

Fieldnotes of Focus Group Studies on Comparative Studies of the Primary Schooling of Malay, Chinese, Tamil Medium Schools in Malaysia

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<https://doi.org/10.15017/7387324>

出版情報 : 国際教育文化研究. 19, pp.29-43, 2019-09-30. 九州大学大学院人間環境学研究院国際教育文化研究会
バージョン :
権利関係 :



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Introduction

Enhancing national unity has been a core state goal ever since Malaysian Independence. However, Malaysia has experienced a high degree of ethnic segregation - a phenomenon manifested in the system of primary schooling, where most pupils study in an ethnically homogenous environment. Primary schooling of 3 Cultures project is a comparative study of the three different types of Malaysian public primary schools, i.e. Malay, Chinese and Tamil-medium schools. It aims to find out to what extent the value systems and cultural understandings of education's purposes in are similar and mutually compatible – or dissimilar and potentially irreconcilable. It further seeks to investigate how each of these three types of vernacular primary school transmits and reflects cultural values while adapting to political and social change and the challenges of globalisation. Amongst the questions that will inform the research are: 'How compatible does this segregated model of schooling appear to be with the inculcation of a shared sense of 'Malaysianness'?'; and 'Do these different types of schools have different agendas and serves different purposes beyond those stipulated in the official curriculum?' The study will broadly reflect on the goals of vernacular education in contemporary Malaysia in the context of official commitments to Multiculturalism and the broader international pursuit of SDG 4.0.

Methodology

This research is qualitative because it is mainly concerned with the experiences of teachers working in primary schools. Merriam and Tisdell explain that "qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam and Tisdell 2015: 6)". As the current inquiry is exploratory, an ethnographic approach was selected to draw out 'valuable insights into how people construct meaning' (Neuman 2014: 353) In order to understand cultural practices through the lens of primary education. Merriam and Tisdell define ethnography as a qualitative research process that "strives to understand the interaction of individuals not just with others, but also with the culture of the society in which they live" (Merriam and Tisdell 2015: 24). Ethnography was originally used in the field of anthropology, but it is widely applied in many fields and disciplines, including education.

The method used in this ethnographic study is an adaptation of Tobin's 'Preschool in 3 Cultures Method', also known as 'video-cued multivocal ethnography' (Tobin et al., 1989; see also 2009). First, activities in primary schools of the 'three cultures' - Malay, Chinese and Tamil - are video-recorded and edited into short 20 minutes videos. Then these videos are shown to members of those three school communities. Comments and feedback on what they see are collected in focus group sessions. This results in a video-cued teachers' dialogue of 3 different ethnic groups discussion the same set of videos. The method focused on prompting discussion among the participants to reveal their experiences, views and thoughts. In other words, it helps researchers to make "implicit thinking visible" (Adair and Kurban, 2019:2).

From an ethnographic perspective, this method ‘condenses’ the time taken to gather quality insights and understanding of the culture it studies. In other words, it “collapses and shortens ethnography”s traditional period of extended fieldwork” (Hsueh and Tobin 2012:117). In education fieldwork, in general, the researcher conducts observations as well as participate in the school activities and then, interview his or her informants to reflect on and explain those activities by referring to the researcher’s field notes and memory. On the contrary, this method replaces the extensive fieldwork with a set of videos, which serves as a focal point for reflections that can be used as a cue to gather insights from informants within the same culture. This method, however, is not faster or more convenient than doing a traditional ethnographic study. The reason is that to produce a ‘meaningful’ video it requires thorough planning, negotiating with school administrators, learning the routines on site, filming, rounds and rounds of editing, and repeated interviewing.

Data Collection

The data collection processes involve two stages: -

1. A conventional ethnographic study is conducted in 3 different primary schools (Malay-medium, Chinese-medium and Tamil-medium). A typical day of each school is video-recorded and edited to a 20-minute video. The following is the details of the fieldwork.
 - a. From 14th to 17th, June 2016 in a Chinese-medium school (**SJKC**)¹ in Selangor.
 - b. From 22th to 24th, June 2016 in a Tamil-medium school (**SJKT**) in Negeri Sembilan.
 - c. From 12th to 14th, February 2018 in a Malay-medium school (**SK**) in Perak.
2. Focus groups sessions (FGS) are conducted across these three school-types, with a total of 12 participating schools from several states in Peninsular Malaysia. Based on the stratified cluster sampling procedure, 3 schools of each type were selected in 4 regions (North, South, East and West) of Peninsular Malaysia, resulting in 12 schools’ samples. The states covered are Penang and Kedah in Northern peninsular, Negeri Sembilan in Southern peninsular, Kelantan in Eastern peninsular, and Selangor and Perak in Western peninsular. The FGS was commenced from 2nd May 2019 to 21st August 2019. Consent was granted before proceeding with FGS².

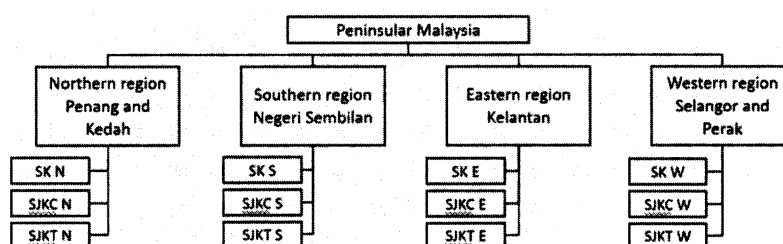


Chart 1: Stratified cluster sampling of the FGS participating schools

Sixty-three teachers and administrators participated in the studies. The participants consist of 84.1% female, and 15.9% are male. As of age group, 20.6% belongs to 20-29 years old group, 39.7% in 30-39 years old group, 15.9% are from 40-49 years old, and 23.8% are 50 years old and above. The ethnicity of the participants is 33.3% Malay, 30.2% Chinese, and 36.5% Indian. Majority of them

¹ Throughout the field note, Malay-medium primary school or National School will be referred to as **SK** (Sekolah Kebangsaan). Chinese-medium primary school or National-Type Chinese School will be referred to as **SJKC** (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina). Tamil-medium primary school or National-Type Tamil School will be referred to as **SJKT** (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil).

