Ethnic Diversity and Climate Change Education in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Climate change is increasingly recognized as a critical global environmental challenge, garnering more attention and discussion each year. This escalating urgency highlights the need for collective action and comprehensive solutions to address its far-reaching impacts. This issue bridges the roles of human values and the involvement of every segment of society. Malaysia is no exception as a multicultural nation with diverse ethnicities, cultures, and religions. In this context, the role of ethnicity emerges as a critical field for consolidating a holistic understanding of climate change education in Malaysia. The practice of environmental conservation, which includes mitigation and adaptation strategies to global impacts, requires an understanding of ecological citizenship to contribute positively to local and global environments. Therefore, global competence (knowledge, skills, cognitive values) related to climate change education is essential to be instilled in every society, especially from the school level. The idea of citizenship in Malaysia needs to be examined, particularly concerning issues of ethnic competition and related concepts. This study also provides insights into the sociological perceptions and differing ideas from various nations and their effects on the global competence of multi-ethnic students in Malaysia. The aspect of ethnic diversity and climate change education discusses the concept of 'nations-of-intent,' examining the global competence of multi-ethnic students through citizenship education, with a focus on knowledge, awareness, cognitive and social skills, as well as attitudes towards addressing global issues, particularly climate change. Thus, citizenship education must respond to the contextual challenges posed by the multi- ethnic nature of society to achieve a comprehensive understanding and development of global competence regarding climate change education in Malaysia.

Keywords: Ethnic diversity; Climate change; Global Citizenship Education (GCED); Ecological citizenship; Concept of 'Nation-of-Intent'

INTRODUCTION

The global climate crisis, with its increasingly evident impacts, demands a multifaceted approach that involves scientific and technological solutions and a deeper understanding of the social and cultural dimensions of climate change. As the world faces unprecedented environmental challenges, the role of education, particularly citizenship education, becomes critical in fostering an informed and active citizenry capable of addressing these issues. Citizenship education, when integrated with the role of ethnicity, holds significant potential in enhancing students' understanding of climate change's sociocultural aspects and cultivating a more inclusive, empathetic approach to environmental stewardship. This intersection of ethnicity and citizenship education is especially relevant in diverse, multi-ethnic societies such as Malaysia, where varying cultural perspectives can enrich the collective response to environmental sustainability.

The role of ethnicity, which explores the history, culture, and experiences of different ethnic groups, offer valuable insights into how diverse communities engage with environmental issues. Ethnic groups often have unique relationships with their natural environment, shaped by historical, economic, and cultural factors.

These perspectives are crucial for understanding the differential impacts of climate change on various communities and for developing equitable, culturally sensitive solutions. Indigenous knowledge systems, as an example, are often marginalized in mainstream environmental discourse and offer valuable lessons in sustainable resource management and biodiversity conservation. By incorporating ethnic diversity into citizenship education, students can learn to appreciate these diverse perspectives and understand the importance of inclusivity in addressing global challenges such as climate change.

Citizenship education, traditionally focused on fostering civic knowledge, values, and skills, is evolving to meet the demands of an increasingly interconnected world. Global citizenship education (GCED) aims to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and values needed to engage with global issues, including climate change, responsibly and effectively. Integrating the role of ethnicity into this framework helps to ensure that students not only understand the global dimensions of climate change but also recognize the local, cultural contexts in which environmental issues play out. This approach promotes a more nuanced understanding of climate justice, highlighting how marginalized communities are often disproportionately affected by environmental degradation and how their voices must be included in developing sustainable solutions.

In Malaysia, a nation characterized by its rich ethnic diversity, the integration of ethnicity into citizenship education is particularly important. The country's multi-ethnic makeup means that different communities may experience and respond to climate change in distinct ways. For instance, rural and indigenous communities who are often most vulnerable to environmental changes, have historically been excluded from national and global climate conversations. By incorporating their experiences and knowledge into citizenship education, students can develop a more comprehensive understanding of climate change and its impacts, while also fostering greater empathy and solidarity across ethnic lines.
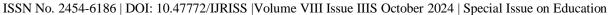
Furthermore, by integrating the role of ethnicity and its diversity into citizenship education encourages students to critically examine issues of equity and justice within the context of climate change. It helps them to recognize that solutions to environmental problems must be inclusive, considering the needs and rights of all communities. This approach not only enriches students' understanding of the complexities of climate change but also prepares them to become more effective, socially responsible citizens who can contribute to a just and sustainable future.

