



## **USING NATIONAL IDENTITY MEASURE AS AN INDICATOR OF MALAYSIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY**

Mehdi Granhenat & \*Ain Nadzimah Abdullah

Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Jalan Upm,  
43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia.

\*Corresponding author: [ain@upm.edu.my](mailto:ain@upm.edu.my)

### **ABSTRACT**

*Conducting research about individuals' feelings of belonging to a society comprising different social strata is of interest to researchers. National identity as a collective identity has gained salient attention in Malaysia because the country's social structure is made up of different ethnic groups. To shed light on this topic, this study investigated national identity among undergraduate students of a public university in Malaysia. A survey questionnaire (the National Identity Measure or NIM) was utilized as the data collection instrument. Using a random proportional stratified sampling strategy, a total of 498 undergraduates studying in the University's 15 different faculties were selected as respondents. The results of the study confirmed that, in a society that embraces various ethnic groups, a collective national identity can be measured.*

**Keywords:** Feeling of belonging, Malaysia, measurement, national identity, national identity measure.

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

It has been well documented in literature that identity-related factors are amongst the most significant factors of any social life (Matondang, 2016). Any culture or nation has some common cultural characteristics and traits that may make that particular culture or nation unique (Clark, 1990). However, a list of various cultural traits may not provide concise and usable information for setting nations apart. Keillor and Hult (1998) referred to national identity as an example of an exclusively unique trait among different nations. In line with this view, Huntington (1997) noted that national identity can be perceived as a theoretical construct that is formed based upon a number of distinctive factors associated with a particular culture practiced inside a particular political state. In other words, associated with the culture of a society, individual members of that society may develop a personal and social identity that is in accord with its dominant personal and social values. Albury and Aye (2016) addressed this notion of personal and social identity that is in line with prevailing values of a society as national identity. This understanding of individuals' national identity is supported by Tajfel and Turner's (1986) Social Identity Theory. Tajfel and Turner (1986) argued that an individual

member of a society may have a self-image consisting of a personal individual identity and a social identity. Therefore, the study of national identity in a multi-racial society such as Malaysia is a challenging issue in social cultural studies

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Ethnic pluralism is a traditionally widespread social behavior in Malaysia (Granhemat & Abdullah, 2017; Khader, 2012). In Malaysian society, ethnic pluralism has been emphasized as a desirably social cultural practice (Changsong & Yiming, 2017). Instilling a sense of solidarity among individual ethnic members of Malaysian society has been a central governmental policy (Albury & Aye, 2016). This sense of solidarity and faithfulness of members of a society towards their country is referred to as national identity (Mohd Mokhtar & Mohd Lokman, 2016). Mohd Mokhtar and Mohd Lokman (2016) pointed out that national identity was the positive feelings that individual members of a society might have and expressed towards their country. Nonetheless, Mohd Mokhtar and Mohd Lokman (2016) were uncertain regarding the existence of a holistic positive feeling among Malaysian youths towards their country. In the same line of discussion, Albury and Aye (2016) as well as Matondang (2016) maintained that in Malaysia many communities were deeply devoted to their cultures and traditions and this sense of belonging to racial values may make national identity activities a challenging issue in this country. Examining a collective identity can be traced back to the pioneering research conducted in several European countries on national identity in the early 1990s. As such, by using Lilli and Diehl's (1999) National Identity Measure (NIM), the present study endeavored to measure the construct of national identity among Malaysian youths.

In order to measure a collective national identity, Lilli and Diehl (1999) developed a global scale, i.e. the National Identity Measure (NIM). They reported that NIM was constructed based on Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) Collective Self-Esteem Scale (CSES), which uses Rosenberg's (1965) seminal Theory of Social and Adolescent Self-Image and Tajfel and Turner's (1986) Social Identity Theory as basic theoretical underpinnings. According to Luhtanen and Crocker (1992), CSES was constructed to globally measure self-esteem of subjects belonging to various ethnic groups. Using CSES as a basis for developing the NIM, Lilli and Diehl (1999) noted that in order to adapt the scale with any particular social concept under investigation, such as national identity, the wording of CSES needed to be modified by substituting 'group' for 'nation'. For example, "The group I belonged to" was substituted by "The nation I belonged to" (Lilli & Diehl, 1999, p. 1). They also conducted an empirical study with 200 participants and, through a self-survey questionnaire, endeavored to examine the factorial components of the NIM by replicating the previously conducted research by Luhtanen and Crocker (1992). Lilli and Diehl (1999) found that four factorial components, each with four items, constituted the NIM. The details of the NIM, according to Lilli and Diehl (1999), are illustrated below:

### **Membership:**

- (I) I am a worthy member of the nation I belong to.
- (II) I feel I don't have much to offer to the nation I belong to.
- (III) I am a cooperative participant in the nation I belong to.
- (IV) I often feel I'm a useless member of the nation I belong to.

