

## The Relationship between Religious Tolerance and Ethnic Relation Practices among Multi-Ethnic Youth in Malaysia

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### Abstract

The study aims to examine the level of religious tolerance, the level of practice in ethnic relations and the relationships between religious tolerance and ethnic relation practices among multi-ethnic youth in Malaysia. A total of 500 respondents from ethnic Malays, Chinese and Indians who were in Melaka, Negeri Sembilan, Perak, Selangor and Johor were used as samples for this study. The research using the Religious Tolerance Index and Inter-Ethnic Tolerance Behavior questionnaire. The data were analyzed descriptively and inferential using SPSS 24.0. The finding shows that religious tolerance has a moderate association with practices in ethnic relations. The respondents of this study have a high level of religious tolerance, but have a moderate value in practicing the ethnic relations practices. In terms of practicing ethnic relations, the Indians are the strongest people practicing practices in ethnic relations. Meanwhile, in terms of religious tolerance, the Malays are the highest in tolerance with other religions. The implication of this study suggests that the good values inherent in individuals help strengthen the individual religious tolerance. To establish a harmonious relationship between different believers, each individual need to have knowledge of the fundamental principles of other believers while establishing a good and deep relationship between different believers.

**Keywords:** Religious Tolerance, Ethical Relations, Malaysian Youth, Various Ethnicities

### Introduction

Tolerance is a policy or act committed without coercion, acceptance or rejection actively, its freedom is limited and conditional and is demonstrated through attitudes, views, behaviors and beliefs (Adeney, 1926; Ferrar, 1976; Laursen, 2005). While religious tolerance is an attitude of mutual respect for other religions and behavior that allows and accepts religious differences to be practiced in a plural society

without discrimination and prejudice (Roni, 2012; Ahmad Tarmizi et al., 2013). Referring to all these definitions, researcher concludes that religious tolerance is respecting the behavior and practice of other religions that are not contrary to the norms of the communities. However, respect does not mean accepting other religious beliefs. Recognizing the existence of other religions in the world does not mean to believe in the doctrinal and philosophical truths contained in other religious teachings (Khadijah and Mohd Herzali, 2008).

Religious tolerance is a topic that is often discussed and there is still much to be debated in order to bring world peace (Ahmad Tarmizi & Sarjit, 2012; Mohd Roslan, 2011). If searched through academic journals from local and others country, there are so many studies pertaining to religious tolerance and interrelationships discussed. However, studies on ethnic relations and their relation to religious tolerance are lacking. Its relevance is very close but empirical evidence is not much done. On this basis, researchers are encouraged to make a preliminary review of the relationship between ethnic relations and religious tolerance.

### **Religious Tolerance in Malaysia**

Religious tolerance is the basis of national harmony and is one of the causes for disunity in a multi-racial society. Various issues involving religion have triggered the outrage of Malaysians. Among them is the issue of the use of the word Allah by Christians (Mohd Roslan, 2011), the issue of teenage couple Alvin and Vivian who insulted Islam (Karmini, 2013), the issue of pig head in Kuala Lumpur mosque, the issue of cow heads match in Selangor and many more (Rahimin Affandi et al., 2011).

Conflicts between these different faiths can be reduced by increasing the level of tolerance between religions. However, the cause of lack of religious tolerance needs to be identified first. Mohd Roslan (2011) states that any religious believer(s) should not trigger any issues that can cause anger and displease another religious believers. Any issues that arise need to be resolved rationally rather than simply using uncontrolled emotions. The lack of religious tolerance also caused by lack of respect for the rights of the Muslims as set out in Article 11 of the Federal Constitution of Malaysia (Khadijah & Mohd Herzali, 2008). And the last one is, the level of individual understanding of other religions that also causes a lack of tolerance between religious believers (Nur Farhana & Khadijah, 2013).

To address the problem of tolerance attitude between religions, past researchers have suggested that there should be interfaith dialogue held between different religions to create understanding between different believers (Khadijah & Mohd Herzali, 2008; Rahimin Affandi et al., 2011; Jaffary, 2009). Interfaith dialogue should not only be held at IPT level, school or among the preachers but should be even more comprehensive to the society of different ages and backgrounds.

In establishing high religious tolerance among Malaysian, there are some challenges that Nur Farhana and Khadijah (2013) have investigated. The first challenge is that rights between Muslims and non-Muslims which are still not clearly defined as there is conflict and overlapping between shariah and civil law. Second, the lack of appreciation from non-Muslims towards Islam as determined by the Malaysian constitution. Third, the internal factor of the religion as described by Jaffary (2003) that religious tolerance cannot be practiced in Malaysia because of Malay prejudice against different religious believers other than Islam. And the last one, which is the worst challenge; when there were party takes the opportunity to introduce the teaching and understanding of religious pluralism as an approach in religious tolerance. Religious pluralism means the meaning of all religions is the same. It is a threat in shaping religious harmony in society as trying to form a new religion.