This paper aims to explain the role of ethnic diversity in citizenship education with regards to climate change challenges in Malaysia. It is a vital step towards addressing climate change more holistically and inclusively. By fostering an understanding of the diverse cultural and social dimensions of environmental issues, this approach will empower students to become informed, empathetic, and active participants with adequate global competences to address climate change challenges.

GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION (GCED) FOR CLIMATE CHANGE EDUCATION

Global Citizenship Education (GCED) has become an essential framework for addressing the growing climate change crisis as it empowers individuals to take meaningful action on environmental issues. By integrating knowledge, values, and skills related to climate change, GCE equips students with the ability to critically assess global environmental challenges and fosters active civic engagement in mitigating these issues (Ahmed & Mohammed, 2022). This approach is particularly valuable in the 21st century, where the climate crisis has reached an unprecedented level, requiring collective global efforts for mitigation and adaptation.

Global Citizenship Education (GCED) is a core essential in promoting a sense of belonging to a global community, where individuals recognize the interconnectivity between their actions and the broader world (Bosio & Torres, 2019). Within the context of climate change, this translates into developing a shared sense of responsibility for environmental sustainability. GCED fosters awareness of global environmental issues, equipping students with the knowledge to understand the causes and consequences of climate change. This

knowledge is coupled with the development of skills that encourage critical thinking and problem-solving, essential for tackling complex climate-related challenges (Chiba et al., 2021).

In addition, GCED is grounded in ethical values such as empathy, equity, and justice, which are crucial when addressing the unequal distribution of climate change impacts. Vulnerable populations, particularly in developing countries, are disproportionately affected by environmental degradation. As such, GCED advocates for climate justice urging students to consider the social, political, and economic dimensions of climate change, and encouraging them to work towards more equitable and sustainable solutions (Estellés & Fischman, 2021).

Climate change education is increasingly being recognized as a critical component of GCED. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), climate change education is essential for promoting sustainable development and empowering individuals to take climate action. GCED offers a platform through which climate change can be integrated into curricula in school, thereby ensuring that students are not only informed about the science of climate change but also the ethical and social dimensions of the issue (Yemini et al., 2019).
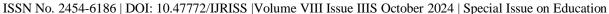
In most educational systems including Malaysia, climate change education has traditionally focused on the scientific aspects of the issue, such as understanding greenhouse gas emissions and their impact on global temperatures. However, GCED expands this understanding by incorporating the human and ethical aspects of climate change. As example, GCED encourages students to consider the environmental responsibilities of individuals and nations, as well as the ethical implications of environmental policies and practices (Ahmed & Mohammed, 2022). This holistic approach allows students to develop a more comprehensive understanding of climate change and empowers them to engage in meaningful action.

One of the key contributions of GCED to climate change education is the concept of ecological citizenship. Ecological citizenship towards environmental issues refers to the rights and responsibilities that individuals have in protecting the environment. GCED promotes ecological citizenship by encouraging students to adopt sustainable practices in their daily lives and to advocate for policies that address climate change (Bosio & Torres, 2019). This involves not only making environmentally conscious decisions, such as reducing personal carbon footprints but also engaging in collective action, such as participating in climate seminars or campaigns for stronger environmental regulations.

Ecological citizenship is defined as both general and personal pro-environmental attitudes or behaviors, guided by the fair and equitable distribution of environmental resources and the need for sustainable policy development. It generally encompasses citizens' engagement toward collective sustainability (Dobson, 2010). According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP, 2005), ecological citizenship refers to the responsibility of environmental preservation as a shared duty of all citizens and governments, based on the intrinsic relationship between humans and the environment. These two definitions emphasize the importance of awareness regarding environmental behavior and the roles and responsibilities of each citizen toward environmental sustainability.

