

Exploring Malaysian Based Intercultural Knowledge and Behaviour among Secondary School Students through English Language Intercultural Reading Programme (ELIRP)

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ABSTRACT

In a multicultural country, education is considered the best medium for the three major ethnic groups to work together and achieve unity. However, to what extent education has been successful in achieving national unity is questionable. This quantitative research investigated the intervention of intercultural knowledge and behaviour among Form Four secondary national school students via a newly constructed English Language Intercultural Reading Programme (ELIRP). The results indicate respondents' level of intercultural knowledge and intercultural behaviour improved during post-ELIRP stage. The implications of this study indicate the need for constructive initiatives and intervention in school reading programmes in order to improve the level of intercultural knowledge and behaviour among Malaysian secondary school students.

Keywords: Intercultural knowledge, intercultural behaviour, Intercultural Reading Program (IRP), secondary school students

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INTRODUCTION

According to the Malaysian Demographic Profile 2014, Malaysia is made up of 50.1% Malays, 22.6% Chinese, and 6.7% Indians besides its minority ethnic groups from the east. Each ethnic group has its own cultural norms, lifestyle, traditions, and belief systems that recognises the Malaysian community for its blending pot

of culture. According to National Institute of Public Administration (INTAN), unity is a process of uniting members of a society via national ideologies in order for the members of the society to construct an identity, universal values and a sense of belonging (INTAN, 1994). Therefore, the Malaysian government has taken measures to nurture the young generation to build unity among its people; beginning with schools. New national educational policies such as recognising one national language and establishing a national school system (Ramlee, Norzaini, Faridah, Abdul Razak & Maimun, 2009) also paves the path to instilling and sustaining a strong unity in the country.

Reading, being a part of the main concern in the education system, helps students to enhance their world view on the diverse cultures, belief systems and helps enhance one's knowledge.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study explores how reading helps the students to enhance their intercultural knowledge. Specifically, the study investigates the impact of an English Language Intercultural Reading Programme (ELIRP) on the level of intercultural knowledge and intercultural behaviour among secondary school students in Malaysia. The study aims to answer two main research questions:

What is the level of intercultural knowledge among the 4th form secondary school students?

What is the level of intercultural behaviour among the 4th form secondary school students?

RELATED LITERATURE

Fostering Unity through National Curriculum: Reading as a Tool

The Malaysian government is committed to developing human capital and is ready to engineer an educational system that is capable of producing students who are competent and competitive with moral values (School of Malaysia Directory 4th Ed., 2013). Thus, the desire to ensure that education has a major role in uniting a nation of different ethnic backgrounds remains significant and vital in Malaysia (Ministry of Education, 2013). In the context of developing a holistic and culturally competent student, Cortazzi and Jin (1999) stated that school textbooks can be a teacher, a trainer, a map, an authority, an ideology and a valid resource. For example, unity can be achieved via the infusion of Malaysian literature in educational system. It is conceded that reading of story books and school textbooks can contribute to national unity among students. Therefore, story books and school textbooks that have been a part of national curricular are able to become a resource for Malaysian students to explore, understand and adapt with the differences. This is because a student does not only engage cognitively and emotionally with cultural embedded story books and text books, but it also works to build up

the student's intercultural knowledge and intercultural behaviour (Wallace, 2003). Furthermore, according to Rajyashree and Urjani (2013) there are a lot of benefits in representing a diverse world through literary texts.

Manjet, Fatin, Jaganathan, Karupiah and Ahmad (2016) in their conceptual research on intercultural understanding among secondary school students asserted that the use of Malaysian based literature is crucial to promote intercultural understanding among secondary school students in Malaysia. ELIRP that heightens students' intercultural knowledge and brings positive changes in their intercultural behaviour will contribute towards the development of intercultural competence among students.