**Private:**

- (I) I often regret that I belong to this nation.
- (II) In general, I'm glad to be a member of the nation I belong to.
- (III) Overall, I often feel that the nation of which I am a member is not worthwhile.
- (IV) I feel good about the nation I belong to.

**Public:**

- (I) Overall, my nation is considered good by others.
- (II) Most people consider my nation to be more ineffective than other nations.
- (III) In general, others respect the nation that I am a member of.
- (IV) In general, others think that the nation I am a member of is unworthy.

**Identity:**

- (I) Overall, my nation has very little to do with how I feel about myself.
  - (II) The nation I belong to is an important reflection of who I am.
  - (III) The nation I belong to is unimportant to my sense of what kind of person I am.
  - (IV) In general, belonging to this nation is an important part of my self-image.
- (p. 2)

Additionally, Lilli and Diehl (1999) stated that, in order to extract a clearer portrayal of individuals' self-image in terms of national identity, a new component, Comparison, must be added to the NIM. Accordingly, the Comparison component of the NIM added aspects of comparison with other nations (out-groups) to the scale. Lilli and Diehl (1999) argued that the Comparison component of the scale "included all those crucial aspects which, according to social Identity theory seem necessary in identifying a collective identity like national" (p. 5). Lilli and Diehl's (1999) Comparison component is illustrated below:

**Comparison:**

- (I) The nation I belong to is superior to other nations in many respects.
  - (II) All in all, my nation becomes less important in the world.
  - (III) Overall, the nation I belong to plays a more important role than other nations.
  - (IV) In competition with others my nation comes off worse.
- (p. 6)

With the same participants in the first empirical study, Lilli and Diehl (1999) conducted a second empirical study and reported that the NIM with its five factorial components (four items were included in each component) was a valid measure that may be utilized to globally investigate a collective identity like national identity.

**3.0 RESEARCH DESIGN**

The present study was conducted in order to examine the significant factors that determine national identity in the multi-lingual and multi-cultural ecology of the Malaysian society. The study's population comprised undergraduate local students at a public university in Malaysia. The population comprised three main ethnic groups, i.e. Malays, Chinese and Indians, as well as a small number of respondents from other ethnic backgrounds such as Bidayuh, Bajau, Siamese (Thai), and Kadazan. 14,343 undergraduates who were studying in the university's 15 different faculties became the population that the sample of the study was extracted from. A random proportional stratified sampling strategy was employed. 498 local respondents were

selected as the sample of the study. The data of the study was collected by utilizing a survey questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised two sections. Section One contained demographic information about the study's respondents, while Section Two, via 21 items, collected data about the respondents' national identity.

### 3.1 The National Identity Measure (NIM)

According to Lilli and Diehl (1999) the NIM principally measures five factors via 20 items. The five factors of the NIM are (I) Membership, (II) Private, (III) Public, (IV) Identity, and (V) Comparison. Lilli and Diehl (1999) maintained that the NIM, in general, refers to individual's insight into their national identities. However, in order to adapt the scale to the Malaysian linguistic ecology, some wordings of the scale were modified and an item was added to the scale (item 21 in Table 1). The modified version of the NIM is illustrated below in Table 1. The respondents of the study were instructed to answer the 21 items of the NIM according to a 4 point Likert Scale (see Table 1).