Dobson (2010) outlines six characteristics of ecological citizenship: 1) Environmental sustainability is a common good, which cannot be achieved through individual actions alone. 2) Environmental motivation must go beyond personal interests and involve collective motivation. 3) The importance of ethical and moral knowledge regarding the environment must be recognized. 4) Rights and responsibilities should be internalized by citizens. 5) Responsibility is not borne by individuals alone but must be shared collectively. 6) Belief that pro-environmental behavior can generate positive impacts.

In essence, these definitions lead to a comprehensive understanding of the concept of ecological citizenship towards environmental issues. The core of this concept is the idea of citizen obligations and the collective roles that must be played in addressing environmental issues, as well as how citizens can contribute to achieving better environmental quality. It also includes actions that can be undertaken by both the public and

private sectors in addressing sustainable development collectively. Chiba et al (2021) second the statement by stating, that the development of ecological citizenship is particularly important considering the global nature of the climate crisis where climate change is a transnational issue, and effective solutions require cooperation between individuals, communities, and governments at all levels. GCED helps to foster a sense of global solidarity, encouraging students to recognize their shared responsibility for addressing climate change and to collaborate with others in pursuit of sustainable solutions.

Global Citizenship Education plays a pivotal role in addressing the climate crisis by fostering environmental awareness, civic engagement, and a commitment to social justice. Through GCED, students are empowered to become active participants in climate action, equipped with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to address the complex challenges posed by climate change. By promoting ecological citizenship and linking climate change education with social justice in the diversity of ethnicities, GCED provides a framework for building a more sustainable and equitable future.
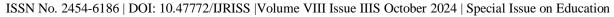
The success of multiple dimensions encompassing knowledge, skills, and values related to global issues or intercultural situations is a key element in defining global competence. This concept is increasingly recognized as essential in addressing contemporary global challenges, particularly climate change, which requires a multi-faceted, cooperative approach. Through this definition, we explore two critical components of global competence: global issues and intercultural situations. Global issues refer to problems that affect all layers of society and have profound implications for both present and future generations. These include environmental degradation, climate change, and social inequality. On the other hand, intercultural situations refer to face-to-face, virtual, or mediated encounters between individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Effective interaction in these contexts is key to fostering cooperation and understanding across cultural boundaries, which is essential in addressing global problems such as climate change.

The development of global competences is a lifelong process achieved through continuous education. This competence is essential in fostering a culture of awareness in individuals, particularly those from multicultural backgrounds, as they navigate global issues such as climate change. Climate change with its profound implications for all of humanity, requires a globally competent population capable of critical thinking and problem-solving across cultural and national borders. Individuals equipped with global competence will have a better understanding of the impact of climate change on various communities, adapt to new realities, and collaborate on solutions that promote sustainability.

Global competence prepares individuals for the realities of the global workforce, where effective communication, openness to individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, building trust in diverse teams, and the ability to show mutual respect are crucial. In the context of climate change, this competence helps to foster the necessary collaboration between nations, industries, and communities in implementing effective environmental strategies. The ability to communicate across cultures is particularly important in this regard, as climate change is a truly global issue that requires coordinated efforts across different sectors and regions (OECD, 2018).

Global competence enables individuals to critically evaluate the causes and consequences of climate change. This critical perspective allows them to question existing systems and practices which contribute to environmental degradation, and advocate for more sustainable practices. By developing an understanding of the social, economic, and political dimensions of climate change, globally competent individuals are better equipped to contribute to solutions that are equitable and just for all people (Boix Mansilla & Jackson, 2021).

Climate change disproportionately affects marginalized communities, particularly in developing countries and among indigenous populations. Global competence, which includes a focus on empathy and intercultural understanding, helps individuals recognize these disparities and advocate for more inclusive climate policies. In this way, global competence is not only about understanding the science of climate change but also about addressing the social and ethical dimensions of the issue (UNESCO, 2021).

Technology plays a crucial role in facilitating global competence, especially in the context of climate change education. Digital platforms allow individuals from different parts of the world to connect, share ideas, and collaborate on climate solutions. This global exchange of knowledge and perspectives is critical for developing innovative and effective strategies to combat climate change. Moreover, technology enables individuals to access real-time data on environmental changes, which enhances their ability to make informed decisions and act on climate-related issues (Tichnor-Wagner et al., 2020).