In general, intercultural knowledge refers to a set of knowledge that assists in understanding cultures that differ from one's own worldview. Judith and Nakayama (2004) divided intercultural knowledge into three components with the first component known as culture general knowledge that necessitates a person to become familiar with the patterns and constituents of certain cultures. The second component constitutes of culture self-knowledge that suggests a person's recognition of their own culture and the way they perceive it from others. The final component is known as culture specific knowledge and refers to one's familiarity with the culture in question, including social norms, values, and history.

Bennett (2008), conceptually defines intercultural knowledge as a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioural attributes that

support affective and appropriate interaction in a diverse cultural context. Within the framework of this research, intercultural knowledge is defined as a systematic way to classify students' own cultural patterns, getting used to unfamiliar ways of being whether empathically or flexibly by comparing and contrasting cultural patterns of others (Bennett, 2008).

Other than intercultural knowledge, intercultural behaviour is also seen as one of the important aspects that helps in developing unity among students as it highlights approaches when communicating with one another. According to Bruhlmeier (2010), intercultural behaviour represents the actions of a person according to their knowledge and values. Chodzkiene (2014) agreed with Chen and Starosta (1996) who described intercultural behaviour as communication skill as well as social skills. Thus, in developing unity among students, it is important to measure the level of intercultural knowledge as well as their intercultural behaviour (Chodzkiene, 2014).

A previous research by Najeemah (2008) utilised a survey research methodology to study the patterns of social interaction between students of different ethnic groups in Malaysia. The results showed that students generally accorded unequal treatment to those from different ethnicities with some even behave negatively towards the other. The study concluded that when students from different ethnic backgrounds are gathered within a multicultural setting they tend to polarise.

This theme of polarisation is also prevalent in several other studies pertaining to intercultural relations in Malaysia. Furthermore, most research is heavily focused on tertiary education, involving university students due to its ethnically diverse campus environment (Ramlee et al., 2009). Findings of studies in tertiary education revealed that the nature of the students towards ethnicity has been internalised in the self, originating from their individual history in social settings especially in schools and the home (Faridah & Amir, 2004). Consequently, it highlights the importance of school as the best place to build intercultural knowledge and intercultural behaviour.

A recent preliminary study (Fatin, Manjet, Jaganathan, Karupiah, & Ahmad, 2016) indicated low level of intercultural knowledge among secondary school students and this phenomenon indicates poor intercultural awareness. A later study by Manjet and Fatin (2016) to gauge English language teachers' perspective on the intervention of English readers infused with Malaysian cultural elements indicated success stories. The readers were able to enhance students' intercultural knowledge and improve their intercultural behaviour.

METHODS

Research Design

This research is quantitative in nature and aims to investigate the level of intercultural knowledge and intercultural behaviour among Malaysian secondary school students during pre-and post-English Language

Intercultural Reading Programme (ELIRP) stage. ELIRP is a reading programme that is specifically developed for the purpose of a research grant sponsored by the Ministry of Education, Malaysia through Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS). Throughout eight weeks of ELIRP, four short stories in English language were introduced to the Form Four students in the state of Penang, Malaysia with the help of 13 language English teachers from 13 selected schools during English lessons in their respective school. These teachers attended a training workshop conducted by several of the researchers who have vast experience teaching in the schools before the implementation of the ELIPR project.

The schools were selected based on their racial composition. The study sought schools where the composition of Malays, Chinese and Indians were balanced based on data from the Penang State Education Department. Prior permission was obtained from the Ministry of Education and the State Education Department to approach the thirteen schools who volunteered to take part in the study. The study was implemented according to the stages summarised below:

Implementation of Study

Phase one. This phase included the development of the pre-and post-ELIRP questionnaire. A pilot study was conducted in order to test the instrument by using a sample of 20 students. The results obtained from the pilot test was analysed using Statistical Pack of Social Sciences (SPSS) software and the Cronbach Alpha

obtained is .749. According to Nunnally (1978), minimum level of .7 for Cronbach's Alpha coefficient value is required to determine good internal consistency. The result obtained suggested that the items in the questionnaire have acceptable internal consistency. The pilot test was followed with the selection of the participating schools. Initially, 20 schools around Penang were selected based on purposive sampling and the schools were approached through school principals after obtaining the consents from Ministry of High Education (MoE), and Penang State Education Department (JPN).