² Consent Form was distributed and explained before the FGS. Most of the participants signed except a few teachers who insist that their identity must not be recognisable in any form of report or presentation. Voice recording for transcription purpose is cancelled when there is an objection from the participants.

are degree holders (58.7%) while 20.6% have a diploma degree, and 20.6% have a master's degree. In terms of the overall experience in the field of education, 3.2% of the participants are less than 1-year experience in teaching, 15.9% have 2-5 years of teaching experience, 22.2% have 6-10 years of teaching experience, 19% have 11-15 years of teaching experience. A majority of them, which is 39.7%, work in this field for more than 15 years.

Fieldnote

The following section is an edited version of the field notes written after each FGS session. The name of the schools and teachers were replaced with removed. The field notes were edited to fit the requirement of this publication. FGS protocol was fine-tuned after receiving feedback from the teachers. First, the length of each video was reduced from 30 minutes to 20 minutes. Each session is about 2 hours long, with 1 hour of video watching and 1 hour of discussion. Secondly, teachers were given the options to choose which video to watch first. It helps to keep them engaged. More often than not, teachers had a good laugh as they watch the videos of the same school type as theirs.

2019-05-02 SJKC W, Selangor

Former Deputy Headmaster (DH) Mdm C. and I reached the school around 12:30. There was no parking space nearby. She parked in front of a home tuition centre next to the school. She used to teach there, and the owner of the tuition centre was a teacher from the same school. We had six teachers, including one former DH and a current DH. It was the first FGS conducted. Each video was 30 minutes long, and it took nearly 3 hours to complete the session. With DH around, the younger teachers were hesitant to comment. The veteran teachers contributed the most.

During/after watching a video of an SJKC

The video shown is not an elite class (high performing class). This is a good representation of a typical scene of a regular classroom. Student streaming is common, although not encouraged. Sometimes, "we had no choice but to let them go" - while referring to the students who are 'difficult' to teach, the teachers gave them up. The concept of 放牛班. Two reasons - lack of resources and high teacher to student ratio. A homeroom teacher will teach a class for three years, from year 1 to 3, year 4 to 6 (Used to be 1-6). Subject hierarchy is visible - Moral, PE, Art, Music subjects are low-ranked subjects. Usually, teachers will be teaching a low-ranked subject and a high-ranked subject in a pair. E.g. Mandarin and Moral. This allows teachers to manipulate the lesson time to give more time for high-ranked subjects. The teacher asked the students to describe the bottle, but when the students try to give different opinions, they were "disobedient". Computer classes had been abolished as it was an outsourced programme done during school hours. Parents complaints to the MOE and action were taken. Parents should be taking up their responsibility to ensure their kids arrive on time. Students coming late to school usually are the same group of students. 24 节令鼓 now left only ten students, school band also very few people. Parents nowadays care less about their children's co-curricular activities. They talked about Dinosaur parenting 恐龙家长.

During/after watching a video of an SK

I like how they "salam" with the teachers. We can see that the students show more respect and affection to their teachers. You do not see this in Chinese school. Muslim practices are praisable. Power distance is apparent and Chinese teachers like it. One teacher commented and "Is this a religious school?" The practices like prayers are a way to frequent for a so-called government public school. Why there is no teacher to teach during the moral lesson? I hope this is not a regular scene in this school.

During/after watching a video of an SJKT

This school looks like a cluster school, with excellent results, isn't it? They have better resources than the standard school. Most of the Tamil schools are small, and some are forced to close down due to lack of students. I wonder how do they react to school closure. The Indian community is not so supportive of the education compared to the Chinese. Many Indian students study in SK, so it is okay if the schools are closed down. If a Chinese school is closed down, “华社就会有很多声音”. Typically arrangement will be made to relocate the school instead of closing down. “我们要捍卫华小，我们华人比较注重根”华人的文化。 Parents who sent their kids to International schools pay extra to make sure their children have Mandarin lessons. Mandarin is getting more important, even Malays and Indians parents are sending their kids to Chinese school. If we Chinese cannot speak Mandarin, we will surely be 淘汰. The additional point here we can see that Indian are more tolerable to accept other's culture. Overall: The element of we 我们 vs them 他们 is active during the discussion. It is always we are like this, and they are like that.

2019-05-03 SK W, Perak

I drove to SK W from KL. My appointment was at 10:30 am so I need to depart from home at 7 pm to be able to reach on time and to avoid a jam. The headmaster (HM) assigned Mdm. M to be in charge of the session. He was absent. After seeing Mdm. M, she assigned six teachers, including herself, to attend the session. She was not informed that FGS could take at least 2 hours. I asked her whether we could postpone it to after school, but she said it was a Friday teacher will not stay back late. We had no choice but to proceed at 10:30 am. After some negotiation with the teachers, we went ahead watching trailers of the videos and followed by discussion. We managed to finish it by 11:30 am for about one-hour discussion.

During/after watching a video of an SK

Our school emphasised on politeness and ethical, moral values, especially Islamic values and Malay values. These values are to be practised in their daily life. From a comparative perspective, it is a fully BM environment. The facilities are inferior to SJKTs. Discipline is okay. I think students are more "Paka terhadap cikgu" or sensitive towards the teachers (able to react accordingly). We can see the commitment of the teachers here and also cooperation from the parents. Parents give full authority for the teachers to educate their kids.

