Heritage education in the Primary School Standard Curriculum of Malaysia

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HIGHLIGHTS
• Education is critical for sustainable preserving of heritage.
• As a multicultural country with a rich cultural heritage, Malaysia is home to four world heritage sites.
• This paper investigates Malaysia’s new kurikulum standard sekolah rendah (KSSR) in respect to heritage education.
• The results showed that, there is a focus on Malaysian cultural heritage in some core subjects.

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ABSTRACT
Due to the importance of education for sustainable heritage preservation, it is imperative to pay attention to how heritage is taught in the education system. As a multicultural country with a rich cultural heritage, Malaysia is home to four world heritage sites. This paper investigates Malaysia’s new primary school curriculum to determine to what extent the core curriculum cultivates an awareness of and sense of respect for heritage. The results reveal a focus on Malaysian intangible cultural heritage in some core subjects, such as history, Bahasa Malaysia, art, and music education.

1. Introduction
In investigation of educational changes or new programs, it has become the norm to subject the curricular materials and curriculum organization to scrutiny (Clark, Lotto, & Astuto, 1984). Curriculum reform is an essential component of educational innovation (Mcculloch, 2005). Whether heritage education involves the integration of new materials into an existing curriculum or the use of innovative teaching approaches in which heritage resources are used to facilitate the teaching of the other subjects, the curriculum itself continues to serve an important role (Badran, 2011). Hunter (1988) argues that the best way to including heritage education into a curriculum is via infusion—integration with existing curricular materials in which all curricula subjects serve as the basis for heritage education. As a multicultural country with four world heritage sites, integrating heritage education into the Malaysian educational curriculum is an issue of critical importance for ensuring sustainable heritage preservation.

Bordered by Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, and Vietnam, Malaysia is a multicultural and multiracial society inclusive of three major races: Malays (53.3%), Chinese (26.0%), and Indians (7.7%). Approximately 13% of the population comprises several smaller ethnic groups, including Eurasians and indigenous ethnicities (e.g., Kadazan, Dusunus, Muruts, Ibas, Bidayahuhs, and Penans), especially in Sabah and Sarawak (Khader, 2012). Although each of these ethnic groups has its own culture and traditions, these cultures contribute to Malaysia’s unique multicultural heritage. Therefore, preserving this national heritage through education forms the backbone of the 1Malaysia public policy. This policy, announced in 2010 by Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak, aims to engender ethnic harmony and national unity. Moreover, achieving the economic,
political, social, spiritual, and cultural development goals of the Vision 2020 plan is contingent upon education and the preservation of national heritage (Nor & Illas, 2012). Vision 2020, introduced by former Prime Minister Dato Sri Dr. Mahathir Bin Mohamad, aims to increase Malaysia’s capacity for knowledge and creativity, to nurture a first-class mentality, and to address issues of socioeconomic inequality.

Notwithstanding, Azmana, Halimb, Liuc, Saidinb, and Komoo (2010) and Jaafar, Noor, and Rasoolimanesh (2014) have demonstrated that Malaysian students have low levels of heritage awareness and are generally reluctant to become involved with conservation programs. Few pupils are aware of the benefits associated with World Heritage Site recognition, nor how such benefits might affect them or their communities. These findings highlight the importance of heritage education in raising public awareness of heritage and in the promotion of sustainable heritage protection.

In 2010, new primary school education curriculum was unveiled with the intention of developing students with a strong sense of national identity. Given the goals of this new curriculum, the integration of heritage education into the curriculum is of paramount importance. Heritage informs people’s understanding of their cultural roots, beliefs and community values, and as such, is the main source of individual and national identity (Aslan & Ardemagni, 2006; Copeland, 2006).

The Malaysian national education system comprises preschool (for children 4–6 years of age), primary school (6 years in duration), secondary school (divided between lower- and upper-secondary education), and post-secondary school (prior to entering higher education). According to the Ministry of Education (2014a), approximately 5,120,802 students were enrolled across all three school levels, with 2,704,046 students enrolled in primary school alone. Primary school education is free and compulsory for all children in Malaysia from the age of 6–13 years-old, regardless of ethnicity. Primary school is divided into two levels, with Level 1 spanning Years 1–3, and Level Two comprising Years 4–6. The rollout of the Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah [KSSR] [Primary School Standard Curriculum] commenced in 2010 and is expected to be fully implemented in 2016. The KSSR aims to prepare primary school children in Malaysia with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for facing the challenges of the 21st century (Ministry of Education, Malaysia, 2012a). This aim is consistent with the mission of the Ministry of Education: To develop global citizens with a strong sense of national identity through an understanding of Malaysia’s history and shared aspirations for the future. Given that racial diversity represents one of Malaysia’s greatest strengths and challenges, the Ministry of Education (2013a) aspires to foster racial and ethnic unity through the secondary curriculum, thus forging a Malaysian identity that is inclusive of the nation’s diverse heritage. This plan capitalized upon the idea that national identity is intrinsically related to heritage, with one’s sense of identity stemming from one’s knowledge of their origins and what is inherited from the past (Copeland, 2006). This paper, therefore, investigates the extent to which the KSSR is inclusive of Malaysia’s heritage.

1.1. Heritage education

Simply stated, heritage is about what has been inherited. Cultural and natural heritage is the legacy of our ancestors transmitted across time and is available to be passed on to future generations. Cultural heritage is concerned with the way people lived in the past and in the present: their traditions, beliefs, values, and achievements. Cultural heritage is both tangible and intangible. Tangible or material heritage refers to that which is physically touchable, such as monuments, buildings, paintings, and objects. Intangible heritage, on the other hand, is immaterial, such as music, dance, literature, religious ceremonies, etc. Natural heritage is concerned with landscapes that demonstrate natural beauty or habitats containing endangered animal or plant species (Aslan & Ardemagni, 2006). Heritage is a unique and irreplaceable resource that tells us how groups of people lived in the past, their values, and how various groups were related to and interacted with one another. Heritage, therefore, is a fundamental part of the process of making meaning out of our lives, is an essential component of our social identity, and is a resource for establishing peace and understanding among people.

While a unique and irreplaceable resource, heritage is nonetheless susceptible to a host of natural and man-made threats (e.g., earthquakes, flooding, looting, military action, and modern development). The fact that heritage is so susceptible underscores the significance of heritage preservation and protection efforts (Aslan & Ardemagni, 2006; Schindler & Bonebright, 2011). Sustainable conservation, however, is contingent upon public awareness and a sense of stewardship toward heritage, something inculcated through education (Copeland, 2006; Collins & Hollinshead, 2000). A third classification, articulated by Copeland (2006), is that of education for heritage, in which students’ sense of self-meaning evolves in response to their
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