



Ethnic boundaries and everyday understanding: The case of Malay and Chinese parental choice of National and National Type School in Peninsular Malaysia

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Abstract

Since the pre-independence era, the Malaysian schooling system has remained ethnicized by two cultural boundaries: language and religion. To explain this situation, this article focuses on how these ethnic boundaries work within Malay and Chinese parents' decisions for National and National Type of Schools, respectively. Thirty Malaysian Malays and 25 Chinese students born between the 1970s and the 1990s were interviewed in this research. The data showed that the majority of them had been enrolled in a primary and secondary school which could be associated with their ethnic identity. Analysis of the findings also suggested that despite the importance of future career planning, regionality and family socioeconomic background in the choice of schooling, it was the language and religious factors which had determined their parents' final decision. It also suggested that a schooling pattern based on the factors of language and religion has been sustainably maintained for three decades. The parental decision was not a simple action as it is also related to the 'everyday' understanding of what kind of school is appropriate to a particular ethnic group. The results of this study offer a theoretical explanation of ethnicity in everyday life from the constructivist perspective. This study also highlights how ethnic boundaries are the end-product of a social process rather than a taken-for-granted, natural and primordial fact of life ascribed through birth.

Keywords: boundaries, cultural boundaries, ethnicity, primary school, schooling decision, secondary school

Introduction

Malaysia is a post-colonial state and a multi-ethnic society. Its main population primarily consists of Malays, Chinese and Indians. Although Malaysia has been independent for more than six decades (since 1957), identification based on ethnic categories remains significantly relevant right through the Malaysian bureaucratic system (Siddique, 1990), especially in its macrostructures such as the economy (Lee, 2005; Lee, 2012; Lee & Khalid, 2015), politics (Shamsul, 1986; Mohamad, 2008; Brown, 2007) and education (Ting, 2010; Gill, 2014). Living in a context in which ethnicity is consistently important in its macrostructures (Crouch, 2001) has consequently influenced decisions made by or for Malaysians in everyday life (micro-processes), such as the choice of primary and secondary school (Santhiram & Tan,

2010); friendships (Santhiram, 1995; Tan et al., 2013) and marriage (Hew, 2010; Pue & Sulaiman, 2013).

The main focus of this article is to understand the decisions made by Malay and Chinese parents for national and national type schools, respectively. Although there is a trend for Malays to enroll into Chinese schools, the percentage of those who do is relatively small compared with those who were enrolled in a school which can be associated with their ethnicity. For example, in 2007, only 6% of Chinese parents (in comparison with 40% of Indian parents) were willing to enroll their children in national schools (Kenayathulla, 2015). In 2012, the Vernacular School Report suggested the same result, showing that the majority of Malay and Chinese parents preferred to enroll their children in national and national type schools, respectively. This suggests that there is a high continuing tendency for Malay and Chinese parents to register their children in a school which can be associated with their ethnic identity and category. The aim of this article is therefore to understand that choice.

The discourse presented in the article is not grounded on statistical discussion. It offers only a qualitative exploration and explanatory discussion of how schooling choices based on cultural boundaries - mainly on language and religion - among Malay and Chinese parents continue to be relevant in post-colonial Malaysia. The discussion is mainly based on Friedrik Barth's work 'Ethnic groups and boundaries' (1969). Barth was a pioneer of constructivism (Brubaker, 2014; Hummell, 2014; Wimmer, 2008a, 2008b). His theoretical perspective was thus the opposite of primordialism. Primordialism sees ethnicity as fixed, given and natural, whereas constructivism interprets ethnicity as a social organization which creates cultural boundaries to differentiate between them and others. "Ethnic boundaries emerged, rather, in and through categorical 'we-they' distinctions drawn by actors themselves and through the channeling of interaction through sets of prescriptions and proscriptions about who can interact with whom in what sorts of social relationships" (Brubaker, 2009). In contrast to primordialism, constructivism suggests that social actors create, maintain and heighten cultural boundaries through categorization and identification during their interaction with others in order to maintain the dichotomy of 'we' and 'they'. "The maintenance of an ethnic boundary, as anthropologist Frederik Barth (1994) contends, sets apart an ethnic group from another and ensures the continuity of the ethnic group" (Hoon, 2011). The maintenance of ethnic boundaries occurs in everyday decisions - be they minor or major decisions such as for food or type of school. It is related to the need for dichotomization (we-they) which this article will highlight in terms of schooling choice.