During/after watching a video of an SJKT

Chinese schools have excellent discipline (based on own experience), in fact, they focused on discipline more. Less emphasized on PDP. We can see that the PIBG (PTA) is pretty strong and play their role well. Can see their contribution through the 'hardware' seen in the videos. The student's environment will be better with the help of PIBG. Now u see, students can be moulded as they can be 'punished'. Punishing the students have become a serious issue nowadays. It is tough to draw the line. The school emphasised on cleaning and hygiene.

During/after watching a video of an SJKT

Tamil school is lively. Somehow based on past experience, moral values are less emphasised. The students have good discipline. You can see the commitment of the teachers. The element of religious values can be seen in the school. Overall the location of the school parents SES level and ethnic cultures heavily influence the students in a school.

2019-08-05 SK E, Kelantan

Departed from KL at 3.10 am so that we could arrive by 12:30 pm. There was another SK school right next to SK E! The security guard escorted me to the office. Greeted HM and proceeded to Bilik Gerakan (meeting room). HM did not follow the instruction because he asked all the teachers to participate. He 'parked' this event as one of his 'project'. We had 13 teachers, including administrators, HM and DHM. The HM or DHM answered most of the interview questions directed to the teachers. Teachers kept quiet most of the time, but some of them wrote their comments on the paper provided. Teachers were hesitant to comment on the videos and continuously looking at HM for cues. Not all teachers signed the form and wrote their comments on the paper. Some teachers acted as 'observers'.

During/after watching a video of an SK

The teachers agreed that these are typical scenes in SK, focused on "Nilai Nilai murni" which means virtuous values. The moral value and religious value to them it is the same; they are both nilai-nilai murni. Praise that students did their prayers well. Most of the element of the school is a routine and 'culture' practised by the majority of SKs. Student-centred and students actively participated in the lessons.

During/after watching a video of an SJKC

Overall commented that Chinese teachers were stringent. However, students can be quite 'aggressive', and it meant that students do not hesitate to correct the teachers if they do not feel right. 7.05 to close the gate and withheld late coming students can be quite harsh. Students in this class are not well-behaved. Students do not show respect to the teachers. We saw that students could not stay focused in class. Some were doing homework during the lesson. The teachers do not allow students to come in front to interact in the class. They still practice the traditional 'chalk and talk' making students bored. Having an impression of emphasizing in co-curricular activities like dancing and 24 seasons drums. The Malay teachers should not be using 'Chinese slang' during the lessons.

During/after watching a video of an SJKT

It is a well-organised school with excellent facilities, and kids are diligent and actives. Looks like a 'lakonan' - like acting in front of the camera. I told them they are showing the best version of themselves.

2019-08-06 SJKT E, Kelantan.

Departed from Kota Bahru at 11 am. The journey to SJKT E took approximately one and ½ hours drive. The school was located inside the rubber and palm oil estates area. It is the only Tamil school left in Kelantan. It houses nine teaching staff (including HM) with 27 students (4 classes: S1, S2&3, S4&5, S6). It serves the Indian population from the small town and the rubber estate nearby.

During/after watching a video of an SK

Religion is heavily emphasized. There are many prayers. The religious routine was incorporated in daily school life. Islamic teaching plays an essential role in SK schools. They have proper 'spiritual guidance'. Prayer before and after a meal is a good thing. Students were saying thanks when they buy food. Practice gender separation - e.g. girls go first then boys. Boys and girls were sitting separately, in classrooms and at the canteen. The teachers are concerned over the absence of teacher in moral class. Perhaps the teacher came late. If without teacher and you bring this up to the national level, it certainly could turn into a 'sensitive' issue. The students are well behaved with good discipline in their daily school routine. Moral values are practised in their actions, such as switching off the light and fan when they are not in the classroom.

During/after watching a video of an SJKT

Music Tamil playing in the morning is uncommon. However, maybe some school does that. It helps to lighten up the mood of the children and teachers and make them feel welcome. Having additional activities during

recess time is uncommon as well but very beneficial for children. The teacher was doing that voluntarily. Reading time in the morning is atypical. Here in our school, for example, we have English reading on Tues, BM on Weds and Tamil on other days. Not all schools have the privilege of having ICT equipped in their schools. The worship of Ganesha and Saraswati is similar. But not in the classroom. We do it in our office or outside. The classroom teacher made a point to have students to stand up before answering, but students can be seen quite reluctant to do so. Perhaps not often practised. Moral value displays, such as Thirukkural phrases are considered good. Parents wait to pick up their children.

During/after watching a video of an SJKC

Greeting the students when they arrive and when they depart is essential. Kids bow and showing respect. Receive kids when they late to school and advising is good. However, it could be intimidating and feel not welcome. In our school, if kids could attend schools, we will celebrate. Not all kids can attend school. That SJKC is very strict. Students respecting teachers, but could they be doing it out of 'fear'? Punishment seems very common among Chinese school. It gives a sense of high expectations from parents and teachers. The school looks like they are 'Bela haiwan' or 'breeding animals' where kids are shovelled into the schools, lock the gate, go through factory process, then output. Teachers use bilingual approaches in teaching. Lots of 'code-switching' to ensure the communication is smooth. One teacher envied that each student has access to a computer without sharing. Students were not concentrating during lessons; they do their work. Student participation in class is also meagre. Students greet teachers using their names. E.g. Puan Kasturi or Li Lao Shi. However, in SK and SJKT, we use cikgu or teacher. Why? The announcement is too frequent. Very distracting. Other: teacher explained about KSSR-semakan. HM: Under Rimup programme, we invited the nearby school to participate in our sports day, celebrate festivals together like Deepavali, Ronggol.