Phase Two. A total of 292 Form Four students from 13 volunteering schools were involved in the second phase of this quasi experimental study. Form Four students were selected as they were not involved in national examination. Slightly over half of the respondents were Malays (63%). This was followed by Chinese (19.5%), Indian (16.8%) and respondents with ethnicity other than the three major ethnics in Malaysia ranked last with (0.7%) from the total percentage of respondents. For the purpose of this study, the students' English language competency was not taken as a consideration and thus serves as a limitation of the study.

During the first meeting between the respondents and the participating English language teacher, respondents were briefed about ELIRP and the teachers distributed the students' consent form and pre-test questionnaire. Respondents were given a reader titled 'Ripples' that consists of

Malaysian culture based short stories. Four short stories were selected for the purpose of this study. The respondents read and discussed the stories throughout the eight weeks of ELIRP based on the guidelines which were provided. This text, *Ripples*, was chosen because it was found to be suitable to the Malaysian multicultural context. After the completion of ELIRP, respondents were required to answer post-ELIRP questionnaire.

Phase Three. In this phase the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0 was used to analyse the data together with an adaptation of Intercultural Competence Value Rubric by Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) (Bennett, Brown, Cartwright, Gin, Davis, Deardorff, Huston, Knefelkamp, Nishishiba & Smith, 2009) as shown in Table 1 was used to measure the level of Intercultural Knowledge and Intercultural Behaviour of the respondents. 'Poor' and 'Average' category indicates low level of intercultural knowledge and intercultural behaviour, whereas 'Good' and 'Average' category indicates high level of intercultural knowledge and intercultural behaviour.

Instruments

Ripples (Reading Material). The first instrument, the reader titled *Ripples* was written by Shih-Li Kow and was published by Silverfish Books Sdn. Bhd. in 2008. It consists of 25 short stories, but for the purpose of this research, only four short stories were selected. The themes

Table 1
Intercultural Competence Value Rubric by Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) (2009)

	Poor 1-5	Average 6-10	Good 11-15	Advanced 16-20
Knowledge Cultural self-awareness	Shows minimal awareness of own cultural rules and biases	Identifies own cultural rules and biases	Recognizes new perspectives about own cultural rules and biases	Articulates insights into own cultural rules and biases.
Knowledge Cultural worldview	Demonstrates surface understanding of the complexity of elements important to members of another culture in relation to its history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, or beliefs and practices.	Demonstrates partial understanding of the complexity of elements important to members of another culture in relation to its history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, or beliefs and practices.	Demonstrates adequate understanding of the complexity of elements important to members of another culture in relation to its history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, or beliefs and practices.	Demonstrates sophisticated understanding of the complexity of elements important to members of another culture in relation to its history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, or beliefs and practices.
Behaviour Empathy	Views the experience of others but does so through own cultural worldview.	Identifies components of other cultural perspectives but responds in all situations with own worldview.	Recognizes intellectual and emotional dimensions of more than one worldview and sometimes uses more than one worldview in interactions.	Interprets intercultural experience from the perspectives of own and more than one worldview and demonstrates ability to act in a supportive manner that recognizes the feelings of another cultural group.
Behaviour Verbal and non-verbal communication	Has a minimal level of understanding of cultural differences in verbal and nonverbal communication; is unable to negotiate a shared understanding	Identifies some cultural differences in verbal and nonverbal communication and is aware that misunderstanding can occur based on those differences but is still unable to negotiate a shared understanding.	Recognizes and participates in cultural differences in verbal and nonverbal communication and begins to negotiate a shared understanding based on those differences.	Articulates a complex understanding of cultural differences in verbal and nonverbal communication

and structures that emphasise the issues of history, identity (both individual and communal), ethnicity, and place (Leon,

2009) was used as the guide to select the four stories.

