language for religious practices, and for accessing the mass media although English was a strong competitor in the mass media domain. In the transaction domain, the participants used mainly Mandarin, Chinese dialects and English. Interestingly, more Chinese participants were opting for Malay newspapers, movies, and television programmes compared to English. This is an indication of the success of the national language policy because the mass media is a tool for the government to communicate and influence the citizens. In the education domain, English was used with lecturers but Standard Malay was used with support staff and friends from other ethnic groups. In this respect, the Malaysian government succeeded in making Standard Malay as the common language for interethnic communication. Most Chinese cannot speak Malay dialects, which explains the minimal use of Malay dialects in the six domains.

The ethnic language use of the Chinese is moderately strong (59.21%). Table 4 shows that Chinese participants used Mandarin or Chinese dialects in about 11 situations. Mandarin was used more extensively (M=5.21) than Chinese dialects (M=2.94). The results show that dialects are less useful in mass media, education, and interethnic friendships. The shift away from Chinese dialects towards Mandarin confirms previous findings (Low *et al.*, 2010; Ong, 2020; Ting; Sussex, 2002; TING; Ting; Mahadhir, 2009) and may augur well for Chinese unity since Chinese dialects is seen by some as divisive (Sim, 2012). The implication of the moderately strong use of Mandarin is that the Chinese university students may be interacting largely within the Chinese community. This finding concurs with other studies which found that the Chinese university students have comparatively fewer friends outside their ethnic group, compared to students from other ethnic groups (Holst, 2012; Tamring *et al.*, 2020; Ting, 2012).

Table 5 – Percentages showing Indian participants' language usage (n=11)

| Domain: Situation | Languages used (%) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | English | Standard Malay | Mandarin | Tamil |
| Family Father | 18.18% | 0 | 0 | 81.82% |
| Mother | 18.18% | 0 | 0 | 81.82% |
| Grandparents (paternal) | 18.18% | 0 | 0 | 81.82% |
| Grandparents (maternal) | 18.18% | 0 | 0 | 81.82% |
| Aunt and uncles (paternal) | 18.18% | 0 | 0 | 81.82% |
| Aunt and uncles (maternal) | 18.18% | 0 | 0 | 81.82% |
| Cousins (paternal) | 18.18% | 0 | 0 | 81.82% |
| Cousins (maternal) | 18.18% | 0 | 0 | 81.82% |
| Religion | 0 | 0 | 0 | 11% |
| Mass media - Radio | 81.82% | 0 | 0 | 18.18% |
| Television | 81.82% | 0 | 18.18% | 0 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Movies | 81.82% | 0 | 18.18% | 0 |
| Newspaper | 100% | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Social media | 100% | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Transactions - shopping | 0 | 100% | 0 | 0 |
| Education Lecturers | 100% | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Support staff | 72.73% | 27.27% | 0 | 0 |
| Friendship Same ethnic group | 72.73% | 0 | 0 | 27.27% |
| Different ethnic group | 72.73% | 27.27% | 0 | 0 |
| *Total number of instances (N)* | *100* | *17* | *4* | *88* |
| Mean number of situations per participant for Tamil | | | | M=8 SD=3.55 |
| Percentage of language use situations dominated by Tamil | | | | 42.11% |

Source: Own elaboration.

For the Indian participants, Table 5 shows that English has taken over various domains of language use with the exception of religion and transactions, which were dominated by Tamil and Malay dialects respectively. The Tamil language is often associated with the Hindu religion (Kesavapany *et al.*, 2003). The Indian participants are similar to Malay and Chinese participants in their tendency to speak English in the mass media domain, with lecturers and friends from different ethnic groups. However, the Indian participants even spoke English with support staff, and friends from the same ethnic group. Hence, it is not surprising that Tamil was used in only eight out of 19 situations examined (M=8) and their ethnic language use was relatively weak at 42.11%, suggesting the relevance of English for the students had superseded that of their ethnic language.