Table 1: National Identity Measure\*

1	I am a worthy member of the nation I belong to.	1	2	3	4
2	I feel I don't have much to offer to the nation I belong to.	1	2	3	4
3	I am a cooperative participant in the nation I belong to.	1	2	3	4
4	I often feel I'm a useless member of the nation I belong to.	1	2	3	4
5	I often regret that I belong to this nation.	1	2	3	4
6	I often feel that it is not worthwhile to be a member of the nation to which I belong to.	1	2	3	4
7	I feel good about the nation I belong to.	1	2	3	4
8	In general, others respect the nation that I am a member of.	1	2	3	4
9	I feel that being a member of this nation is worthwhile.	1	2	3	4
10	My nation has very little to do with how I feel about myself.	1	2	3	4
11	The nation I belong to is an important reflection of who I am.	1	2	3	4
12	The nation I belong to is important to my sense of the kind of person I am.	1	2	3	4
13	In general, belonging to this nation is an important part of my self-image.	1	2	3	4
14	The nation I belong to is superior to other nations in many aspects.	1	2	3	4
15	My nation is not as important as many other nations in the world.	1	2	3	4
16	The nation I belong to plays a more important international role than other nations.	1	2	3	4
17	In competition with others my nation comes off worse.	1	2	3	4
18	My nation has been successful in its international policy.	1	2	3	4
19	I admire important Malaysian people.	1	2	3	4
20	One of Malaysia's strengths is that it emphasizes events of national historical importance.	1	2	3	4
21	Malaysia has a strong historical heritage.	1	2	3	4

\*1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly agree

### 3.2 Respondents' Demographic profiles

On average, the study's respondents were 21 years of age, (i.e. 71.7% of the respondents were between 21 and 22 years of age). There were more female respondents (71.7%). The respondents' self reported ethnicities were 71.5% Malay (n=356), 21.7% Chinese (n=108), 3% Indians (n=15), while 3.8% identified themselves as belonging to other ethnic groups (n=19).

## 4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To examine the probable sub-dimension of the NIM, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was applied to 21 items of the scale by using the principal components procedure. Yong and Pearce (2013) stated "Factor analysis operates on the notion that measurable and observable variables can be reduced to fewer latent variables that share a common variance and are unobservable, which is known as reducing dimensionality" (p. 80). In other words, a large dataset such as the NIM comprised a number of variables may be reduced by observable groups or components. Accordingly, in the present study attempts were made to examine those unobservable factors of the scale NIM that were not directly measurable, but were hypothetical constructs that were employed to signify the variables. In line with this view, the conducted Factor Analysis resulted in identifying four components (See Table 3). According to the identified Scree Plot of the Eigenvalue, the four components of the scale explained 56.28% of total variances among respondents (See Diagram 1 and Table 2).