Table 2
Title of story

Story	Title	Value Acculturation	Topic
1	One Thing at a Time	Interracial Harmony	Interracial Marriage
2	Deep Fried Devil	Interracial Harmony	Traditional Food Customs
3	Courting of Cik Zahirah	Intercultural Values	Cultural Beliefs
4	The Prize	Intercultural Values	Religious Beliefs

The selection of the short stories in Table 2 above were limited to four due to time constraint as the ELIRP was held during English language period and the participating teachers have to alternate ELIRP intervention with daily English language teaching. Participating teachers and respondents were expected to finish reading each story and discuss the story based on the guidelines provided. A time frame of two weeks was provided to complete each story. A total of eight weeks was required to complete the ELIRP.

Questionnaire. The questionnaire involved two parts: pre-IRP questionnaire and post-ELIRP. It was administered to 292 respondents Form Four students from 13 participating schools in Penang before ELIRP started and after the completion of ELIRP. The same set of items was used in order to observe the differences in the level of intercultural knowledge and intercultural behaviour of the respondents during pre- and post-ELIRP stage. The questionnaire comprises of two parts whereby Part 1

consists of personal information of the respondents and Part 2 was divided into Section A and Section B. Each section consisted of 5 items; Section A focused on Intercultural Knowledge and Section B on Intercultural Behaviour and a total of 40 items were prepared for four short stories.

RESULTS

The results of the level of intercultural knowledge and intercultural behaviour among Malaysian secondary school students in the pre-English Language Intercultural Reading Programme (pre-ELIRP) stage and post- English Language Intercultural Reading Programme (post-ELIRP) are presented according to the research questions.

Research Question 1: What is the level of intercultural knowledge among the 4th form Malaysian secondary school students?

The data came from 292 respondents in 13 secondary schools in the Penang area before the four short stories were

introduced. The respondents were provided with a questionnaire that consisted of two different parts according to four short stories with total of 20 items to learn the level of intercultural knowledge among respondents. Respondents were graded

according to the marks awarded to the respective items. Guttman scale was used to measure respondents' intercultural knowledge; Table 3 shows the respondents' evaluation of their level of intercultural knowledge during pre-ELIRP test.

Table 3
Title of story

Short Story	Mean Score
Story 1 : One Thing at a Time [Topic : Interracial Marriage]	3.95
Story 2: Deep Fried Devil [Topic : Traditional Food Customs]	4.59
Story 3: The Courting of Cik Zahirah [Topic: Cultural Beliefs]	3.99
Story 4: The Prize [Topic: Religious Beliefs]	3.18
Total Pre-English Language IRP stage score	15.70

The mean score above represents mean of the marks obtained by the respondents. In measuring respondents' intercultural knowledge, total mean score received by respondents will serve as the indicator of their level of intercultural knowledge in the pre-ELIRP stage. As for post-ELIRP test, respondents were given the same

questionnaire as the pre-IRP stage and the results were measured based on the mean score obtained according to short stories as well as overall score. Table 4 shows the mean score obtained in measuring the respondents' level of intercultural knowledge during post-ELIRP test:

Table 4
Level of intercultural knowledge during post-English Language Intercultural Reading Programme Stage

Short Story	Mean Score
Story 1 : One Thing at a Time [Topic : Interracial Marriage]	4.02
Story 2: Deep Fried Devil [Topic: Traditional Food Customs]	4.74
Story 3: The Courting of Cik Zahirah [Topic: Cultural Beliefs]	4.25
Story 4: The Prize [Topic: Religion Beliefs]	3.22
Total Pre- ELIRP test	16.24

In comparison to the mean score results for pre-ELIRP and post-ELIRP questionnaire, the findings revealed that there were positive changes in the total mean score of pre-

ELIRP test and post-ELIRP test. The difference of the scores is as shown in table 5 below:

Table 5
Comparison of English Language Intercultural Knowledge Pre-Intercultural Reading Programme Stage and English Language Post-Intercultural Reading Programme Stage Questionnaire Score

Short Story	Mean Score (Pre-ELIRP)	Mean Score (Post-ELIRP)
Story 1 : One Thing at a Time [Topic : Interracial Marriage]	3.95	4.02
Story 2: Deep Fried Devil [Topic : Traditional Food Customs]	4.59	4.74
Story 3: The Courting of Cik Zahirah [Topic: Cultural Beliefs]	3.99	4.25
Story 4: The Prize [Topic: Religion Beliefs]	3.18	3.22
Total Test Score p-value = 0.000	15.70	16.24

Although the total mean score showed that respondents' level of intercultural knowledge fell under the same category during pre-ELIRP stage and post-ELIRP stage as according to Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Value (2009), indicated that respondents have a good level of knowledge during post-ELIRP stage. The rubric indicates good level of intercultural knowledge suggesting that respondents are able to recognise new perspectives about own cultural rules and biases as well as demonstrate adequate understanding of the complexity of elements that are important to members of other cultures. This proves that respondents have high level of intercultural knowledge.

Moreover, paired sample t-test for two related samples was also conducted to compare the means as the repeated measures. In this research study, subjects were measured on two occasions and under two different conditions. Paired sample t-test revealed that the p-value obtained after comparing overall mean score during pre-ELIRP stage and post-ERLIRP stage is 0.000 which is less than 0.05. Therefore,

the findings indicate that overall two sets of scores are significantly different.

Research Question 2: What is the level of intercultural behaviour among the 4th form Malaysian secondary school students?

In Section B of pre-English Language Intercultural Reading Programme (ELIRP) test, a total of 20 items to examine the level of intercultural behaviour among respondents were prepared and the items divided according to the topics portrayed in the short stories. Respondents used a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Scale 1 (strongly disagree) and scale 2 (disagree) were combined for reporting purpose. Scale 3 (agree) and scale 4 (strongly agree) are combined for reporting purposes whereby scale three (neutral) stands alone. According to Allen and Seamen (2007), Likert scale is best to use as wide scale as possible, however, it is appropriate for the researcher to condense categories for analysis purpose. Therefore, the purpose of combining the scales is to report respondents' answers and responses

and categorise them into three major categories, which are; agree, neutral and disagree. Tables 6 until Tables 9 summarise the level of intercultural behaviour during the pre-ELIRP stage according to the short stories and the scale is as follows: Scale: 1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly Agree.

Table 6
Pre-ELIRP Story 1 (One Thing at a Time)

Items	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	Mean Score
1. <i>I think inter-racial marriage should be promoted</i>	7.5	11.3	53.1	16.1	35	3.14
2. <i>I will practice interracial marriage in the future</i>	16.1	21.9	40.4	15.1	6.5	2.74
3. <i>I would like to learn the languages of other races</i>	0.7	1.4	12.0	36.6	49.3	4.33
4. <i>If I can speak another language, I will be able to learn about the culture better</i>	0	4.1	15.8	40.8	39.4	4.15
5. <i>I would like to learn traditional dances of other races in Malaysia</i>	6.8	11.3	34.6	27.1	20.2	3.42

Table 7
Pre-ELIRP Story 2 (Deep Fried Devil)

Items	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	Mean Score
1. <i>I think traditional food is ethnic free</i>	2.4	9.9	35.6	27.1	25.0	3.62
2. <i>I eat traditional food of other races prepared by cooks of my race only</i>	16.1	24.3	26.4	25.7	7.5	2.84
3. <i>I eat traditional food of other races prepared by cooks of other races</i>	3.8	11.6	34.6	31.2	18.8	3.50
4. <i>We should not change the original recipe of traditional food that belongs to other races</i>	2.7	8.2	26.0	31.5	31.5	3.81
5. <i>I think food can be unifying symbol for Malaysians</i>	0.7	2.7	15.4	32.2	49.0	4.26