Table 6 – Percentages showing Indigenous participants' language usage (n=30)

| Domain: Situation | Languages used (%) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | English | Standard Malay | Malay dialect | Mandarin | Chinese dialect | Indigenous languages |
| Family Father | 3.33 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 83.33 |
| Mother | 3.33 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 83.33 |
| Grandparents (paternal) | 3.33 | 3.33 | 6.67 | 0 | 0 | 83.33 |
| Grandparents (maternal) | 3.33 | 3.33 | 3.33 | 0 | 0 | 86.67 |
| Aunt and uncles (paternal) | 3.33 | 3.33 | 6.67 | 0 | 0 | 83.33 |
| Aunt and uncles (maternal) | 3.33 | 3.33 | 3.33 | 0 | 0 | 86.67 |
| Cousins (paternal) | 3.33 | 3.33 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 80 |
| Cousins (maternal) | 0 | 3.33 | 6.67 | 3.33 | 0 | 83.33 |
| Religion | 10 | 16.67 | 6.67 | 0 | 0 | 53.33 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mass media - Radio | 33.33 | 10 | 13.33 | 0 | 0 | 40 |
| Television | 43.33 | 53.33 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Movies | 73.33 | 23.33 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Newspaper | 20 | 66.67 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 |
| Social media | 20 | 6.67 | 30 | 0 | 0 | 40 |
| Transactions – shopping | 3.33 | 30 | 50 | 0 | 0 | 13.33 |
| Education Lecturers | 3.33 | 53.33 | 26.67 | 0 | 0 | 13.33 |
| Support staff | 0 | 46.67 | 50 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Friendship Same ethnic group | 0 | 10 | 3.33 | 0 | 0 | 83.33 |
| Different ethnic group | 3.33 | 76.67 | 13.33 | 0 | 0 | 3.33 |
| Total number of instances (N) | 70 | 124 | 75 | 3.33 | 10 | 278 |
| Mean number of situations per participant for indigenous languages | | | | | | M=9.41 SD=3.84 |
| Percentage of language use situations dominated by indigenous languages | | | | | | 49.55% |

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 6 shows that the indigenous participants spoke their ethnic language (278 instances) the most, followed by Standard Malay (124 instances). However, Malay dialects and English were less frequently used (75 and 70 instances respectively). The family domain was still the bastion of ethnic language use for most indigenous participants. Their ethnic language was still relevant in the religious domain, and for interactions with friends from the same ethnic group. In the education and mass media domains, Standard Malay, English and Malay dialects were more applicable. In the transaction domain, they spoke mainly Sarawak Malay Dialect and Standard Malay – confirming that Malay has become the language of the transaction domain in Sarawak (Lau; Ting, 2014; Soong; Ting, 2014; Ting, 2010) and in other parts of Malaysia (Burhanudeen, 2006). The ethnic language use among the indigenous participants was moderate (49.55%) and they could use their ethnic language in only nine situations (M=9.41). With the exception of the Iban, other indigenous languages are hardly spoken outside of their speech community because their number is too small, and other ethnic groups prefer to use widely spoken languages for convenience.

## 5.3 Strength of ethnic identity

Table 7 shows all four ethnic groups have positive ethnic identity. Among the ingroup-oriented ethnic identity components, the highest score was for affirmation/belonging (M=3.52) and the lowest was for ethnic behaviour (M=3.05). The Indian participants had the highest overall ethnic identity score (M=3.48) while the Malay had the lowest score (M=3.13). Although the context is entirely different in the United States,

interestingly, the majority group also had lower scores than the minority groups: Whites scored lower than ethnic minorities on ethnic identity (Phinney, 1992). Identity formation for the Whites is not about developing a sense of belonging to their group, but developing an awareness of racism and the privilege associated with being White (Phinney, 1996, p. 144). Similarly, in Malaysia there are special privileges accorded to the Malays in recognition of *ketuanan Melayu* (Malay privilege) status but whether the Malays also have similar experiences of developing an awareness of racial discrimination and special privileges need to be further researched. However, the differences in ethnic identity scores were too small to be of significance. The Chi-square test results showed that there were no significant differences between the four ethnic groups and the mean scores of the ethnic identity components, $X^2$ (9, N=100) = 0.07, p=.99.