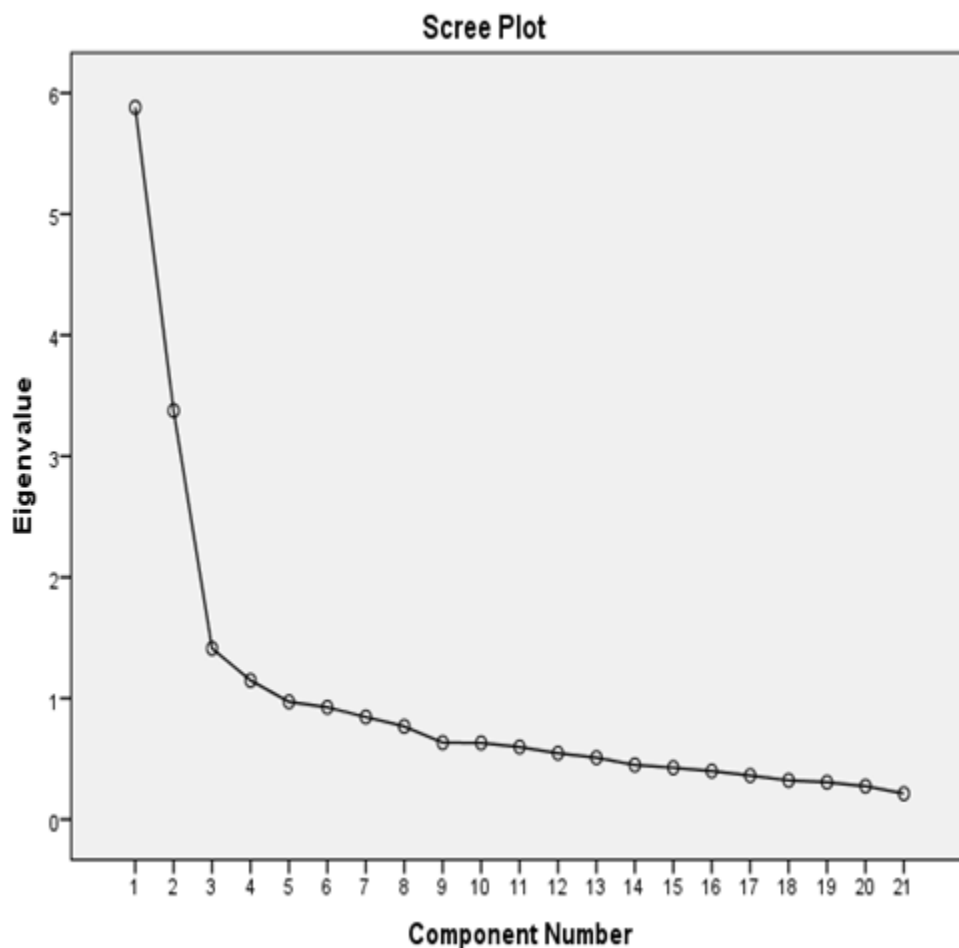


Diagram 1: Scree Plot of the NIM

The result of Bartlett's Test for Sphericity was significant ( $p < 0.01$ ) and the results of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test for measuring sample adequacy was 0.867, which as Beavers et al. (2013) asserted, denotes that the sample size for factor analysis was sufficient (See Table 2).

Table 2: Extracted Components of the NIM

Component	Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		of Squared Cumulative
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% Variance	
1	5.882	28.011	28.011	3.418	16.278	16.278
2	3.377	16.079	44.09	3.163	15.061	31.34
3	1.412	6.724	50.814	2.906	13.84	45.179
4	1.148	5.466	56.28	2.331	11.101	56.28

The detailed results of the EFA are illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3: The Result of EFA on Respondents' National Identity Items

Items No.		Components			
		1=Members hip	2=Public	3=Identity	4=Private
<b>Rotated Component Matrix</b>					
1	I often regret that I belong to this nation.	0.789			
2	I often feel I'm a useless member of the nation I belong to.	0.772			
3	I often feel that it is not worthwhile to be a member of the nation of which I belong to.	0.735			
4	My nation is not as important as many other nations in the world.	0.686			
5	I feel I don't have much to offer to the nation I belong to.	0.621			
6	In competition with others my nation comes off worse.	0.611			
7	My nation has very little to do with how I feel about myself.	0.503			
8	One of Malaysia's strengths is that it emphasizes events of national historical importance.		0.778		
9	My nation has been successful in its international policy.		0.766		
10	I admire important Malaysian people.		0.674		
11	Malaysia has a strong historical heritage.		0.649		
12	The nation I belong to plays a more important international role than other nations.		0.557		

13	The nation I belong to is an important reflection of who I am.	0.83 3
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*Items Nos. are listed according to the findings of the present study.*

*Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis*

*Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization*

Table 3: The Result of EFA on Respondents' National Identity Items (Continue)

14	The nation I belong to is important to my sense of the kind of person I am.	0.80 7
15	In general, belonging to this nation is an important part of my self-image.	0.80 2
16	The nation I belong to is superior to other nations in many aspects.	0.58 6
17	I feel that being a member of this nation is worthwhile.	0.72 6
18	I am a worthy member of the nation I belong to.	0.71 9
19	I am a cooperative participant in the nation I belong to.	0.54 3
20	In general, others respect the nation that I am a member of.	0.52 1
21	I feel good about the nation I belong to.	0.49 3

*Items Nos. are listed according to the findings of the present study.*

*Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis*

*Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization*

As shown in Table 3, in the first identified component of the examined scale (1=Membership) the highest loading factor belonged to item 1: "I often regret that I belong to this nation", followed by item 2: "I often feel I'm a useless member of the nation I belong to", and the lowest observed loading factor belongs to item 7: "My nation has very little to do with how I feel about myself". In the second component (2=Public), the highest loading factor belonged to item 8: "One of the Malaysia's strengths is that it emphasizes events of national historical importance", followed by item 9: "My nation has been successful in its international policy", and the lowest observed loading factor of the second component belonged to item 12: "The nation I belong to plays a more important international role than other nations". In the third component (3=Identity), the highest loading factor belonged to item 13: "The nation I belong to is an important reflection of who I am", followed by item 14: "The nation I belong to is important to my sense of the kind of person I am", and the lowest observed loading factor of the third component belonged to item 16: "The nation I belong to is superior to other nations in many aspects". Finally, in the fourth component (4=Private), the highest loading factor belonged to item 17: "I feel that being a member of this nation is worthwhile." followed by item 18: "I am a worthy member of the nation I belong to" and the lowest observed loading factor belongs to item 21: "I feel good about the nation I belong to". None of the components' loading factors was less than 0.4, which denotes that the items were well related to each other (Beavers et al., 2013; Ledesma & Valero-Mora, 2007). Therefore, with the Malaysian multi-cultural, multi-lingual respondents, the components of the scale together with their sub-items were identified as following:

### 1. Membership:

- (I) I often regret that I belong to this nation.