Table 8
Pre-ELIRP Story 3 (Courting of Cik Zahirah)

Items	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	Mean Score
1. <i>I believe that practicing black magic is cultural practice specific to Malay community</i>	28.8	31.8	27.4	9.6	2.4	2.25
2. <i>I understand why some culture/communities forbid courtship before marriage</i>	3.1	9.2	51.0	26.7	9.9	3.31
3. <i>I would date a woman before marriage/engagement irrespectively of my/her cultural/religious beliefs</i>	12.3	12.0	42.5	25.3	7.9	3.04
4. <i>In my opinion, Malay superstitions are defined by culture and not religion</i>	4.1	13.0	52.4	21.9	8.6	3.18
5. <i>I feel that modern Malay society is still tied to superstitious beliefs</i>	5.5	6.5	48.6	30.8	8.6	3.30

Table 9
Pre-ELIRP Story 3 (Courting of Cik Zahirah)

Items	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	Mean Score
1. <i>I believe that all forms of gambling are prohibited in my culture</i>	8.6	14.4	29.8	22.3	25.0	3.41
2. <i>I think that it is permissible to partake in games of chance as one can control one's luck</i>	10.6	25.7	47.9	13.7	2.1	2.71
3. <i>In my opinion, the prohibition on gambling is more religious in origin than cultural</i>	3.1	14.0	43.2	3.6	16.1	3.36
4. <i>I think that gambling is a destructive habit and I should not participate in it</i>	2.1	6.5	19.9	24.7	46.9	4.08
5. <i>I think gambling is a form of social and is culturally sanctioned</i>	17.1	23.6	34.6	18.8	5.6	2.73

In finding the difference in the level of intercultural behaviour among the secondary school students at the pre-ELIRP stage and post IRP stage, the same procedure was repeated. During post-ELIRP stage, the same questionnaire was distributed among the same respondents in pre-ELIRP stage.

Tables 10 until Tables 13 summarise the respondents' evaluation on the level of intercultural behaviour during post-IRP questionnaire and the scale is as follows: Scale: 1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly Agree

Table 10
 Post-ELIRP Story 1 (One Thing at a Time)

Items	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	Mean Score
1. <i>I think inter-racial marriage should be promoted</i>	4.5	8.9	45.2	29.1	12.3	3.36
2. <i>I will practice interracial marriage in the future</i>	10.3	21.6	46.2	17.8	4.1	2.84
3. <i>I would like to learn the languages of other races</i>	0.7	0	10.3	40.4	48.6	4.36
4. <i>If I can speak another language, I will be able to learn about the culture better</i>	0	1.7	18.5	42.5	37.3	4.15
5. <i>I would like to learn traditional dances of other races in Malaysia</i>	2.7	7.9	38.7	30.5	20.2	3.58

Table 11
 Post-ELIRP Story 1 (One Thing at a Time)

Items	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	Mean Score
1. <i>I think traditional food is ethnic free</i>	1.7	7.9	43.2	30.5	16.8	3.53
2. <i>I eat traditional food of other races prepared by cooks of my race only</i>	17.5	24.7	26.4	25.3	6.2	2.78
3. <i>I eat traditional food of other races prepared by cooks of other races</i>	2.4	17.1	29.1	30.5	28.4	3.50
4. <i>We should not change the original recipe of traditional food that belongs to other races</i>	1.0	8.2	31.8	30.5	28.4	3.77
5. <i>I think food can be unifying symbol for Malaysians</i>	0	0.7	15.4	39.4	44.5	4.28

Table 12
 Post-ELIRP Story 3 (Courting of Cik Zahirah)