### Purpose of the Study

This study aims to see the relationship between ethnic relations and religious tolerance among Malays, Chinese and Indians in Malaysia. In particular, this study will answer the following questions: -

- 1) What is the level of religious tolerance of multi-ethnic youth in Malaysia?
- 2) What is the level of ethnic relation practices among ethnic groups in Malaysia?
- 3) Is there a connection between the practice of ethnic relations and religious tolerance of multi-ethnic youth in Malaysia?

### Sample

The sample of this study consists of 500 respondents from various ethnics in Selangor, Johor, Negeri Sembilan, Melaka and Perak, age between 15 and 24 years old. These five selected locations were chosen because the level of population composition was high and the researchers were able to acquire various backgrounds of the respondents. Based on the population distribution and basic demographic characteristics (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2010), the percentage of population in Malaysia for Malay is 55.8%, Chinese 28.6% and India 13.5%. Stratified sampling was selected in a 5: 3: 2 ratio for Malay, Chinese and Indian. It is more appropriate to use as it represents more respondents, saving time and economics (Newman & MvNeil, 1998).

### Instruments and Data Analysis

The instruments used in this study were religious tolerance index by Gallup organization and inter-ethnic tolerance behavior (IETB) questionnaire by Fazilah et al. (2006; 2007; 2008) and Ezhar et al. (2006; 2008). To measure the tolerance of respondents' religion, researcher have adapted the religious tolerance index. Meanwhile, to measure the practice in respondent's ethnic relations, the researcher used the IETB questionnaire of the practice component. This study used SPSS 24.0 software while study was analyzed descriptively and correlated.

### Results

The results of this study will elaborate on the demographic of the respondents consists religion, ethnicity, racial class in the place of residence, involvement and interaction between other races and their level in religious practice. The results of this study will also address the questions of the respondents which is the degree of tolerance of the respondents, the level of respondents' ethical relation, and their relationship between their ethnic relations and their religious tolerance.

### Respondent Demographics

Table 1

*Respondent demographics*

Demographical factors	frequency	Percentages (%)	
<b>Religion</b>	Islam	253	50.6
	Buddhist	97	19.4
	Hindu	94	18.8
	Christian	45	9.0

	Sikh	1	0.2
	Tao/Konfusius	6	1.2
	Others	4	0.8
<b>Ethnic</b>	Malay	250	50.0
	Chinese	150	30.0
	Indian	100	20.0
<b>Types of residential area</b>	Own ethnic group only	100	20.0
	Mix ethnic group	375	75.0
	Other Ethnic group as the majority	25	5.0
<b>Involvement in multiethnic group organization</b>	Yes	219	43.8
	No	281	56.2
<b>Number of friends from other ethnic groups</b>	None	44	8.8
	A few	221	44.2
	Many	235	47.0
<b>Frequency in contacting friends of other ethnic groups in a month</b>	Very often	82	16.4
	Often	124	24.8
	Sometimes	231	46.2
	Never	63	12.6
<b>level of your religious practice</b>	High	117	23.4
	Moderate	341	68.2
	Low	35	7.0
	Do not practice at all	7	1.4

It is shown that all Malay respondents are Muslims while the majority of Indians are Hindu and Chinese are Buddhists. However, there are also Indian and Chinese are Christians and etc. The questionnaire also shows that most of the respondents live in a multiracial community, involved in mixed racial associations, friendships and families. However, the stage of religious practice according to the respondents themselves shows is in a moderate level.

### Religious Tolerance Level

Table 2

#### *Religious tolerance level*

Item	Malay	Chinese	Indian	Total	Level
	(N=59) Mean S.D	(N=36) Mean S.D	(N=24) Mean S.D	Mean S.D	
1. You treat people of other religious faiths with respect.	4.3320 0.82004	3.9267 1.0936	4.4200 0.9340	4.2280 0.9518	High
2. You believe that most religious faiths make a positive contribution to society.	4.1880 0.9055	3.8200 0.9836	4.1400 0.8879	4.0680 0.9387	High
3. You would not object to a person of a different religious faith moving next door.	4.3400 0.8362	3.9467 1.0978	4.0700 1.2412	4.1680 1.0277	High

4. People of other religions always treat you with respect.	4.0000	3.7533	3.8800	3.9020	High
5. In the past year, you have learned something from someone of another religious faith	0.9271	0.9549	1.0757	0.9707	
	3.9080	3.8000	3.8700	3.8680	High
	1.0771	1.0166	1.0978	1.0625	
Total	20.7680	19.2467	20.3800	<b>20.2340</b>	<b>High</b>
	3.3930	3.9982	4.0844	<b>3.7772</b>	