Table 7 – Mean score showing strength of participants' ethnic identity (N=100)[1]

| Ethnic identity components | Indian (n=11) | Chinese (n=16) | Indigenous (n=30) | Malay (n=44) | Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Affirmation/belonging* | 3.60 | 3.61 | 3.52 | 3.34 | 3.52 |
| Other-group orientation | 3.53 | 3.23 | 3.39 | 3.30 | 3.36 |
| Achievement of ethnic identity* | 3.29 | 3.02 | 2.92 | 3.07 | 3.07 |
| Ethnic behaviour* | 3.52 | 3.10 | 2.77 | 2.80 | 3.05 |
| Mean | 3.48 | 3.24 | 3.15 | 3.13 | |

Source: Own elaboration.

First, the results on the three components of ingroup-oriented ethnic identity are described. The affirmation/belonging results (M=3.52) showed that the participants took pride in their ethnic identity. The affirmation/belonging mean score is higher than those for achievement of ethnic identity (M=3.07) and ethnic behaviour (M=3.05). The participants had spent time trying to find out about their culture and history, and thinking about how their life is affected by being a member of their ethnic group. They were rather clear about the role of their ethnicity in their life, and were somewhat committed to their ethnic identity. The participants from the four ethnic groups exhibited ethnic behaviours characteristic of their ethnic group to some extent: speaking their ethnic language, engaging in cultural practices, and joining associations that included mostly members of their ethnic group.

Next, the other-group orientation was positive for all four ethnic groups (M=3.36), indicating that they felt comfortable in intergroup relationships. A majority of them liked interacting with people from other ethnic groups, and believed that it was good for different ethnic groups to mix together. For all four ethnic groups, the other-group orientation mean scores were lower than the affirmation/belonging mean scores, showing the participants' more favourable attitudes towards their own ethnic group than to other ethnic groups. However, the other-group orientation was still positive showing acceptance of intergroup relations as a part of life.

Pearson correlation test results show that there were no significant relationships between ingroup oriented ethnic identity and other-group orientation for the Malay, Chinese, and Indigenous participants

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[1]   Range of mean: 1-4; mid-point: 2.5; *In-group oriented ethnic identity components

at 95% confidence level. However, there was a significant strong negative relationship between ingroup oriented ethnic identity and other-group orientation for the Indian participants (r=-1.0, p<.05). Indian participants with a strong Indian ethnicity were likely to have feel negative about other ethnic groups. In other words, Indians with a strong ethnic identity may be less tolerant of other ethnic groups, but the results need to be verified in further studies because they were derived from a small sample size.

## 5.4 Relationship between ethnic language use and ethnic identity

Table 8 – Participants' ethnic language use and ethnic identity (N=100)

|  | Malay (n=44) | Chinese (n=16) | Indigenous (n=30) | Indian (n=11) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Extensiveness of ethnic language use | 58.37% | 59.21% | 49.55% | 42.11% |
| Strength of ethnic identity | 3.13 | 3.24 | 3.15 | 3.48 |
| Correlation between ethnic language use and strength of ethnic identity | 0.877 | 0.876 | 0.910 | 0.855 |

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 8 shows the participants' ethnic language use and ethnic identity. The Pearson correlation test showed that there was a significant strong relationship between extensiveness of ethnic language use and strength of ethnic identity (r=.885, p < .05) for the whole group of participants. When the Pearson correlation tests were calculated separately for the four ethnic groups, the results also showed strong positive relationships between ethnic language usage and ethnic identity (Table 8). These results suggest that greater use of the ethnic language may strengthen the ethnic identity, or individuals with a strong ethnic identity are more likely to speak their ethnic language frequently. In short, there is a reciprocal relationship between ethnic language use and ethnic identity.

## 6 Discussion

The study produced three noteworthy findings that will be discussed. Firstly, the study showed that greater use of the ethnic language is associated with a stronger ethnic identity for the Malaysian university students. This finding supports the view that there is a reciprocal relationship between language use and ethnic identity (Felföldi, 2004; Fishman, 1972; Gudykunst; Schmidt, 1987; Spivak, 2001). However, the finding contradicts two studies conducted in Malaysia. Granhemat and Abdullah (2017) also studied university students but found a significant relationship between ethnic language use and ethnic identity only for Malay students, but not for Indian and Chinese students. Our findings possibly carry more weight because