Items	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	Mean Score
1. <i>I believe that practicing black magic is cultural practice specific to Malay community</i>	19.9	28.8	38.4	11.0	2.1	2.47
2. <i>I understand why some culture/communities forbid courtship before marriage</i>	6.8	6.5	46.6	27.4	12.7	3.33
3. <i>I would date a woman before marriage/engagement irrespectively of my/her cultural/religious beliefs</i>	9.9	13.7	42.5	25.3	8.6	3.09
4. <i>In my opinion, Malay superstitions are defined by culture and not religion</i>	7.9	14.0	51.0	17.8	9.2	3.07
5. <i>I feel that modern Malay society is still tied to superstitious beliefs</i>	3.8	10.6	53.8	26.4	5.5	3.19

Table 13
Post-ELIRP Story 4 (The Prize)

Items	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	Mean Score
1. <i>I believe that all forms of gambling are prohibited in my culture</i>	8.9	9.9	31.5	25.0	24.7	3.47
2. <i>I think that it is permissible to partake in games of chance as one can control one's luck</i>	11.6	28.1	47.6	10.6	2.1	2.63
3. <i>In my opinion, the prohibition on gambling is more religious in origin than cultural</i>	6.8	9.9	43.2	29.8	10.3	3.27
4. <i>I think that gambling is a destructive habit and I should not participate in it</i>	6.5	5.1	20.2	27.1	41.1	3.91
5. <i>I think gambling is a form of social and is culturally sanctioned</i>	16.8	20.5	43.2	14.7	4.8	2.70

In comparison to the results obtained from the pre-ELIRP questionnaire and post-ELIRP questionnaire, the findings revealed that there were only slight changes in relation to the total scores obtained by the respondents. Adding to that, based on the mean score for

every story, the respondents were found to be neutral in each item in the questionnaire. Table 14 shows the difference of the scores on the level of intercultural behaviour of the respondents during pre-and post-ELIRP questionnaire.

Table 14
Comparison of Pre-ELIRP and Post-ELIRP stage questionnaire score

Short Story	Mean Score (Pre-ELIRP)	Mean Score (Post-ELIRP)
Story 1 : One Thing at a Time [Topic : Interracial Marriage]	3.56	3.66
Story 2: Deep Fried Devil [Topic : Traditional Food Customs]	3.60	3.57
Story 3: The Courting of Cik Zahirah [Topic: Cultural Beliefs]	3.01	3.03
Story 4: The Prize [Topic: Religion Beliefs]	3.26	3.20
Overall Score	13.43	13.46

The overall score obtained by respondents indicate that respondents have the same level of intercultural knowledge during pre-and post-ELIRP stage. According to Intercultural Competence Value Rubric (2009), respondents have ‘Good’ or high level of intercultural behaviour during

pre-and post-ELIRP stage. This means that, their level of intercultural behaviour allows them to recognise intellectual and emotional dimensions of more than one worldview, and sometimes uses more than one worldview in interactions and respondents are able to recognise and

participate in cultural differences in verbal and non-verbal communication and begins to negotiate a shared understanding based on the differences.

However, a non-parametric Wilcoxon Signed Ranked test was performed to validate the changes of intercultural behaviour before the stories were being introduced and after the respondents were exposed with four of the related stories based on the English Language Intercultural Reading Programme test that they have to answer during pre-ELIRP stage and post-ELIRP stage according to items. Table 15

summarises the pre-and post-test Z-value according to 20 items based on the four short stories.

Based on the data presented in Table 15, only four out of 20 items have Z-value that is less than .05. The results show that only S1Q1 / PS1Q1 (Z value=0.001), S1Q5 / PS1Q5 (Z value=0.035), S3Q1 / PS3Q1 (Z value=0.002) and S4Q4 / PS4Q4 (Z value=0.024) have significance difference between pre-and post-ELIRP score in respondents' intercultural behaviour. Other than the four items in Table 15 with Z value that is less than .05, the changes in the level of intercultural behaviour of the respondents were not caused mainly by ELIRP, but mainly were caused by other external factors.