In conclusion, global competence are vital skills set for addressing climate change. It involves not only understanding the scientific and technical aspects of the issue but also the cultural, social, and ethical dimensions. As climate change continues to affect all corners of the globe, individuals with global competence will be better equipped to collaborate across borders, communicate effectively, and advocate for sustainable solutions. Through continuous education and the development of global competence, individuals can contribute to a more just and sustainable future for all.

THE INFLUENCE OF 'NATION-OF-INTENT' CONCEPT TOWARDS CLIMATE CHANGE CHALLENGES

Malaysia is a country shaped by its diverse ethnicities, a legacy of the British colonial era. As a result, various ethnic groups and identities have emerged in Malaysia, continuing to the present day. Since the post-independence period, Malaysia has aspired to build a concept known as the *Bangsa Idaman*' or known as the Ideal Nation. The idea of 'Ideal Nation' is influenced by the ethnic diversity within the country. According to Shamsul (1996b), the political ambitions of both majority and minority social groups have abstracted their vision of an "ideal nation," which stems from the concept of a 'nation-of-intent'. However, in many cases, this remains merely a political imagination. The notion of an 'ideal nation' or 'nation-of-intent' was first introduced through the concept of *Bangsa Malaysia* (the Malaysian Nation), which has been widely debated for a long time. There has been rhetoric both supporting and questioning the concept of *Bangsa Malaysia* during the era of *Malaysia Baharu* (New Malaysia), especially under the leadership of Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad. According to the *Kamus Dewan* (Fourth Edition), the term *bangsa* (nation) has five definitions. However, two of these definitions are commonly used: one referring to ancestral origin and meaning like 'race' or 'ethnicity', as in *bangsa Melayu* (Malay race) or *bangsa Melanau* (Melanau race). The other meaning of *bangsa* refers to a group of people within a political nation-state. When translated into English, the word 'nation' is often used to represent this concept. However, this translation has sparked debate, as critics argue that it conflates the two distinct definitions. Meanwhile, the complex understanding of citizenship in Malaysia which is shaped by cultural discourse and stems from the country's social divisions has also been in the debate of defining the idea of ideal nation in Malaysia. Nur Atiqah & Anuar Ahmad (2020) state that citizenship can be interpreted in two ways as a legal status and through a sociological lens.

The concept of 'nation-of-intent' in Malaysia, as it relates to climate change, reflects a vision of unity that transcends ethnic, cultural, and political divides to address a common environmental challenge. Malaysia, a multi-ethnic and multicultural nation, has long grappled with the idea of forming a cohesive national identity. The idea of 'nation-of-intent', introduced by Shamsul A.B. (1996), refers to the political ambitions within different ethnic groups to shape a collective national identity. This concept remains particularly relevant as Malaysia confronts pressing global issues, such as climate change, where a unified, multi-ethnic approach to environmental sustainability is required.

Climate change presents an existential threat to Malaysia, with the nation facing rising sea levels, increasingly erratic weather patterns, and degradation of biodiversity. Addressing these environmental challenges requires the nation to cultivate a shared sense of responsibility and collective action across all segments of society. In this context, the "nation-of-intent" becomes a useful framework for examining how Malaysia's diverse communities might unite to combat climate change. The environmental issues in Malaysia are intricately tied to social justice and economic disparities, particularly as the effects of climate change disproportionately impact marginalized communities, including rural and indigenous populations (Majeed et al., 2020).

The 'nation-of-intent' concept can serve as a bridge for these diverse groups to form a collective response to climate challenges. This collective effort requires not only government policies but also grassroots mobilization that cuts across ethnic and cultural lines. Malaysia's development policies, particularly those linked to the economy, infrastructure, and energy, need to be reconciled with the broader goals of environmental sustainability. However, Malaysia's multi- ethnic makeup often complicates efforts to adopt unified policies, as different communities may prioritize economic growth or cultural preservation over environmental concerns (Aziz et al., 2021).