we used a 24-item MEIM compared to the 12 items in Granhemat and Abdullah's (2017) study. In addition, our language use data were based on six domains compared to only the family domain in their study. Next, the finding on non-significance of the relationship between ethnic language use and ethnic identity obtained by Ting and Rose (2014) needs to be discussed. We employed the same instrument as Ting and Rose (2014), which is an expanded version of MEIM with four additional items on ethnic language behaviour specific to the Malaysian context (Appendix 1). The sample in Ting and Rose's (2014) study was the indigenous teenagers living in Sarawak. There is also a substantial percentage of Sarawak indigenous students in the present study (26%; 29% if the Sabah indigenous students are included). A comparison of the participant background in the two studies revealed that Ting and Rose (2014) probably found a non-significant relationship because of the homogeneity of the participants. The Sarawak indigenous secondary school students were living among their own people, and frequently speaking their ethnic language. In comparison, in the present study, the university students were living away from their homes, usually in university campuses or rented accommodation in student residential areas. The research site for the present study was a university in the capital city of Sarawak, with students from various ethnic backgrounds coming from all over Malaysia. As the indigenous university students were living among other ethnic groups, this made it necessary for them to think about living amicably with other ethnic groups – a situation that is different in Ting and Rose's (2014) study. Further, the results of these two studies need to be seen in the context of ethnic identity development, which underpins Phinney's (1992) MEIM. As the indigenous individuals transition from secondary school (Ting; Rose, 2014) to university (the present study), their ethnic language use and strength of ethnic identification became more varied. Those with stronger ethnic identities became more likely to speak their ethnic language and vice versa.

Secondly, the study showed that positive ingroup attitudes can co-exist with a positive intergroup orientation. In multi-ethnic societies, ethnic identity formation is not only about developing a sense of belonging to one's own ethnic group but also having the awareness that different ethnic groups co-exist. Other Malaysian studies have also found positive attitudes towards their own ethnic group co-occurring with marginally positive attitudes towards other ethnic groups (Awang *et al*., 2019; Jawan *et al.,* 2020; Mustapha *et al*., 2009; Nordin *et al*., 2018; Ting; Rose, 2014). These findings suggest that cultural distinctiveness may not be a barrier to integration because Malaysians live with the reality of multi-ethnic societies where different cultural groups co-exist and work together towards societal cohesiveness. For decades since the independence of Malaysia from British colonial rule, Malaysia has sought to achieve integration of ethnic groups. Some scholars are of the view that assimilation into the dominant Malay group is the key to integration (*e.g*., Ibrahim, 2002; Nordin *et al*., 2018; Rahim, 2018) but Alatas (1999) asserts that compassion for and understanding of the culture of other groups will reduce ethnic conflict and pave the way for integration. Undoubtedly, ethno-grouping still exists in social interactions of Malaysian students (Gregory *et al.* 2020; Holst, 2012; Tamring; Ting, 2012). However, it is not realistic to expect minority groups to assimilate fully into the culture of the dominant ethnic group – even though 65 years have lapsed since the independence of Malaysia. Chinese diaspora living in Western settings for an even longer period have maintained their ethnic culture (*e.g*., Mah, 2005; Varghese, 2017; Yip; Fuligni, 2002). The findings on the openness of Malaysian students to other ethnic groups lends credence to the view that ingroup attitudes and intergroup attitudes do not exist in a subtractive relationship, in that the increase of one co-occurs with a decrease in the other. In a multi-ethnic setting, ingroup attitudes and intergroup attitudes exist in an additive relationship.