2019-08-07 SJKC E, Kelantan.

FGS was scheduled at 13:45, but I went there earlier to have a chat with the DHM. HM was the key person to connect me to all the schools in Kelantan. The primary school is only part of the whole school campus as it has its kindergarten and secondary school, all side by side. A few blocks down the road, there was a bigger SJKC that looks like a well-funded school. The jam was horrible during school departure.

During/after watching a video of an SK

Gender separation is apparent, but it depends on the teacher. I do not think SK school has activities like 校庆. The teachers in our school have to organize all the activities. Had to do 义卖会. It takes up too much time from the teachers. Our school now has about 20%-30%, non-Chinese students. Twenty years teaching here I can tell, 1989 maybe each classroom has 1-2 Malay students, now we have 6-10 Malay students in a grade of 40 students. There is a lot of doa (prayers) happening in this school. Religion (being a Muslim) is part of their culture. The two non-Muslim students, I do not think they are Chinese. They might be orang Asli (Aborigines), how can you tell? By their facial look. Here in the morning when we have moral lessons, the Muslim students will go for religion classes. Besides, they have additional religion classes in the afternoon. E.g. Year 4 Wed 1:15 pm to 2:15 pm, Year 5 2:15 pm to 3:15 pm. We have a swimming class for one slot per week.

During/after watching a video of an SJKT

They have excellent facilities, and the field is so big and green. Most likely fully-aided school. 100% of aided schools usually have a beautiful field. All given by the government. Even the science room was air-conditioned. The teacher knows how to make use of the ICT room as a classroom. Our computers in the ICT classroom are broken now. Technician no longer comes and fix it. Students are all ethnically Indian. Their staff also all Indians. Practical if monoculture, more comfortable to manage. For example, canteen food is

also easier to prepare. Chinese school need to prepare Malay, Chinese and Indian food. Can put a portrait of Gandhi? Just like we put a portrait of 孔子, a similar concept. This SJKT was implementing TS20 very well, and we just started with some teachers going for training and slowly implementing it. It is essential to let the student lead and do and think by themselves.

During/after watching a video of an SJKC

Kelantan Tanah Merah Primary School has 贩卖部. See, they can lock their gate, why do we need to keep ours opened? 迟到训话 - 我们学校的对照。Exactly like what our school does (laughing). 华小的 Pattern 都是一样的。I think Chinese education in Malaysia is sick ‘华社生病了’. Facilities are inadequate; teachers are overworked. Different degree of respect to a different race. 读书不齐, 乱乱读。华小注重课程, 以知识为主。very academic-oriented. 班规 you can see that there are chanting, but do they mean it? Nowadays, many gestures are made for the sake of doing. 感恩词 sounds robotic. SJKC is impossible to control their number of students cos SJKC are limited. Computer lesson issues - parents complaint why computer lessons need to pay tuition fee. The issue is brought up in media and MOE. Now the programme is terminated. Who loses? The students. Students in the urban area each of them might have their computer or even smartphones. However, students from outskirts or rural or those who cannot afford, the computer classes might be their only chance to interact with a computer. Similar case 作业簿事件. These minority voices are interfering our education. 董事部 too, they misused their power to order teachers to do things, usually, the unnecessary activities. The teachers are required to help to raise fund. However, that is because our board is ‘useless’. From 财力 to 权力, 势力 (面子) But we are still semi-aided school, besides teachers salary, 50% utilities, and repair/ maintenance, other expenses had to be covered privately. If you are fully-aided, everything they give you. 董事部应该要帮忙解决学校的问题, 找钱。Alumni is more of a symbolic than functional. However, teachers have to help them organise activities.

2019-08-08 SJKT N, Kedah

Departed at 6:30 am from Taiping, Perak to Alor Setar, Kedah. I arrived at SJKT N at 9 am. The. I greeted the HM, and he introduced me to Mdm K. FGS is done during school hours, by freeing up five teachers to participate. How? Combine the classes. I am incredibly thankful for her arrangement. The teachers have not eaten breakfast yet, so we settled down for breakfast at the canteen before FGS. Most of them are young teachers in their 30-40s. It was one of the best sessions I had so far.

During/after watching a video of an SJKC

Showing respect to teachers by bowing. Highly admirable. Commenting on students who are late for school, they dislike the practice of teacher questioning and punishing the students. Because it feels not welcoming, making school a scary place to be. In our school, we want them to feel welcome. Some students from more impoverished background have difficulty coming to school. For example, no transport, having financial difficulty. We have to understand each situation and treat them individually. A student coming to schools is hindered by poor parenting. In regards to corporal punishment, carrot and stick are common in both our schools and theirs. However, our parents are not cooperative. If the kids are punished, the parents will come to school to complain to the teachers. If students could not finish homework, we have to give a warning and punish them. If they do not let us punish, Why don't they take up the responsibility to make them finish their homework? I prefer the Chinese school way. Parents give the teachers more authorities to guide the students.

During recess time, we have 'gallery walk' where students are rewarded if they pay attention to the quotes and banners around the school and able to answer teachers' questions. For ICT room, the SJKC have more resources to help teachers in teaching. How many smart screens do they have? We would like to have one of these cool gadgets. Even the announcement speaker is impressive. Our school used to have such a speaker, but without peruntukan (budget) from the government, we could not maintain it. All depends on the gov budget. Budget restraint. Not many Tamil schools are fully aided school. However, we have SJKT that is fully sponsored. Ours is fully aided school.

