

TRAINEE TEACHERS' AWARENESS ON MALAYSIAN NATIONAL SYMBOLS

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ABSTRACT

Malaysian national symbols play a significant role in determining Malaysian identity and patriotism among its people. A past study of university students indicated that their level of awareness of Malaysian national symbols was moderately high. Hence, this current study, which employed a questionnaire, was conducted to determine the awareness level of trainee teachers on Malaysian national symbols, the significant difference between History and TESL trainee teachers' level of awareness on the Malaysian national symbols, and the element of Malaysian national symbol which the trainee teachers were most familiar. The five elements of national symbols that were focused on in this study were the national anthem, national emblem, national flower, national language, and national flag. A total of 93 respondents were involved in this study, and the data was analysed descriptively and inferentially using the 29th SPSS version. The findings indicated that trainee teachers' level of awareness on Malaysian national symbols is high ($M = 4.05$) and there is a significant difference between History and TESL trainee teachers' awareness of the Malaysian national symbol ($t(91) = -10.458$, $p < .001$). Whereas, the highest Malaysian national symbol element with which the trainee teachers were most familiar was the national language ($M = 4.49$). In conclusion, the findings of the study could be one of the benchmarks of the younger generations' spirit of patriotism towards Malaysia.

Keywords: Malaysian National Symbols, symbols of nationality awareness, patriotism, Malaysian identity, trainee teachers

1. Introduction

Malaysia is one of the rich and unique countries with national symbols. The symbols signify the country's ethnicity, culture, and strength that represent one's identity and values. Malaysia's National Symbols are significant to the construction of a more excellent nation-state. Munirah Aayuni Mohd Mokhtar & Anitawati Mohd Lokman (2016) pointed out that national symbols were the positive feelings that individual members of a society might have and expressed towards the Malaysian country. National symbols are symbols that represent a country. Keillor and Hult (1998) claimed that national identity is an example of an exclusively unique trait among different nations.

National Symbols

National symbols has been a topic of investigation since the foundation of the Malaysian nation in 1957 (Wolf, 2016). According to Ayu Nor Azilah Mohamad et al. (2020), there are five elements of Malaysian National Symbols namely national emblem, national anthem, national flag, national flag and national language. The same five elements of Malaysian National Symbols will be focused in this study. Knowing each of the elements of the Malaysian National Symbols as a Malaysian indirectly portrays the patriotism among its people and the awareness of the symbols.

Patriotism

Patriotism is defined as love and devotion to one's country. Ku Hasnita and Mohd Haizam (2009) defined patriotism is also delineated as the degree of love for and pride in a nation. Gill et. al (2015) noted that patriotism remains a feeling of love for the homeland. Building a patriotic nation is significant in Malaysia as this country consists of a plural society.

Importance of Malay Language as a Symbol of Malaysia Identity

A study by Ayu Nor Azilah Mohamad et al. (2022) found that the Malay language is one of the identities of the Malaysian nation that acts as a symbol of Malaysian identity. Ayu Nor Azilah Mohamad et al. (2022) stated the Malay language portrays the unification of the voice of Malaysians and acts as a medium for unity in the plural society in Malaysia. Ayu Nor Azilah Mohamad et al. (2022b) noted that the position of the Malay language continues to be strengthened when it is elevated as the main medium of instruction in the national education system as a part of the process of building a nation. A qualitative study by Ying et al. (2024) on primary school teachers in five SJKCs in Terengganu found that the pupils had a great influence on learning the Malay language using Mandarin as an effort and indicator to learn our national language better. However, considering the pupils were young learners, it is common for them to use their mother tongue to learn a second language which in this case refers to the Malay language. In contrast, a quantitative study by Noor Azmira Mohamed & Nor Azlili Hassan (2022) on private university students found that the level of respondents' awareness of the usage of the Malay language as the symbol of Malaysian identity was moderate as they used English as the medium to communicate. Thus, these findings on the past studies provided unique data on how respondents in each study view the Malay language as a symbol of Malaysian identity and their awareness of the importance of the Malay language as one of the symbols of Malaysian identity.

Awareness on Malaysian National Symbols

Ayu Nor Azilah Mohamad et al. (2020) had conducted a mixed-method study which revolved around the awareness among students of Public Institutions of Higher Learning (IPTA) and Private Institutions of Higher Learning (IPTS). He mentioned in his study that the level of awareness among IPTA and IPTS students on national symbols of identity in Malaysia was high. This study can be one of the benchmarks of the younger generation's patriotism towards Malaysian national identity. In addition, a study conducted by Ayu Nor Azilah Mohamad et al. (2020) indicated that students' level of regard for national symbols as Malaysian identity was moderately high. This study included 150 respondents involving public and private university students in Peninsular Malaysia using quantitative methods. These findings were also supported by a study by Ayu Nor Azilah Mohamad et al. (2021) on 350 respondents from public and private universities which showed that the patriotism among the students in empowering Malaysian national symbols is high.