Besides that, Malaysia's political landscape also influences its approach to climate change. Historically, the nation's political structure has been heavily influenced by ethnic considerations, leading to fragmented policy approaches. However, recent efforts under Malaysia's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) commitments reflect an increasing awareness of the need to align climate change mitigation with broader development goals. Initiatives such as the National Policy on Climate Change (NPCC) emphasize a cross-sectoral and inclusive approach, signaling progress toward integrating environmental sustainability with national identity formation (Hashim & Mahmood, 2021).

Education plays a pivotal role in shaping Malaysia's response to climate change within this 'nation-of-intent' framework. Efforts to incorporate environmental awareness into national curriculum, particularly through Global Citizenship Education (GCED) will help to foster a sense of ecological citizenship among young Malaysians. These educational initiatives aim to transcend ethnic divisions by emphasizing a shared responsibility for environmental stewardship (Rahim et al., 2022). As young people from different ethnic backgrounds come to understand the global implications of climate change, they are more likely to participate in collective actions aimed at protecting their shared environment. The concept of 'nation-of-intent' in Malaysia serves as a potential foundation for addressing climate change, offering a framework for building a cohesive national response. The nation's success in mitigating climate risks will depend on its ability to mobilize diverse communities under a unified vision of environmental responsibility and shared citizenship. Achieving this vision requires reconciling development goals with sustainability, promoting environmental education, and fostering inclusive policies that resonate across Malaysia's multi-ethnic society. Addressing climate change in Malaysia requires an interdisciplinary approach that integrates the role of ethnicity and climate change education to foster a comprehensive understanding of ecological citizenship. Malaysia's diverse cultural and ethnic landscape presents unique challenges and opportunities in promoting environmental conservation and sustainable development. The idea of global competence becomes crucial here, as it involves not only technical knowledge about climate change but also social, cognitive, and intercultural skills necessary to engage with diverse communities effectively. Global competence is needed to develop students' ability to critically assess environmental issues and collaborate across cultural boundaries.

The concept of ecological citizenship, which emphasizes the shared responsibility of individuals and governments in environmental conservation, can be a vital framework in fostering awareness and action. By understanding their roles as ecological citizens, students, especially those in a multicultural setting like Malaysia, can grasp the importance of engaging in practices that contribute positively to both local and global environments. This understanding must be cultivated early, particularly through educational systems that emphasize not only scientific knowledge but also social responsibility, ethical reasoning, and cross-cultural collaboration.

One of the core challenges in Malaysia is reconciling the multi-ethnic nature of society with the need for unified action on climate change. Ethnic competition and differing cultural perspectives can sometimes hinder collective efforts towards environmental conservation. However, by integrating ethnicity with climate change education, these challenges can be addressed through citizenship education. Citizenship in this context is not merely about national identity but encompasses a broader sense of global responsibility. Teaching global competence within the framework of ecological citizenship allows students to develop the critical thinking and problem-solving skills needed to address complex environmental issues such as climate change, while fostering empathy, intercultural understanding, and cooperation.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, the concept of 'nation-of-intent' provides an insight of Malaysia's multi-ethnic students shared vision of environmental stewardship. This vision serves as a common goal that transcends ethnic divisions and encourages collective action toward sustainable development. By focusing on knowledge, awareness, cognitive and social skills, and attitudes, educators can help students develop the competencies needed to engage with global issues, particularly climate change, both culturally sensitive and globally informed. It is clearly vital that citizenship education in Malaysia must be responsive to the contextual realities of its multi-ethnic society, ensuring that all students are equipped with the knowledge and skills to contribute meaningfully to climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts. This requires a holistic approach that integrates environmental education, intercultural competence, and a deep understanding of the sociopolitical dynamics within Malaysia's diverse population. Only through such an integrated approach can Malaysia hope to cultivate a generation of ecologically responsible citizens who are prepared to meet the challenges of climate change on both a local and global scale. By inculcating global competence from young, particularly in the context of ecological citizenship, Malaysia can ensure that future generations are well-equipped to tackle the environmental challenges of the 21st century, fostering a society that values sustainability, inclusivity, and cooperation in the face of a rapidly changing climate.

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