Finally, our findings on ethnic language use and ethnic identity support the notion of "unity in diversity", espoused by other Malaysian researchers studying ethnic relations (Ting; Ling, 2017; Nordin *et al.*, 2018). Ting and Ling (2017) found that the patriotism messages in newspaper articles on the national day celebration highlighted "unity in diversity". In Nordin *et al.*'s (2018, p. 22) study, the Chinese secondary school students were in favour of the "multiple identities approach" which sought to "cultivate the sense of political unity among diverse ethnic groups, while at the same time upholding and maintaining the social structures and cultural norms that make the groups disparate"; but the Malay students were in favour of the assimilation approach. The Chinese, being a minority group, is comfortable with the "multiple identities approach" because it does not require them to abandon their own culture to adopt the culture of the majority group. For the "multiple identities approach" to lead to "unity in diversity", cultural distinctiveness needs to be downplayed. Pande (2017) explains this strategy as strategic essentialism, whereby differences are temporarily downplayed and unity is assumed for the sake of achieving political goals. Pande (2017) stated that strategic essentialism is the basis for multiculturalism. In Malaysia, minimising the display of ethnic differences may take the form of not speaking ethnic languages, not wearing the traditional dress, and not congregating with members of one's ethnic group in the presence of other ethnic groups. Strategic essentialism is a conscious decision to downplay cultural distinctiveness to appear more similar to other ethnic groups, thereby giving an appearance of other-group tolerance. It is debatable whether the tolerance is genuine but it requires a suppression of cultural supremacy or the belief that one's own culture is superior. The Chinese believe their cultural values are more superior than other groups because of their 5000-year old civilisation, and are adamant about preserving their cultural values and practices (Hussin, 2012). The Chinese is the minority group that needs to downplay their cultural distinctiveness more than other groups because the present study shows that they are using their ethnic language more than other ethnic groups and other studies have identified the Chinese as having stronger ethno-grouping.

Since it takes two hands to clap, strategic essentialism only works if the majority group plays along and does not exercise their "right" to expect minority groups to assimilate into their culture. The Malay may prefer the minority groups to assimilate (Nordin *et al.*, 2018). However, if we view strategic essentialism as situational, which is often the case, then it is already happening, particularly among individuals who are often in contact with other ethnic groups in their family, social and work circles. Interestingly, Ismail Sabri Yaakob, the ninth prime minister of Malaysia, stated that "unity in diversity is the true strength of the Malaysian Family" in his Facebook post (Malay Mail, 2021). This is an about-turn on racial harmony compared to earlier prime ministers who advocated integration via assimilation.

The question is whether strategic essentialism is possible on a long-term basis. We view language shift as a phenomenon which downplays cultural distinctiveness, but it does not arise from the conscious decision of individuals to cultivate political unity among diverse ethnic groups. Language shift and the resulting marginalisation of ethnic languages happen because of parents' concern with children's academic achievement, access provided by education in the global languages, and the lack of opportunity to speak ethnic languages outside of home and friendship domains (Ong, 2022). Language shift may result in possible detachment from cultural knowledge embodied in ethnic languages. As the young generation shifts towards powerful standard languages (*e.g.*, Cavallar; Serwe, 2010; David; Dealwis, 2006; Lee, 2014; Morita, 2004, 2005; Tamis, 1990), the importance of ethnic languages in marking cultural distinctiveness wanes.

As such, the role of ethnic language as a marker of group identity recedes in prominence. Among the Chinese diaspora in the United States, some Americans of Chinese descent can no longer speak Chinese, but they feel more Chinese when they eat Chinese food or partake in Chinese cultural celebrations, such as the lunar new year (Yip; Fuligni, 2002). In the absence of ethnic language, other cultural markers such as the name (indicative of parentage), food and material culture (*e.g.*, ornaments, art, buildings, clothing) may grow in importance. Food is already becoming more similar across ethnic groups, and many of the traditions and customs are losing traction among the younger generation. Some of the cultural differences in material culture of ethnic groups are accentuated for tourism purposes but may not be practised by individual members of the ethnic communities, for example, traditional costumes and architectural designs. With tangible dimensions of culture becoming less distinctive among ethnic groups and language shift happening, individuals do not have to consciously play down their cultural distinctiveness for smoothening ethnic relations in a multi-ethnic setting.

# 7 Conclusion

The study showed positive ingroup and intergroup attitudes among Malaysian university students. The Malay, Chinese, Indian, and indigenous students have a moderately strong ethnic identity, and there are no significant differences across ethnic groups. Ethnic language use is weak among the Indian and indigenous, and is moderately strong among the Malay and Chinese university students. There is a strong and positive relationship between the extensiveness of ethnic language use and strength of ethnic identity for the university students.