Literature review

Historical background of the schooling system in Peninsular Malaysia

a. Pre-independence era

Primary schools in pre-independence Malaya were ethnicized by the language boundary: English, Malay, Mandarin and Tamil (Gill, 2014). The English schools were built only in urban areas and the majority of their pupils were European and Chinese, with small numbers of Malays and Indians (Shamsul, 2005; Gill, 2014). Initially, all English schools were primarily sponsored by Christian missionary funds, but later were partially sponsored by the colonial government (Hashim, 2008). Other than the locational and financial factors, many Malay parents avoided registering their children at an English school because they believed that it would expose them to Christianity (Loh, 1970).

The Malay-vernacular schools, were located in rural areas and were limited to primary schools. They were sponsored fully by the colonial government (Lim, 1985). They were established in order to make Malays better farmers and fishermen than their fathers (Lim, 1985; Booth, 1999). English was excluded from the syllabus (Ozóg, 1993). In the 1930s, the numbers of Malays enrolled in these schools dropped, as many parents realized that the education provided would not give their children any opportunity for social mobility (Snodgrass, 1980; Rudner, 1994). Prior to the British educational policy, Islam was an important force in the Malay traditional educational system (Shamsul, 2005). The basic Malay traditional subjects were Qur'anic learning and reading, Qur'anic memorization, *Jawi* reading and personal religious duties. At the advanced level, Malay-Muslim students would further their studies in a *pondok* or a *madrasah*, where they would learn a different range of subjects. The main subjects were Islamic law, Qur'anic exegesis and the prophetic tradition (Shamsul, 2005). The *madrasahs* and *pondoks* were both important for preserving Islam in Malaya (Shamsul, 2005). The *madrasahs* were more formal and more organized than the *pondoks*. *Madrasahs* offered combinations of theological, vocational and secular subjects, such as the Madrasah al-Hamidiyyah (established in 1906) in Kedah and the Sekolah al-Diniah (established in 1924) in Perak. The Sekolah al-Diniah, for example, offered Mathematics, History, English and Commercial subjects, which made it popular among Malays (Shamsul, 2005).

The Chinese-vernacular schools were located in urban areas (Gill, 2014) and offered both primary- and secondary-level education. The pupils could continue on to tertiary studies in China (Ozóg, 1993). The British at the beginning were never directly involved in the Chinese schools but left them with more freedom to shape their own educational syllabus, curriculum and choice of language (Gullick, 1987; Pong, 1993). Since the British provided no sponsorship of Chinese schools, the Chinese had to finance their own schools (Tan, 1997), mostly through donations from wealthy merchants and trade guilds (Asmah, 2007). The teachers were recruited directly from China and the syllabus was based primarily on Chinese philosophy (Ozóg, 1993). In addition, the textbooks were all printed in China (Purcell, 1948). In the 1900s, the KMT promoted the use of Mandarin in Chinese schools in Malaya in order to strengthen the Chinese identity with China (Kratoska, 1997). Throughout the 1910s-1930s, Chinese education in Malaya reflected the political situation in China (Kheng, 1983). Through education, the KMT managed to bring Chinese dialect groups together and made the Japanese - who invaded China in 1937 - into their common enemy (Kratoska, 1997). The main concern of the British about the Chinese schools was their potential to produce anti-colonial feelings (Kwa, 2008). In the 1930s, the British started to intervene in the Chinese schools by providing financial aid, but this was limited to schools located in the Straits Settlements (Penang, Singapore and Malacca) and the Federated Malay States (Perak, Pahang, Selangor and Negeri Sembilan) (Purcell, 1948).

b. Post-independence era

After independence, the mainstream Malaysian schooling system remained highly ethnicized and politicized (Joseph, 2008). The question of 'what are the symbols of national identity?' could no longer be avoided. Language, in particular, was the primary issue for Malaysian identity. A few years prior to independence (in 1957), the issue of a national language was already part of British concerns. The Barnes Report of 1951 proposed a single, national school system with bilingual (Malay language and English) education (Tan et al., 2013). As a reaction to the Barnes Report, the Fenn Wu Report suggested that each primary school should teach in its own ethnic language whilst secondary schools should teach in English (Ozóg, 1993). According to Lee (2009), the Chinese leadership was concerned about the possible

elimination and extinction of Chinese culture in Malaya. The language of Mandarin was a symbol of their unity (Heng, 1996) and identity (Tan, 1988): “Chinese Malaysians, especially the Chinese-educated ones, generally hold the view that their mother tongue (*muju*) will not survive if they do not fight for it” (Tan, 1988). It was probably hoped that the language maintenance and preservation would unite Chinese political support in opposition to the Malays’ political power. In this case, language was no longer seen as a means of communication but was symbolically utilized as a form of power to access and gain a political end (Bourdieu, 1993).