The first question of this study is 'what is the level of religious tolerance of multi-ethnic youth in Malaysia?' This issue is based on five items and the Likert scale consists of "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". Table 2 shows that the respondents' religious tolerance is at a high level. However, based on the questionnaires presented, it shows the most basic questions in religious tolerance. Hence, accordingly the level of tolerance of the respondent's religious is high because it is the basic thing in forming a harmonious society. If you look through item by item, item 'You treat people of other religious faiths with respect' is the highest mean compared to other items. Following item 'You would not object to a person of a different religious faith moving next door'. This illustrates that respondents have high attitude of respecting other religious adherents. Respondents of this study also have high attitudes in respecting and allowing different religious beliefs to stay next to them. Based on the mean value, the Malays for the respondents of this study have the highest tolerance attitude compared to Chinese and India. Respondents from the Chinese are the lowest in practicing religious tolerance. The findings also show that the average respondents think 'they are more respectful of the other' than 'other people treat them with respect'.

### Ethnic Relations Practice Level

Table 3

#### *Ethnic relation practices*

Item	Malay	Chinese	Indian	Total	Level
	(N=59)	(N=36)	(N=24)	Mean S.D	
	Mean	Mean	Mean		
	S.D	S.D	S.D		
1. Watching local drama that relates to the lives in a multi ethnic society	3.1840 0.9890	2.9533 1.0056	3.3900 1.1361	3.1560 1.03431	Moderate
2. Allow family members to be involved in multi ethnic programmes	3.1760 1.1823	3.4867 0.9813	3.6200 1.1081	3.3580 1.12444	Moderate
3. Discuss inter ethnic issues with other ethnic groups	3.0560 1.1568	3.2733 1.0549	3.3500 1.1044	3.1800 1.12166	Moderate
4. Try learning foreign languages	3.3920 1.1150	3.7133 1.0056	3.8800 1.0633	3.5860 1.09040	Moderate
5. Involving myself in National Day activities	3.7600	3.4267 1.0951	4.0200 1.1632	3.7120 1.15226	High

	1.1470				
6. Helping people from any other ethnic groups to solve their problems	3.5760	3.8000	4.1500	3.7580	High
	1.0624	0.9123	0.9987	1.02837	
		3.0067	3.2000	2.8000	Moderate
7. Attend inter religious dialogue	2.5160	1.0459	1.1976	1.18609	
	1.1931				
		3.9667	4.3100	3.9160	High
8. Respect the dos and don'ts from different ethnic groups	3.7280	0.9994	0.8492	1.09880	
	1.1982				
		3.7267	4.1200	3.7240	High
9. Care to know the basic life style of other ethnic groups	3.5640	0.9405	1.0178	1.05168	
	1.0893				
		3.5200	4.1300	3.4620	Moderate
10. Preparing suitable food for different ethnic groups	3.1600	1.1156	1.0411	1.22129	
	1.2412				
		3.8067	4.3400	3.9020	High
11. Helping friends in poverty regardless of ethnic groups	3.7840	0.9810	0.9014	1.04239	
	1.0872				
		3.4400	3.8000	3.4240	Moderate
12. Shopping with friends from other ethnic groups	3.2640	1.1439	1.2472	1.27101	
	1.3241				
		3.7200	4.2800	3.7940	High
13. Shopping in shops belonging to different ethnic groups	3.6440	0.9562	0.9110	1.07045	
	1.1395				
		3.0133	3.3000	2.7480	Moderate
14. Cohabiting with friends from different ethnic groups	2.3680	1.2744	1.4737	1.44245	
	1.4230				
		2.6333	3.3400	2.6240	Moderate
15. Renting houses belong to other ethnic groups	2.3320	1.3282	1.5190	1.43902	
	1.3731				
		3.4400	3.5200	3.0840	Moderate
16. Singing songs of other ethnic groups	2.6960	1.1439	1.3520	1.35817	
	1.3723				
		3.9600	4.5000	3.8420	High
	3.5080	1.0984	0.7850	1.18990	
17. Respecting places of worship of the different ethnic groups	1.2555				
		3.9067	4.4400	3.9380	High
	3.7560	1.1253	0.8566	1.11384	
18. Respecting others in practicing the beliefs of their religion	1.1410				
		3.8200	4.2700	3.7420	High
	3.4840	1.0560	1.0333	1.17737	
19. Eating with friends of different ethnic groups	1.2263				
Total	61.9480	66.6133	73.9600	<b>65.7500</b>	<b>Moderate</b>
	14.0576	13.1097	12.5665	<b>14.2208</b>	

According to Wan Norainie (2010), practice is a common practice or repetitive act. Meanwhile, Kaliyaperumal (2004) defines the practice of referring to the ways that one demonstrates knowledge through their actions. As the study conducted by Fazilah (2008), the practice of ethnic relations in Malaysia is measured by the daily practices that are directly or indirectly related to other ethnicities.