During/after watching a video of an SK

ICT Frog programme 'died' already. Gov didn't renew the contract due to poor performance. The prayers Doa before entering the toilet - perfect (I wonder why?). Emphasised a lot on religion, always refer to god. The emphasis that God is always watching. Here in our school, we refer to God as well but we use the general term God instead of Allah. We have Hindus, Christians, Muslims. So referring to God, in general, is the right thing to do. We also talked about karma. Emphasised about Karma. You do good, and you become a better person, the right person will be rewarded. This SK school has been portrayed as a Sekolah agama - religion school.

During/after watching a video of an SJKT

Lots of laughter. Tamil schools are always full of colours hahaha. Our prayer sessions - once our students arrive, they will first go pray in the prayer room, then have breakfast at the canteen, then only go into the classroom. There is a special prayer session on Thursday. We have prayers during assembly. Music lesson looks fun. The teacher knows what he is doing.

2019-08-14 SJKC N, Penang (5 teachers but from 3 different schools)

I hosted the FGS at First Penguin, Sungai Dua. This session is done during school holidays, so it might not be convenient to do this in their school. We started from 10.15 am till 12.30 pm. Five participants (4 teachers and a deputy HM) from 2 SJKC and 1 SK school attended. One of the Chinese teachers teaches Mandarin in an SK.

During/after watching a video of an SK

Religious routine, Ms I said it is quite similar to the school that she is teaching. This includes prayer during assembly, before and after a meal, during the lessons, toilet etc. But 宗教色彩 is stronger in this school in the video. Her school has more non-Muslim, so it is slightly toned down. Same goes to school in an urban area where you have more non-Muslim, thus less 宗教色彩. This school still looks like agama school to me. If it was done too much, how about the non-muslims who study there? A teacher praised the meal prayer, and draw examples from Christian as well as the value of 感恩 in Chinese. The kids in the school are well behaved, more disciplined. Urban schools nowadays, the kids are pampered by the parents; they have less discipline in school. Observing computer lesson, Ms I did, if I wear the skirt just like the Chinese teacher in the school. I would be called too sexy. My school teachers prefer me to wear Baju Kurung. There was one time when I wear Baju kurung to work, and they praise that I look terrific and ask me to wear more often at school. Malay teachers are more 热情 and 团结. I think they are united as they have a higher calling due to religious faith. However, they lack a sense of urgency and often do at the very last minute, according to Irene. Ms W, the Malay canteen staff usually very friendly. Just like this school, often they give their customers (students) extra food without charging them. Alternatively, when they buy too many snacks or too much food, they would ask them not to do so. But I've never seen any Chinese canteen operator do that. I think Chinese are more profit-driven, even in school.

During/after watching a video of an SJKT

A right balance of male and female teachers. For Chinese primary schools, the majority of the teachers are female. The music played before school starts; we have that too, we play 弟子规 music. This school must be fully aided school. Chinese schools are usually half aided so that the board of directors have more controls. Why not go, full-aided? The disbursement of the fund is usually slow, with a board we can achieve more. Tamil teachers 敢怒敢言, more spontaneous. Unlike Chinese teachers usually 要面子. SJKT are more secular compared to SK and SJKC are most secular. They still use many school buses. In our school, usually, parents or the 安亲班 service will pick up the kids after schools by cars and van. Nowadays most of the time both parents are working so they 'outsource' the pick up to 安亲班. Students show respect to the teachers; they have good discipline and manners. TS25, with 21st-century learning (or formally the i-think programme), is implemented in this school. I think the student-led/ oriented approach is suitable for secondary school. We have so much (syllabus) to cover, and giving them too many activities is not practical. They need to 'memorize' them. When the teacher needs to 赶课程, it is like 'touch and go'. Very hard to implement the new method. When it comes to performances, the government look at scores. So it is back to 'drilling', and the traditional teaching.

During/after watching a video of an SJKC

In the SK that I teach, when the students come to school late, they have to do 'taklimat' - they will call the parents to come to the school for a meeting. SJKC prefer bilingual teachers that speak the mother tongue. SJKC there is no 'ethnic' dress code, unlike Malay and Tamil schools. Their school and ours are similar. The teachers 很快不耐烦. Big class, lots of administrative work makes teacher stress out. The students mistreated non-Chinese teachers. Ironically, in SK school, non-Muslim teachers are treated like a 'star' cos they are rarer in SK schools. The non-Muslim teachers feel they are treated better by both fellow teachers and students. Need PIBG (PTA) and board of school to raise fund to give students a better learning environment. 再穷也不能穷教育. Too much announcement. Quite common in SJKC. Recess time is like 'Pasar' or morning market. Very noisy, but it is understandable. In the classroom, they have to be quiet and discipline all the time. NGO and private companies compete to get involved in school activities. Two reasons, commercial incentive and branding. Considered as a win-win situation. Gov is always implementing new things, and then teachers have to take leave to sit for seminars —> this take up a lot of teaching time. However, the problem is that this implementation does not last long. Plus, teachers need to 带队 as in to bring sports or performing arts team out of school for competition etc. 华小赶课程, the 21st century learning pedagogy is not effective —> classes are huge, take up too much time doing activities, in the end in order to 'perform' teachers used their usual 'drilling' method. Need a balance. Keyword: PAK21 (pelajaran Abad Ke-21), TS25 - Transformasi 25. GOV —> KPM —> JPN —> PPD —> School (expected to implement). Teachers are just government servants who are responsible for implementing gov's plan.

2019-08-14 SK N, Penang

I secured an appointment with HM to organize FGS from 1000-1200 on the 9th. Arrived earlier thinking I could set up first before we start. I waited till 10:20. Given her, the benefit of the doubt as HM needs to deal with unexpected events. She appointment another staff to handle but she has forgotten about this. Quickly getting a few teachers to attend but only to realise that my session needs at least 2 hours. Negotiated to do it on another day during school holiday on 14th. Three teachers participated.