In order to accommodate the strong linguistic demands made by non-Malay communities, the Razak Report of 1956 recommended maintaining the Chinese and Indian vernacular primary schools with two conditions: first, the Malay language must be taught compulsorily alongside the English language, and second, all primary schools must use the same curriculum and syllabus (Jadi, 1983). The Malay-medium primary schools were hence acknowledged as national schools and the Chinese, Indian and English schools were categorized as national-type schools (Gill, 2014). In the 1970s, the government began to transform English-medium primary schools into Malay-medium primary schools (Tan, 2013).

In 1960, the Rahman Talib Report stated that all Chinese and English secondary schools would be converted into Malay-medium secondary schools. Subsequently, Chinese secondary schools were divided into two categories. In the first category were the Chinese secondary schools which had agreed to be converted into Malay-medium secondary schools; these schools are now known as national-type Chinese secondary schools (SMJK) (Asmah, 1976). The second category comprised the Chinese secondary schools which had declined to be converted into Malay-medium schools. They continue to be known as independent Chinese secondary schools (ICSSs). In 2015, there were only 60 ICSSs in Malaysia (Tan & Teoh, 2016). In contrast with SMJKs, ICSSs operate entirely through the support of the local community (Kwa, 2008). In the 1970s, the Islamic resurgence revived and this increased the demand for Islamic schooling. Malay parents - particularly in urban areas - started to seek an alternative education which was more ‘Islamic’ from their perspective. Alternative schools were initiated by Muslim social organizations, such as the Muslim Youth Movement in Malaysia (ABIM), *Jemaah Islam Malaysia* (JIM) and *Parti Islam se-Malaysia* (PAS). In order to compete with this development, the government decided to provide funds for secondary religious schools and to take over their administration (Lee, 2009). Some of the religious private schools refused to let the government take over their administration, resulting in Private Religious schools. The establishment of these alternative schools, however, maintained the *ethnicization* of Malaysian schooling by religious and language boundaries.

Methods

This article is based on a qualitative approach of exploration and explanatory research. Fifty-five Malaysian informants born between the 1970s and the 1990s were interviewed in 2013-2014. Thirty of them were Malays and 25 were Chinese. During the period of the interviews, all of them were students in tertiary institutions. Their participation was entirely voluntary and their real names have been anonymized. The longest interview lasted for 1 hour, 42 minutes and 21 seconds, and the shortest for 23 minutes and 8 seconds. At the start of the analysis, Nvivo software was used for sorting and managing the data. However, it proved to be difficult to handle using this means; there were a few cases where the software suddenly stopped running and it cost the researcher time to recover the data. The researcher therefore decided to proceed with manual coding of the interview transcriptions. During the analysis,

several codings were established in accordance with the constructivist theoretical framework. These codings were later organized into several main themes: language, religion, future career planning, regionality and family socio-economic background. The discussion which follows is based on these themes.

Results and discussion

Religious and language boundaries in the parental choice of schooling

Malaysian children are assigned to primary schools located within their neighbourhood. Even so, parents have choices and freedom about what they might think best for their children (Tan et al., 2013). There is no law which restricts Malay parents from enrolling their children in a Chinese school or *vice versa*. The only limitation is for the religious schools, as only Muslims are accepted to enroll in them. According to one informant's understanding, this limitation is possibly due to the Qur'anic and other Islamic literature which has to be taught in this type of school. However, the curriculum should not be considered as the real reason for the outcome; the *rule* itself limits non-Muslim enrolment into Islamic religious schools.

Although there are no clear and immediate restrictions on school admission (except for religious schools), the empirical data show that the Malay informants had been registered by their parents into either a National Primary School (SK) or a Primary Religious School (SAN). Only two Chinese informants had been registered in a SK and the rest had studied in a National Primary (Type) Chinese School (SKJC) (Table 1).