From this analysis it shows that the majority of respondents have a high level of helpfulness regardless of race. In addition, they also respect the beliefs and taboos of other races and seek to learn the fundamentals of other races. However, the average respondents are less interested in attending dialogue or inter-religious dialogue, living with other races and renting homes from other races. They also rarely watch local dramas which showing the real daily life of other races or to sing other races's songs. This suggests that respondents respect and strive to understand about other races but do not reach the level of sharing of residences or experiencing the lives of different races of religion and culture.

### Relations between Practice of Ethnic Relations and Religious Tolerance

After a normality test, data is normally distributed. Thus, the Pearson correlation test was conducted to test the relationship between ethnic relations practice and religious tolerance. The result of the analysis shows that there is a low correlation between the respondents' ethnic relations practice with the religious tolerance level of respondents in which the value of  $p < 0.05$ .

Table 4

*Pearson correlation test relationship between ethnic practice practices and religious tolerance*

	Religious Tolerance	
	Pearson (r)	P
<b>Ethnic relation practices</b>	0.350**	0.000

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

This clearly shows that practices such as trying to learn the basics about other races, respecting their cultural taboos and their religious teachings have a relationship with the tolerance of respondents' religious attitudes, but their relevance remains weak. This finding shows the mutual respect between different believers of religious beliefs have relation to the respecting behavior of other races of culture and taking into account the fundamentals of other races. From the questions raised, there is also a relationship between religious tolerance and ethnic relations, which are to 'treat them with different religious beliefs with respect' and 'respect the worship places of other races' and 'respect for others practicing their religious teachings'. Apart from that, the relationship between these two variables proves that ethnicity and religion for the respondents are strongly linked to Malay-majority respondents, the majority of whom are Muslim, Chinese-majority are Buddhist and Christian and most Indian respondents are Hindus.

### Discussion

Survey studies in these five states show attitude of the respondents with moderate value in practicing ethnic relations practices yet embrace a high religious tolerance. Indians have high level in practicing ethnic relations followed by the Chinese. The results show that Malays, whom are all Muslims, have a high religious tolerance compared to other races although the

practice of practicing ethnic relations is low. This has rejected the notion of Chandra (1997) that Muslims are still prejudiced against non-Muslim societies and need to be educated in order to practice religious tolerance towards other believers. Through the respondents' background, it also shows that most respondents are familiar with, communicate and are in a multi-racial environment. States such as Selangor, Malacca, Johor, Negeri Sembilan and Perak which have most dense community of multi-racial has made the people accustomed to having a daily routine with other ethnic groups. In a society, the practice of respecting customs, cultures, religions and other ethnic taboos is a major factor in tolerating religion. In fostering strong and tighten relationships in society, studying the fundamental of other ethnics is a must. Individuals also should not bring out any sensitive issues that could anger other believers and to respect the rights enshrined in the constitution (Mohd Roslan 2011; Khadijah & Mohd Herzali 2008). However, if the respondents are often involved in interfaith dialogue, perhaps the higher religious tolerance level is as the results of the study conducted by Jaffary (2009) and Azrinah (2009). The effectiveness of this interfaith dialogue mechanism is also emphasized by Rahimin Affandi et al. (2011).

### **Conclusion**

The conclusions from this findings show that ethnic relation practices among Malaysian multi ethnic youth are related to their religious tolerance, but the relationship is moderate. In accordance with the background of respondents' demographics which are majority Malays are Muslim, Chinese are Buddhist and Christian, and Indian are Hindu. The religious tolerance level among Malaysian youth at high level, but the ethnic relation practices at moderate level. It shown that, respondents respects others beliefs but they not really communicate and interact with other ethnics in daily life as a community. There are still have a gap between each other especially in serving food and residential.

### **Implications**

The implication of this study shows that the practices in ethnic relations have a modest relation with the attitude of individual religious tolerance. However, practices in relation to other ethnics are not the main thing to be religious tolerant. The average youth of this study had a helpful attitude and a good value within themselves regardless of ethnic background. These values can be helping to strengthen religious tolerance level of each individual. The key of a great religious tolerance is to give and have respect towards each believers. And the last but not least is to establish a good relationship with all ethnic groups in everyday life and acknowledge the fundamental beliefs of other religions so that religious harmony can be sustained.

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