In contradiction to the studies above, Mohamed Ali Haniffa et al. (2020) found that the knowledge and sensitivity to the Malaysian national symbols were low in a bibliography study conducted using

secondary sources as preliminary findings performed on printed materials such as books, articles, journals, brochures, newsletters, guidelines, and ministry policies. The findings demonstrated that Malaysian citizens still lacked awareness towards the identity of Malaysia and must increase their understanding and knowledge towards the significance of Malaysian symbols to represent appreciation. Therefore, based on the discussion above, it shows that it is crucial to bridge the gap of past studies on the awareness of national symbols by investigating the same issue employing IPGM teacher trainees as the respondents.

Therefore, this study intends to identify:

- the trainee teachers’ awareness on Malaysia National Symbols
- the significance difference between History and TESL trainee teachers’ awareness on Malaysia National Symbol
- the highest element of Malaysia National Symbol which the trainee teachers are familiar the most

2. Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative method which employed a questionnaire adapted and modified from the past study by Ayu Nor Azilah Mohamad et al. (2020). The questionnaire was distributed to the whole population to obtain the data via Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of 20 items on the awareness of Malaysian National Symbols. The respondents were to rate the items with the following variables 1 = I really do not know, 2 = I do not know, 3 = Unsure, 4 = I know, and 5 = I really know of the 5 Likert-scale. The quantitative data of this study was analysed descriptively and inferentially using the 29th SPSS version. In order to interpret the mean of the qualitative data, a score mean interpreter was adapted from a study by Fathen Suriati (2017) which also applied a similar 5-point Likert scale in her study. Table 1 below shows the mean score interpretation.

**Table 1:
Score Mean interpretation**

Interpretation	Mean Value
Low	1.00 – 1.67
Medium	1.68 – 3.34
High	3.35 – 5.00

2.1 Research Sampling

A purposive sampling technique was employed to recruit the TESL and History pre-service teachers of PISMP 2021/2025 in-take as the participants of this study. The sample size for the quantitative finding of this study was based on the Sample Size Determination Table which was suggested by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). There were 93 respondents who were involved in the study to represent the population.

3. Discussion

Demographic data indicated that there were 28 (30.1%) male trainee teachers and 65 (69.9%) female trainee teachers involved in this study. Based on the courses, there were 53 (57.0%) TESL trainee teachers and 40 (43%) History trainee teachers involved in this study. Table 2 below represents the demographic data of this study.

Table 2: Demographic Data of the Respondents

		Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Male	28	30.1
	Female	65	69.9
Course	TESL	53	57.0
	History	40	43.0

The findings indicated that trainee teachers' level of awareness on Malaysian National Symbols is high ($M = 4.05$). This finding is similar to the past studies conducted by Mohamed Ali Haniffa et al. (2020), Ayu Nor Azilah Mohamad et al. (2020) and Ayu Nor Azilah Mohamad et al. (2021) which also found that their respondents, the students of public and private universities also had high awareness of Malaysian National Symbols. This suggests that national symbols play an important role in fostering patriotism and serve as a benchmark of the concern and affection Malaysians have for their country. Therefore, it can be concluded that the awareness of the importance of appreciating Malaysian National Symbols is a good indicator of patriotism among the young generation. The detailed findings are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics For Malaysia National Symbols

ITEMS	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
A1 The National Anthem of Malaysia is called 'NEGARAKU'.	93	4.99	.10370
A2 NEGARAKU was selected from Perak's official state song 'Bright Moon'.	93	3.99	1.31459
A3 The national anthem, "Negaraku" was heard for the first time after the stroke of midnight on 31 August 1957, at the Selangor Club field.	93	3.83	1.25649
A4 NEGARAKU was composed by Mr. Saiful Bahri in 1957.	93	3.43	1.45511
TOTAL MEAN: NATIONAL ANTHEM		93	4.06 .75667
B5 The National Emblem was introduced on 30 May 1952.	93	3.27	1.41529
B6 The 14-point star item in the National Emblem represented 14 allied states in Malaysia.	93	4.74	.64105