Table 15
Intercultural behaviour Pre-ELIRP and Post-ELIRP p-value

Pre-ELIRP	Post-ELIRP	Z-value
PrS1Q1	PS1Q1	0.001
PrS1Q2	PS1Q2	0.165
PrS1Q3	PS1Q3	0.326
PrS1Q4	PS1Q4	0.991
PrS1Q5	PS1Q5	0.035
PrS2Q1	PS2Q1	0.164
PrS2Q2	PS2Q2	0.231
PrS2Q3	PS2Q3	0.821
PrS2Q4	PS2Q4	0.410
PrS2Q5	PS2Q5	0.740
PrS3Q1	PS3Q1	0.002
PrS3Q2	PS3Q2	0.851
PrS3Q3	PS3Q3	0.572
PrS3Q4	PS3Q4	0.165
PrS3Q5	PS3Q5	0.079
PrS4Q1	PS4Q1	0.588
PrS4Q2	PS4Q2	0.321
PrS4Q3	PS4Q3	0.407
PrS4Q4	PS4Q4	0.024
PrS4Q5	PS4Q5	0.664

S: Story, Q: Question, Pr: Pre, P: Post

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Based on the findings obtained from the quantitative research study to explore the level of intercultural knowledge among secondary school students, it was shown that respondents have high level of intercultural knowledge during pre-and post-ELIRP stage. However, there is an improvement in the score obtained during post-ELIRP stage as compared to pre-ELIRP stage. This is in line with Bennett (2008) who explained that the development of intercultural knowledge suggests systematic way to classify own cultural patterns, getting used to unfamiliar ways of being whether empathically or flexibly. Savicky (2008) also proposed that such knowledge cannot be assumed and in building intercultural knowledge a balance theory, research, and application is required.

This study suggests that ELIRP has helped respondents to improve their level of intercultural knowledge through intercultural exposures via intercultural reading. In a study of intercultural knowledge among school students, Garza (2008) found that the selection of reading materials and reading activities in classrooms to promote intercultural knowledge is important as they allow students to broaden their perspectives and familiarity of cultures other than their own. Quantitative findings of this research also suggested that respondents explicitly improved their knowledge on their own culture. This illustrated that ELIRP does not only help to increase respondents' intercultural knowledge of cultures other than their own, but also leads the respondents to know their own culture's customs, traditions, practices, beliefs. Thus, if intercultural reading among secondary school students is nurtured appropriately, the results could lead respondents to increase their general knowledge, extra understanding of cultures other than their own.

Intercultural behaviour is seen to be important in fostering unity among Malaysian secondary school students. Although the level of intercultural behaviour among Malaysian secondary school students was found high in this research study, Wilcoxon Signed Ranked test suggested that the changes in the level of respondents' intercultural behaviour varies due to the external factors rather the influence of ELIRP. Chen and Starosta (1996) highlighted that intercultural behaviour is interrelated with

one's communication skill. It is important to realise that such skill improves over time and according to situations or behavioural flexibility, interaction management and social skill. The current study implied that the level of intercultural behaviour of every respondent relies on the amount of stable mental programming over time as suggested by Hofstede (1981).

ELIRP would also be a platform to improve other skills such as critical thinking skills among students. Students are encouraged to ask critical questions that can provoke cultural values in intercultural classroom environment. Therefore, in order to improve understanding of both a student's own culture and that of others more effort should be directed at developing thinking skills.

Learning environment influences the ways in which students process new intercultural information and understand how they should react when involved in discussions on culture. ELIRP is suitable for a class of multi-cultural composition for knowledge sharing of cultural elements among students of diverse cultures. This criterion will truly affect intercultural relationship among the students.

Thus, there is a need for better initiatives and intervention in school based reading programmes in order to help improve the level of intercultural knowledge and behaviour among Malaysian secondary school students. English language competency of the students should be taken into consideration to improve understanding of intercultural infused

texts that are being used. Another element that needs consideration is the extension of the intervention for a longer period to ensure more representative findings on the intercultural relationship among students of different races.

The findings of this research will be used as the indicator in exposing students' level of intercultural knowledge and behaviour. It hopes to initiate more research studies among secondary school students on the same theme.

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