Table 1. Informants' primary schools (based on ethnicity)

School	Malay	Chinese
SK	28	2
SKJC	0	23
SAN	2	0
Total	30	25

The same pattern was shown at the secondary level of study, where the majority of the Malay and Chinese students had attended a National Secondary School and a National Secondary (Type) Chinese school respectively. Only three of the Chinese informants had studied in a National Secondary School. The rest of the Malay and Chinese informants had attended private religious schools or ICSSs (Table 2).

Table 2. Informants' secondary schools (based on location of interview)

School	Malay	Chinese
SMK	26	3
SMJK	0	20
SMAR	2	0
SMAR-SMK*	2	0
ICSS	0	2
Total	30	25

Note: * signifies those who transferred from SMAR to SMK

The difference between a national and a national-type Chinese school is in their medium of instruction. The national schools (primary and secondary) use Malay as the language of instruction whereas the national-type Chinese schools (primary and secondary) use Chinese (Santhiram & Tan, 2010). Colloquially, these schools are also known as ‘Malay schools’ (primary and secondary) and ‘Chinese schools’ (primary and secondary). The reasons for this are that Mandarin is offered mainly in Chinese schools, the internal culture is identifiable either with the Malay or with the Chinese community, and each school has a close relationship with its respective community. The student composition is also influenced by the language which is used as the medium of instruction. The question is, do these cultural elements play a role in parents’ educational decisions, or they are just assumed to be the reason?

According to one Malay informant, religious education was an important aspect emphasized by her parents. She particularly stressed that the syllabus offered in the private religious schools indicated a lack of Islamic subjects in the national schools, as she said:

“Religious teaching is important for my parents. Every one of my siblings went to a private religious school. This was probably because of the subjects. They are more ... comprehensive [...]. To be honest; I prefer private religious schools because they have more religious subjects than national schools” (Rohana, Malay female informant, born in 1987).

As already explained, the Malaysian contemporary private religious school was a result of the Islamic resurgence in the 1970s. As a reaction to this resurgence, the state started to offer an Islamic subject in the national schools and to take over some of the private religious schools. Some of the private religious schools, particularly those which had been established by PAS - one of the opposition political parties, were unwilling to accept the full government intervention. In 2001, in order to limit PAS’s increasing involvement in alternative schooling, the ruling government decided to reduce the financial aid to private religious schools, which, according to the government, had long been politicized by PAS (Tan et al., 2013). This consequently affected some Malay parents’ decisions on their children’s schooling. Rohana was one of these children; she explained that:

“There were rumours saying that the private religious schools, I mean the students from *Sekolah Menengah Agama Rakyat* (SMAR), are not qualified for matriculation study [pre-university]. So [*pause*] most of us decided to transfer to *Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan* (SMK). I am not really sure whether it is true or not but [*pause*] the government had already stopped giving financial aid to my school” (Rohana, Malay female informant, born in 1987).

As stated at the beginning of this section, all of the Malay informants went to either Malay primary and secondary national or private religious schools. What is important to highlight here is also what the Malay parents of the participants in this study chose *not* to do. Although Malay parents had the freedom to choose any type of school, they did not register their children in Chinese schools. There are two possible explanations for this. First, there is greater future academic convenience offered in the mainstream schools, and second, it would be likely that what kind of education is appropriate to which ethnicity is also crucial here. As Rohana’s experience shows, although her parents emphasized the importance of religious education, the future academic prospects were ultimately an important factor for her education. The transfer was therefore conditioned by the language factor which caused her transfer option to be limited to a national Malay school.

Alongside the mainstream national schools, there are other types of national school which were established during the era of the New Economic Policy (NEP) (1970-1990): Maktab Rendah Sains MARA (MRSM) and fully residential schools (SBP). Both of these types were established for socio-economically disadvantaged *Bumiputra* who performed with excellence in their academic work. “In 2001, the government decided to ‘re-open’ MRSM colleges, residential schools [SBP] and matriculation programmes to non-*Bumiputra* students” (Lee, 2005). Nonetheless, the students’ composition in MRSM and SBP schools continued to be dominated by the *Bumiputra* (Lee, 2005). This further created an everyday understanding for the informants that admission into these types of school was mainly *Bumiputra*-based and quota-based, as the following comments made by two of the informants show:

“I think they [the state] allocated 10% of students for non-Malays in MRSM”(Azlan, Malay male informant, born in 1984).