Since greater use of the ethnic language is associated with a stronger ethnic identity, it may be beneficial for indigenous ethnic communities to work towards incorporating the ethnic language in the education system. The Chinese and Indian already have Chinese and Tamil schools, and their ethnic languages are also already taught as subjects in public schools. On the other hand, the only indigenous languages taught in school are Iban and Kadazandusun, and these are the biggest indigenous groups in Sarawak and Sabah respectively. It is not easy for small indigenous groups to advocate for the inclusion of their languages as school subjects because there may not be enough students signing up for the classes. There are also logistics problems of the selection of school to offer the subject, and the availability of curriculum materials when the languages have not been standardised (Kayad *et al.*, 2020, 2021). While language revitalisation is desirable for cultural transmission, the reality is that the indigenous communities are swept along by the tide of language shift brought about by rural-urban migration, education, intermarriage, and the importance of standard and global languages.

In the context of cultural maintenance, language shift is an ominous phenomenon but in the context of ethnic relations in a multi-ethnic society, language shift works hand-in-hand with downplaying of cultural distinctiveness for the sake of achieving "unity in diversity". Strategic essentialism (Pande, 2007) applied in interethnic interactions gives the appearance of ethnic tolerance and racial harmony, and pacifies segments of society who are keen to see assimilation of minority groups. The university students in this study have expressed a preference for a "unity in diversity" orientation in ethnic relations. In our view, since assimi-

lation into a majority culture cannot be forcibly enforced, the "unity in diversity" orientation is the most feasible for multi-ethnic societies because it acknowledges cultural plurality within a dominant political culture.

One limitation of this study is that it was conducted on university students. Research involving the older generation who have decision-making power should be conducted to obtain a societal-wide understanding of aspects studied. This is because while the young may be open to other ethnic groups, the older generation may reject the concepts of cultural plurality and maintain the need for a national culture policy formed based on the Malay culture (Hussin, 2012). Such studies will pave the way to understand the consolidation of ethnic and nationality groups.

# Acknowledgement

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# Appendix 1. Multi-ethnic identity measure

Write your chosen score for each of the following statements on a scale of 1 to 4:

| 1: Strongly Disagree | 2: Quite Disagree | 3: Quite Agree | 4: Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | I have spent time trying to find out more about my own ethnic group, such as its history, traditions and customs. | EI |
| 2 | I am active in organisations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group. | EB |
| 3 | I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me. | EI |
| 4 | I like meeting and getting to know people from other ethnic groups. | OTH |
| 5 | I speak my ethnic language whenever I can with people from my ethnic group. | EB* |
| 6 | I think a lot about how my life will be affected by belonging to my ethnic group. | EI |
| 7 | I am happy that I belong to my ethnic group. | AF |
| 8 | I sometimes feel it would be better if different ethnic groups didn't try to mix together. | OTH[R] |
| 9 | I am not very clear about the role of my ethnicity in my life. | EI[R] |
| 10 | I try to speak my language to show that I belong to my ethnic group. | EB* |
| 11 | I often spend time with people from other ethnic groups. | OTH |
| 12 | I really have not spent much time trying to learn more about the culture and history of my ethnic group. | EI[R] |
| 13 | I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group. | AF |
| 14 | I understand quite well what my ethnic group membership means to me, in terms of how to relate to my own group and other groups. | EI |
| 15 | I don't feel comfortable when I am with people from other ethnic groups. | EB* |
| 16 | In order to learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group. | EI |
| 17 | I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group and its achievements. | AF |
| 18 | I don't try to become friends with people from other ethnic groups. | OTH[R] |
| 19 | I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food, music or customs. | EB |
| 20 | I often talk with older family members during family events such as weddings and festivals. | EB* |
| 21 | I am involved in activities with people from other ethnic groups. | OTH |
| 22 | I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group. | AF |
| 23 | I enjoy being around people from other ethnic groups. | OTH |
| 24 | I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background. | AF |

## Notes:

1. Components of ethnic identity in MEIM: Affirmation/Belonging (AB), Ethnic identity achievement (EI), Ethnic behaviour (EB), Other-group orientation (OTH).

2. R – These three items needed to be reverse coded before calculation of mean scores.

3. * – These four items were added to Phinney's (1992) MEIM by Ting and Rose (2014).