During/after watching a video of an SJKT

Students are wholly independent, looks more organized. Instruction to drink water is engaging. It is okay, though because our weather is hot and it is better to remind the kids to drink more water to avoid dehydration. It looks like a good class. I think "Streaming" is easier and more effective for teachers to teach. Assuming that the school will handpick the 'best' class to 'showcase' in the video. Does not believe that the scenes are natural. Teachers on duty to give additional learning during recess is highly praisable. Depend on teachers. These are not compulsory. Lions club - our school also trying to engage with local NGO. Shows a positive thought on SJKT where SJKT is monoculture schools. No influences from outside. This might be a cluster school (high performing school). A new generation of children needs a new teaching strategy. Implement a new strategy, but the rules should remain the same.

During/after watching a video of an SJKC

Good practice 'berkat' bow; showing respect makes learning easier. Students nowadays are too pampered and protected by parents. See this parent say feel free to cane, giving authority to teachers to 'educate' students. Parents play a crucial role here. Nowadays, the students are 'untouchable' This Chinese boy might have ADHD. Cannot sit still and follow instructions. When the students disagree with the teachers, they will voice out. Students have 'principle'. They stand for what they think is right. We think discipline comes first. We agree that to a certain degree, punishment should be done. The announcement is too much. It is distracting classes. Need to use social media. Whatsapp or telegram. Our school use telegram for the announcement. The computer teachers look like 'pemerintah yang kejam' - a dictator. Gov official letter change From Saya menurut perintah To Saya yang menjalankan Amanah. Softer, but it's still the same. We are just gov servant following orders. Nowadays, parents interference too much. Minden school motto Senyum Sayang Salam Sopan —> values. Minden is a cluster school. Parents usually are professionals like doctors, engineers. Students are arrogant, 'You are just a teacher'. Why should I listen to you?

During/after watching a video of an SK

Maths lettuce method. We do not like this method, but It is in the textbook, so we need to teach them. It is tested in the exam. Display about cultural info of other races is good. Cluster school has a more mixed culture. Our school 50% Malay, 40% Indian, 5% Chinese. 'Educated' parents nowadays care more about their social life than on their children. Take nutrition as an example. Home cooking is less, the health of the children not properly taken care. They prepare what the kids like to eat, not what they should eat. Parents look down at school and management. Extra point: Malay has Khusus Kahwin to cultivate understanding and marriage life. Which is crucial to curb social issues.

2019-08-19 SK S, Negeri Sembilan

I arrived at SK Port Dickson at 1 pm. The main gate was locked for security reasons, and parents were picking up students at the side gate. I went to the side gate. I greeted the HM, an amiable person who escorted me to the Makmal Komputer to set up the FGS sessions. I asked for only 5-6 teachers, but ten teachers turned up. They are all English teachers in this school. The HM mentioned putting this under one of the programmes for the teachers. They were not adequately briefed. However, I could understand because today is the first day of school, and most of them were not expecting this. Nevertheless, I apologized for the inconvenience caused and proceeded with the session.

During/after watching a video of an SJKC

The computer teacher looks very strict and fierce. I'm like that too. I think students nowadays are lack of discipline. In the morning, the teacher took their attendance seriously; the teacher questioned the students why they are late for school. In our school, we cannot punish the students even if they are late, the parents might be video-recording our action if we do something like that, especially at the gate. Strictly handling the

attendance to school on time shows that they take school seriously. School is not a playground. Parents nowadays do not cooperate with schools. When we cannot have any punishment at all, they will not be afraid of the teachers. One of the Chinese schools in Lukut has CCTV all over the school. Their students have absolute discipline, which I admire (said the disciplinary teacher). Even when there is no teacher in the classroom, the students are well-behaved. However, here, we see instructions given are taken lightly. Still very chatty despite the teacher's presence in the classroom. Show less respect to the teachers.

During/after watching a video of an SJKT

Motivation songs in the morning to set a good start in the morning. Indian teacher: The music played is like a booster. A motivational song. It helps to create a positive vibe at the beginning of a school day. The pupils know what they need to do even when the teachers are not around. For example, in the morning cleaning as well as doing the RIMUP programme (reading). The video is quite similar to the Tamil school that I taught in 2009. Our school's RIMUP is done every day, from 7:15-7:40 am. The students might be 'acting' because of their presence. However, one teacher said that the discipline looks genuine. Why? Because of the way they wear their PE uniform, they are neat. All tight in and all. They could handle the daily routines better by themselves. They can clean the classroom by themselves without a teacher, ordering them to do so.

During/after watching a video of an SK

Parents express their love the children in public - kissing them before entering the school. Good discipline, show respect by listening to the teachers. Recitation prayers before starting the school session. DOA before learning/ before/after eating is suitable for the students. The boy did well by reciting prayers before entering the toilet. During a class exchange on religion and moral subject. The moral subject students politely waited outside until religion class is finished. Our school teachers complain, should not punish their children.

All good behaviours start not only from the teachers but also from the parents. We need to set good examples. Good practices help in moulding students towards the better. There is a different kind of ways to show respect to teachers. The student's response to their teacher differently as well.

2019-08-20 SJKC S, Negeri Sembilan

GPS did not work, and I lost my way. I was driving towards Port Klang instead of Port Dickson. Informed the HM and corrected the GPS car navigation system. I arrived at 30mins late. I apologized to the teachers, and we quickly started FGS. The teachers were very patient. The DHM was attending the session, and she asked me whether I had any permission from MOE and requested the letter. I explained that I did apply, but I have not received anything from them yet. She said all the teachers had recently signed a paper saying that they could not 'talk' to outsiders' without consent from the government. I convinced them that well, to proceed without signing the FGS consent letter, and no recording is required. I told them to be assured that their privacy is protected and feel free to speak their mind. We started at 2:30 pm till 4:30 pm.