- (II) I often feel I'm a useless member of the nation I belong to.
- (III) I often feel that it is not worthwhile to be a member of the nation of which I belong to.
- (IV) My nation is not as important as many other nations in the world.
- (V) I feel I don't have much to offer to the nation I belong to.
- (VI) In competition with others my nation comes off worse.
- (VII) My nation has very little to do with how I feel about myself.

## 2. Public

- (I) One of Malaysia's strengths is that it emphasizes events of national historical importance.
- (II) My nation has been successful in its international policy.
- (III) I admire important Malaysian people.
- (IV) Malaysia has a strong historical heritage.
- (V) The nation I belong to plays a more important international role than other nations.

## 3. Identity

- (I) The nation I belong to is an important reflection of who I am.
- (II) The nation I belong to is important to my sense of the kind of person I am.
- (III) In general, belonging to this nation is an important part of my self-image.
- (IV) The nation I belong to is superior to other nations in many aspects.

## 4. Private

- (I) I feel that being a member of this nation is worthwhile.
- (II) I am a worthy member of the nation I belong to.
- (III) I am a cooperative participant in the nation I belong to.
- (IV) In general, others respect the nation that I am a member of.
- (V) I feel good about the nation I belong to.

### 4.1 Respondents' Level of National Identity

Since the respondents of the study answered 21 items of the NIM according to a Likert scale that ranges from 1=strongly agree to 4=strongly disagree (See Table 1), a representative score of national identity of any respondent could be a minimum score of 21 to a maximum score of 84. The distribution of data was normal with a mean score of 59.67 and standard deviation of 7.04. Without considering the respondents' ethnicity their national identity was categorized as low, moderate and high (the cut point values of mean score  $\pm$  1 standard deviation evaluated as moderate national identity, lower and higher values more than moderate value were respectively evaluated as low and high national identity). Table 4 shows that a majority of the respondents were identified as having moderate national identity.

Table 4: Respondents' National Identity

National Identity level	N	%
Low	67	13.5
Moderate	356	71.5
High	75	15.1

The result of the present study indicated that the sense of national identity among younger generation in Malaysia was considerable. This result is not in harmony with Mohd Mokhtar



and Mohd Lokman (2016) study that pointed out solidarity and integration in a multi-cultural society like Malaysia was still a question mark.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

Ethnic Identity and national identity has been a topic of investigation since the foundation of the Malaysian nation in 1957 (Wolf, 2016). 60 years after the formation of an independent multicultural Malaysia, the present study endeavored to examine to what extent national identity as a collective identity is widespread among the younger generations of the three major ethnic groups that constituted Malaysian nation. To do so, the NIM was found to be a reliable measure to examine the construct of national identity in Malaysia.

The NIM has successfully demonstrated that national identity—as a theoretical construct—can be measured in a multi-cultural and multi-lingual society like Malaysia. Although Lilli and Diehl (1999) added a fifth component to the scale, the results of the present study demonstrated that the items in the NIM were in accordance with the CSES developed by Luhtanen and Crocker (1992). As a result, the four main components of the scale can be explained by Rosenberg's (1965) Theory of Social and Adolescent Self-Image and Tajfel and Turner's (1986) Social Identity Theory as bases of CSES that was constructed by Luhtanen and Crocker (1992).

Besides, although there were some studies (e.g. Mohd Mokhtar & Mohd Lokman, 2016; Albury & Aye, 2016) that revealed uncertainty about the existence of a solid sense of national identity among the younger generation in Malaysia, the results of the present study illustrated that there was a moderate sense of national identity among the majority of the respondents of the study. There was also a considerable percentage of the study's respondents who had a high sense of national identity.

However, it may be necessary to test the NIM with respondents from other sectors of the Malaysian society such as the market place etcetera. Moreover, in a multi-lingual Malaysian ecology, research may be needed to understand how the Malaysian national identity is correlated with the choice of languages used in different domains since as Fishman (1975) attested; the choice of a language may be evaluated as a sign of loyalty to a national identity.

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