“My school was a boarding school [SBP]. There were few Chinese and aboriginal people. I think they only took a few percent of other races apart from Malays into the school” (Asma, Malay female informant, born in 1991).

On the other hand, any statement that would suggest non-*Bumiputra* discrimination in SBP or MRSM admission from the Chinese informants in this research were not found. As a matter of fact, none of the Chinese informants had applied to SBP or MRSM schools. This suggests that formal discrimination does not have to be present because the assumed shared boundaries (language and religion) could structure people’s feelings and prohibit such a move. Moreover, since the majority of the Chinese informants in this study had gone to Chinese elementary and secondary schools, I could not ignore the fact that language would have been one of the important reasons for the outcome.

In the Chinese everyday understanding, which is supported by many academic authors such as Ho et al. (2016), it is stressed that Mandarin is the heart and soul of Chinese ethnicity and that the Chinese school is the important agent for transmitting Chinese culture to the next generation (Kenayathulla, 2015). Historically, the Chinese community worked hard to maintain Chinese education and language, especially between the 1950s and the 1960s. The Chinese pedagogical movement in the 1950s particularly stressed the importance of Chinese education and language for Chinese children:

“I am a Chinese Malaysian. Chinese culture is ingrained in us ever since we are young. If you compare Malaysian Chinese with Indonesian Chinese, they [Indonesian Chinese] don’t have their own language and I think this is because of our ancestors back then. They really emphasized the importance of Chinese education. Even if they don’t get enough funding from the government, they would take money from their own pocket just to fund Chinese education” (Ah Boa, Chinese male informant, born in 1990).

The importance of Chinese education and language is also strongly emphasized by the older generation, as one informant had experienced:

“It was my grandparents’ idea. The Chinese people really appreciate their mother tongue, which is the Chinese language. How should I put it? It is like a continuity of culture, right? [...] My parents rarely give their opinion. They

respect what my grandparents say” (Alex, Chinese male informant, born in 1988).

Alex’s case gives an example of how school preference is sometimes not solely down to the parents’ decision, but may also involve other family members, which in turn suggests the determination of the older generation to preserve the language as part of Chinese-ness. Moreover, according to Tan (2005), “Chinese parents generally want their children to be literate in Chinese”. Even in a family which uses English for everyday conversation, the parents will try to expose the children to the Chinese language, as Jasmine explained:

“We went to a Chinese school because my parents wanted us to learn Chinese”
(Jasmine, Chinese female informant, born in 1991).

In addition to the language factor, enrolment in a Chinese school is also intensified by the Chinese teaching system. According to Tan et al. (2013), Chinese schools’ assessment culture and learning environment, which stems from the high level of discipline, are a distinction between Malay and Chinese schools. Because of their conducive learning environment, Chinese schools have successfully produced excellent students, especially in mathematics and the sciences (Tan et al., 2013). Therefore, for some informants, their enrolment in a Chinese school was primarily on the basis of its reputation, followed by the importance of language, as stated by this informant:

“My parents are both Chinese educated. Both of them previously studied in my primary and secondary schools. They sent me there because the schools produced excellent students. Another reason was they wanted me to learn my mother tongue” (Shun, Chinese female informant, born in 1989).

In some cases, there was a possibility for the Chinese informants to study in a Malay elementary or secondary school, but this depended on their regionality. One Chinese informant (Cathy) from Kelantan - the most homogenous state with a Malay population in Malaysia - graduated from Malay primary and secondary schools. Cathy’s parents were the only parents who had graduated from Malay schools. Her parents had low proficiency in Mandarin because they had never formally learnt it in school. They did, however, know how to speak in a Chinese dialect. Her parents’ lack of Mandarin proficiency encouraged them to send her to a Malay elementary school. According to Cathy, this decision was more helpful for her studies, as she explained that:

“They [my parents] don’t have any basic Chinese [Mandarin] because they went to a Malay school too. So, it would be difficult for them to help me with my homework and everything. That is why they registered me in a Malay School. You know that in a Chinese School, they will give us tons of homework. So, my parents probably would not be able to help me with that. The solution was to send me to a Malay school. But I still can speak *Hokkien* [dialect] and Mandarin. My Malay is good too” (Cathy, Chinese female informant, born in 1987).