During/after watching a video of an SK

The morning assembly looks like a daily one as I can see they have their bags with them when they queue up. If it is a daily assembly, I wonder whether the prayer is it a daily practice? The structure of the lesson (referring to Maths) seem like lack of introduction. An introduction (like stating the objective of today's lesson, etc.) to bring the students into the lesson. Music lesson in the music room is a luxury that we do not have. The school we usually teach in our classroom. One teacher points out that they remove their shoes before entering the room. Why? SK schools students usually do that. Music teachers are very scarce. Our school has only one qualified teacher. Most of us are not qualified to teach, but we had no choice. The objective & target of music lessons is not realistic. We only teach music once a week for 30 mins. It is not possible to learn theories or learn to compose songs. It is ridiculous, but we do what we can. Year 1-3 they

enjoy the nursery rhymes and kids songs in the syllabus. However, older students could not relate to the songs. They prefer pop songs. So we play popular songs and let them sing and discuss the lyrics. Unrealistic curriculum same goes to other subjects as well like History or RPT. The targets are too high. Even the maths is getting harder these days. I have heard that their parents and even some tuition teacher cannot solve those math problems. Computer lessons require programming and website building is very hard as well. The new curriculum KSSR semakin emphasized on HOTS (higher-order thinking skill), but we can see the decline in academic with the students nowadays. 学校的 Curriculum 在开倒车，学生还没学会爬，就要教他们跑。

Recess, there is a parent bring in food for their children and accompanying them. This will not happen in our school. For security reasons, the parents are not allowed to come in during school hours as we are afraid that there will be bad guys who disguise as a parent. Nowadays 治安不好。We have to protect our students. Better be safe than sorry. We have allocated a specific space for parents to pass food to their children under supervision (like a prison). Another reason is to avoid unnecessary conflict between parents and teachers. The parents are very sensitive. If the parents in the school compound see something that they do not feel right, they might complain again or make a fuss out of it. 家长自己不会教但是却要指指点点。Now our classrooms all have a computer, projector, etc. If we wait for government funding, it will take forever. Our PIBG and board are entirely committed to raising funds to do it. However, classrooms are lack of internet connection. We have to rely on our handphone data or pre-download the content at home when we prepare our lesson plan. The industry is moving towards 4.0, but we are still teaching students as if we are preparing them for industry 2.0/3.0. The gap is huge. The new implementation is not aligning with the local context and situation. Computer lesson -FROG programme that was terminated has a few critical issues. It was not effective as students sometimes need to copy the questions and do the problems offline. The problem with an unstable internet connection. Students could not log in at home with the same user password. SK schools students look happier and having a relaxed environment for learning. 华小感觉上就是很‘苦’ Some parents send to UCSI (International school nearby) giving the reason that 上课不用那么苦。They incorporate the outdoor learning in their school hours. Classes more happening. Our new TS25 are moving towards the same direction, but it's hard to implement due to parent's concern. Our lessons 很紧凑。Coming to school early, from one lesson to the next very little resting time for students.

During/after watching a video of an SJKT

I see that the children in this school are independent. They can work independently and stick to school routine, which is applaudable. When we look at our school, they are very passive. Perhaps at home, they do not need to do housework. Very pampered. The school compound and classroom looks colourful and clean. The tables are beautifully wrapped, decorate and wall painting. These are scenes that we can see in Tamil schools. Look at our school it is dull, 暗淡无光。But in terms of safety, for example, the sand for long-jump is a bit dangerous because the sand was not soften. The TV in the classroom is too high for students. Long term it will hurt their neck and posture. We always look at the safety of the students first. They have only two ceiling fans in school. Our classrooms have four ceiling fans, and sometimes additional ones on the wall, but our students still complain too hot. I think our students are too pampered. Maybe at home, they are too comfortable. Having aircond and sort. In comparison, the students in Chinese schools (our school) 很不合群。Maybe it's more competitive in school and students teamwork, and collaboration is less. We need to work on that. The students in Chinese school are very good at 看人脸色。It means they can ‘read’ the teachers. So they treat each of the teachers differently. Departure: no teacher is supervising during departure.

Perhaps it is safer there. In our school, the teachers take a turn to 'station' the gate. We need to make sure there is a teacher to be there to handle any possible 'accidents' immediately.

During/after watching a video of an SJKC

First impression: the bags that the students are carrying looks extremely heavy. 迟到训话 we do that too in our school after comparing all three types of school. We can see that SJKC 暗淡无光, BUT SJKT 五彩缤纷. There is a 问题学生 he is a bit hyperactive. 学生敢发言, 但是感觉上他们有点嚣张. Interaction between students is limited. Still using the traditional method. Canteen culture - Eat and speak at the same time, not good. 不好吃就倒掉, 你看多浪费. They need to recite 班规. Talk about the PA system, take one as an example, spend so much money on the trolley system, now no maintenance and no one is using them. Gov do things 不了了之. 电脑课是外面请回来的老师. 华小很多 announcement 很正常. 很多课外活动. Need reminders. TS25 all teachers must follow, some not suitable but we need to implement them. Gov does not consider teachers point of view. I think they the gov respect teachers professionalism. For example, sitting in groups, but students end up talking to each other all the time interrupting the classes.