B7	The star and the crescent symbolize the Islamic Religion as Malaysia's official religion.	93	4.96	.29170
B8	The five crises represent the five formal Unfederated Malay states namely Johor, Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan and Terengganu.	93	4.42	1.00350
TOTAL MEAN: NATIONAL EMBLEM		93	4.35	.54801
C9	Bunga Raya is our national flower.	93	4.92	.33740
C10	Bunga Raya is selected as the national flower because it is easy to find.	93	3.19	1.45407
C11	Bunga Raya is selected as the national flower because it is not the National Flower of any other country in the world.	93	3.47	1.42639
C12	In 1958, the Ministry of Agriculture presented seven varieties of flowers to be selected as National Flowers, namely, flower, ginger, blossom, flower, lotus, rose and cape.	93	3.05	1.59732
TOTAL MEAN: NATIONAL FLOWER		93	3.66	.90563
D13	Bahasa Melayu is our national language.	93	4.96	.25169
D14	The position of the Malay language as the official language is stabilised further with the National Language Act 1967.	93	4.09	1.31103
D15	Its importance as a language of knowledge and the medium of teaching and learning has also led to the Education Act 1961.	93	4.12	1.22884
D16	Other languages used by other races in Malaysia are free to be used such as Mandarin by the Chinese and Tamil by the Indians.	93	4.80	.50128
TOTAL MEAN: NATIONAL LANGUAGE		93	4.49	.61890
E17	On 29 November 1949, the Council of Rulers and the Federal Legislative Council had held the national-level competition to choose the design of the flag.	93	3.74	1.42114
E18	The Malaysian flag created by Johor architect, Mohamed bin Hamzah.	93	3.88	1.48799
E19	The flag of the Federation of Malaya was flown for the first time in the compound of the Sultan of Selangor's Palace with the attendance of DYMM Malay Rulers and Officers of King George VI on 26 May 1950.	93	3.32	1.43831
E20	The name of the Malaysian Flag was changed to the Jalur Gemilang in 1997 in conjunction with the 40th Independence Day by Tun Dr. Mahathir Bin Mohamad, who was then Prime Minister.	93	3.79	1.24725
TOTAL MEAN: NATIONAL FLAG		93	3.69	1.11676
OVERALL MEAN FOR ALL ELEMENTS		93	4.05	.64490

Valid N (listwise) 93

This study also found that there is a significant difference between History and TESL trainee teachers' awareness of the Malaysian national symbols ($t(91) = -10.458, p < .001$). Even though the mean of both groups were high, there is a slight difference on the awareness of the Malaysian National Symbols in both groups. Table 4 below portrays the result of the t-test of the study.

**Table 4: t-Test Result
Group Statistics**

	COURSE	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Overall mean	TESL	53	3.64	.50530	.06941
	HISTORY	40	4.59	.34641	.05477

Independent Samples Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sided p	-Sided p	Difference	Std. Error Difference	Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
all Mean equal variances assumed	5.308	.024	-10.144	91	<.001	<.001	-.94380	.09304	-1.12861	-.75899
variances not assumed			-10.674	90.260	<.001	<.001	-.94380	.08842	-1.11944	-.76815

Whereas, the highest Malaysian national symbol element with which the trainee teachers were most familiar was the national language ($M = 4.49$). This finding is aligned with the past study conducted by Ayu Nor Azilah et al. (2020) where the level of awareness among IPTA and IPTS students on national symbols of identity in Malaysia especially in national language was high. This current study also indirectly sets a benchmarks of the younger generation's patriotism towards Malaysian national identity. Besides, Ayu Nor Azilah et al. (2020) study also indicated that the level of concern of students from the public and private institutions of higher learning (IPTs) in Peninsular Malaysia regarding the symbols of nationality as Malaysian identities was high. This study will create new concepts of awareness among students about the symbols of Malaysian identity that promote the national identity of Malaysia. Other than that, a study by Mohamed Ali Haniffa et al (2020) also noted national symbols are very important to nourish a deep love of the country. This will help Malaysians to face future challenges.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, TESL and History trainee teachers in this study had high awareness of the Malaysian national symbols and there is a significant difference between History and TESL trainee teachers'

awareness of the Malaysian national symbol. Whereas, the highest Malaysian national symbol element with which the trainee teachers were most familiar was the national language. The study's findings revealed that the respondents demonstrated a strong sense of patriotism towards their country and showed that they were not ignorant citizens. Albury and Aye (2016) as well as Saiful Anuar Matondang (2016) pointed out that in maintaining a good patriotism in Malaysia many communities were deeply devoted to their cultures and traditions and this sense of belonging to racial values may make national identity activities a challenging issue in this country. These findings ultimately proved that the young generations in this study could be good agents as future teachers to integrate the importance and awareness of the Malaysian national symbols to the future generations. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure that every individual in Malaysia embodies true Malaysian identity by being knowledgeable about Malaysian national symbols and understanding their importance. Future studies could explore this issue by involving participants from different racial backgrounds to identify any significant differences in awareness of Malaysian national symbols. Additionally, conducting similar studies on other campuses of IPGM or exploring other courses could provide further insights.

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