There are two possible explanations for her parents’ decision. First, for some Chinese families, a Chinese dialect is possibly enough to define their Chinese-ness. They probably do not require any formal institution to recognize them as Chinese especially when they still can use, communicate in and practice a Chinese dialect at home. Second, regionality can produce

different degrees of ethnic need and expectation. The different decisions made by Jasmine's (the previous informant) and Cathy's parents may have been related to different conditions of Malay-Chinese inter-ethnic relationships back in their hometown. Jasmine was a Chinese from Selangor, one of the most highly urbanized states in Malaysia. The Malays has a population of 2,814,597 and the Chinese population was 1,441,774 (Department of Statistics, 2011). The number of Chinese in Selangor is higher in comparison with other Chinese populations in other states. Cathy, however, was a Chinese from Kelantan. In Kelantan, the Chinese were the minority with a population of 51,614, whereas the Malay population was 1,426,373 (Department of Statistics, 2011). Moreover, in Kelantan, the socio-economic status between Malays and Chinese is arguably equal. The Chinese Kelantanese also experience a great deal of cultural assimilation with the Malay community. Therefore, what is important in Selangor is not necessarily important in Kelantan. In other words, an ethnic boundary - language - in parents' schooling decisions is not necessarily important in all contexts.

As previously highlighted, the majority of the Chinese informants had been enrolled in national secondary schools - 'Malay' or 'Chinese' - instead of ICSSs. The reasons for this were the high level of fees in ICSSs and the opportunity which they offered, as one of the informants explained:

"The SMK was cheaper than the Chinese private secondary school [ICSS]. Usually, after students graduate [from ICSS], they will further their studies in China, Taiwan or Singapore. [...] My family's condition did not allow me to further my studies there. That was the reason for me to choose an SMK and if I had gone to a university abroad, I do not think my family would have enough money to support my study" (Ah Man, Chinese male informant, born in 1986).

Even if finance is not an issue, some Chinese parents are not interested in sending their children to universities located in Mandarin-speaking countries. The reason for this is related to their children's future career. These Chinese parents want their children to work in the Malaysian public sector and the Malay language is an important and basic qualification for getting a job in the public sector. The national secondary schools therefore offer two important things: language and qualification. If parents aim to nurture their children with 'Chinese-ness' within an appropriate *space* and at the same time aim enable them to get a national qualification for a local university and a job in the public sector, the national Chinese secondary schools would be the best choice for them compared to a Malay secondary school or an ICSS. One informant commented that:

"My parents maybe didn't want to send me to a Chinese private secondary school [ICSS] because of the opportunity offered there. They were not really keen to send me to Taiwan or China after my graduation. Those who graduated from this school furthered their studies in Taiwan, China or Singapore. Singapore is fine but you may not always end up with your choice. And they wanted me to have better BM [Malay language] and be able to speak BM. They want me to work in Malaysia one day so I should know how to speak in proper BM. Because those who went to a Chinese school [ICSS], although not all of them can speak in BM, there is a chance that their BM is not as good as those who studied in a national Chinese secondary school" (Shaun, Chinese male informant, born in 1990).

The discussion above shows that there are many reasons for Malay and Chinese enrolment in national Malay and Chinese schools respectively. The reasons for this could be

socio-economic background, regionality, future academic opportunities or career prospects, yet most of these reasons are confined within the religious, language and cultural boundaries of their respective ethnic groups.

Conclusion

Although enrolment decisions in elementary and secondary schools were made on the basis of regionality, informants' socio-economic status, future tertiary chances and career prospects, the decision always fell inside the language and religious boundaries, which consequently have *ethnicized* the process of decision-making. Apart from that, the *everyday understanding* of 'Malay' and 'Chinese' schools also plays an important role in the parental choice of schooling. This everyday understanding is complicated as it involves the subjective belief that the members of an ethnic group share the same boundaries (Weber, 1968) which persist through time. In the context of this article, this view consequently influenced the decision of what was an appropriate school for a particular ethnic group. This belief has been strongly established over time and will not be easily broken in the short term, thus making cross-school decisions difficult for some parents. Offering Mandarin as an alternative language and subject in a national school would probably attract more non-Malay parents to this school.

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