2019-08-21 SJKT W Selangor

It is located inside a gated and guarded new township called Bandar S.C. The school was recently relocated in April. Although it is a semi-aided school, It looked brand new. The land and building were given by a developer as compensation in exchange for the former school land. We started our session at 1:40 pm with five teachers attending the session. This school has about 110 over students, so each teacher in charge of a grade and teaches all the subjects.

During/after watching a video of an SJKC

Classroom management in this particular class can be messy and out of control. The attention of the students was not there. This is especially obvious during English and Malay lessons where they were thought by non-Chinese teachers. Maybe because of the language barrier that the teachers and students couldn't 'click'. They seem hard to concentrate in class. In contrast, the strict teacher in pink and computer teachers, the students were listening attentively. Strict teachers always give effective lessons, in my opinion.

Here in our school, it is the same. The students know how to 'read' the mind of the teachers. They know where the 'line' is and able to take advantage of the teachers. The arrival time - bowing to the teachers showing respect is good. Showing respect is important. Students were detained to be questions is okay. Proper punishment is needed. The students need to take responsibility and explain their actions. We can see that the parent is cooperating with the teacher, giving the teacher the power to punish the kid. Nowadays, we are not allowed to punish the students. Parents would come and complaint. During recess, look at the food wastage. Even just food waste but it has accumulated a lot. Here we advise the students to finish their food, but a minority of parents would complain about that. Again parents nowadays pamper their children. Announcements are distracting the lessons. Students show less respect for Malay and Indian teachers. Shocking! 'Oath' taking (moral values) good practice among the students.

During/after watching a video of an SK

Problem with FROG. No internet at home, cannot access, cannot do the assignment. Do it after school. Just log in. All schools internet is free. Started to introduce google classroom. Starting lesson does praying, seem more concern on religions and beliefs. Apply religious values. On Friday, we allocated 30 minutes for religious class. Here we have Christian student and Indian Muslim. One teacher Christian teacher, separate class, Now the teacher is not around, give them extra activities, carry on with their prayers. Teacher centred

and class is under control. Here Fun learning not seen, students involvement not much is seen. We focus on fun learning - we want to attract students attention before the lesson starts and during the lesson. We want them to enjoy the learning. They have useful facilities, like a music room. Semi-aided schools usually we cannot get this kind of facilities unless we raise fund on our own. Same goes to the science lab. Teachers sometimes have to find sponsors. Ask the help of parents. We put our own money to decorate or prepare our classroom. We do not have a budget for classroom decoration.

During/after watching a video of an SJKT

Teachers (sometimes parents) have to find sponsors. Lack of support from parents. PTM - not all attend. Talk about students progress. Student-centred learning. Maybe only 2-3 schools are fully aided. Mostly semi aided. Why? Too few students. Model schools have a conducive classroom. Moreover, lots of teaching aids. We want kids to learn from reality /real thing. We buy the tools ourselves or borrow from another school. We like to do a mockup. The classroom in the video has excellent infrastructure. More colourful too. Optionist - teachers who know their subject well, like Music teacher or PE teachers but usually, the school are short of optionist. Teachers have to do lots of clerical work. It's already 'cemented'. Let us say the same amount of admin work. SK school is feasible but not small schools like us. For example, they have their English panel, and clerical work can be distributed among all English teachers. However, a small school like ours, we have only 1-2 teachers teaching the same subject. We have to handle the same amount of clerical work as a school with a team of 10 English teachers. It sounds ridiculous. Smaller schools - teachers 40% time teaching, 60% clerical. Since teachers need to teach the different subject, known options, meeting or involvement. Recess, reading programme, games during recess, morning. Weak students, we give them a new one-hour teaching school. When it comes to implementing new ideas. Usually training only last two days which is NOT sufficient. Then gov expect us to master new skills and implement in our classroom. Now we need to learn to use google classroom.

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Fieldnotes of Focus Group Studies on Comparative Studies of the Primary Schooling of Malay, Chinese, Tamil Medium Schools in Malaysia

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Abstract

The paper is an edited version of the field notes written during the Focus Group Studies (FGS) conducted from May to August 2019. FGS used in this ethnographic study is an adaptation of Tobin's 'Preschool in 3 Cultures Method', also known as 'video-cued multivocal ethnography' (Tobin et al., 1989; see also 2009). First, activities in primary schools of the 'three cultures' - Malay, Chinese and Tamil - are video-recorded and edited into short 20 minutes videos. Then these videos are shown to members of those three school communities. Comments and feedback on what they see are collected in focus group sessions. This results in a video-cued teachers' dialogue of 3 different ethnic groups discussion the same set of videos. The method focused on prompting discussion among the participants to reveal their experiences, views and thoughts. In other words, it helps researchers to make "implicit thinking visible" (Adair and Kurban, 2019:2).

This method is applied in the Primary Schooling of 3 Cultures project. It is a comparative study of the three different types of Malaysian public primary schools, i.e. Malay, Chinese and Tamil-medium schools. Malaysia has experienced a high degree of ethnic segregation - a phenomenon manifested in the system of primary schooling, where most pupils study in an ethnically homogenous environment. This research aims to find out to what extent the value systems and cultural understandings of education's purposes in are similar and mutually compatible – or dissimilar and potentially irreconcilable. It further seeks to investigate how each of these three types of vernacular primary school transmits and reflects cultural values while adapting to political and social change and the challenges of globalisation. Amongst the questions that will inform the research are: 'How compatible does this segregated model of schooling appear to be with the inculcation of a shared sense of 'Malaysianness'?' and 'Do these different types of schools have different agendas and serves different purposes beyond those stipulated in the official curriculum?'

This paper summarizes the methodology used and the data collection process, i.e. from producing the videos for the interview to doing the Focus Group Studies. A significant part of this paper is fieldnotes sorted according to the date of the visit to schools.